The Third-phase of the Yungang Cave Complex—Its Architectural Structure, Subject Matter, Composition and Style

Volume One

by

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Abstract

The Yungang Cave Complex in Shanxi province is one of the largest Buddhist sculpture repositories produced during the Northern and Southern Dynasties. This thesis argues that the iconographic evolution of the Yungang caves underwent three developing phases which can be summarized as the five Tan Yao Caves phase, the transitional period, and the sinicized third-phase under the reigns of five Northern Wei (386-534) emperors Wencheng (452-465), Xianwen (466-471), Xiaowen (471-499), Xuanwu (500-515) and Xiaoming (516-528).

This dissertation studies the Yungang third-phase caves, namely those caves executed after the capital was moved from Pingcheng to Luoyang in the year 494. It focuses primarily on what we call the western-end caves, which are composed of all the caves from cave 21 to cave 45, and as cave 5-10 and cave 5-11 are typical representations of the third-phase and even today are well preserved, they are also included in this study.
Using typology method, as well as primary literary sources, this study places the western-end caves in their historical, social and religious context while focusing on four perspectives: architectural lay-out, iconographic composition, subject matter and style of representation. It deals with such questions as: what these images represent, what is their connection with Buddhist literature, what is the origin of the style of the western-end caves, what is the relationship between sculpture and painting, what is the relationship between the monastic life and Buddhist art, what was the status of Yungang after the transfer of the capital to the south, and who were the patrons. This study sheds new light on the changes in the iconographic motifs over the time from the first-phase to the third-phase and constructs a timeline for the sequence of construction of the western-end caves.

The study also investigates the iconographical inter-relationship between the Yungang third-phase caves and those in the Longmen and to a lesser extent, the Gongxian complexes, as well as some relatively small caves in Shanxi province in order to trace the spread of the “Yungang Style.” This will map out the evolution in Buddhist iconographical style throughout the Central Plain of China.
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6.76 Left wall, Yangtoushan Cave 5
6.77 Right wall, Yangtoushan Cave 5
6.78 Dvarapalas, Yangtoushan Cave 5
6.79 Jiaodingshan Cave
6.80 Main wall, Jiaodingshan Cave
6.81 Right wall, Jiaodingshan Cave
6.82 Left wall, Jiaodingshan Cave
6.83 Baoyingsi Cave Complex
6.84 Baoyingsi Cave 1
6.85 Main wall, Baoyingsi Cave 1
6.86 Left wall, Baoyingsi Cave 1
6.87 Right wall, Baoyingsi Cave 1
6.88 Main wall, Baoyingsi Cave 3
6.89 Left wall, Baoyingsi Cave 3
6.90 Right wall, Baoyingsi Cave 3
6.91 Seated Buddhas, main wall, Baoyingsi Cave 4
6.92 Left wall, Baoyingsi Cave 4
6.93 Right wall, Baoyingsi Cave 4
6.94 Gaomiaoshan Cave Complex
6.95 Gaomiaoshan Cave
6.96 Ceiling, Gaomiaoshan Cave
6.97 Flying celestial, ceiling, Gaomiaoshan Cave
6.98 Main wall, Gaomiaoshan Cave
6.99 Left wall, Gaomiaoshan Cave
6.100 Right wall, Gaomiaoshan Cave
6.101 Fushan Cave
6.102 Left wall, anteroom, Fushan Cave
6.103 Right wall, anteroom, Fushan Cave
6.104 Main wall, Fushan Cave
6.105 Asoka jataka, main wall, Fushan Cave
6.106 Left wall, Fushan Cave
6.107 Vimalakirti niche, left wall, Fushan Cave
6.108 Right wall, Fushan Cave
6.109 Spirit kings, right wall, Fushan Cave
6.110 Manjusri niche, right wall, Fushan Cave
6.111 Kaihesi Cave Complex
Conventions

The existing Buddhist canon texts are cited according to the Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō, edited by Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaikyoku (Tōkyō: Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō Kankōkai, 1924-1934). Citations are as follows: T(aishō); Taishō serial number; Taishō volume number; page, register (a, b, or c), line number(s): e.g., T50:2060:427c27.

Illustrations are all by the author unless otherwise noted.

Lacunae such as □ indicate damaged, eroded or indiscernible Chinese characters.

The drawings are arranged in order of cave floor plan, north wall, west wall and east wall. If the south wall of the cave exists, the arrangement would be north and south walls, west and east walls and the bottom of the page is the cave floor plan.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I. Yungang

The cave complex known as Yungang 云冈 (Cloud Ridge) is located south of the Wuzhou Mountain 武州山 and north of the Wuzhou River 武州川 (current Shili River 十里河) sixteen kilometers from the western suburb of Datong 大同 City, Shanxi Province (fig. 1.1). The caves were hewn from a mountain cliff face and stretch out from east to west for over one kilometer. There are, in total, 254 caves and 1100 niches with 21 large and 24 medium caves, and 51,000 images.

Topographically, the major caves are divided into three sections, east, middle and west, each of which is separated by a dale: the east, middle and west (fig. 1.2). The caves are numbered from the east to the western end. The eastern section has four caves, i.e. 1 to 4, the middle, sixteen, from caves 5 to 20, and the western-end section consists of twenty-five main caves from 21 to 45 (fig. 1.3). These western-end caves are the primary focus of this study.

Chronologically, the Yungang caves evolved through three phases and were executed under the reigns of five Northern Wei (386-534) emperors: Wencheng 文成 (r.
and Xiaoming (r. 516-28) with the majority being constructed under Emperor Xiaowen. The western-end caves (caves 21 to 45) are usually referred to as the Yungang third-phase caves and they were executed after the transfer of the capital from Pingcheng (current Datong) to Luoyang in the eighteenth year of Taihe Era (494). The first-phase caves are the so-called five Tan Yao Caves (caves 16 to 20). The second-phase caves include caves 1 to 3 and 5 to 13; they represent the transitional phase between the five hybrid Tan Yao Caves and the sinicized western-end third-phase caves.

The first two phase caves were primarily patronized by the royal court and high officials. These grand caves make Yungang one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in human history. After the transfer of the Northern Wei capital in 494, the third-phase caves were mainly commissioned by local officials, Buddhist devotees, families and local Buddhist societies (yishe 邑社). Some sponsored a small cave, others a niche or several niches. According to the inscriptions extant, the highest-ranking patron was a certain local duke who sponsored cave 38 in order to build merit for his family and to “transcend eternally the sea of bitterness.”

Wuzhou Mountain was an important northern frontier even from the Han dynasty. For example, it is recorded that Xiongnu troops, comprising one hundred and one thousand horse-men, attacked Wuzhou Fortress in the first year of Yuanguang (134 B.C.). We are told in the Weishu (Annals of the Northern Wei) that Emperor Mingyuan (r. 409-423) of the Northern Wei prayed to the gods of heaven and

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1 The inscription is above the entrance of Cave 38.
2 Si Maqian 司馬遷 (c.145-186 B.C.E), Shiji 史記, 180:2861.
earth on Wuzhou Mountain before he ascended to the throne. Even after he became emperor, he often personally visited the mountain every year without a fixed date to pray and offer sacrifices. Thus, Wuzhou Mountain was a spiritual mountain where the emperors of the Northern Wei prayed and worshipped. It was believed to bring blessings and protection. Evidently the location for the Yungang Cave Complex was purposefully and carefully chosen.

In the Weishu, the Yungang caves were called Wuzhoushan shikusi 武州山窟寺 (Wuzhou Mountain Cave Temples), Wuzhoushan shiku fosi 武州山窟佛寺 (Wuzhou Mountain Buddhist Cave Temples) or simply Shikusi 窟寺 (Cave Temples). In the Shuijing zhu 水經注 (Annotated Commentaries on the Classics of Waterways) of the sixth century, the caves were called both Wuzhoushan shikusi and Lingyansi 靈嚴寺. Dao Xuan 道宣 (596-667), one of the greatest Buddhist monks of the Tang dynasty (617-907), called them Beitai shiku 北臺石窟 (Beitai Caves) or Heng’an shiku 恒安石窟 (Heng’an Caves) in his Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳 (the Continuation of the Biographies of Eminent Monks). The complex was still called Wuzhoushan dashikusi 武州山大窟寺 (Grand Cave Temples on Wuzhou Mountain) in 1147 when Cao Yan 曹衍 of the Jin dynasty 金 (1114-1234) composed the inscription for a stele entitled “the Dajin xijing Wuzhoushan chongxiu dashikusi” 大金西京武州山重修大窟寺 (Record of the Repairs of the Grand Cave Temples of the Wuzhou Mountain in the Western Capital of

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3 Wei Shou 魏收 (505-572), Weishu, 181:2736 (henceforth Weishu).
4 Weishu, 6:130; 7:152.
the Great Jin, [hereafter known as the Jin stele]).\(^6\) We have no literary record on the Yungang caves from the Yuan dynasty 元 (1234-1368). The name “Yungang” was used first in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). It occurred in an inscription recording the repairs of the Yungang Fortress, which derived its name from the peak of Wuzhou Mountain. So did the Yungang Cave Complex. This has remained the name for the complex down into the modern period.

The initiation of the construction of the Yungang Cave Complex is recorded in the *Weishu*, as follows:

曇曜白帝，於京城西武州塞，鑿山石壁，開窟五所，鏤建佛像各一。高者七十尺，次六十尺，彫飾奇偉，冠於一世。

Tan Yao petitioned the Emperor (Wencheng) to hew the mountain wall of the Wuzhou Fortress in the west of the Capital and execute five caves, inside each of which would be carved one Buddha image. The tallest one would be seventy *chi* (21.6 m) and next one sixty *chi* (18.5 m).

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\(^6\) The stele is no longer extant. The inscription survived in the *Yongle dadian* 永樂大典 (the Encyclopaedia of the Yongle Era). It consists of more 2100 characters and records the history of Yungang. In the twenty third year of Zhizheng 至正 (1363) during the Yuan Dynasty, Xiong Mengxiang 熊夢祥, a Yuan Confucian scholar and poet, visited Yungang personally and transcribed the entire inscription. He later included it in his *Xijing zhi* 析津志 (the Xijing Gazetteer), the earliest Beijing gazetteer, which, in turn, was included in the *Shuntianfu Zhi* 順天府志 (the Shuntianfu Gazetteer), a Beijing gazetteer, compiled in 1885 by Miu Quansun 繆荃蓀 (1844-1919), a Qing bibliophile, in the fragmentary *Yongle Dadian*. This is the only source that we have today about the inscription. Su Bai came upon the transcription in 1947 while going through the *Shuntianfu Zhi* in the Beijing Library. The transcription is a valuable literary source for scholars to further study the Yungang caves, in particular, to possibly put the second-phase caves in chronological sequence and to date them because it provides the dates of several cave temples. It is evident that the transcription has been copied several times and there are mistakes and missing words, but scholars do not question the authenticity of the transcription.
Carvings and embellishments would be wondrous and magnificent. It would be the unparalleled of the time.  

It is therefore evident that Tan Yao, the chief administrator of the monks, was the first to propose the construction of the caves and the carving of colossal statues. Tan Yao, who had just gone through the bitter experience of the first Buddhist persecution (446-453), was eager to protect Buddhism and the Dharma-pitaka teaching. Yungang thus arose as a symbol of his mission.

We are also told in the *Weishu* that after the death of Cui Hao 崔浩 (?-450), his chief advisor, Emperor Taiwu 太武 expressed repentance for the aforementioned persecution of Buddhism, but considered it too late to rescind the order. We are told that Gong Zong 恭宗 (427-451), Emperor Taiwu’s oldest son, a fervent Buddhist, secretly desired to restore the religion but did not dare to do so.  

After Emperor Wencheng succeeded to the throne, he wasted no time in restoring Buddhism and rebuilding Buddhist caves, monasteries and statues in repentance for what his grandfather had done. He therefore issued an edict ordering the restoration of Buddhism and having the images built and caves hewn along Wuzhou Mountain. It was under such a fervent revival of Buddhism and the expiation from the court that Yungang caves were executed.

In the autumn of the first year of Xingguang 興光 (454), Emperor Wencheng issued an edict to cast five standing statues of Sakyamuni Buddha in the Great Monastery

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7 *Weishu*, 114:3037.
8 *Weishu*, 114:3035.
of the Five-Storeyed Pagoda for the benefit of five emperors from Taizu onwards, each measuring one zhang six chi (4.9 m) high.\textsuperscript{9}

We might therefore infer that the five Tan Yao caves in the first-phase were executed to honor the same five emperors, and that the five statues represent the same five emperors. Evidently the construction of the early Yungang caves was greatly motivated by political reasons, as well as for religious purposes.

Northern Buddhism, which differs from southern Buddhism remarkably, needed support from the court. Southern Buddhism, on the contrary, was not closely connected with politics or the court in order to survive. It emphasized doctrines and translations, whereas northern Buddhism paid more attention to practices such as meditation and visualization of the images. As a result, most of the Buddhist caves are concentrated in northern China, and early Buddhist caves and monasteries were constructed to pray for the emperors, and for the protection and promotion of the Buddha Dharma. Political motivation was a major influence on the subject matter in visual representations. The later caves, as indicated in the inscriptions, were executed for very different reasons. The donors came from a broad cross-section of society expressing wishes to be reborn in the Pure Land, to transcend the “sea of bitterness” and to accumulate karmic merits.

We may never know who the Yungang artists were because we do not possess any literary source to explicitly tell us who worked there or how many different groups were hired. However, the \textit{Weishu} does mention that when Liangzhou 涼州 was pacified by the Northern Wei in the year of 439, many people were forced to migrate to the east,

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Weishu}, 114:3036. The five emperors were believed to be Emperors Daowu, Mingyuan, Taiwu, Jingmu and Wencheng. One zhang is ten chi and one chi is 30.9 cm.
and among them came Buddhists and artists.\textsuperscript{10} The \textit{Weishu} also tells us that some barbarian monks had visited the Western Regions and observed Buddhist images there before they arrived at the capital:

太安初，有師子國胡沙門邪奢遺多，浮陀難提等五人，奉佛像三，到京都。皆云“備歷西域諸國，見佛影跡，及肉髻、外國諸王相承，咸遣工匠，摹寫其容，莫能及難提所造者...”又沙勒胡沙門，赴京師，致佛缽并畫像跡。

Early in the Taian there were five barbarian Śrāmanas from Lion Land (Ceylon), Yesheyitu, Fotunanti and others who bearing three Buddha images, arrived at the capital. They all said that they had traveled all the countries of the Western Regions and seen the Buddha’s image with top-knot. The kings of foreign lands, one after another, had all sent artisans to copy the image, but there had been none who could equal that made by Fotunanti. A barbarian monk from Shale also went to the capital and presented the Buddha’s begging bowl and paintings of Buddha image.\textsuperscript{11}

These literary sources suggest that Yungang artists absorbed different styles from a number of sources, and perhaps added innovations of their own. Early Yungang images display a mixture of western influence and local creation so that, for instance, Yungang

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Weishu}, 114:3032.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Weishu}, 114:3037.
artists lightly covered the right shoulder of the Buddha image with the hem of the robe to conform better to the Chinese culture. In Gandhara, Mathura or Western Regions, the right shoulder of the Buddha is bare. I will suggest that the early imagery at Yungang is a combination of various elements, though western influences are dominant. Chinese elements gradually began to seep through during the second-phase where we see Chinese influence in architecture and style. Thorough sinicization eventually took place in the last stage of the second-phase and reached its peak during the third-phase.

In the Shuijing zhu 水經注, the earliest written record of Yungang, Li Daoyuan 魄道元 (?-527) described the caves as grand and matchless.\(^\text{12}\) In the Xu gaoseng zhuan of the Tang dynasty, Dao Xuan tells us that, “the carving and decoration are unique and marvelous. They are forever matchless.”\(^\text{13}\) These remarks make clear that even relative contemporaries recognized the grandeur of Yungang.

II. The State of the Field

The study of Yungang can be summarized into four categories: traditional Chinese antiquarian documentation, pioneering Japanese exploration, Western scholarship and contemporary Chinese scholarship.

(1) Traditional Chinese Antiquarian Documentation

The earliest extant literature about Yungang is, as mentioned above, Li Daoyuan’s Shuijing zhu which vividly depicts the caves and its surroundings vividly:

武州川水又東南流, 水側有石祗洹舍并諸窟室, 比丘尼所居也. 其水又東轉巡靈巖南, 鑿石開山, 因巖結構, 真容巨

\(^{12}\) Li Daoyuan, Shuijing zhu, juan 13 in SKQS.

\(^{13}\) Xu gaoseng zhuan, T50:2060:427c27.
The water in the Wuzhou River again runs southeast. 

Beside the river there are stone monasteries and many caves. It is where the Bhikkhunis (nuns) live. The water then turns east passing south of Lingyan (Yungang). Stones were chiseled and mountain was hewn according to the structure of the mountain. The images are realistic and grandiose. They are rare for this time. The (Buddha) halls on the mountain, platforms over water, and the smoke (of the incense) from the monastery are all within sight of each other. The dense forest reflects a scene of brocade. Looking into the distance a new vista dazzles your eyes. The (Wuzhou) river then runs off the mountain from the southeast.  

That Yungang could thus inspire such poetic imagery attests to the beauty and majesty of the site.

As mentioned earlier, in the Weishu, Wei Shou records in some detail the persecution of Buddhism, its restoration and the initiation of the construction of the

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14 Shuijing zhu, juan 13, in SKQS.
Yungang caves with the enthusiastic revival of Buddhism. This perhaps is the most reliable literary source on Yungang.

In the *Lidai sanbao ji* (Annotated Bibliography of Buddhist Sutras from Han dynasty to Sui), Fei Changfang 費長房 of the Sui dynasty (581-618) mentioned that in the third year of Heping 和平 (462), Tan Yao assembled eminent monks in the Beitai Cave Temple (Yungang) and translated sutras to assure that the Buddha Dharma would be transmitted to later generations.¹⁵

The vinaya master Dao Xuan of the Tang dynasty wrote about Tan Yao and the Yungang caves in three of his books: the *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, the *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 (Collected Essays on Buddhism from the Northern Wei to Early Tang) and the *Da Tang neidian lu* 大唐內典錄 (Catalogue of Buddhist Works in the Great Tang).

The *Xu gaoseng zhuan* described one of the Yungang caves as such:

竊之大者, 舉高二十餘丈, 可受三千許人. 面別鐫像, 窮諸巧麗, 竊別異狀, 駭動人神.

A large cave can be as high as twenty zhang (66m) and can hold some three thousand people. The faces of the images are unique and the carving of the body beautiful. The beauty of the embellishment is unparallel. Each cave is unique. It trembles your spirit.¹⁶

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¹⁶ *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T50:2060:427c27.
The *Guang hongming ji* gives a similar description of Yungang to that of the *Weishu* and considered Yungang to be exceptional, unique and marvelous, and unparalleled throughout the world.\(^{17}\)

The *Da Tang neidian lu* also mentioned, like the *Weishu*, that in 462 Tan Yao and others were translating sutras in Yungang. It also mentioned that there was still a stele at that time. It should be mentioned that the *Da Tang neidian lu* is the source which misled many scholars to believe that Yungang was first executed in the first year of Shenri (414).\(^{18}\)

Both the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*\(^{19}\) (A Catalogue of Buddhist Scriptures Compiled during the Kaiyuan Era) and the *Fayuan zhulin*\(^{20}\) (The Forest of Gems in the Garden of the Dharma) mentioned Tan Yao’s translation of sutras in 462.

In the *Gu Qingliang zhu*\(^{21}\) (Ancient History of Mt. Qingliang), Hui Xiang of the Tang briefly mentioned Yungang.

The transcription on the Jin stele that I have mentioned earlier is a valuable literary source for scholars to study Yungang. The first half of the transcription records the execution of Yungang and the rest records the repairs and additional constructions at Yungang through the Tang, Liao and the Jin dynasties. It mentions that two temples, Huguo Temple and Chongjiao Temple still bore stele inscriptions at that time (Jin dynasty) and that the Chongjiao Temple stele inscription indicated that the temple was built in 484 and completed in 489. This inscription provides important clues

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\(^{21}\) Hui Xiang, a monk from the Tang, *Gu Qingliang zhu*, T51:2098:1095b08.
to make it possible for scholars to date and put the second-phase caves in chronological sequence.

In the Ming Dynasty, Hu Mi 胡謐, a Ming scholar, recorded the ten temples of Yungang mentioned in the Jin stele transcription in his Shanxi tongzhi 山西通志 (Shanxi Gazetteer).

Zhu Yizun 朱彝尊 (1629-1709), a well known Qing (1644-1911) scholar, visited Yungang and wrote the Yungang shifo ji 云岡石佛記 (Notes on the Yungang Stone Buddha) and mentioned that Yungang was well known at that time and people often visited there and admired the grandeur of the Buddha images.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese scholars did not contribute much to the study of Yungang. Buddhist art and architecture were not appreciated as an object to study, and the poverty and political turmoil did not allow scholars to pay any attention to Yungang, one of the greatest Buddhist devotional centers was deserted (fig. 1.4). However, Japanese scholars, architects, photographers and artists conducted pioneering explorations of Yungang and re-introduced Yungang to the Japanese populace, many of whom practiced Buddhism along with the native Shinto religion.

(2) Pioneering Japanese Scholarship

The earliest expedition to Yungang was made in 1903 by Itō Chūta 伊東忠太 (1867-1954), an architect and well-known architectural historian. Itō, accompanied by Yokogawa Shōzō 橫川省三 and Utsunomiya Gorō 宇都宮五郎, “re-discovered”

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22 Hu Mi, Shanxi tongzhi, juan 170 in SKQS.
23 Zhu Yizun, “Yungang shifo ji,” in Pushuting ji 曝書亭集 (Collections from the Pavilion of Drying Books), juan 67 in SKQS. Pushuting is a garden pavilion in Jiaxing, Zhejiang Province where Zhi Yizun used to dry his eighty thousand books.
Yungang accidentally when they traveled from Zhangjiakou 張家口 in Hebei Province to Datong passing by Yungang. Soon after his visit, Itō suggested that the Yungang style had been directly influenced by the Gandhara style and it had no direct connection with the Western Regions. He also wrote other articles on Yungang in Tōyō kenchiku no kenkyū 東洋建築の研究 (Research on East Asian Architecture) and in Kengaku kikō 見学紀行 (Notes on Expeditions). However, these articles are, as acknowledged by himself, studies only from the perspective of architecture because he had neither knowledge of Buddhism nor Buddhist art.

Of the early Japanese scholarship on Chinese Buddhist art, Ōmura Seigai’s 大村西崖 (1868-1927) Shina bijutsushi chōsō hen 支那美術史彫塑編 (A History of Chinese Art: Sculpture Volume) published in 1915 is among the most significant. Using largely primary sources, Ōmura examined Chinese sculpture, both religious and secular, from antiquity to the Five dynasties (907-960) arranging them chronologically with photographs and rubbings. In this survey, he included twenty-six hundred inscriptions and used about twelve hundred primary sources. Alexandra C. Soper calls this book “an anthology of Chinese sources” and translated a large portion of the records into English with annotations to his Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China. In the Yuan-Wei chapter of his book, Ōmura discussed the restoration of Buddhism by Emperor Wencheng and the five Tan Yao caves (Caves 16-20) suggesting for the first time that the

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24 See his article “Shina sansei Unkō no sekkutsu-ji” 支那山西雲岡の石窟寺 (The Cave Temples of Yungang in Shanxi China), Kokka, Nos. 197 and 198, 1906. Also see Dongfang zazhi, vol. 16, Nos. 2 & 3. The article later was translated into Chinese by Huang Xiaoke 黃曉可 and collected together with Chen Yuan’s 陳垣 article “Ji Datong Wuzhou shanshi shikusi” 記大同武州山石窟寺 (On the Cave Temple of Wuzhou in Datong), in Shanxi Datong Wuzhou shikusi 山西大同武州山石窟寺 (The Cave Temple of Wuzhou in Datong Shanxi) (Datong zhen: [s.n, 1922], 1922).
five images in the five Tan Yao caves represent the five emperors from Emperor Daowu onwards. This theory is later widely accepted by scholars.

Matsumōto Bunzaburō 松本文三郎 (1869-1944) visited Yungang on his way home from a journey to India in 1917. In chapter five of his book Shina Bukkyō ibutsu 支那仏教遺物 (Buddhist Remains in China), he argued that the Yungang caves are more influenced by the Gupta style, and not by the Gandhara style at all, as proposed by Itō Chuta.

In 1918, Sekinō Tadashi 関野貞 (1868-1935) also paid a visit to Yungang. In his articles “Saiyū zasshin” 西遊雑信 (Miscellaneous Accounts of the Journey to the West) and “Unkō sekkutsu no nendai to sono yōshiki no iigen nitsuite” 云岡石窟の年代と其様式の起源に就いて (The Origin of the Style and Periodization of Yungang), which were later collected in his book Shina no kenchiku to geijutsu 支那の建築と藝術 (Chinese Architecture and Art), in collaboration with Tokiwa Daijō 常盤大定 (1870-1945). With these essays, Sekinō Tadashi re-introduced Yungang to the Japanese public. Sekinō’s contribution to the study of Chinese Buddhist art, however, is better recognized for his work Shina Bukkyō shiseki 支那佛教史跡 (Buddhist Monuments in China), another collaboration with Tokiwa. From 1906 to 1925, Tokiwa and Sekinō made seven archaeological expeditions to China, and they compiled this six-volume survey with texts and plates from 1925 to 1931. The English version Buddhist Monuments in China came out in 1930. In this survey, Buddhist monuments (caves, temples and steles) with an emphasis on Buddhist caves were carefully examined and arranged geographically. Volume two, the section on Shanxi province, is mainly dedicated to an examination of
Yungang caves from 1 to 20. The section discusses Tan Yao, the initiator of Yungang, the motivations behind the construction, and the date of the execution, placing the beginning of the construction in 460 A.D. The authors give a general description of the style suggesting that stylistically Yungang was inspired indirectly by Central India and was stimulated by Dunhuang.\(^{25}\)

Tokiwa also made a number of archeological expeditions to China on his own, and from 1920 to 1928, he made five visits to Buddhist sites, Yungang included. These exploration accounts appeared later in his book *Shina bukkyō shiseki tōsaki* 支那佛教史跡踏查記 (Expeditions to Chinese Buddhist Sites) in 1937. Arranging these sites geographically, Tokiwa briefly introduced each of them briefly. In September of 1920, Kinoshita Mokutarō 本下杢太郎 (1885-1945), who was a medical doctor, went to Yungang with the artist Kimura Sōhachi 木村壯八 (1893-1958). Kinoshita wrote about this journey including Kimura’s sketches under the title “Unkō nihōku” 云岡日録 (Account of Yungang Journey) and “Daitō sekibutsu zatsuwa” 大同石佛雑話 (Miscellaneous Accounts of the Datong Stone Buddhas). Later on, these two short works were collected in his book *Daitō sekibutsuji* 大同石佛寺 (The Datong Cave Temples). This book, though not as scholarly as Ōmura’s or those by Sekinō and Tokiwa, was remarkably influential and widely known in Japan.

The problem with the early studies of Yungang mainly lies in the fact that they were limited to the framework of a visual understanding of the imagery, lacking contextual and comparative analysis. None of the scholars studied Yungang in comparison with other Buddhist caves in China or with any individual images prior to

This historical event is important given the fact that Tan Yao himself was from Liangzhou and that Northern Wei Buddhism was greatly influenced by that of the Northern Liang.

It was Ono Genmyō 小野玄妙 (1883-1939) who for the first time in 1924 shed new light on the evolution and stylistic features of Yungang by carefully examining it in the context of its iconographic connections with the Dunhuang and Longmen Caves. In his book *Kyokutō no sandai geijutsu* 極東の三大藝術 (Three Great Arts of the Far East), Ono argued that the subject matter and iconographic style in Yungang, Dunhuang and Longmen are rather similar and there is a close connection between them. He mapped out the interlinks of Buddhist caves from Gandhara to other caves in the Western Regions to Yungang and Longmen. Thus a new avenue for investigating Yungang imagery was opened up.

Among all the Japanese scholars working on Chinese Buddhist art, two scholars, Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 (1905-1971) and Nagahiro Toshio 長廣敏雄 (1905-1974), deserve special recognition. They undertook painstaking surveys of Buddhist caves at Xiangtangshan 嚮堂山 (1937), Longmen 龍門 (1941) and Yungang (1951-56). Their thirty-two volume monumental work on the Yungang Cave Complex, *Yungang—the Buddhist Caves Temples of the Fifth Century A.D. in North China* has been a valuable source for the study of Yungang even though it contains misjudgments. Their systematic analysis and close reading of the imagery of each cave (1934-1944) made this work invaluable and the exhaustive description of each plate is admirable. The photographs
and the transcriptions of the inscriptions have become even more valuable over time due to the destruction of the caves and the erosion of the inscriptions over the years.

A detailed account of this indefatigable expedition was given in Mizuno’s article “Unko sekkatsu chōsaki” 云岡石窟調查記 (Notes on the Investigation of Yungang Caves) which later was collected in his book Chūgoku no Bukkyō bijutsu 中国の佛教美術 (Chinese Buddhist Art). It provides the schedule of their measuring, photographing, making rubbings, and so on.

The thirty-two volumes consist of sixteen volumes of plates and sixteen volumes of texts. In the Introduction to each volume, the authors investigate a special theme such as “the Cave Temples in China,” and the Conclusion briefly deals with a particular cave. The majority of each volume is devoted to reading the imagery of each cave.

However their research excluded the western-end caves, which are the focus of this study. They focused primarily on the caves of the first two phases and only briefly summarized the third-phase caves as a whole. This was my primary inspiration for the exploration of the third-phase caves in detail and to compare them with some small, unstudied Shanxi caves and some early Longmen caves. I hope that with the addition of my own work, the evolution of Buddhist art in Central Plain China can be mapped out more clearly.

Nagahirō’s Unkō to Ryūmon 云岡及龍門 (Yungang and Longmen) briefly compares these two cave sites and traces the origin of the style of Yungang. He analyzed the styles of Gandhara and Gupta as well as other Central Asian sites and their relations. He noticed that Cave 5 displays a combination of different styles from Gandhara, Central India and Central Asia. However, he cautions that this does not mean that Cave 5 was
directly influenced by the West. Rather he suggests that it was the Liangzhou artisans who played a more important stylistic role.

The work of Mizunō and Nagahirō on Yungang certainly laid the foundation for later research. Yet, due to lack of archaeological hard evidence and literary sources, the investigation was limited to historical context and stylistic analysis of a general nature. Their studies were not able to date the Yungang caves, nor were they able to put them in chronological sequence.

Therefore, scholarship on the Yungang caves in the early twentieth century was impeded. It was limited to the general introduction of the caves, to visual iconographic comparisons with western precedents, and to a stylistic analysis within a limited frame. This problem continued until 1947 when Su Bai from Peking University came upon the Jin stele transcription, which I mentioned earlier. This discovery made possible the beginning of the groundbreaking study of Yungang that I will discuss in the next section.

(3) Contemporary Chinese Scholarship

The studies of Yungang by Chinese scholars from the point view of art history started rather late. The leading scholars of Chinese Buddhist art, Su Bai and Yan Wenru, among others, did not thoroughly investigate Yungang until the 1960s and 70s.

Earlier studies of Yungang were undertaken either from historiographical or Buddhological perspectives. Chen Yuan (1880-1971) studied Yungang in 1919 as historiographer collecting all the primary sources on Yungang.26 His article, “Yungang shikusi de yijing yu Liu Xiaobiao” cloud shikusui de yijing yu Liu Xiaobiao (The Translation of Sutras

in Yungang and Liu Xiaobiao) in 1929 was from the Buddhological perspective. He argued that Tao Yao was not only the initiator of the five Tan Yao colossal caves but also the first translator of sutras in Yungang.

Tang Yongtong 汤用彤 (1893-1964) studied Yungang from the perspective of a Buddhologist. He pointed out that the images in Yungang must have originated from Liangzhou considering the fact that the initiator of Yungang, Tan Yao, was from the land of Liang. He also argues that Buddhism in Northern Wei was greatly influenced by the Northern Liang Buddhism which emphasizes meditation practice. He also discussed the iconographic features of the early caves and the close connection between meditation practice and Buddhist caves.

We should also not neglect Yan Wenru’s contribution to the study of Chinese Buddhist art and that of Yungang. Yan disagreed with Su Bai on the date of inception of the Tan Yao caves arguing, using literary sources, that the Tan Yao Caves were not started in the first year of Heping (460) as Su Bai had proposed. Rather they were started from the second year of Xing’an 興安 (453).

Su Bai’s study of Yungang was groundbreaking. He dated and put the caves of the first two phases in chronological sequence. This was not possible before the discovery in 1947 of the Jin stele transcription which provides significant clues for dating and arranging the caves in chronological sequence.

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28 Tang Yongtong, Han Wei liangJin Nanbeichao fojiao shi 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (History of Buddhism from the Two Jins and the Southern and Northern dynasties) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1938), 119.
29 Yan Wenru, “Yungang shiku zaoxiang zhong de yixie ticai de kaoshi” 云岡石窟造像中的一些題材的考釋 (Examination of the subject matter in the imagery of the Yungang caves), Xiandai foxue, 1963, 2: “Yungang shiku de kaichuang he ticai de fenxi” 云岡石窟的開創和題材的分析 (Analysis of the inception and subject matter of the Yungang caves), Shehui kexue jikan, 1980, 5 & 6.
The methodology applied by Chinese and Japanese scholars differs considerably. Chinese scholars prefer to use literary sources to interpret the visual representations whereas Japanese scholars emphasize visual interpretations. For example, they focused on stylistic evolution and used that as an anchor for reading the imagery. In contrast, Su Bai examines Buddhist art relying heavily on literary sources. After he came upon the Jin stele transcription, Su Bai, in 1956, published an article “Dajin xijing Wuzhoushan chongxiu dashikusi bei jiaozhu” 大金西京武州山重修大石窟寺碑校註 (Annotations on the Record of the Repairs of the Grand Cave Temple of the Wuzhou Mountain in the Western Capital of the Great Jin).³⁰

Later, basing himself on the Jin stele transcription and other primary sources, Su Bai reexamined the Yungang caves and wrote another article, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun” 云岡石窟分期 試論 (Preliminary Research on Periodization of the Yungang Caves) in 1976.³¹ In this article, and for the first time, he shed new light on such issues as the chronological sequence of the caves, the dating of the caves, and the inception and completion of the caves. Using this new evidence, he was able to date caves whose time of construction had long puzzled scholars.

Refuting Su Bai in 1980, Nagahiro argued that the authentication of the Jin stele transcription was highly questionable and that the periodization of Yungang should not be based on untested written material.³²

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³² Nagahiro Toshio, “Shuku Haku Shi no Unkō Sekkutsu bunkirono bakusu” 宿白氏の雲岡石窟分期論を駁す (Rebuttal of the periodization of the Yungang caves by Su Bai), Tōhō gaku, 60 (1980): 30-44.
Su rebutted these arguments in his article “Dajin xijing Wuzhoushan chongxiu dashikus i bei de faxian yu yanjiu” (The Discovery and Examination of the Transcription for the Jin Stele), providing a detailed history of the transcription and testifying to its authenticity.\footnote{Su Bai, “Dajin xijing Wuzhoushan chongxiu dashikus i bei de faxian yu yanjiu,” in Zhongguo shiku Yungang shiku, 89.}

In 1987, Su proposed the “Yungang Style” theory in his fourth article “Pingcheng shili de jiju he ‘Yungang moshi’ de xingcheng yu fazhan” (The Steady Empowerment of Pingcheng and the Formation of ‘Yungang Style’).\footnote{Su Bai, “Pingcheng shili de jiju he ‘Yungang moshi’ de xingcheng yu fazhan,” Zhongguo shiku Yungang shiku, vol. 1, 176-197.} In this article, Su argued that Pingcheng was a significant city with a large number of migrants from all over Asia and that it was a political and cultural center in north China from the time of Emperor Daowu (r. 386-414). He claims that that is why it attracted many artists from all over the country who made great contributions in building the capital and Yungang. He proposed a dating for the construction of the second-phase caves, and further argued that the patronage by the court made the formation of “Yungang Style” possible. Su concluded that Yungang was an important cave complex and that the “Yungang Style” had a profound impact on the evolution of Buddhist caves throughout China. An elaboration of this viewpoint will be the main focus of Chapters 5 and 6 of this study.

Nagahiro changed his position and accepted Su Bai’s theory later in 1990.\footnote{Nagahiro Toshio, “Yungang shiku di jiushi shuangku de tezheng” 云岡石窟第9, 10雙窟的特徵 (The Features of the Twin Caves of 9 and 10), Zhongguo shiku Yungang shiku, vol. 2, 193-207.} Although Su Bai’s arguments were unanswerable in the past, they are entirely valid in view of such new literary evidence, i.e. the Jin stele transcription.
Su Bai, in spite of advancement of Yungang studies, never examined in detail the Yungang third-phase caves which are the central focus of this study.

We should also acknowledge the importance of the chronology of Yungang from earliest times to present. The work by Zhang Zhuo 張焯, the current director of the Yungang Grottoes Institution, *The Chronology of the Yungang Caves* collects and annotates all the historical records concerned with Yungang and Pingcheng.\(^{36}\) It is a valuable literary resource for all scholars of Yungang and the Northern Wei.

(4) Western Scholarship

The earliest leading Western scholars of Chinese Buddhist art are Édouard Chavannes, Osvald Sirén and Alexander C. Soper. Chavannes started his expeditions to Buddhist cave temples (Yungang, Longmen and the caves in Shandong) as early as 1907, and his survey of Buddhist caves and temples *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale* (1909, 13 vols.) contains invaluable photographic records.\(^{37}\) Some of the Yungang images which he documented were the earliest visual sources upon which scholars depended during the early study of Yungang.

Sirén conducted important iconographic surveys of Chinese Buddhist art in the early 1920s. His *Chinese Sculptures from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Centuries* (1925, 4 vols.) analyzed the Chinese Buddhist monuments arranging them according to the geographical locations and chronological order.\(^{38}\) Using the typology method, Sirén examined artifacts with extant hard evidence such as dates and records of provenance. He briefly discussed the Yungang caves of the Northern Wei in the Shanxi section of his

\(^{36}\) Zhang Zhuo, *Yungang shiku biannianshi* 云岡石窟編年史 (the Chronology of the Yungang caves) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2006).


book. However, his research on Yungang, like much other early scholarship, is limited to the introduction of the images of Yungang and he was unable to provide a chronological order for the caves. He made the same mistake as Chavannes by stating that Yungang was started in the first year of Shenrui (414) and ended in Zhengguang (524).  

So far James Caswell’s *Written and Unwritten* is the only full length study of the five Tan Yao caves in English. Regrettably his attempt to date the caves is not convincing simply because the caves do not bear any inscriptions, nor do we have any hard evidence.

(5) Problems and Reflections:

With all of the persevering, century-long studies of Yungang, regrettably, no attempts have hitherto been made to study the western-end caves. Attention has been concentrated on the first two phases, and the third-phase caves have been totally neglected. Mizuno and Nagahiro mentioned these caves only briefly in their thirty-two volume monumental work.

No attempts have been made to read the imagery of the third-phase caves; or to look into the close connections between words and visual images, that is, between the iconography and Buddhist scriptures. No study has ever examined the connection between the imagery and Buddhist monastic life, or the connection between sculpture and painting. Even basic issues such as what the visual representations tell us, who they represent, and what the chronological order of the caves is and how much the “Yungang

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Style” influenced the Buddhist art in central plain China, have gone unexplored. It is these questions which this study, the first comprehensive examination of the western-end caves, attempts to answer. These questions seemed unanswerable in the past. I hope this is no longer the case.

III. Methodology and Organization of This Study

Using the archaeological typology method, based on first hand site observations and a broad consultation of primary text material, this contextual study reads the iconography of the Yungang third-phase caves and attempts to decipher their visual representations. It explores the architectural structure of the caves, the subject matter of the imagery and the stylistic evolution of the images, and more importantly, it traces their origins. The study also compares the Yungang third-phase caves with the Longmen early caves, and some small unexplored Shanxi caves to trace the route by which the “Yungang Style” spread out and influenced the evolution of Buddhist caves in central plain China.

Using the visual representations in Yungang as hard evidence, I will attempt to address such issues as the connections between literature and imagery, Buddhist monastic life and imagery, and politics and imagery.

The significance of the study of the Yungang third-phase caves does not lie only in its iconographic interpretations, but also in the understanding it provides of the origin and development of Buddhist iconography in Longmen, Gongxian and other caves. The study is also crucial to understanding the continuity of the “Yungang Style” and to tracing the iconographic origin of the Shanxi caves and their interrelations with Yungang. It is significant also because it provides a clear picture of the stylistic development of Buddhist caves in the central region China.
The study begins in Chapter Two with an overview of Yungang in its historical, social, religious and visual contexts. It discusses the restoration of Buddhism immediately after Emperor Wencheng came to the throne in the year of Xing’an (452), and the significant role of Tan Yao in the execution of Yungang. The centre of this chapter, however, is to address issues of the first two phases in terms of subject matter, style, composition and architectural structure to better understand the imagery of the third-phase. I propose a new chronological order for the second-phase caves. When Su Bai proposed his chronological sequence for the second-phase caves, he did not include caves 11, 12 and 13. I argue that cave 13 was executed shortly after the five Tan Yao caves, and before any of the other second phase caves. Caves 11, 12, and 13 were constructed right after the five Tan Yao caves. They were the first group of the second-phase caves. The rest of them are all twin caves.

Chapter Three is devoted to reading the imagery of the third-phase caves. The chapter divides the third-phase caves into six types according to the arrangements of the niches in each cave. It identifies the subject matter and deciphers every visual representation. The chapter studies each cave by examining their stylistic features and categorizes them into five groups. It examines caves 37 and 38 in great length as case studies. The chapter finally dates the third phase caves using the extant images bearing explicit dates as an anchor, thereby putting the third phase caves in chronological sequence. This is the highlight of the chapter and a major contribution of this study.

Having deciphered the visual representations and read the imagery of the third-phase caves in the previous chapter, I will interpret and analyze them in Chapter Four. I will trace the origins of the architecture, the subject matter and style of the third-phase
caves. I propose that the subject matter of Yungang is primarily the visual representation of literary works, in particular, the works translated by Tan Yao. I also propose that the eternal theme of the three Buddhas in three *kalpas* was primarily based on the *Fufazang Yinyuan zhuan* 付法蔵因緣傳 (*A History of Indian Patriarchs*) and the *Dajiyi shenzhou jing* 大吉義神咒經 (*Sutra of Great Auspicious Significance of Magic Spell*) translated by Tan Yao and others rather than on the *Lotus Sutra*. I argue that several prominent episodes such as the Great Departure and the Defeat of Mara in Buddha’s life, and the Dipamkara Buddha and the Asoka *jataka* in his previous lives were represented as didactic tools. The highlight of the chapter is the detailed examination of the close connection between words and images.

Chapter Five examines the interrelationship between the third-phase caves in Yungang and the early caves in Longmen. By comparing and contrasting the architectural structure of the caves, the iconographic composition, the subject matter and the style in some detail, this chapter traces the evolution of the central plain caves in the late Northern Wei. It ultimately attempts to deal with two major issues: firstly how far temporally and geographically did the “Yungang style” go? Did Yungang influence Longmen or Gongxian? Secondly, was the sinicization of Buddhist iconography completed in Longmen or in Yungang? It argues that the sinicization of Buddhist imagery was a long process, and that the sinicization edict of emperor Xiaowen and the growth of southern influences after the court moved to Luoyang were not the only factors pushing the process. I propose that Chinese Buddhist monastic material culture and the synchronization of painting and sculpture also played a part. This is the essence of the chapter.
Chapter Six looks into the relationship between the unexplored caves in Shanxi and the third-phase caves of Yungang. It examines the architectural structure, the imagery, subject matter and style of about twenty unstudied Shanxi caves. It further compares these caves with the Yungang third-phase caves and the Longmen caves to seek an interrelationship between them and to trace the iconographic origins of these caves. The chapter examines the Fushan Cave in great detail as a case study. It categorizes the twenty selected unknown Shanxi caves into three groups according to their iconographic features. The chapter ultimately dates the caves, puts them in three time periods and maps out the iconographic evolution of the central plain caves. This is the highlight of the chapter. It also attempts to explore the issues of patronage and function. The study of these caves will shed new light on the imagery of the central plain caves as a whole, and their interrelationship with the third-phase caves in Yungang.
CHAPTER TWO

THE YUNGANG CAVES—AN OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a panoramic overview of Yungang. It begins with the historical, social and religious background of Buddhist persecution by Emperor Taiwu of the Northern Wei in 446 and the revival of the religion. This is followed by the discussion of the execution of the Yungang caves at the restoration of Buddhism and the significance of the eminent monk Tan Yao. It goes on to examine the features of the first-phase caves and looks into the individual images and the images in the West prior to Yungang to trace the origins of the early Yungang style. The chapter then reviews second-phase cave and examines the chronological sequence of the cave and some problematic issues.

I. Historical, Social and Religious Background

From the disintegration of the Han Empire in 220 C. E. to the reestablishment of a unity under the Sui dynasty in 581, China went through a period of almost four centuries great political turbulence and disunion. Never since 221 BC had China been so divided before and never been divided for so long, and she would never be afterwards. Never before had there coexisted so many powerful nomadic tribes in and around northern China struggling for power. The Xiongnu 匈奴, the Xianbei 鲜卑, the Jie 羯, the Di 氐
and the Qiang were the major tribes that caused the political and social turmoil. They founded many short-lived, petty states in the north and forced Chinese to migrate to the south. Among all of these tribesmen, the Xianbei tribe survived to be the strongest.

We do not, however, know much about the early history of the Xianbei people though the word Xianbei was mentioned as early as in the *Yi Zhoushu* (Memorabilia of Zhou Documents) and *Chuci* (Songs of the South). Recent archaeological discoveries attested to their early settlements in the Da xinganling region in northeastern Inner Mongolia. They were hunters and lived a nomadic life, and during the Han dynasty, Xianbei people migrated to northeast China and gradually grew powerful after the decline of the Xiongnu. In the third century, they continued their nomadic life both in the Inner Mongolia and northern Shanxi. Among the Xianbei tribes, the Murong, the Yuwen, the Duan and the Tuoba clans emerged as the most powerful. The word Tuoba means the “descendants of Xianbei father and Xiongnu mother.”

Our knowledge about the ethnological origins of the Tuoba people remained uncertain until the Tuoba ancestral shrine was discovered in 1979 near Gaxian cave to the north of the Da xinganling on the upper Gan River, a branch of the Nen River in Heilongjiang Province, in northeastern China. We still do not

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43 The archaeological excavation conducted in 1979 and 1980 led by Mi Wenping 米文平 discovered the blessings inscribed by Li Chang 李敞 who was sent by Emperor Taiwu to worship his ancestors’ stone shrine in a cave located to the northwest of Nen River 嫩江 in northeastern China. The inscription is on the west side of the stone wall, see Mi Wenping, “Shi Xue 石學 (Study of stones),” *Guangming ribao* 光明日报
possess much knowledge about the social and economic development between Tuoba Liwei (r. 220-277) and the early reign of Tuoba Gui (r. 386-409), which is a transitional period of the Tuoba from the tribal confederation to the establishment of the dynasty. The Tuoba clan founded a small independent state called Dai first in 315; however, it did not last long. Shi Yijian (r. 338-376) rejuvenated it in 338 but it soon collapsed. In January of 386, Tuoba Gui, the son of Shi Yijian, succeeded to the hereditary leadership of the Dai. In April, he changed the name of the state from the Dai to Wei. In 396, he marched his army into China proper and in the first year of Tianxing (398), he transferred his political seat from Shengle (in modern Hohhot, Inner Mongolia) to Pingcheng and soon began to build palaces and ancestral shrines establishing a new dynasty. Pingcheng then became the southern capital, and Shengle the northern capital. However, at his death, Tuoba Gui left five states in the north unconquered: Western Liang, Northern Liang, Northern Yan, Western Xia and Great Xia. It was not until the year of 439 when the third emperor of the Northern Wei, Tuoba Tao (Emperor Taiwu) conquered the Northern Liang, that northern China was unified.

In the Weishu, we are told that Emperor Taiwu was a Daoist believer and did not support the teaching of the Buddhist treatises. Here we read:

報, 1980, 11, 25. Also see Mi Wenping, “Xianbei shishi de faxian yu chubu yanjiu” 鮮卑石室的發現與初步研究 (Discovery and preliminary research on the stone chamber of the Xianbei), Wenwu, 1981, 2, 1; and Mi Wenping, “Xianbei Shishi shishi de faxian yu chubu yanjiu” 鮮卑石室所關諸地理問題 (Several issues concerning the geography of the Xianbei stone chamber),” Minzu yanjiu, 1982, 4.

Weishu, 2:33.
Although he followed the Buddha Dharma and respected the Śramanas (monks), Emperor Taiwu did not look at the teachings of scriptures. Nor did he earnestly seek out the meaning of karma. On acquiring the Way of Kou Qianzhi (the Way of Daoism), the emperor believed in purity and quietude, and non-action (of Daoism). Kou Qianzhi convinced the emperor of the Daoist Way about immortality. Thus, he believed it.  

Emperor Taiwu was much involved in military campaigns so he hardly had any time to focus his attention on Buddhism. During a campaign in 445 to suppress a revolt by a certain Gai Wu 蓋吳 in Chang’an, Emperor Taiwu learned, with great astonishment, that the Śramanas drank wine and secretly kept bows and arrows, spears and shields in their monastery. An inspection of the monastery then was immediately ordered. More surprisingly, winemaking utensils and tens of thousands of treasures deposited for safekeeping by high officials and wealthy people, as well as hidden rooms for sexually promiscuity with the daughters of noble families were found. The emperor was thus enraged by śramanas’ illicit behavior. In the third month of 446, an edict was issued ordering the execution of the śramanas of Chang’an, and the destruction of the Buddha

45 Weishu, 114:3037.
images. A new decree to copy the action of Chang’an soon came into effect over all of China. The decree also says that from then on, if anyone dared to serve the barbarian Gods and make images, statues in clay or bronze they should be executed with their whole households.

However, after Cui Hao 崔浩, the main instigator of persecution of Buddhism, who wanted to sinicize the Tuoba people and establish an ideal Confucian state in the north, was executed, Emperor Taiwu felt repentant for what he had done and attempted to withdraw the order but it was too late. The suppression of Buddhism continued for seven to eight years and only ended with Emperor Taiwu’s death.

When Emperor Wencheng 文成, Taiwu’s grandson, ascended to the throne, he immediately restored Buddhism in the twelfth month of the same year of the Emperor Taiwu’s death in 452.

The decree says:

夫為帝王者, 必祗奉明靈, 顯彰仁道, 其能惠著生民, 濟益群品者, 雖在古昔, 猶序其風烈, 是以春秋嘉崇明之禮, 祭典載功施之族, 況釋迦如來功濟大千, 惠流塵境, 等生死者, 歎其達觀, 覽文義者, 貴其妙明, 助王政之禁律, 益仁智之善性, 排斥群邪, 開演正覺, 故前代已來, 莫不崇尚, 亦我國家常所尊事也．

All those who are emperors and kings must humbly revere the illustrious spirits and make manifest the way of
humanity. Those who were able to bestow compassion on the people and benefit the beings, though they existed in antiquity we still follow their example. Therefore the

*Spring and Autumn Annals* approve the worship of gods, and the Sacrificial Codes record those who achieved great exploits. How much more so has the Tathāgata brought the benefit to the world and his passion flows out to this worldly realm? Those who consider life and death as equal admire his supreme vision; those who look at writings and doctrines honor his wondrous clarity. He supports the prohibitions and the regulations of kingly government, and enriches the good nature of humanity and wisdom. He banishes the many evils and performs the perfect Enlightenment. Therefore since former ages none has failed to do him honor. Even in our realm has he ever revered and served…

今制諸州郡縣, 於衆居之所, 各聽建佛圖一區, 任其財用, 不制會限. 其好樂道法, 欲為沙門, 不問長幼, 出於良家, 性行素篤, 無諸嫌穢, 郡里所明者, 聽其出家. 率大州五十, 小州四十人, 其郡遙遠臺者十人. 各當局分, 皆足以化惡就善, 播揚道教也.

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46 *Weishu*, 114:303. Eng. trans. by Leon Hurvitz with some revision, *see Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism* (Kyoto: Jimbunkagaku Kenkyusho, Kyoto University, 1956), 70.
We now command the various provinces, prefectures and sub-prefectures, wherever multitudes dwell, to permit the building of one Buddha image in each place and allow any expense without financial limit. For those who love and find the pleasure in the Way of Dharma and wish to become śramanas (monks), be they old or young, if they come from a good family, if their nature and conduct have always been sincere, if they are not suspected of indecency, and if they are vouched for by their native villages, they will be permitted to quit their household life for monastic life. As a rule, fifty in the large provinces, forty in small provinces, and ten in prefectures far from the capital. If each applies himself to his particular function, they therefore should all suffice to turn the evil to good and spread the Way of the Doctrine...\textsuperscript{47}

\begin{quote}
天下承風, 朝不及夕, 往時所毀圖寺, 仍還修矣. 佛像經論, 皆復得顯.
\end{quote}

When the entire empire received the mandate, ruined Buddhist images and monasteries were restored and

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Weishu}, 114:303. Eng. trans. by Leon Hurvitz with some revision, 70.
repaired immediately. Buddha images, sutras and treatises
soon all reappeared openly. 48

During the persecution, Tan Yao had taken a vow to be faithful to Buddhism. Immediately after the persecution, he urged the emperor to have colossal Buddhist images carved along the Wuzhou Mountain. This is the beginning of the execution of Yungang.

II. Tan Yao and the Inception of Yungang

We do not know much about Tan Yao considering his significance in bringing Buddhism to a greater height of development after the persecution, carrying out the translations of Buddhist sūtras and initiating the construction of Yungang. We do not know his birth or death dates, and only have very few fragmentary literary accounts of him. He is only briefly mentioned in the biography of Xuan Gao 玄高 in the Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳 (Biographies of the Eminent Monks):

時有沙門曇曜，亦以禪業見稱，偽太傅張潭伏膺師禮.

At that time the śramana Tan Yao was well known for

Dhyāna meditation practice. The Honorary Grand Mentor Zhang Tan humbly revered and treated him as a teacher. 49

48 Weishu, 114:3036.
The Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳 (The Continuation of Biographies of the Eminent Monks) said he was virtually unknown:

释曇曜，未詳何許人也。少出家，攝行堅貞，風騷閑約，以元魏和平年，任北臺昭玄統。綏縂僧眾，妙得其心，住恒安石窟通樂寺，即魏帝之所造也。

The Śramana Tan Yao was virtually unknown. He left the household life when he was young. He was virtuous and pure. He strictly followed the vinaya vow. During the Heping Era (460-465), he was appointed the Chief Administrator in Beitai (Yungang). He assembled great number of monks and skillfully gained their faith (lit. hearts). He lived in Tongle Monastery of the Hengan Caves (Yungang) which was constructed by the emperor.⁵⁰

The Weishu provides us with more details about him:

沙門曇曜有操尚，又為恭宗所知禮。佛法之滅，沙門多以餘能自效，還俗求見。曜誓欲守死，恭宗親加勸喻，至於再三，不得已，乃止。密持法服器物，不暫離身，聞者歎重之…

⁵⁰ Xu gaoseng zhuan, T50: 2060:0427c22.
The śramana Tan Yao has virtuous qualities and was respected by Emperor Gongzong with proper rites. After the persecution, most of the monks made their living by their abilities, and wanted to be seen as secularized persons. Tan Yao made a vow to remain faithful (to Buddhism) unto death. Emperor Gongzong personally attended to dissuade him. He tried many times. In the end he did not succeed so he stopped. Tan Yao still secretly wore Buddhist robes and carried Buddhist objects and was never separated from them. Those who heard about it celebrated and respected him…

Tan Yao, together with the śramana Changnayeshe and others, translated fourteen new sūtras. 51

The Lidai sanbao ji 历代三宝记 (Records of the Three Jewels through All Dynasties) mentioned that Tan Yao began to translate sutras in the Beitaï Cave Temples (Yungang) in 462:

至和平三年，詔玄統沙門釋曇曜，慨前凌廢，欣今載興。故
於北臺石窟寺內集諸僧眾，譯斯傳經，流通後賢，庶使法
藏住持無絕。

51 Weishu, 114:3035 and 114:3037.
By the third year of Heping (462), the chief administrator śramana Tan Yao was still bitter about the persecution and was overjoyed that Buddhism was restored. Therefore he assembled many Buddhist monks to translate sutras in the Beitai Cave Temples, so that the sutras could be carried down to future generations and that the Buddha Dharma would be carried down forever.52

The *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集 (A Catalogue of the *Tripitaka*) compiled by Seng You 僧祐 (445-518), pointed out that Tan Yao collaborated with Ji Jiaye 吉迦夜 in 472 and they translated the *Zabaozang jing* 雜寶藏經 (the Sutra of the Miscellaneous Treasures) and the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* 訇贄元真贄 (transcribed by Liu Xiaobiao).53 It is worth mentioning that Tan Yao re-translated the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* together with Ji Jiaye because he was not satisfied with his first translation. This suggests the importance of the sutra, which I shall discuss in great length later in Chapter Four. Among all his translations, three sutras: the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan*, the *Zabaozang jing* and the *Dajiyi shenzhou jing*, have come down to us.

In the *Guang hongming ji*, we are told that Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) issued an edict appointing Seng Xian 僧顯, head of the Siyuan Temple 思遠寺, to be the Chief Administrator of Monks 沙門都統 in succession to Tan Yao, and Seng Yi 僧義 from the

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52 Fei Changfang 費長房, comp. in 597, *Lidai sanbao ji* (Records of the Three Jewels through All Dynasties), T49:2034:85b05.
Huangjiu Temple 皇舅寺 to be the Vice Administrator of Monks 都維那 to assist the Chief Administrator of Monks. This new appointment indicates that even at that time, Tan Yao was still active and was solely in charge without the assistance of the Vice Administrator.⁵⁴

Tan Yao’s contributions to Buddhism consisted not only of the initiation of the execution of Yungang and the translation of the sutras, but also his lesser known establishment of the Samgha-household 僧祇戶 and Buddha-household 佛圖戶 economic systems.

In the Weishu, we are told:

In early Heping Era (460-465), Shi Xian passed away. Tan Yao replaced him and his title was changed to the chief administrator of Śramanas. Earlier, in the second year of the restoration of the Dharma of the Buddha (453), Tan Yao was ordered to leave Zhongshan for the Capital (Ping Cheng). The Emperor happened to be out [when Tao Yao

⁵⁴ Dao Xuan, Guang hongming ji, T52:2103:27b18.
arrived] and met with Tan Yao on the road. The Imperial Horse moved forward to nibble [Tan] Yao’s robe. At the time, it was believed that even the horse recognized a benevolent man. The Emperor later honored him with the etiquette of the teacher. Tan Yao petitioned the Emperor to hew the mountain wall of the Wuzhou Fortress in the west of the Capital and execute five caves, inside each of which would be carved one Buddha image. The tallest one would be seventy chi and next one sixty chi. Carvings and embellishments would be wondrous and magnificent. It would be the best of the time.55

The execution of Yungang was thus started under this directive. However the passage does not provide us with an exact date of the inception of Yungang. Therefore any proposal on the beginning of the construction of Yungang is a matter of conjecture.

Based on the above passage, Su Bai inferred that the inception of Yungang was started in the first year of Heping (460) when Tan Yao replaced Shi Xian as the Chief Administrator of Śrāmanas.56 Yan Wenru, disagreeing with Su, argued that Su Bai mistakenly dated Tan Yao’s replacement of Shi Xian in 460 as the time of the execution of Yungang, and that these are two different events that happened at different times. Yan suggested that Yungang was begun in the second year of the restoration of Buddhism (453) soon after Tan Yao was asked to leave Zhongshan 中山 (in current Hebei) to go to

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55 Weishu, 114:3037.
the capital (Pingcheng), when personally Tan earnestly requested the emperor to execute the caves. Therefore, the caves were started in the second year of Xingan (453); not the first year of Heping (460) as proposed by Su Bai.

The third inference to the inception of Yungang was based on the *Da Tang neidian lu*, which put the inception of Yungang in a much earlier date: the first year of Shenrui 神瑞 (414). In the *Da Tang neidian lu*, we read:

... 即道武皇帝魏之太祖也, 改號神瑞元年, 當晉孝武太元元年也 ... 恒安郊西大谷石壁, 皆鑿為窟, 高餘十丈, 東西三十里, 櫛比相連其數眾矣. 谷東石碑見在, 紀其功績, 不可以算也.

... It was the founder of the Wei, emperor Daowu, who changed the reign name to the first year of Shenrui. This was certainly the first year of Taiyuan of the Eastern Jin Emperor Xiaowu...To the west of Heng’an (Datong) outskirt, in the deep valley on the stone cliff, caves were hewn throughout. They are more than ten *zhang* high and spread over an area of thirty *li* (fifteen kilometers). They are situated one after another and there are a great number of them. To the east of the valley, the stele can still be seen recording their countless accomplishments.  

57 Yan Wenru, “Yungang shiku de kaichuang he ticai de fenxi,” *Shehui kexue jikan*, No.s 5 and 6; Also see *Yungang shiku yanjiu* (Study of the Yungang Caves) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2003), 7.

Based on this source, Cao Yan concluded in his Jin stele inscription that the Yungang caves were started from the first year of Shenrui (414) and ended in the first year of Zhengguang 正光 (524). This proposal was later widely accepted by the Ming and Qing sources. However, if we carefully examine the Da Tang neidian lu, the problem appears immediately. First, during Emperor Daowu’s reign (386-409), there was no such reign title as “shenrui”, which is actually Emperor Mingyuan’s 明元 (409-423) reign title. Secondly, Northern Wei Buddhism directly followed that of the Northern Liang, and did not flourish until the migration of the Northern Liang people to the capital, Pingcheng. We are told that in October of the fifth year of Taiyan 太延 (439), Liangzhou was pacified by the Northern Wei, and some thirty-thousand people were forced to migrate to the capital (Pingcheng). The Śrāmanas and Buddhist practices both went along with them to the east and from then on Buddhist images and doctrines grew rapidly. If Buddhism was not popular before 439 in the Northern Wei, it is not likely that Buddhist practice was active before that, nor that Buddhist art was popular.

Let us now turn our attention back to the earlier Weishu passage (p. 39) based upon which both Su Bai and Yan Wenru drew their conclusions about the inception of Yungang as 460 and 453 respectively.

The passage tells us two things: 1) Tan Yao replaced Shi Xian in 460 as the chief administrator of Śrāmanas; 2) in the second year of the revival of Buddhism (453), Tan Yao was ordered to leave Zhongshan and go to the capital (Pingcheng). And when Tan

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59 Weishu, 4:90.
60 Weishu, 114:3032.
Yao met with the emperor on his arrival (453), he requested construction along the mountain to execute five caves.

This passage does not indicate the inception of Yungang. Neither does it mention that Yungang was started after Tan Yao became the chief administrator of Śrāmanas in 460 as Su Bai suggests.

Furthermore, in the Xu gaoseng zhuan, we learn that in the first year of Heping (460), Tan Yao was appointed as the chief administrator and lived at Tongle Temple 通樂寺 in the Heng’ an Caves (Yungang). This shows that in the first year of Heping, there were already temples in Yungang. So the beginning of the construction must be prior to that.

Several sources testify that in the third year of Heping (463), Tan Yao had already assembled many virtuous monks in the Beitai Caves 北臺石窟 (Yungang) and translated sutras. Thus, it seems impossible that Yungang was begun in 460, and the start must have been sometime earlier. The construction must have been started shortly after Tan Yao met with the emperor (453) and petitioned the execution of five caves, but before the first year of Heping (460). We have been told that Tan Yao had already translated sutras in Yungang in 463 and there were temples in Yungang in 460. Thus I am proposing that the inception of Yungang would have been between 454 and 460.

III. The Five Tan Yao Caves and Their Influence

The five Tan Yao caves are the five first-phase caves, namely, caves 16 to 20, inside each of which a colossal Buddha image was executed. The images appear

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masculine and mighty with broad chest and round face. The first-phase caves can be divided into two groups: caves 18, 19 and 20; and caves 17 and 16.

The general architectural structure of the five caves is almost identical (fig. 2.1). The plan of the caves is elliptical with the east, west and north walls tapering gradually when they ascend towards the ceiling forming a half dome, but the ceiling itself is almost flat in a smaller elliptical shape corresponding to the floor. Only the south wall stands straight. Above the entrance gateway, there is a window in each cave. All five first-phase caves belong to statue caves. No vihāra (monastery) caves or caitya (stūpa) caves are found.63

The motifs of the five Tan Yao caves are mainly the three Buddhas of the three kalpas and the thousand Buddhas. The life of the Buddha and the jataka stories are not yet represented.

All five caves except cave 16 are primarily occupied by the three Buddhas of the three kalpas surrounded by the thousand Buddhas. Cave 16 contains only a single standing Śākyamuni Buddha, and the rest of the cave is covered by small niches (fig. 2.2). Stylistically, the Śākyamuni Buddha differs considerably from the main Buddha in other caves. It shows a more elegant and sinicized style. The Kāsāya (outer robe) is in covering mode with flattened step-like folds. The Samkakasika (inner robe) whose upper hem crosses the chest diagonally is held in place by a sash with a bowknot whose streamers hang down to the navel. The figure appears extremely dignified and graceful. The main Buddha in caves 17 to 20, on the other hand, looks very powerful and solemn as exemplified by the standing Buddha in cave 18 (fig. 2.3). The seated Buddha in cave 20,

63 Vihaaras a Sanskrit word for dwelling or refuge, monastery cave. Caitya is a Sanskrit word, meaning that which is worthy to be gazed upon. In Buddhism it means a stupa cave.
in particular, produces a mighty and solemn appearance with round face, large eyes and broad shoulders (fig. 2.4). The outer robe which clings to the body closely covers the left shoulder and its hem covers the right shoulder. This rendition is very common in the early images. Later images are more in the covering mode with slanting shoulders and more attenuated body. The outer robe of the Buddha in cave 20 is rendered with many raised lines, on top of which is an incised line. This gives firmness to the image. The double-layered edge of the robe with zigzag designs hangs down to chest at one side and goes around to cover the left shoulder. Most of the early Yungang images are rendered in a similar manner. This almost became a symbol of the early Yungang visual representations.

Our knowledge of the five Tan Yao caves seems to have remained at the visual observation level: the architectural structure, the subject matter and the style, as we have discussed. Many iconographic questions remain unanswered. Who do the five colossal images represent? What is the chronological sequence of the five caves? Scholars have studied the five caves and made many speculations, one of which suggests that cave 19 was the first cave to be executed, then caves 18 and 20 followed right after it, cave 17 was after them and cave 16 was the last one, and that only caves 18, 19 and 20 were finished, caves 17 and 19-1 were left unfinished, and caves 16 and 19-2 were started in a much later time which is evidently reflected from the style of the Buddhas in these two caves. It is reasonable to assign cave 16 as the last one since it is at the east end of the five caves and stylistically the main Buddha is sinicized and does not have the masculine

feature of the images in caves 20 and 18. It is very possible that cave 19 was the first one to be executed since it is the largest cave among the five, and more importantly, the structure of the cave is different from the other five Tan Yao caves. This is the only cave which has two side caves in which the attendant Buddhas are represented (fig. 2.5). I believe that the cave with its own side caves was initially designed to be the centre of the five caves, and that caves 18 and 20 are on the right and caves 17 and 16 are on the left. Thus the initial plan was to execute the five caves from the center and then extend outwards to both sides. This is likely to be the sequence of the execution of the caves.

However if we observe the style of the five images in the five caves, the question of the stylistic sequence arises immediately. The image in cave 19 does not seem to demonstrate early style (fig. 2.6). The main Buddha in caves 18 and 20, on the other hand, shows the early style. They closely resemble to the Taian images (dated to 455 and 457 respectively) (figs. 2.7 and 2.8). The thin robe of the main Buddha in cave 19 demonstrates a different visual rendition. It covers the left shoulder and the hem of it crosses to cover the right shoulder. The edge of the outer robe is pleated with zigzag designs. The rendition of the folds differs from that in caves 18 and 20. Here the folds are rendered in flattened step-like form unlike the cord-like folds observed in caves 18 and 20. The folds in cave 19 are more relaxed and natural. These step-like folds are not represented in any of the early images either from Taipingzhenjun 太平真君 era (440-451) or Tai’an 太安 era (455-459). I am inclined to believe that the construction of cave 19 was started first but the statues were executed later, after those in caves 18 and 20. The sequence of the style perhaps can be arranged as such: 18 and 20, 19, 17 and 16. The side caves of cave 19 were finished in a later time.
Thus I am proposing that the construction of the caves and the carving of the images were conducted by two different groups and they were not carried out simultaneously. After the construction of cave 19 was started, cave 18 was soon started as well. The images in cave 18 however were carved right away. For unknown reasons, the images in cave 19 were not rendered immediately after the cave was hewn. The cave was left unfinished.

The chronological sequence of the construction and iconographic style of the five caves are not the only questions that scholars have not been able to answer with concrete evidence. We are hitherto unable to identify the five colossal images with complete confidence since none of these five caves, regrettably, bears an inscription. The only source that allows us to speculate upon the identification of the five images is *Weishu* in which we are told that in the very same year of the restoration of Buddhism (452), officials were ordered to have a stone image made to resemble the emperor. When it was completed, on both the face and soles of the feet were black pebbles, which mysteriously resembled the moles on emperor Wencheng’s body.65 This incredible coincidence corroborated what Faguo 法果 had claimed half a century earlier that “the emperor of his time was *Tathāgata* Incarnate.”66 The *Weishu* also provides us another clue to infer who these five images might represent. It says that in the autumn of the first year of Xingguang 興光 (454), a new edict was issued ordering the officials to cast five standing *Śākyamuni* images representing the five emperors from the Emperor Taizu (Daowu) onwards within the Grand Five-Storeyed Temple. Each image would be six *chi* (1.85 m) in height and together twenty-five thousand *jin* (twelve thousand kilograms) of copper

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65 *Weishu*, 114:3036.
66 *Weishu*, 114:3031.
would be used. In light of the traditional practice, it is thus generally inferred that the five colossal images from cave 16 to cave 20, following the tradition, represent the same five emperors.

This theory was first proposed in 1915 by Ōmura Seigai and later was widely accepted by scholars. Yet, it is still debatable who each of these images specifically represents. Without any new inscriptive evidence, we probably will never have complete confidence to assign the image to a certain emperor. Any suggestion would be a matter of conjecture.

We are not only uncertain about the identification of the five images, the chronological sequence of the construction and iconographic style, or the inception of the five caves as we have discussed above, we are also unaware of when the five caves were completed. Su Bai suggested that the five Tan Yao caves were mainly Emperor Wencheng’s accomplishment and the work was stopped with his death in 465. He later changed his position and admitted that the construction of the five caves could have been extended to Xiaowen reign (r. 471-499). Nagahiro Toshio argued that the work continued to 467 during the Xianwen’s reign and cave 16 was completed as late as the

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67 Weishu, 114:3036.
69 Alexandra Soper assigned cave 20 to emperor Jingmu 景穆, cave 19 to emperor Taiwu 太武, cave 18 to emperor Mingyuan 明元, cave 17 to emperor Daowu 道武 and cave 16 to emperor Pingwen 平文, see “Imperial Cave-chapels of the Northern Dynasties: Donors, Beneficiaries, dates” in Artibus Asiae, 1966, 242; Yoshimura Rei 吉村伶 assigns the five images to the different rulers: cave 16 to emperor Wencheng, 17 to emperor Jingmu, 18 to emperor Taiwu, 19 to emperor Daowu and cave 20 to emperor Mingyuan, see Tennin tanjōzu no kenkyū: Higashi Ajia Bukkyō bijutsushi ronshū 天人誕生図の研究 東アジア仏教美術史論集 (Tokyo: Tōhō shoten, 1999), 256; Su Bai did not assign these images to any specific ruler. Instead, he simply suggested that these five images represent the five emperors (Daowu, Mingyuan, Taiwu, Jingmu and Wencheng), see “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 76.
70 Su Bai, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” in Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 76.
thirteenth year of Taihe (490). Su Bai believed that the construction of cave 16 continued until sometime before the transfer of the capital to the south in 494.

When we reviewed, based on previous studies, the five Tan Yao caves, I mainly addressed the problematic issues which have long puzzled scholars in the hope that, by using both hard evidence and literary sources, we can at least look into these issues in different perspectives if we can not find concrete evidence to support our proposals.

Another issue I would like to address is the iconographic origin of the five caves. The question I would like to look into is what elements have exerted the greatest influence on the formation of the iconography in the five Tan Yao caves.

I will examine some extant images, from India, Gandhara, the Western Regions to the Silk Road and central plain China, in comparison with the images in the five Tan Yao caves in the hope of finding some clues to the iconographic origins of early Yungang.

The Gupta Buddha, dated to 440-55, now housed in the National Museum New Delhi, appears similar to the standing Buddha on the south wall of cave 19 and those in cave 18. All the robes cling to the body closely and the rendition of the folds is very similar. These are just few examples of iconographic similarity (figs. 2.9, 2.10 and 2.11).

The “Preaching Buddha” discovered in Peshawar is reminiscent of the seated Buddha in cave 20 (fig. 2.12). Both images appear masculine and grandiose with stern face and broad chest. The Peshawar image is in open mode with only one shoulder covered. The cave 20 image covers the left shoulder and the hem of the robe covers the

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right shoulder leaving part of the chest bare. Both inner robes cover only one shoulder. The arrangements of the folds of the robes are considerably similar. The cord-like folds seem to be glued onto the robe. We have ample examples of Gandhara images that resemble the early Yungang images (fig. 2.13 and 2.14).

We should also not overlook the facts that both Tan Yao and Shi Xian are from the West and that Northern Wei Buddhism carried on from that of the Later Qin 后秦 and the Northern Liang 北凉. Both Tan and Shi came to the capital (Pingcheng) in 439 when Liangzhou was pacified along with other migrants and Buddhist images and doctrines. The famous meditation master Xuan Gao 玄高 from the Maijishan Cave Complex came to the capital as well. It is not hard to imagine that the migration from the west had a profound influence on the iconography of early Yungang.

Some extant images preceding Yungang bear an explicit date. For example, the image dedicated by a certain Wan Shen 菀申 was dated to the fourth year of Taipingzhenjun (443) (fig. 2.15). This image closely resembles the standing Buddha on the south wall of cave 19 (fig. 2.10). The robe of the Buddha clings tightly to the body demonstrating the contour of the body. The end of the robe is layered by inner robe and outer robe. These two images are so closely alike that one might believe that these two images were perhaps made by the same artists.

By comparison of these images, I would argue that the early iconography of Yungang was inspired by the style of Mathura, Gandhara and images preceding Yungang.

In the Weishu, we are also provided more clues as to the inspiration of the early Yungang images:
Early in the Taian there were five barbarian sramanas from Lion Land (Ceylon), Yesheyitu, Fotunanti and others who bearing three Buddha images, arrived at the capital. They all said that they had traveled all the countries of the Western Regions and seen the Buddha’s image with top-knot. The kings of foreign lands, one after another, had all sent artisans to copy the image, but there had been none who could equal that made by Fotunanti. A barbarian monk from Shale also went to the capital and presented the Buddha’s begging bowl and paintings of Buddha image.  

The passage clearly tells us that the Śramanas who came to the capital with Buddhist images and paintings had been to all the countries of the Western Regions and seen the Buddhist images there, and these images must have played a role in the formation of the early Yungang images. It is not hard to imagine that when Pingcheng was the capital and one of the Buddhist centers of the fifth century, many Buddhist artisans and devotees must have visited the capital and worked there. 

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75 Weishu, 114:3037.
It is thus not surprising that the early imagery of Yungang is a hybrid of different elements. It is a combination of different cultures and different lands. Mathura, Gandhara, the Western Regions and finally Liangzhou were the important inspirations of early imagery of Yungang. In the meanwhile the images preceding the Yungang early images have played a role as well. The extant Taipingzhenjun images must also have given the Yungang artists some inspiration for their own creation. Based on all kinds of different influences, the Yungang artists made their own innovations when they created the five Tan Yao images of the first phase.

The icons in the second-phase present different imagery. They are relatively small and the rendition is more natural. The sternness shown in the first phase images is replaced by the mild smile on the face. The creation of the second-phase images is a process of gradual sinicization.

IV. The Yungang Second-phase Caves

The second-phase caves have been previously studied. Thus our review, based on the previous research, will primarily look into problematic issues and unanswered questions such as where caves 11, 12 and 13 fit chronologically into the sequence of the construction, why the Dharma protectors were represented in every cave during the second-phase and why the jataka stories are mainly represented in caves 9 and 10. It is hoped, by doing so, to find some clues as to how much, if any, influence the second-phase caves have exerted on the third-phase caves which is the primary task of the thesis.

76 Su Bai wrote several influential articles on Yungang. In these articles, the second-phase caves were examined and some of them were dated. See “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” and “Jinbei yanjiu” in Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 76 and 89. Japanese art historians Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio studied the second-phase caves in detail, see “Unkō sekkutsu: seireki goseiki ni okeru Chūgoku hokubu Bukkyō kutsuin no kōkogakuteki chōsa hōkoku: Tōhō Bunka Kenkyūjo chōsa, vols. 1-X.
To do so, the architecture, the subject matter and the style of the second-phase caves will be reviewed first.

The second-phase caves are composed of eleven caves (1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13), among which caves 1 and 2; 5 and 6; 7 and 8; and 9 and 10 are four pairs of twin caves. They are believed to be executed between 465, the death of Emperor Wencheng, and 494, the transfer of the capital to Luoyang, three decades in total. Some caves were finished before the transfer of the capital; some were left unfinished (caves 5, and 11) for unknown reasons.

The second-phase caves were not only sponsored by the court, as all the first-phase caves were, but also by high officials (such as Qian’er Qingshi 鉗耳慶時), Buddhist monks, nuns and yiyi邑義 (local religious and social organizations). Caves 5, 6, 7 and 8 are believed to be sponsored by Emperor Xiaowen, and caves 9 and 10 by Qian’er Qingshi. Cave 11 was never finished. The construction was stopped soon after it was started. Only the stūpa in the center was finished according to the initial plan; the small niches were added later on. They were sponsored by Buddhist devotees and communities as indicated by the inscriptions in the cave.

Architecturally the second-phase caves differ considerably from the first phase-caves. They are relatively small and are either rectangular or square in plan with flat, coffered or corbelled ceiling (fig. 2.16). Cave 13 is the only elliptical cave. Twin caves (caves 1 and 2; 5 and 6; 7 and 8, and 9 and 10) and complex caves with an ante-room and a main room (caves 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12) began to emerge during the second-phase (fig.

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77 Su Bai, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” in Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 78.
78 The images on the east wall of cave 11 are the earliest (483) icons sponsored by a yiyi of fifty-four devotees. Later in 493, Sun Qiusheng 孫秋生 and other 200 yiyi devotees patronized the images in Guyang cave, Longmen.
2.17). So did the caitya (stupa) caves (caves 1, 2, 6 and 11). Caves 5, 9 and 10 contain an arched passage behind the main image to allow the devotees to practice pradaksina (circumambulate) (fig. 2.18). Caves 7 and 8 began to have storeyed niches on each wall (fig. 2.19). The north wall bears two storeys, whereas the sidewalls contain four levels. The second-phase caves, in general, are more diversified in architectural structure than the first-phase. They began to be influenced by Chinese architecture. The ceilings began to be coffered or corbelled. The half-domed ceiling of the first-phase caves, which copied the Tupba tent style, gradually disappeared. During the third-phase, they are not seen any more. The Yungang ceilings are not really vaulted as those in Kyzil Caves (fig. 2.20). The center of the ceiling is actually flat but the edge of the ceiling is curved where it joins the walls.

The subject matter in the second-phase is also more diversified. It is not limited to the three Buddhas in the three kalpas and thousand Buddhas any more. The legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri, the twin Buddhas, the Dharma protectors, the life story of the Buddha and his previous lives all began to appear in the second-phase. Thirty-six episodes of the Buddha’s life story were represented in cave 6 alone. Most of the jataka and nidana stories in Yungang were represented in caves 9 and 10. The episodes of Mara’s assault, the conversion of Uruvila Kasyapa, the offering of food by the merchants are popular motifs in caves 7 and 8. Cave 6 presents a panoramic life story of the Buddha from his birth to his first sermon represented all over the cave. The jataka and nidana stories such as celestial maidens dedicating the canopies, two brothers who became monks, Nirgrantha-putras redeemed by Buddha in the fire Samadhi, offering of meal by Sudatta’s wife, Brahmana defeated in debate by Nagarjuna, Hariti lost her son
and the Syama story etc. represented in caves 9 and 10 are not found in any other caves. These stories are mostly represented in one single niche or panel. Only the Syama story is represented in successive panels to emphasize the significance of the motif.

The discourse between Vimalakirti and Manjusri became increasingly popular since the second-phase. Evidently it is because the *Vimalakirti Sutra* was one of the most popular sutras at that time. The debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri wonderfully set the stage for Chinese elite to have *qingtan* 清談 (Pure Conversation). The twin Buddhas steadily became one of the most important motifs. During the third-phase, the twin Buddhas are represented in almost every cave and in many case, they are represented as the main images of the cave on the north wall. Needless to say, the visual representation of the twin Buddhas is derived from the most influential sutra of the time, the *Lotus Sutra*.

Another motif that became very popular in the second-phase is the Dharma protectors. They are represented in every cave and everywhere, either on the ceiling or on the sides of the entrance. Evidently protecting the Dharma was a primary concern and issue at that time. The motif was also popular during the third-phase but not as frequently represented as in the second-phase.

The origin of these diversified motifs will be discussed at length in Chapter Four when I trace the origin of the motifs in the third-phase which will cover the motifs represented in the entire Yungang.

Stylistically the second-phase images slowly began to show the tendency of sinicization. The masculine, weighty and non-Chinese icons of the first-phase gradually began to be replaced by the smaller and more relaxed images. The stern and dull looking images were replaced by the more human images with gentle smile on the face. By the
end of the second-phase, the images in cave 6 had fundamental stylistic changes. The images are no longer in the open mode with one shoulder covered as seen in the first-phase. Instead, all images are clad in traditional Chinese robe with both shoulders covered. The standing Buddha on the west of the south wall is clad in thick and long Chinese robe with the entire body covered (fig. 2.21). The hem of robe flares out like a fishtail accentuates the weightiness of the body. The “V” shaped neckline is pulled down low. The cord-like folds disappeared and were replaced by the flattened step-like folds. It is a more natural rendition. The tense shown in the first-phase images are not observed in cave 6 any more. The images appear relaxed and human with gentle smile and smooth rendition of the robes. The iconographic style underwent fundamental changes since cave 6. After that, the images in small the caves between cave 11 and cave 13 continued the stylistic innovation (fig. 2.22). The images became more slender and human and the rendition is more natural as reflected in the seated Buddha in cave 11-10 (fig. 2.23). This is the transitional period between the second and third phase. By the third-phase, the images became even more slender and graceful with long neck and sloping shoulders (fig. 2.24). The iconographic style innovation was continued and new sinicized images were created. The sinicization reached its peak during the third-phase, which I will discuss in chapters three and five.

We have just reviewed the representative features of the second-phase caves from the perspectives of architecture, subject matter and iconographic style. It is suggested that these caves were constructed between 465 and 494.80 Among them, caves 7 and 8 are said to be the earliest executed right after the five Tan Yao caves, and caves 9 and 10, and caves 1 and 2 followed in time. Caves 5 and 6 are the last group of the second-phase

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80 Su Bai, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” in Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 78.
caves. Su Bai, annotating the Jin stele transcription, assigned caves 7 and 8 as the Huguo Temple, and caves 9 and 10 as Chongjiao Temple, and suggested, as the transcription indicated, that caves 9 and 10 were constructed in the 8th year of Taihe (484) and completed in the 13th year of Taihe (489). The Jin stele transcription indicated that the construction time of the Huguo Temple is unknown. It only mentioned that the temple is huge. He suggested that cave 11 was close to caves 5 and 6 in time. However, he did not put caves 11, 12 and 13 in chronological sequence with other second-phase caves.

Caves 11, 12 and 13 are a unique group. They are not twin caves like the other four groups. Cave 12 is a rectangular statue cave  with an anteroom and a main room as caves 9 and 10 (fig. 2.25); cave 11 is a stūpa cave (fig. 2.26); and cave 13 is a colossal statue cave (fig. 2.27). They represent the basic architectural structure in Yungang. Judging from the overall arrangements of the niches, I believe that both caves 12 and 13 were completed as initially planned but not cave 11. The cave was aborted soon after the stūpa and the ceiling were completed. Cave 12 contains an anteroom and a main room. The façade, like those in caves 9 and 10, is divided into three spans by four pillars. The plan of the main room is rectangular like other twin caves in the second-phase. The arrangement of the niches follows that in caves 7 and 8 (fig. 2.28). Cave 13 houses a colossal Maitreye Buddha with ankles crossed. The plan of the cave is

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81 Su Bai, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” in Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 80.
82 Su Bai, “Jinbei Yanjiu,” in Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu, 103. Zhang Zhuo annotated the Jin transcription in a different way and suggested that the transcription missed several lines thus the original meaning was lost through different transcriptions over time. He argued that Huguo Temple should be caves 1 and 2, which are the so-called Shigudong 石鼓洞 and Hanquandong 寒泉洞 in the Qing dynasty. These two caves even today still reverberate as described in the transcription, see Zhang Zhuo, “Dajin xijing wuzhoushan chongxiu dashilusi bei’ xiaoyi” 大金西京武州山重修大石窟寺碑小議 (On the transcription of the Jin stele recording the repairs of the grand cave temple of the Wuzhou Mountain in the western capital of the great Jin), in Yungang biannian shi (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2006), 437.
elliptical as the five Tan Yao caves. The ceiling is occupied by two intertwined dragons, flying celestials and clouds patterns (fig. 2.29). Cave 11 is occupied by a stūpa in the centre and the walls are filled with niches and images without an overall structure plan which led us to believe that the cave was unfinished (fig. 2.30). This suggests that caves 12 and 13 are earlier than cave 11. Caves 12 and 13 had been finished when cave 11 was started. It is worth mentioning that cave 11 bears an inscription with an explicit date, the 7th year of Taihe (483) (fig. 2.31). Evidently cave 11 was executed earlier than this date.

It is also clear that cave 11 is earlier than caves 9 and 10 which were dated between 484 and 489. If caves 12 and 13 were constructed earlier than cave 11, they are thus earlier than 483 and earlier than caves 9 and 10 as well. Further more, cave 13 is the closest to the five Tan Yao caves in locality. It would be more reasonable to execute cave 13 before any of the second-phase caves. Besides in both architecture and style, cave 13 resembles the five Tan Yao caves closely. The architectural structure is the same as the five Tan Yao caves with an elliptical plan. The cave houses a colossal image like the five Tan Yao caves. Another clue to support our proposal is that caves 11, 12 and 13 are not twin caves, which appeared at a later time when Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) succeeded to the throne and ruled together with Empress Dowager Wenming.

Thus they must have been constructed before any of the twin caves. We can also judge the chronological sequence of the caves by the visual representations of the images. The rendition of images in cave 12 is a reminiscence of that of cave 20 Buddha image.
They also resemble that of Luyeyuan Cave 鹿野苑 which was constructed under the reign of Emperor Xianwen (r.466-471) (fig. 2.32).83

Based on the clues we have just looked into, thus I propose that cave 13 is the earliest cave in the second-phase. It is followed by caves 12 and 11. These three caves were constructed under the reign of Emperor Xianwen (r. 466-471). In turn, they are followed by caves 7 and 8; caves 9 and 10; caves 1 and 2, and caves 5 and 6. These four groups of twin caves were constructed under the reign of Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) and Empress Dowager Wenming. Cave 6 is shown fundamental stylistic changes. Before that, all the second-phase caves continued the first-phase caves in style with minor changes in style. The fundamental innovation only took place in cave 6 where the images began to be clad with traditional robes with both shoulders covered.

V. Conclusion

As one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in human history, Yungang Cave Complex was an active Buddhist devotional center during the 5th century. It attracted many eminent monks and artists to contribute in translating the sutras and carving the images. The monks from north China made the contribution in building the caves for meditation practice, whereas the southern monks contributed in working on doctrines. Yungang was a meditation practice center and an institution for Buddhist doctrines. When the Liangzhou meditation master met the monks from Xuzhou 徐州 in south China, they contributed what they excelled at. This allowed Pingcheng to become a meditation center as well as a translation center of the doctrines.

Since northern Buddhism was often used by the court, the construction of Yungang is closely related to politics. The images in the five Tan Yao Caves are intended to represent the five emperors. The twin caves in the second-phase symbolize the “joint rule” of Emperor Xiaowen and Empress Dowager Wenming at the same time. That visual representation and politics are closely connected is also reflected by the rich representations of the Dharma protectors during the second-phase.

The first-phase caves were constructed under the reign of Emperor Wencheng (r.452-465), the first group of the second-phase caves (caves 13, 12 and 11) were executed under the reign of Emperor Xianwen (r. 466-471) and the rest of second-phase caves were under Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) and Empress Dowager Wenming (442-490). The third-phase caves were constructed under the reigns of Emperors Xiaowen, Xuanwu (r. 500-515) and Xiaoming (r. 516-528). With the court support, Yungang became one of the most important Buddhist centers in China.
CHAPTER THREE

THE THIRD-PHASE CAVES: IMAGERY AND DATING

This chapter is an attempt to date and read the imagery of the western-end caves along with caves 5-10 and 5-11 (37 caves in total). It reads these caves from four perspectives: the architectural structure, the iconographic composition, the subject matter and the style. The chapter categorizes the western-end caves in six groups according to their architectural structures and the arrangements of the niches and analyzes their iconographic features. It divides these caves into five groups according to their stylistic features.

Using the method of typology and iconographic styles, I try to ultimately constructs a chorological sequence of the third-phase caves and categorize them into six groups according to their chronological sequence and stylistic features. The chronological dating of the caves is a vexed question among scholars. In this study, I propose a new chronology.

I. Architectural Structure

Buddhist caves can generally be divided into two basic types: shrine caves 祇拜窟 and vihāra cave 精舍窟, which are not found in Yungang and anywhere in China. The shrine caves can be subdivided into statue caves 佛殿窟 and caitya caves 塔廂窟. In the
third-phase, with a single exception (Cave 39) all are statue caves. The floor plan of the
third-phase caves is either square or rectangular with a flat ceiling. The elliptical cave
with a half-domed ceiling, typical of the first-phase architectural structure, is not found in
the third-phase caves.

1. Caves

According to the arrangements of the niches, these statue caves can be divided
into six types: (1) three niches on three walls; (2) one niche on the north wall and
storeyed niches on other walls; (3) storeyed niches on three walls; (4) no niches; (5) two
niches on three walls and (6) Thousand Buddhas caves (Chart 1). The three niches on
three walls are the predominant cave structure. The composition of the images in three
niches on three walls varies and it presents 8 different variations.

Type One—Three Niches on Three Walls (18 caves)

The caves with three niches on three walls constitute almost half of the third-
phase caves, which are pointed or trabeated, and roofed or canopied niches are rarely
seen in third-phase caves. Cave 25 (fig. 3.1) is representative with three niches on three
walls, a composition which is richly diversified and is not just limited to the conventional
three seated Buddhas (caves 23-1 and 43). In this type of cave, we find many innovative
iconographic compositions. The three Buddhas can be one cross-legged Buddha with a
seated Buddha with legs pendant and a cross-ankled Bodhisattva (caves 32-12, 35 and
40); or the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna represented with a seated Buddha and one
Bodhisattva with ankles crossed (caves 33-6, 38-3 and 42-4). The composition can also
consist of the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna represented with a Buddha and a

84 They include caves 22-1, 23-1, 24, 25, 27-1, 27-2, 28, 32-11, 32-12, 33, 33-6, 34, 35, 37, 38-3, 40, 41
and cave 43, 18 in total.
Bodhisattva both of whom have their ankles crossed (cave 33) or the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna are simply represented with two cross-legged Buddhas (caves 25, 28 and 34). Another new iconographic composition in three niches is a seated Buddha on the main wall represented together with the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna on both east and west walls (cave 24).

The iconographic composition in three niches on three walls in the third-phase caves is much more complicated and diversified than the earlier caves. Since the conventional three seated Buddhas are no longer regular iconographic compositions. Instead, we encounter a richly diversified iconography. The Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna become the predominant images repeatedly represented on the main wall. They constitute almost half of the primary icons on the main wall.

**Type Two—One Niche on the North Wall and Storeyed Niches on the Other Walls**

(7 caves)

In the case of type 2, the north wall contains one niche in which the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna are represented and the west and east walls are covered by storeyed niches, the top of which, usually trabeated, contains a Bodhisattva with ankles crossed and the lower niche, usually a pointed arch, houses the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna, the three of them representing the three Buddhas of the three kalpas. Cave 26 (fig. 3.2) is an exemplar of this type of caves. Sometimes the niches on the side walls contain a cross-ankled Bodhisattva and only one seated Buddha, instead of two seated side by side (caves 24-1, 33-3 and 33-4). The iconographic composition of cave 24-1 (fig. 3.3) is unique and complicated. The top level of the side walls is covered by five images: the usual Bodhisattva with ankles crossed in the center, attended by two pensive

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85 These include caves 21, 22, 24-1, 26, 33-3, 33-4 and cave 38.
Bodhisattvas which, in turn, are attended by two seated Buddhas with legs pendant. In cave 38 (fig. 3.4), the top niche of the east wall is a Bodhisattva with ankles crossed. Beneath it is a seated Buddha with legs crossed. The west wall contains a seated Buddha with both legs pendant. Thus, the three Buddhas of the three *kalpas* are composed of the seated Buddha with legs crossed, the Buddha with both legs pendant and the Bodhisattva with ankles crossed.

**Type Three—Storeyed Niches on Three Walls (6 caves)**

Type 3 caves bear storeyed niches in all three walls and can be, according to the arrangements of the niches on the north wall, subdivided into two types: either two niches or six niches on the north wall.\(^{86}\) The north wall of caves 27 (fig. 3.5), 29 and 30 contains six niches arranged vertically in two tiers, three on each tier. The three lower niches are occupied by a cross-legged Buddha in the center and two seated Buddhas with both legs pendant beside it. The three upper niches of cave 27 are occupied by the Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed, whereas those in cave 29 (fig. 3.6) and cave 30 (fig. 3.7) are occupied with a seated Buddha with both legs pendant in the center and two attendant Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed beside it. The east and west walls of caves 27 and 29 bear four niches, two in each level. The upper niches are trabeated whereas the lower niches are point-arched. The upper level of the west wall of cave 30 is unusual, since it is a large canopied niche divided into three compartments inside of which a seated Buddha and two standing Buddhas are represented. The standing Buddha (fig. 3.8) to the north side has been looted, but the trace of the outline clearly demonstrate that originally it was a standing Buddha.\(^{87}\)

\(^{86}\) These include caves 27, 29, 30, 31, 32-9 and cave 36.

\(^{87}\) I think I found the lost standing Buddha in Musée Guimet in 2005 when I was doing research in Paris.
Caves 31 (fig. 3.9), 32-9 and 36 belong to the second type of storeyed niches. The north wall bears only two niches instead of six. The upper niche, as is usual, is a trabeated niche and the lower one is a pointed arch niche. Cave 31 and cave 32-9 (fig. 3.10) contain a Bodhisattva in the upper niche and the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna in the lower niche forming the three Buddhas of the three kalpas. The east and west walls of cave 31 contain three niches, two on the top and one at the bottom. The three Buddhas (a cross-legged Buddha with a seated Buddha with both legs pendant and a cross-ankled Bodhisattva) inside of these three niches form the three Buddhas of the three kalpas. The east and west walls of cave 32-9 and cave 36 (fig. 3.11) contain only two niches, one on top of the other.

**Type Four—Caves without Niche (3 caves)**

Type 4 caves do not contain any niches (23, 25-2 and 28-2), and instead there is an altar in front of each wall. Among them, Cave 23 (fig. 3.12) is unique in terms of imagery. The north wall is occupied by Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna and the west and east walls bear two standing Buddhas and an attendant Bodhisattva. The east wall is now damaged but the traces indicate the original iconography. Both caves 25-2 and 28-2 are unfinished judging from the arrangements of the niches and the carving of the images. The seated Buddha of cave 25-2 (fig. 3.13) was originally attended by two Bodhisattvas and two disciples, five image in this cave. The disciple (fig. 3.14) on the west wall is believed to be Kasyapa judging from the wrinkles on his neck. The workmanship of this small cave is excellent, though the east wall has been damaged.

Most of Cave 28-2 (fig. 3.15) was left uncompleted with only the main Buddha finished. The west and east wall niches were added to the cave later. This cave contains
two inscriptions with two explicit dates, one the fourth year of Zhengshi 正始 (507) and
the other to the third year of Yanchang 延昌 (514) on the west and east walls respectively.
This indicates that cave 28-2 is earlier than 507. Both caves 25-2 and 28 are similar to the
transitional caves located between caves 11 and 13 in architecture.

Type Five—Two Niches on Three Walls (2 caves)

Cave 5-10 (fig. 3.16) and cave 5-11(fig. 3.17) belong to type 5. The main wall
contains no niches, but instead, there is a low altar where all the images still are standing.
The east wall contains a trabeated niche and the west wall has a pointed arch niche.

Type Six—Thousand Buddha Cave (1 cave)

Cave 36-2 (fig. 3.18) is the only Thousand Buddha cave in Yungang. All three
walls are filled with small Thousand Buddha niches. At the bottom of each wall is the
depiction of the donors (fig. 3.19) in procession, and we might surmise that they possess s
high official status judging from the entourage holding the canopy following them. The
north wall bears seven Buddhas (fig. 3.20) between the Thousand Buddha niches and the
donors. Stylistically the seven Buddhas closely resemble those in Cave 4, in which there
is an inscription indicating the cave was executed in 524 which is the end of the
construction of Yungang. Therefore it is not unreasonable to infer that cave 36-2 is not
far from that date.

2. Niches

The niches in the third-phase are simpler and less ornate than in the second-phase.
Some of the trabeated fronts are plain without any ornament. There are six kinds of
niches: (1) pointed-arch; (2) trabeated; (3) roofed; (4) canopied; (5) curtained and (6)
stūpa niches, among which the pointed-arch niche and trabeated niche are most popular and are represented in every cave, while the rest rarely appear.

The pointed-arch niche is usually comprised of arch fronts, arch ends and arch posts. Sometimes arch ribs are represented, partially replacing the arch posts which in turn become very short.

The trabeated niche consists of trabeation and posts which separate the niche into three parts, with the central niche usually containing the cross-ankled Bodhisattva, and left and right compartments housing the seated Bodhisattva with one leg pendant. The trabeation is divided into a central part, rhomboidal parts and wings. A looped curtain sometimes appears underneath the trabeation.

The canopied niche consists of inverted triangular and round ornaments under which looped curtains are usually represented. The typical rendition of canopied niches in the western-end caves is that which is found in the western wall of cave 30 and those in cave 33-4 in the western wall.

The roofed niche consists of chiwei 鴟尾 (roof ridge ornaments), a bird in the middle of the roof, rafters, brackets, triangular ornaments and side pillars which divide the niche into three parts: a central niche, which usually houses a seated Buddha with both legs crossed, and two side compartments. In a typical case, underneath the roofed niche, a trabeated niche is represented as seen in the western side of the south wall in cave 38.

The pointed-arch front is usually decorated with a row of seated Buddhas, normally seven, above which is usually a row of ornate garland, and sometimes the garland is held by a row of aupapadukas (youth born by spontaneous transformation).
The best representation of the arched front is exemplified by those in the west walls of
cave 34 (fig. 3.21), cave 28 and cave 25. The rendition of the arch front in cave 34 is
refined and elegant and seven seated Buddhas with a row of ornate garland above them
are represented. Above the arch front on either side, four animated flying celestials soar
gracefully with fluttering drapery. In Cave 25, the row of garland is held by aupapadukas
(fig. 3.22) and there are two rows of kneeling donors at the corner.

The arch front type is not just adorned with seated Buddhas, donors and garland.
Sometimes it is also decorated with episodes of the life of the Buddha, usually the
episodes of the conversion of the three Kāśyapas (fig. 3.23) and the assault by Mara as
observed in the south wall of cave 35 (fig. 3.24).

It appears that the arch front in small caves is adorned only with the seven
Buddhas.

The trabeated front is usually decorated with flying celestials and flying
musicians as well as seated Buddhas, and the most beautiful trabeated front is perhaps
represented in the eastern wall (fig. 3.25) of cave 21, where the flying celestials and
musicians are soaring gracefully fluttering with movement. The trabeated front in the
eastern wall (fig. 3.26) of cave 5-11 is also notable. It is adorned with seated Buddhas in
the so-called “folding screens” beneath which aupapadukas holding the row of garland
appears. The workmanship of this niche is superb.

In the western wall (fig. 3.27) of cave 23-1, the trabeated front is flat and
decorated with dots. In some caves unfinished such as cave 36, the trabeated front is flat
without any decoration. The trabeated front (fig. 3.28) in cave 24-1 is carved shallowly
and the seated Buddhas are represented with floral patterns at corner. Not only is this arrangement beautiful, but it is not seen in any other caves.

The arch ends are normally terminated with animals (dragons, phoenixes and unidentified) that turn their heads inward as if looking towards the Buddhas. The best examples of arch ends are represented in cave 27 (fig. 3.29) and cave 29 (fig. 3.30).

3. Ceilings

The ceilings of Yungang underwent three evolutionary stages from the elliptical and half-domed ceiling of the first-phase caves to the slightly domed ceiling of the early second-phase, then finally to the rectangular or square flat ceiling of late second-phase and third-phase caves. According to the structural shape, they can be broadly divided into two types: 1) elliptical and half-domed, 2) rectangular or square and flat. According to the decorative patterns, the latter can be subdivided into: 1) coffered (pingqi); 2) coffered and corbelled (zaojing pingqi); 3) decoration with neither coffer nor corbel. The elliptical and half-domed ceiling in the first-phase is not decorated as the colossal image takes up most of the space, while the early second-phase ceiling is still slightly domed but decorated. For example, cave 13 is decorated with intertwined dragons and flying celestials. The later second-phase ceilings are maybe either coffered,
or coffered and corbelled such as the ceiling of the anteroom of caves 9, 10 and 12. The best example of the *zaojing pingqi* ceiling is the anteroom of cave 12 (fig. 3.31).

Ceilings in the second-phase are the most decorative and ornate, and became much simpler in the third-phase. Most of these are coffered, but there is no *zaojing pingqi* ceiling in the third-phase. Some ceilings are not even coffered, but are only decorated with lotuses and/or flying celestials.

The *pingqi* pattern consists usually of either square, rectangular or trapezoid forms as with 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, or 12 chessboard-like panels, inside of which are flying celestials, lotuses and sometimes intertwined dragons. The ceiling of cave 29 has nine trapezoid panels with a lotus in the centre (fig. 3.32). The third-phase *pingqi* design usually has nine panels with lotus pattern in the centre and eight fly celestials surrounding it. This design can be exemplified by the ceiling in cave 24 (fig. 3.33), where the flying celestials typical of the third-phase ceiling appear supple and elegant with a strong sense of movement. Sometimes there are five lotus patterns and four flying celestials in the nine panels. This can be best exemplified by cave 33-1 (fig. 3.34).

The most popular decorative motif on the ceiling is the lotus pattern which is usually surrounded by flying celestials. Some of the ceilings also have intertwined dragons in the center. Another motif often seen on the ceiling is the Dharma protectors such as multi-faced and multi-armed Kumarakadeva and Mahesvara as in cave 12 (fig. 3.35). This also is a popular subject in the second-phase caves. The ceiling of cave 39 (fig. 3.36) is the only one in the third-phase that bears the subject of Dharma protector.

**II. Composition**
As a general trend, the iconographic composition of the wall images in the western-end caves became more diversified and complicated than in the first two phases.

The composition of the three Buddhas on three walls now came to consist of three seated Buddhas with legs crossed; a cross-legged Buddha together with a cross-ankled Bodhisattva and a seated Buddha with legs pendant; or the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna with a seated Buddha and a cross-ankled Bodhisattva.

The composition could also be composed of the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna represented with a cross-ankled Buddha and a cross-ankled Bodhisattva or the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna represented with two cross-legged Buddhas. It also can be two cross-legged Buddhas with a cross-ankled Bodhisattva or a cross-legged Buddha on the main wall and Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna on both east and west walls. These seven types of compositions in three niches on three walls in the third-phase caves present a greater variety than earlier caves and are the most diversified iconographic compositions in Yungang.

It is noteworthy that in the third-phase, the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna became increasingly popular and are often represented as primary icons on the north wall.

The composition of the images on each wall exhibits even a greater variety than the composition of the images in three niches on three walls we just discussed and it presents more diversified motifs and arrangements.

The composition of the images on the main wall presents 12 different types. The most popular composition is a cross-legged seated Buddha flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas as seen on the north wall of cave 23-1 (fig. 3.37). The Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas is also a popular composition on the
main wall (23, 28, 33-6, 38-3, 24-1 and 33-3), and later caves (33, 34, 35 and 33-4) have two disciples beside the Bodhisattvas, therefore depicting five icons on the main wall.

The composition of the images on the main wall of storeyed caves demonstrates a more complicated composition. The top level of cave 27 (fig. 3.5) contains three cross-ankled Bodhisattvas and the bottom level contains a cross-legged Buddha flanked by two seated Buddhas with legs pendant. The top level of cave 29 (fig. 3.6) and cave 30 (fig. 3.7) bears a seated Buddha with legs pendant in the center flanked by two cross-ankled Bodhisattvas. The bottom level is the same imagery as caves 27. Another iconographic composition of the storeyed main wall is a cross-ankled Bodhisattva on the top represented with Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna at the bottom, forming three Buddhas of the three kalpas as demonstrated in cave 31 (fig. 3.9) and cave 32-9 (fig. 3.10). In the case of cave 36, the bottom is just one seated Buddha with a cross-ankled Bodhisattva above the top (fig. 3.11).

The iconographic composition on the west walls of the various caves displays a rich variety as well. The most popular composition is, as it is on the main wall, a seated Buddha flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas. A seated Buddha with legs pendant flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas is also a popular composition, and for the storeyed west wall, cave 24-1 presents a more complicated composition (fig. 3.3). The top level contains a cross-ankled Bodhisattva flanked by two pensive Bodhisattvas. The bottom level bears a seated Buddha flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas. These six icons in the center, in turn, are flanked by six images arranged vertically in three levels. The top is a seated Buddha with legs pendant, the bottom one is a standing Buddha and the central
figure is a seated Buddha with legs crossed. These three arranged icons form the three Buddha in three *kalpas* and it is a rare occurrence to see them arranged vertically.

The west wall of cave 33 also presents a unique iconography. The cross-ankled figure, which usually is a Bodhisattva, is a Buddha and it is flanked by two standing Buddhas from the *jataka* stories (fig. 3.38).

The west wall of cave 31 presents the three Buddhas of the three *kalpas* on two levels (fig. 3.9). The top level bears a cross-ankled Bodhisattva and a seated Buddha with legs pendant, and the bottom is a seated Buddha with legs crossed.

The composition on the west wall of cave 30 is unusual (fig. 3.39). The top level contains a seated Buddha flanked by two standing Buddhas, not Bodhisattvas as is usual, and the bottom has two seated Buddhas with legs crossed.

Finally the composition of a cross-ankled Bodhisattva flanked by two pensive Bodhisattvas on the top, and Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas at the bottom, is also a popular arrangement as exemplified in cave 26 (fig. 3.2).

On the east walls, the iconographic compositions are usually simpler. They usually contain a cross-ankled Bodhisattva flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas. This is the most popular composition and is exemplified by the Bodhisattvas on the east wall in cave 5-11 (fig. 3.40).

In the case of a storeyed east wall, the cross-ankled Bodhisattva flanked by two pensive Bodhisattvas is often represented together with a cross-legged Buddha flanked by two standing Bodhisattvas (24-1 and 38) one above the other. Sometimes the bottom level is replaced by the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna (caves 21 and 26).
In sum, the iconographic composition of the third-phase caves displays a rich diversity and is much more complicated than the iconography of the first two phases.

The composition varies greatly since it is not simply limited to the one seated Buddha flanked by two standing Buddhas (cave 20). The Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna became a very popular motif in the third-phase caves and constitutes over half of the iconography on the main walls. They are often represented together with a cross-ankled Bodhisattva to form the three Buddhas of the three kalpas.

It is noteworthy that the disciples appeared rather late in Yungang imagery and they are not regular icons represented in every cave as Bodhisattvas. The disciples became a regular feature only later in the Longmen caves and are usually represented in bas-relief. There are normally two disciples on each wall but in caves 13-10 in Yungang and Lu cave 路洞 in Longmen, there are four disciples, something not observed in the western-end caves in Yungang.

**III. The Subject Matter and Visual Representations**

The subject matter and its representations in the third-phase are rich in their diversity. Not only do we see the usual Buddhist pantheon of Buddha, Bodhisattva, disciple and Dvarapala, but we are also presented with a rich collection of illustrations of the Buddha’s life; the *jataka* stories; the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side; the legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri; the multi-faced and multi-armed Mahesvara and Kumarakadeva. Among these visual representations, the stories of the Buddha’s life provide kaleidoscopic illustrations of many significant events in his life, from his miracle descent from the Tusita heaven to his serene realization of Nirvana.
We shall review these, subject by subject, in order to better understand the iconography of the third-phase. Analysis of these representation and origin of their subject matter will be examined in Chapter Four.

As far as I can ascertain, more than ninety scenes with thirty-three themes can be discerned as Buddha’s life stories in Yungang. In the third-phase alone, more than seventeen motifs of his life stories are depicted. They present various episodes in different stages of his life beginning with his descent from the Tusita Heaven in the form of an elephant; his miracle birth from his mother’s hip in the form of a human being; his first bath by nagas; his riding on an elephant; archery competition and tossing the elephant; his great departure from the palace and his bidding farewell to his white horse Kanthaka; his first meditation under the tree; his defeat of the demons and conversion of the Kasyapas; his endurance in search of Enlightenment; his first sermon; his ascent to Tavatimsa to preach for his mother Mayadevi, and his final serene realization of Parinirvana. These illustrations of his life constitute an important part of the subject matter of the third-phase caves and many of them were never depicted in the earlier caves. One example is the prince tossing the wild elephant depicted in cave 37.\(^\text{89}\)

Among these illustrations of Buddha’s life, the great departure and the prince riding on an elephant are the two most popular motifs.\(^\text{90}\) These two themes are usually

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\(^{89}\) The story is told in the *Guoqu xianzai yingguo jing* 過去現在因果經 (Sutra on the Causes and the Effects in the Past and Present), see T03:189:628c21.

\(^{90}\) The great departure episode is depicted in caves 5-11, 5-33, 5-38, 28, 31, 35, 38 and 41, seven depictions in total during the third-phase. Since the great departure and the prince riding on an elephant episodes are often depicted together as a pair, I believe cave 5-10 originally had the depiction of the great departure as well but it was looted leaving a big hole there now on the west side of the front wall, but the prince riding on an elephant is still there on the east side. It is the same situation in caves 33-3 and 33-4. In cave 33-4, the two episodes are illustrated outside the cave above the entrance. The prince riding on an elephant is illustrated in caves 5-10, 5-11, 5-33, 5-38, 31, 33-3, 33-4 and 38, eight discernable now in total. I also believe that the north side of the west wall in cave 35 originally had the depiction of the prince riding on an elephant as well but it is eroded now. The south side still has the great departure illustration.
represented together as a pair and on the front wall over either side of the entrance of the cave.\textsuperscript{91}

The great departure through the city gate at night always shows the prince, the groom, Kanthaka and the four guardian kings whether it is illustrated in profile as seen in cave 28 (fig. 3.41) or in full face as observed in cave 5-11 (fig. 3.42). The groom usually carries the parasol by its long handle and the four guardian kings hold Kanthaka’s hoofs in their hands to soften their touch on the ground.

In India, all noblemen at the time of the Buddha learned four skills. These were elephant-riding, horsemanship, chariot-driving and handling of arms. The prince riding an elephant (fig. 3.43) is repeatedly depicted in Yungang paired with the great departure, and we may assume that one of the reasons that these two episodes are represented together is aesthetic, since one side shows a horse and the other side the elephant, both animals eminent in young noblemen’s life. The Yungang artists seemed to favor these subjects.

Along with the stories of the great departure and the prince riding on an elephant, the episodes of the banishing of the demons and the conversion of the three Kasyapas are among the most favored subjects. These are also depicted as a pair and are usually portrayed in the pointed arch front on the south wall of a cave.\textsuperscript{92} The banishing of the demons is often illustrated with demonic soldiers and Mara’s three daughters.

\textsuperscript{91} In cave 28, the great departure episode is depicted on the west wall over the niche, but it is not illustrated together with the story of the prince riding on an elephant as a pair. Instead, it is depicted together with the prince’s farewell to his white horse Kanthaka. In cave 38, these two episodes are illustrated together as a pair, as is usual, but they are not illustrated on the front wall over the entrance. Rather they are depicted on the north wall. In cave 31, the two episodes are depicted on the either side of the reveals of the window of the rear chamber, not on the front wall.

\textsuperscript{92} The episode of the banishing of the demons is depicted in caves 31, 35 and 38. The episode of the conversion of the three Kasyapas is illustrated in caves of 35 and 38. Judging from the illustration of the story of the banishing the demons in cave 31, I believe that the story of the conversion of the three Kasyapas was originally portrayed as well.
demons are often animal-headed: elephant, foxes, rams and oxen. The center of the illustration is usually the mountain-throwing demon (fig. 3.44), and the soldiers usually have large turbaned heads with protuberant eyes, thick lips and flaming hair.

The conversion of the three Kasyapas is usually identified by the Brahmins holding bottles in their hands attempting to put out the fire and the Buddha holding a bowl with three Kasyapas inside.

Other motifs appear frequently but are not as common as the four mentioned above. The Buddha’s first sermon (fig. 3.45) at Sarnath near Benares depicted in caves 29, 36 and 38, is one of the four most important episodes in Buddha’s life, and is usually illustrated in a large niche. The emblem of the event is the triple wheels flanked by reclining deer as seen on the south wall of cave 38 (fig. 3.46). In cave 36, only triple wheels are shown (fig. 3.47). Neither the five bhiksus (Kaundinya and others) nor the five hundred merchants who offered food to the Buddha right after his Enlightenment are illustrated in the third-phase.

The prince’s palace life such as his education, engagement and marriage are not popular subjects in Yungang, and the first meditation seems to be the only subject of his palace life that attracted the Yungang artists.

The prince’s first meditation is often depicted in small caves although it is the first sign foretelling the Bodhisattva’s religious vocation. Since the episode took place in the “plowmen’s village,” the prince usually sits under a jambu (rose-apple) tree which crooks its branches to provide shade for the prince. The prince is usually depicted with a small kneeling figure, his father Suddhodhana, in front of him as seen in Cave 33-3 (fig. 3.48),

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93 The other three are the birth, the Enlightenment and the attainment of Nirvana.
94 The episode is illustrated in caves 32-11, 32-12, 32-13, 33-3, 33-4, and 35-1.
and the king, startled by the miracle of the branches, is worshipping the prince whom he had not recognized from a distance.  

It should be mentioned here that many scholars mistakenly identify the pensive Bodhisattva as the prince’s first meditation.

Although the pensive Bodhisattva and the contemplative prince share some iconographic similarities in posture (both figures have one leg pendant and the right hand is raised to the chin), the first meditation, however, is usually depicted with a small kneeling figure in front of the prince. The pensive Bodhisattva (fig. 3.49), on the other hand, is often represented in the side compartments of a trabeated niche flanking the Bodhisattva with ankles crossed in the center as seen in cave 35. The first meditation episode is not depicted in the side compartments as flanking figures. In Gandhara, the first meditation episode is often depicted with the tiring plowing men and oxen (fig. 3.50). In Longmen, the first meditation motif became very popular and a regular scene on either side of the niche front. The prince is often seen with a kneeling figure, the king Suddhodhana, and his entourage holding the canopy for the king (fig. 3.51).

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95 According to the *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起経 (Sutra on the Origin of Practice of the Bodhisattva), translated by Zhu Dali 竺大力 and Kang Mengxiang 康夢祥 in 197 C. E., the earliest extant literary source on the biographies of the life of the Buddha, tells us that the king asked his advisers how to prevent the prince from leaving home to pursue his spiritual life. One minister suggested that the prince should be ordered to oversee the ploughing so he can be distracted. So he was sent out with a thousand servants to oversee the farming and told how to inspect their work. The prince then sits under a *jambu* tree watching them till the land. When they broke new soil, worms came out from the soil, and then the birds swallowed them. Then frogs chased and ate the birds and snakes ate the frogs. Peacocks then ate the snakes and in turn the hawks ate the peacocks. The vultures then ate the hawks. Watching these creatures devouring each other, the adolescent’s heart was wounded. He sat under the tree and attained the first meditation. When the king heard that his effort to prevent the prince from his spiritual life was in vain, he went out to the field to meet with his son. Looking from the distance, the king witnessed the miracle of the branches of the trees moving to make shade for the prince. He recognized the existence of the spirit after watching the miracle, but he didn’t realize that it was his son. So he dismounted the horse and worshipped his son, see T03:184:467b18.

Interestingly, the Buddha’s early life is not depicted as much as his later life. The conception, Maya’s dream, was a very popular motif in Gandhara art, but was only depicted once (cave 37) in Yungang. Maya is usually portrayed lying down with an elephant beside her in Gandhara art (fig. 3.52), and the Bodhisattva is not shown. In cave 37, however, the Bodhisattva is seen descending from the Tusita heaven mounted on a six-tusked elephant while entering his mother through her right flank (fig. 3.53). This is a unique illustration and is not found anywhere else. Chinese artisans perhaps tried to solve the puzzle of how and when the Bodhisattva transformed himself from a six-tusked elephant, in which form he entered his mother’s body, to a human being, and in which form he emerged from her womb.

It should be mentioned here that some scholars mistakenly identify the illustration of the prince riding on an elephant as the episode of the conception, Maya’s dream. The conception episode is normally illustrated with Maya lying down sleeping and dreaming of an elephant entering her body. The Bodhisattva is not even shown. The portrait of the episode in cave 37 with the Bodhisattva mounting on an elephant to enter his mother’s body is the only example anywhere.

Even the miraculous birth of the Buddha under the trees in the Lumbini garden, one of the four most important events in his life, did not seem to attract the Yungang artists as much as they might have. The episode is usually depicted in a small panel in bas-relief and is represented in a slightly different manner in Yungang than in Gandhara art. Although Maya is still seen standing up grasping the branch of a tree when the infant Buddha comes forth from her body, the baby comes forth from the opposite side he entered at the time of Conception. In Gandhara art, the infant Buddha comes forth from

the right side of her body (fig. 3.54), whereas in Yungang, the baby sometimes comes out from her left side (fig. 3.55). The depiction of the episode seems simple without the many details as shown in Gandhara art.

Immediately after the Buddha’s miraculous birth, he slipped out of the hands that received him and took seven steps and proclaimed in a lion’s voice: “Among all beings, I am the first and I am the best. I have come here through infinite births and deaths for the benefit of mankind.” As soon as the newborn left the hands that received him, the lotus miraculously emerged from the earth under his feet to protect the newborn from contact with the ground. The episode is portrayed on the north wall in cave 41 (fig. 3.56).

Another immediate activity after the Buddha’s miraculous birth is his first bath. We are told in one of the literary sources that two Naga (water spirits) brothers, named Kala and Akala who welcomed the infant Buddha and gave him the first bath, one on the left rained the warm water and the other, on the right, poured the cold spring water. The first bath is vividly depicted on the east wall in cave 37 (fig. 3.57).

The great sage, Asita’s prophecy of the newborn is often depicted with Asita holding the infant in his hands as seen in cave 41 where the episode is illustrated together with the miraculous birth of the Buddha and the miraculous seven steps (fig. 3.56).

The subject of the Buddha’s farewell to his white horse Kanthaka is usually represented in small panels in bas-relief. The Yungang artists did not seem to favor the subject as much the Gandhara artists. However in both representations, Kanthaka is seen

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98 The episode is depicted in caves 32-3, 33-3 and 41.
99 Xiuxing benqi jing, T03:184:463a17.
100 The episode is depicted in caves 28, 30 and 41.
bending his legs licking the prince’s foot and crying with tears falling down like rain (fig. 3.58).  

There are no illustrations of the return of Chandaka and Kanthaka in Yungang.  

The illustration of the prince riding on an elephant is not the only depiction of his physical training in youth. Other athletic contests such as the archery competition and tossing the elephant are illustrated as well. Interestingly, these two activities are represented together on the west wall over the pointed arch front in Cave 37. It is evident that the iconographic representation is the depiction of the literary source as the two events are recounted together in the *Guoqu xianzai yingguo jing*. The illustration of tossing the elephant in cave 37 shows the prince and his two cousins, Nanda and Devadatta. The figure on the south side with the elephant on his out-stretched right arm evidently is Devadatta, the standing figure pulling the elephant’s trunk is obviously Nanda and the person in the middle, though eroded but still discernible, holding the elephant to his chest is evidently the prince (fig. 3.59).  

The archery competition on the south side of the arch front now shows only one bow, one drum and one figure instead of three (the prince and his two cousins).  

The athletic contests are a favorite subject of the Gandhara artists but they did not appear at Yungang. The wrestling contest is not depicted here and tossing the elephant is only depicted only once (cave 37).

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101 *Guoqu xianzai yingguo jing* tells that after they departed the palace and by dawn, the prince patted Kanthaka’s back and said: “you have accomplished some difficult task.” He said to Chandaka: “now that I have reached this place of refuge, you need to lead Kanthaka and return to the palace.” Chandaka cried after he was told to leave. He fell lame on the ground and could not control himself. Kanthaka, when hearing that they would be left behind, knelt down and licked the prince’s foot, his tears fell like rain, see T03:189:633b1.  

102 *Guoqu xianzai yingguo jing*, T03:0189:0628c21. The story is slightly different in the *Xiuxing benqi jing* which begins with the elephant event: “when they tried to go out the city gates, they realized that an elephant is stuck between the gates so the prince and his cousins decided to have a strength test to see who is the strongest,” see T03:184:465c7.
The event of the Buddha’s ascent to Tavatimsa to preach for his mother Maya is illustrated only once, and that is on south wall in Cave 38 (fig. 3.60).

The death of the Buddha is not a favorite subject for the Yungang artists. Thus the Parinirvana scene is far less frequent than other important events in his life.\textsuperscript{103}

We have reviewed, one by one, the stories of the Buddha’s life represented in the third-phase caves and have attempted to read the iconography in detail. We shall now turn our attention to the \textit{jataka} tales, which enrich the already diversified subject matter at Yungang.

The core tenets of karma and reincarnation in Buddhism form in important part of all Buddhist iconography. The Wheel of Life shows various realms, in which living beings can be reborn through karma, which is the result of willful intention, and good or bad karma is what determines in karmic outcome. Therefore rebirth to various realms of existence from animal to human to divine depends on the good or bad actions in one’s previous life.

With these key concepts in mind, Chinese artists favored the subject of the \textit{jataka} stories of the Buddha’s previous lives, and among the seventeen \textit{jataka} motifs in Yungang, four are illustrated in the third-phase including the Buddha’s revisit to his hometown Kapilavastu and his son Rahula; the Gridhrakuta Hill episode; the Asoka story and the Dipamkara legend.\textsuperscript{104}

The vivid depiction of the Gridhrakuta Hill episode on the south wall in cave 38 shows the Buddha and Ananda seated side by side in two niches with the Gridhrakuta

\textsuperscript{103} The moment is illustrated only in caves 35 and 38.

\textsuperscript{104} The Rahula \textit{jataka} is depicted in caves 9, 19 and 38; the Asoka story is illustrated in caves 25, 28, 29, 33, 33-4, 34 and 5-11; the Dipamkara story is depicted in caves 35 and 38 and the Gridhrakuta Hill legend is depicted on the south wall in cave 38. The story is accounted in Xuan Zang’s \textit{Da Tang xiyu ji} 大唐西域記 (Buddhist Records of the Western World), see T51:2087-921b6.
Hill, where the Buddha used to dwell for some fifty years and deliver the Dharma, with a huge vulture behind them. The Buddha is, through the wall, patting the head of Ananda who is frightened by the vulture (fig. 3.61). The visual representation is a depiction of an episode in *jataka* tales.

The depiction of the Rahula *jataka* is usually recognized by the Buddha patting a little boy’s head. In cave 19, the standing Buddha is patting the kneeling boy’s head with his left hand. The boy is seen to his left side. In cave 9, the kneeling boy is in front of the Buddha. In cave 38, the story is illustrated twice and in both cases the Buddha is seated and the boy is kneeling down to the left of the Buddha (fig. 3.62). Evidently the Yungang artists have created their own iconography rather than strictly following the doctrine, since the boy is always seen kneeling down to the left side of the Buddha instead of standing beside him.

The Asoka *jataka* is often depicted in a large niche on the south wall. The illustration usually shows the Buddha holding a bowl and slightly bending over towards three boys, squatting or standing, who are trying to offer the earth named “millet” to the Buddha. The boy standing on the shoulder of another boy and closest to the Buddha is

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105 Xuan Zang told us: “…to the south of the *vihara*, by the side of the mountain cliff, is a great stone house in which Tathagata, when dwelling in the world long ago, entered *Samadhi*. To the north-west of the stone house and in front of it is a great and extraordinary stone. This is the place where Ananda was frightened by Mara. When the venerable Ananda had entered the *Samadhi* in this place, Mara, assuming the form of a vulture, in the middle of the night, during the dark portion of the month, took his place on this rock, and flapping his wings and uttering loud screams, tried to scare the venerable one. Ananda, filled with fear, was at a loss to know to do, then Tathagata, by his spiritual power, seeing his state, stretched out his hand to compose him. He pierced the stone wall and patted the head of Ananda, and with these words of great love he spoke to him thus: ‘you need not fear the assumed form which Mara has taken.’ Ananda in consequence recovered his composure, and remained with his heart and body at rest and peace. Although years and months have elapsed since then, yet the bird traces on the stone and the hole in the rock still remain visible,” see T51:2087:921b6. Eng. trans. by Samuel Beal with minor revision, see *Buddhist Records of the Western World* (Delhi: Motilal Banardass, 1994), 9:154.

106 In *Zabaozang jing* (Sutra of the Miscellaneous Treasures), from which the story is derived, we are told that the boy is standing to the left side of the Buddha but the Yungang artists portrayed a kneeling boy and he is not always on the left side of the Buddha, see T04:023:0497:b15.

107 The story can be found in caves 5-11, 5-38, 25, 28, 29 33, 33-4 and 34. It is depicted twice in cave 33-4.
King Asoka (fig. 3.63), and the illustration is without a doubt based on the Xiānyú jīng (the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish).108

The emphasis on reincarnation makes the Dipamkara legend a favored subject for both the Yungang artists and the Gandhara artists. The legend is easily identified by the standing Buddha and the Learned Brahmin Youth spreading his deerskin cloak and his own hair over the marshy ground for the passage of Dipamakara (fig. 3.64).109 The illustration of the legend shares iconographic similarities in Yungang and Gandhara art (fig. 3.65). Strangely though the subject is not illustrated in the earliest Gandhara art or in the early Chinese art.

The life of the Buddha and his previous lives, therefore constitute a major part of the subject matter in Yungang. Other subjects, such as the eternal theme of the three Buddhas in three kalpas; the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side; the discourse between Vimalakirti and Manjusri, and the Dharma protectors are also favored subjects.

The three Buddhas in three kalpas is, without a doubt, the most favored subject and are the most frequent visual representation in Yungang throughout the three phases. It was a much favored motif in the third-phase when the caves with three niches on three

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108 Xiānyú jīng, translated into Chinese by Hui Jue 慧覺 and others in 445. According to Chu sanzang ji ji, Tan Xue 塔學, Wei De 威德 and eight others went westward from northwestern China to Khotan to seek Buddhist scriptures. They unexpectedly encountered a Buddhist Council at the Great Monastery which happens every five years. During the Council, Buddhist monks expounded the Buddhist scriptures and rules of monastic discipline in the language of Khotan. Tan Xue and other monks translated and recorded the lectures in Chinese. Later they returned from Khotan and, upon reaching the region of Turfan, compiled the lectures given by the monks in Khotan as a single sutra, which is known as the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish, T04:202:368:c14.

109 Many sutras, for example, the Sutra on the Causes and Effects of the Past and Present, Sutra on the Origin of Practice of the Bodhisattva and Lalitavistara, start with the former existence of the Buddha in the time of the Buddha Dipamakara.
walls became the predominant architectural style. The three Buddhas are usually represented in three niches on three walls.

The representation of the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side appears in almost every cave and usually occupies the north wall as the primary icons of the cave. In cave 24, they are even represented in both east and west walls, which is a rare occurrence. It is believed that there are about 385 illustrations of the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side, and needless to say, the visual representation is derived from the *Lotus Sutra*. The twin Buddhas became almost a symbol of the doctrine.

The debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri, though not as popular as the two Buddhas, occurs frequently. Vimalakirti is easily identified by his fly whisk, *zhuwei* 雲尾, and in the third-phase the subject is not represented in large niches, but rather in small ones.

The multi-faced and multi-armed Dharma protectors such as Mahesvara riding on a bull and Kumarakadeva on a peacock are also popular although they are considerably less frequent in the third-phase. Mahesvara and Kumarakadeva are usually represented on either side of the reveals of the window. Sometimes they appear on the ceiling as seen in cave 39.

In summation, we have seen that the subject matter in the third-phase presents a kaleidoscopic imagery from the life of the Buddha from his previous life to the multi-faced and multi-armed devas. In Chapter Four, we will examine the connection between iconography and Buddhist literature in hopes tracing the origin of the motifs in the third-phase.

**IV. Style**
Stylistically, the images in the third-phase do not appear as grandiose and masculine as the Tan Yao images. Nor do they appear as powerful and plump as the images of cave 6. Rather, they look slender, elegant, supple and life-like with an amiable smile on their faces. The imagery demonstrates a new visual representation, a sinicized form.

All Buddha images in the third-phase are clad in a loose robe and a wide girdle (baoyi bodai 襄衣博帶) with both shoulders covered (covering mode). The open mode which covers only one shoulder represented in earlier caves disappears completely. The neckline is a “U” shape instead of a “V” as observed in the images in cave 6, and the cordlike raised folds and incised lines observed in the five Tan Yao caves and early second-phase caves are not found. Instead, we only find step-like folds, some flattened, and others bulgy. In general, the early images have flattened and well balanced step-like folds as seen in caves 21, 22, 23 and 28, 33, 25, 27 and 29 etc, and the later images have bulgy and uneven folds which is best exemplified in the seated Buddha image (fig. 3.66), dated to the 4th year of Yanchang 延昌 (515) in cave 19-2 and those in caves 27-2, 5-10, 5-11, 33-3, and 40-1. The imagery before and after the 4th year of Yanchang (515) differ considerably.

The drapery of the Buddha image is generally rendered in two ways: one large series of arcs in the center covering both feet and two series of arcs side by side covering both legs but leaving the right foot exposed. Generally speaking, the earlier images have only one large arc and the later ones have two arcs; and the longer the drapery falls down, the later the rendition is. The drapery from the last stage of the third-phase between 515 and 524 falls down low like a waterfall. But the one large arc rendition did not disappear
entirely when two arcs emerged. The former can be best exemplified by the image (fig. 3.67), dated to the 19th year of Taihe (495) in the east reveal of the window of cave 11.

The one arc rendition can also be observed in the seated Buddhas dated to the 13th year of Taihe (489) in cave 11-14 (fig. 3.68). The latter can be exemplified by the seated Buddha in cave 34 (fig. 3.69).

The Bodhisattvas in the third-phase appear slender and graceful with long neck and narrow waist. The heaviness of the Bodhisattvas with short neck and thick skirt in cave 6 is not seen. Rather, we see supple and elegant figures with fluttering celestial robes which form an “X” in the center and taper from the shoulder area down to the end. The left hand holds one end of it and the other hangs over the right arm. The end of the skirt is undulate giving a strong sense of movement. The earlier Bodhisattva does not have a large ring in the center for celestial robe to cross through.

The flying celestials in the third-phase look supple and elegant with long drapery fluttering backwards. The worshippers are slender and elegant as well, with long necks and high chignons.

The stylistic features of the third-phase caves we just briefly reviewed will be demonstrated more in detail when we examine the stylistic evolution, cave by cave, and construct a chronological sequence of the caves.

For convenience and due to limited space, I have divided the third-phase caves into five groups according to their stylistic development and features. The caves will be examined in the chronological sequence I am proposing in this study.

1. **Group One (494?-507)**
The first group includes 13 caves (caves 21, 31, 39, 22, 23, 33, 25, 28, 24, 27, 29, 30, and 28-2). These caves resemble one another in style and yet they distinguish themselves in detail. They are chronologically close to each other, and certainly cave 21 was likely to have been executed before the transfer of the capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang in 494.

**Cave 21**

This is no doubt the earliest cave in the third-phase. The suggestive evidence is the style and the size of the cave. This is the largest cave in the third-phase (fig. 3.70). It must have been patronized by a high official or perhaps also by the court before the capital was moved to Luoyang. It is hard to imagine that such a large cave (fig. 3.71) was commissioned by a local devotee. The workmanship of the cave is excellent, which also indicates that the cave was patronized by a high official if not the court, though for unknown reasons the cave was not finished and was aborted after the main wall and the east wall were finished. The west wall was left unfinished judging by the disorganized arrangement of the niches, which does not correspond to that of the east wall. Stylistically, the seated Buddha on the east wall (fig. 3.72) resembles closely the image dated to the 19th year of Taihe (495) in the east reveal of the window of cave 11 (fig. 3.67). The drapery has only one arc in the front instead of two. The seated Bodhisattva (fig. 3.73) with ankles crossed on the east wall resembles closely to that of cave 11-7 on the east wall (fig. 3.74). This also suggests that the cave was executed early. The face is full and the crown is high. The chest is broad and the neck is short. The flying celestials on the trabeated niche front closely resemble those in cave 11-7. The roof of the cave collapsed leaving the images exposed.
Cave 31

This huge badly-eroded cave is the only one in the third-phase that has an anteroom and a main room. There is a small cave dug into the west wall of the anteroom (fig. 3.9). The iconographic composition and the arrangements of the niches are similar to those of caves 7 and 8, and stylistically, the images appear slender and archaic. The seated Buddhas (fig. 3.75) are reminiscent of those dated to the 13th year of Taihe (489) of cave 11-14 (fig. 3.68) and the usnisa and the contour of the faces look alike. The rendition of the robes and folds indicates that this cave was possibly started right after the capital was moved to Luoyang. Another piece of evidence, besides the architectural and stylistic indications, to prove that this cave is earlier than many other third-phase caves is that the Dvarapalas on each side of the entrance resemble closely those on cave 9.

Cave 39

Cave 39 is the only caitya cave in the third-phase (fig. 3.76). This is also the only cave in the third-phase that bears the Dharma protectors on the ceiling (fig. 3.36) and judging from the arrangements of the niches on the south wall, I assume that the cave was not completed as it was initially planned (fig. 3.77). Perhaps only the stupa in the center and the ceiling were finished. Later on the thousand Buddha niches on three walls were added and the south wall niches were added even later. Judging from the styles of the images, the cave was completed within a short period and was executed early in the third-phase.

Cave 22

This is a small cave. Only the north wall is preserved. The seated Buddhas (fig. 3.78) on the north wall closely resemble those in cave 11-14 although the drapery has two
arcs side by side. But they are rather short. The round face with gentle smile, the smooth
usnisa and the rendition of the robes all appear similar. The Buddha images also
resemble those in cave 21. The iconographic likeness suggests that cave 22 is close to
cave 21 in time and it is one of the earliest caves. The east and west walls, as well as the
south wall are damaged.

Cave 23

Cave 23 (fig. 3.12) should not be far in time to caves 21 and 22 judging from the
style of the seated Buddhas on the north wall and east wall. The drapery of the seated
Buddhas on the east wall still has the archaic one arc in the front covering both legs and
feet. The standing Buddhas (fig. 3.79) on the west wall are later innovative versions of
the seven Buddhas (fig. 3.80) on the west wall in cave 11. Thus, they are close to each
other in time. The robe is not as heavy as in the earlier version. The face is not as full as
those in cave 11 and the hair is not as wavy as the earlier ones. But the overall
impressions of the images in these two caves resemble one another. Other suggestive
evidence is the slightly domed ceiling and the decorative design on it (fig. 3.81). The later
caves all have flat ceilings and the design of the ceiling is different. The flaming nimbi of
the north wall go all the way to the ceiling. This design is only observed in the earlier
caves. The flying celestials are clumsy compared to the later flying celestials which are
supple and elegant with a great sense of movement.

Cave 33

Cave 33 (fig. 3.82) is a noteworthy cave both in style and in iconographic motifs.
This is the cave where disciples are represented beside the Bodhisattvas, not the Buddha,
and is the only cave that contains seated Buddhas with ankles crossed (fig. 3.83), rather

than seated Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed. The representation of the Buddha is refined. The folds are flattened and well balanced, and the texture is smooth and material is soft. The right hem of the robe which crosses the abdomen to hang over to the left arm is rendered thin and flat. The series of arcs in the abdomen and between the legs are well arranged, the arcs on the left knee are well balanced. The end of the robe on both sides flares out and is tucked underneath the legs. The almost transparent inner robe covers only one shoulder. The sash flows down naturally to the abdomen area. The Bodhisattva (fig. 3.84) attending the Buddha is a clumsy work and the body is not well-proportioned. The head is large, the face is square and the eyes are dull. The celestial robe crosses in the center without a ring then goes up to hang over to the arms flowing down low. The Asoka Buddha (fig. 3.85) beside it appears elegant with a loose robe and sloping shoulders. The series arcs in the middle of the body are well arranged and balanced. The seated Buddha with legs crossed (fig. 3.86) on the east wall appears solid wears a thick robe whose folds are bulgy and thick. The inner robe covering both shoulders is held in place by the bowknot and the streamer hangs down outside of the robe. The solidness of the image is reminiscent of the images in cave 6 but the rendition is more natural. The two Buddhas seated side by side (fig. 3.87) in the north wall resemble that of the east wall. The rendition of the drapery (fig. 3.88) resembles those in cave 27 (fig. 3.29) and cave 29. The Bodhisattva and the disciple (fig. 3.89) attending the Buddhas on the north wall are noteworthy. They appear extremely slender with slim waists and long necks. The disciple has exaggerated wrinkles on his neck and is thus identified as Mahākāśyapa. The features of the face are striking, with high cheekbones and bulgy forehead and deep eyes. The gentle smile makes this image lifelike, similarly the Bodhisattva looks kind and humane.
with mild smile. The eyes are gazing down and the eyebrows are long. The celestial robe covers both shoulders and forms an “X” in the abdomen through a large ring with the right end is held in his right hand and left end is hung over the left arm. All these stylistic features and iconographic likenesses with earlier images suggest that cave 33 is one of the early caves in the third-phase. Unfortunately many images are badly eroded.

Cave 25

Cave 25 (fig. 3.1) is a typical sanbi sankan (three niches on three walls) cave with a square floor plan. The ceiling is coffered with nine panels filled with intertwined dragons, flying celestials and lotuses (fig. 3.90). The images appear slender and graceful; in particular, the standing Buddhas in the south wall (fig. 3.91) and the attendant Bodhisattvas on the sidewalls (fig. 3.92). The seated Buddha with long neck and slender face on the east wall (fig. 3.93) is reminiscent of those in cave 24 (fig. 3.94) and cave 29. The sets are flattened and smooth, and the sash is represented with a bowknot. The streamers hang down naturally and the inner robe covers both shoulders. Two standing Buddhas on the south wall appear slim with sloping shoulders and long neck. Their robes are thin and rendered with flattened pleats. The series of arcs in the abdomen area are well-balanced, and the hem of the robes is fluttering as in the wind. It is significant to notice that the Bodhisattva in the east wall of the south side has a ring in the abdomen to have the celestial robes to cross through it. The ring is not, with the one exception of cave 33, represented in the aforementioned caves. Thus, I infer that cave 25 was executed later than those caves since the ring is a late representation. Other iconographic features also suggest that cave 25 was executed after caves 21, 39, 22, 23 and cave 33. The arch front of the west wall is beautifully decorated with a row of ornate garland held by a row of
aupapadukas (fig. 3.95). The north wall is terribly weathered (fig. 3.96). The small niches above the entrance lintel contain twin Buddhas (fig. 3.97).

**Cave 28**

Cave 28 (fig. 3.98) shares architectural and iconographic similarities with cave 25, and is also a typical *sanbi sankan* (three niches on three walls). It is highly likely that these two caves are close in time judging from the architecture and iconography. The ceiling of the cave is coffered with nine panels and the robes of the two Buddhas (fig. 3.99) in the north wall are in covering mode with the folds are flattened and wide which accentuates the elegance of the images. The inner robe covers only one shoulder and the sash is represented with a bowknot with streamers hanging down outside of the right hem of the robe. The bowknot on the robe (fig. 3.100) of the two Buddhas in the north wall seems to be pasted on the sash. The Buddha on the west wall (fig. 3.101) also appears elegant and dignified with sloping shoulders and flattened folds. The bowknot looks like a round button nicely fastened on the inner robe which covers both shoulders of the Buddha thus distinguishing itself from the two seated Buddhas in the north wall. The rendition of the robes in cave 28 proves the mastery of sculpting by Chinese artists at that time. The images can be considered representative works of Yungang third-phase caves.

**Cave 24**

Cave 24 (fig. 3.102) contains three niches on three walls. The south wall is damaged. Both niches on the west and east walls contain twin Buddhas which is a rare occurrence, and the north wall bears a canopied niche which is rare as well (fig. 3.103). The ceiling (fig. 3.104) is coffered with nine panels, the center of which is a lotus surrounded by eight flying celestials (fig. 3.105) which demonstrate a strong sense of
movement. The images are slim and elegant with long necks and sloping shoulders. The overall rendition is smooth and natural and the seated Buddhas (fig. 3.106) on the west wall in particular appear graceful and supple. The drapery has two series of arcs side by side, however, the main image (fig. 3.107) on the north wall has one series of arcs in the center of the drapery which falls down over the pedestal and the hem of it flares out forming an angular 八. This kind of single series of arcs is also observed in the images of caves 34 and 37 which appear heavier and fleshy. The arcs are large and the drapery hangs down over the pedestal forming the angular 八. These are the later rendition of the single series of arcs, where the earlier draperies with one series of arcs do not drape down low over the pedestal. The Buddhas on the east wall also appear slim (fig. 3.108).

Cave 27, Cave 29 and Cave 30

Caves 27 (fig. 3.5), 29 (fig. 3.6) and 30 (fig. 3.7) resemble one another closely in architecture and style. The visual alikeness of the iconography makes one believe that these three caves were carved out of the same model and by the same artists. Caves 27 and 29 are likely to have been executed as twin caves like caves 7 and 8 judging from the architectural structure and arrangements of the niches. These two caves were likely to be planned as a whole.

Cave 30 was possibly constructed at the same time as these two caves. The architectural structure is the same and the arrangement of the niches is very similar. In imagery and style, these three caves resemble each other.

The images in these three caves look fairly elegant and refined, good representatives of Yungang style.
The images on the sidewalls of cave 27 (figs. 3.109 and 3.110) and cave 29 (figs. 3.111 and 3.112) are represented delicately, and drapery is exquisitely rendered with two series of arcs side by side. The sidewalls of caves 27 and 29 are divided into two storeys and contain four niches, two trabeated niches on the top and two pointed arch ones at the bottom. These four niches house three seated Buddhas with both legs crossed and one seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed. In cave 27, the Bodhisattva is represented in the top trabeated niche in the south side. The figure appears slender and refined with long neck, narrow waist and a high crown. The celestial robe crosses in the abdomen without a ring. The three Buddhas seated with legs crossed appear serene and human. The robes are rendered in well-balanced flattened step-like folds, and the drapery is elegant, the hem of which forms two series of arcs side by side. Interestingly, the images on the north side of the west wall in cave 27 appear fleshy and robust, whereas the images on the south side appear slender and elegant with elongated faces and sloping shoulders. The sash is represented on the north side images but not on the south side images and the images of the south wall. The sash hangs down naturally and does not have a bowknot to hold the inner robe in place. The south side image of cave 27 is reminiscent of the images in the lower level niches in the east wall of cave 29 and the image in the west wall of cave 24 (fig. 3.106). These four images resemble each other so closely that one believes that they are from the hands of the same artists. The images appear graceful and elegant with gentle and serene expression on their faces. The shoulders are sloping and the neck is long. The robes covering both shoulders are rendered with smooth step like folds. The right hem of the robe crosses the abdomen to hang over the left arm forming series of arcs in the center of the abdomen. The inner robe covers both shoulders and looks thin. It
pulls down low so that the chest is observed. The drapery hangs down over the pedestal and forms two series of arcs side by side. Its hem drapes down lower than that of cave 27 and flares out at both sides.

These four images (caves 27, 29 and 24) can be considered as the masterpieces of the western-end caves and well represent the third-phase work of Yungang. In fact, they represent the pinnacle of Yungang third-phase art.

The masterpiece among masterpieces is the image (fig. 3.113) housed in the upper storey canopied niche in the west wall of cave 30. It is a perfect visual representation with well-proportioned body and refined rendition. The image, gazing into distance, appears calm, graceful and stately. The neck is long which enhances the elegance of the image, and the face is serene. The Buddha is draped in baoyi bodai robe with well-balanced flattened step-like folds. The shoulders are sloping. The drapery hangs down richly leaving the right foot uncovered and the sole facing upward. It flares out at both sides. The right hand is raised to the chest and the left hand points down with palm facing outward. The sash is represented in a usual manner. Its end is tucked inside the robe unlike the other ones which hangs down outside the robe and it hangs down naturally without a bowknot to fasten the inner robe in place. The Buddha seems to have three layers of robes, the middle of which has the sash. Both inner robes are in covering mode. The body of the Buddha is completely covered by the layers of the robes. It is in my opinion, this image is the most dignified and stately visual representation of Yungang.

The composition of the images on the north wall of caves 27 (fig. 3.114) and 29 (fig. 3.115) are similar. The Asoka Buddha (fig. 3.116) on the south wall of cave 29
appears slim. The ceiling of cave 29 (fig. 3.117) is coffered with nine panels, the center of which is a lotus surrounded by eight flying celestials.

**Cave 28-2**

Cave 28-2 (fig. 3.15) is an unfinished small cave. The seated Buddha (fig. 3.118) on the north wall resembles those aforementioned images although it is not as refined and slender as they are. It appears more powerful and fleshy than the masterpiece in cave 30. The face is round and the cheeks are full. The incised eyebrows are long and the nose is sharp. The eyes appear dull. The neck has incised lines to reflect the fleshiness, and the ears are elongated. The robe with step-like folds covers both shoulders. Its thick right hem crosses to hang over around the left arm. The robe looks thick and the step-folds are bulgy, not as flattened and smooth as in the images in cave 21, 28, or 30. The neckline of the inner robe turns outward and pulls down low so the chest is exposed. The inner robe is held in place by a bowknot, the streamers of which hang down outside the robe hem. The drapery hangs down voluminously over the pedestal with two series of arcs. The overall impression of this image is stately and powerful with a well-built body and a full face. The Bodhisattvas on both sides appear slender and animated with one hand holding the celestial robe and the other is raised to the chest. The workmanship is not skillful as that of caves 27, 29 and 30. The cave was not finished as initially planned judging from the arrangements of the niches on side walls.

Cave 28-2 is important since it has two inscriptions with explicit dates. The inscription (fig. 3.119) on the east wall is dated to the 4th year of Zhengshi 正始 (507) and the inscription (fig. 3.120) on the west wall is dated to the 3rd year of Yanchang 延昌 (514). This indicates that the cave and the Buddha were executed earlier than 507. As I
have mentioned, the seated Buddha in this cave shares considerable iconographic similarities with the masterpiece of cave 30 and the images in caves 27, 29 and 24 except that the workmanship is not as refined as those.

Thus, it is not unreasonable to infer that caves 27, 29 and 30 were executed before cave 28-2. We can further infer that the caves we have reviewed were all constructed before this date. The stylistic features demonstrate the development of the iconography clearly. We find that the images in these caves resemble each other in general and at the same time, they distinguish themselves in matters of detail. This enables us to trace the evolution of the iconography and form a coherent map.

For example, as we have suggested, the images in caves 22, 23, 28 and 25 share similarities in the rendition of the robes and the arrangement of the draperies with those of caves 28-2 and 30. However, they distinguish themselves as well. Two Buddhas seated side by side in cave 22 (fig. 3.78) resemble the seated Buddha (fig. 3.72) of cave 21 in the lower niche of the east wall, but the cheeks are not as full as seen in the image of cave 21. The Buddha of cave 21 looks serene and kind with well formed features. The step-like folds are not pleated as closely as those in the images in caves 28-2 and 30. The pleats are wider. The inner robe covers only the left shoulder unlike those in caves 28-2 and 30 which cover both shoulders. However, it does not cross the chest diagonally. Rather, it goes right around the underarm so that the chest is not exposed much. The sash is not represented in either of the Buddhas. The contour of the face and the rendition of the usnisa of these two images are reminiscent of images dated to the 13th year of Taihe (489) of cave 11-14 (fig. 3.68). But the cheeks are not as full.
These similarities and differences provide us clues and evidence to therefore construct a chronological sequence of the caves and date them in relationship to images with explicit dates.

The earliest cave in the third-phase is, as discussed, without a doubt, cave 21. It was followed by caves 31, 39, 22, 23, 33, 25, 28, 24, 27, 29, 30 and cave 28-2. I argue that all these caves were constructed before the 4th year of Zhengshi (507). The most suggestive evidence to date them is the architectural stylistic features. This group is the highlight of the third-phase caves. They were executed from perhaps before the transfer of the capital (cave 21) to the early Zhengshi era (504-508) of Emperor Xuanwu (r. 500-515).

2. Group Two (507-515)

The second group includes only three caves: 37, 34 and 35. The imagery in these caves appears different from earlier caves. The images have transformed from slender and elegant to slightly solid and fleshy. It is likely that this group of caves were constructed by the same group of artisans who only worked only on these three caves which differs from any other caves in the third-phase. They presumably had different models to copy.

Cave 37

Cave 37 (fig. 3.121) is a unique cave in terms of the composition of the image and the subject matter. The main icon in this cave is a cross-ankled Bodhisattva (fig. 3.122) which is a rare occurrence. The subject matter in this cave is richly diversified, and some of the motifs were represented only in this cave. The images appear solid and stern as reflected by the seated Buddha on the west wall (fig. 3.123). The Buddha’s face is round
and the cheeks are full. The chest is broad and the nose is sharply carved. The eyes are gazing down which enhances the sternness of the image. The step-like folds of the robe are flattened and the pleats are wide. The inner robe covers both shoulders. The sash hangs down inside the robe. The drapery hangs down low over the pedestal voluminously. The series of large arcs in the front are well-balanced. The end of the drapery flares out at each side. The east wall Buddha (fig. 3.124) appears solid and powerful as well. The current head is a replacement.

It is interesting to note that the standing Buddhas on the south wall (fig. 3.125) and the Bodhisattva on the north wall are slender and elegant, whereas the images from the sidewalls are solid and powerful. The standing Buddha on the eastside of the south wall appears slender and supple. It is reminiscent of the standing Buddhas in caves 25 and 29. It is unusual to see both solid and elegant images represented in the same cave. The reveals of the window (figs. 3.126 and 3.127) bear Dharma protectors.

**Cave 34**

Cave 34 (fig. 3.128) was originally a sanbi sankan cave. The images appear solid and robust compared to the images in caves 27, 29 and 30. Two Buddhas (fig. 3.129) seated side by side in the north wall are draped in crudely carved robes with wide and bulgy folds. The right hem of the robe crosses the abdomen and hangs over to the left arm forming a series of arcs in the front. The drapery hangs down over the pedestal and flares out at the bottom. The drapery forms one series of large arcs in the front instead of two series of arcs side by side. The inner robe crosses the chest and is held in place by a bowknot. The streamers are long and hang over outside the robe. Unfortunately, the heads of the Buddhas are damaged.
The seated Buddha (fig. 3.130) on the west wall, compared with the Buddhas on the north wall, appears more elegant particularly with a more refined rendition of the robe. The body is well-proportioned. The step-like folds are flattened and rhythmical. The inner robe is covering both shoulders and is held in place by a well knitted bowknot. The streamers hang down long to the legs. The drapery is in the two parallel series of arcs as seen in the images in cave 27 and 29 etc. However, it does not drape down low over the pedestal, as is usual. The end of the drapery flares out to each side. The rendition of this image is one of the best and most elegant pieces in the third-phase caves. The iconography in this cave is unique. Judging from the stylistic features, this cave is close in time to that of cave 28-2. It was perhaps executed shortly after cave 28-2 or possibly at the same time.

**Cave 35**

Cave 35 (fig. 3.131) is square with three niches on three walls. The Dvarapalas (fig. 3.132) outside the entrance still exist. The reveals of the window contain Dharma protectors (figs. 3.133 and 3.134), and the cave entrance bears an inscription with an explicit date, the 4th year of Yanchang (515). Thus it is clear that cave 35 was executed before that date and very likely not too far from that date judging from the iconographic style.

The overall impression of the images is solid and chunky. The composition of the three images on the three walls is unique. The west wall contains a well-built seated Buddha (fig. 3.135) with both legs pendant. The image looks bulky and heavy with a broad chest. The robe is thin with wide and flattened pleats which accentuate the sense of chubbiness. The right hem of the neckline, which crosses the front to hang over to the left
arm, is thick. A large series of arcs is represented in the front and drapes down to the floor, an evidence of later rendition. The drapery flares out at each side and hangs down low over the pedestal. The sash is rendered and the streamers hang down outside the robe.

The east wall trabeated niche houses a cross-ankled Bodhisattva (fig. 3.136). The face is round and the cheeks are full. This Bodhisattva is perhaps the most elaborate and adorned image in all Yungang caves with necklaces, earrings and crown. The beads of the long necklace are sharply carved and the inner necklace is in inverted tear drop shape. The celestial robe which is wide in the shoulder area crosses through a large ring forming an “X” in the front. The series of sharp arcs is rendered on both legs and it gives a strong sense of rhythm. The drapery hangs down low over the pedestal and flares out at both sides. The image appears kind and humane with the gentle smile.

The main Buddha in the north wall is unfortunately weathered. However the contour indicates that the original image was powerful and solid.

The two standing Buddhas (fig. 3.137 and 3.138) on the south wall look fleshy and tall. They are the only plump standing Buddhas in the third-phase caves, since the rest appear slender and elegant. The workmanship of the standing Buddhas in this cave is clumsy. The tall bodies are disproportionate with small heads and broad chests.

The seated Buddhas (figs. 3.23 and 3.24) in each of the south wall niche appear slender with sloping shoulders and long neck compared with the images on sidewalls. These two images are reminiscent of those in caves 5-10 and 5-11. The robe is rendered with step-like folds, and the right hem of the robe is thick. It crosses the front to hang over to the left arm forming a series of arcs in the abdomen area. The drapery is long and hangs over the pedestal generously. The inner robe covers both shoulders with a thick
neckline. No sash is represented. The bodies are well-proportioned and balanced. The folds of the drapery are bulgy and voluminous which remind us of the images in caves 5-10 and 5-11. However, the images in caves 5-10 and 5-11 are more elegant and graceful. Evidently, cave 35 and caves 5-10 and 5-11 are close in time judging from the iconographic style and features, though perhaps Caves 5-10 and 5-11 are a little bit later than cave 35.

3. Group Three (512-515)

Cave 5-10 (fig. 3.16) and cave 5-11 (fig. 3.17), hidden deep in the mountain behind cave 5, are perhaps the most delicate and refined examples of the third-phase caves; in particular, the seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed in cave 5-11. These two caves, in my view, best exemplify the third-phase caves in iconography and workmanship. Cave 5-10

This small cave has only two niches wall the north wall holding only an altar on which the images are placed. The main Buddha (fig. 3.139) appears graceful and dignified. The robe is in the covering mode with double hemmed neckline, and the step-like folds are flattened with the right hem of the neckline hanging down to cross the front then hang over to the left arm forming a series of arcs in the abdomen area. The inner robe covers both shoulders and is pulled down low so that the chest is exposed. The sash is rendered, but no bowknot is represented, and the streamers hang down over the robe. The generous drapery hangs down low over the pedestal and the edges flare out at each side. The west wall contains a seated Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. The Buddha (fig. 3.140) appears even more slender and elegant with sloping shoulders and long neck. The drapery hangs down low over the pedestal voluminously, and the inner
robe covers both shoulders with a thick neckline. The east wall contains a cross-ankled Bodhisattva (fig. 3.141) in a trabeated niche, the front of which is so-called the “folding screening.” The south wall bears two standing Buddhas (figs. 3.142 and 3.143) and the story of Buddha’s life (fig. 3.144). The west niche of the south wall, which is damaged now, presumably was intended to represent the Great Departure judging by the fact that the east niche is the story of the prince riding on an elephant. These two stories are usually represented together. The ceiling is decorated with a large lotus in the center and four flying celestials surrounding it (fig. 3.145).

**Cave 5-11**

Cave 5-11 is perhaps one of the most refined caves in all of Yungang. The images compared to those in cave 5-10 are even more elegant and slender with sloping shoulders and long drapery. The main Buddha (fig. 3.146) is draped in a thin robe with both shoulders covered. The folds are dense and flattened, and the neckline is double hemmed. The sash ties the inner robe forming a bowknot. The streamers hang down outside the robe. The inner robe is pulled down low so the chest is shown. The drapery, more over, is exceptional. It is rich and rhythmical like a waterfall flowing over the pedestal. The attendant Bodhisattva (fig. 3.147) appears slender and elegant as well.

The seated Buddha with both legs crossed (fig. 3.148) on the west wall is a unique rendition. The Buddha is draped in layers of robes and the outermost robe covers only the left shoulder then crosses to cover the right shoulder slightly, then to tie together to cross the front forming a thick line in the front before it hangs over the left arm. It is important to note that the second layer robe is flat without any pleats. The neckline is double hemmed. The sash is tied together in the front with a bowknot and the streamers hang
down inside the outermost robe. The innermost robe covers both shoulders and is a thin layer. The complicated rendition of layers of robes makes the image bulky. Again, the drapery is long and rich, and flows down over the pedestal like a waterfall. The edges of the drapery are angular and flare out at both sides. The west wall also contains the depiction of the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri (fig. 3.149).

The seated Bodhisattva on the east wall (fig. 3.150) is a masterpiece of workmanship. The image appears extremely elegant and stately with well-proportioned slender body and gentle expression on the face. The waist is slim and the legs are long. The celestial robe covers the shoulders and the edges flare out. It crosses in the front forming an “X” without a ring (whereas the Bodhisattva in cave 5-10 is represented with a ring), then it is pulled up to hang over both arms to flow down to be tucked underneath both legs. The series arcs on both legs are well balanced and rhythmical. The large beaded necklace is long and hangs down in the front. The crown with a seated Buddha is high. The halo is small and round. The image is a perfect example of the third-phase cave representation.

The south wall, like that in cave 5-10, contains two standing Buddhas (figs. 3.151 and 3.152) and the life stories of the Buddha (figs. 3.153 and 3.154).

The ceiling (fig. 3.155) is decorated with the lotus and flying celestials. The nimbus of the main Buddha from the north wall extends to the ceiling and occupies much of the space.

Evidence to help us dating these two caves is that the images closely resemble the image (fig. 3.66) in cave 19-2 and dated to 515. The only difference is that the cave 5-11 images are refined works. They appear more slender and the folds are dense and bulgy.
The drapery hangs down over the pedestal richly. The lower part of the image appears weighty with long flowing drapery. The trabeation is adorned with so-called “folding screens” which are also observed in many other caves such as in cave 27-2 and the niche in the east side of entrance of cave 35 is coincidentally dated to 515 as well. This further suggests that these two caves are not far from 515 in time and were constructed in the last stage of Yungang. Thus caves 5-10 and 5-11 were likely to be executed around that time.

The images in caves 5-10 and 5-11 belong to the later style of the third-phase from the later Xuanwu era (r. 500-515).

The artisans who worked on these two caves probably worked on no others. I surmise that this was the case since the rest of the third-phase differs from these two in architecture and iconography. These are the only two caves that contain only two niches while all the others contain at least three niches. I also believe that the patrons perhaps held high social status or invested more financially, because the images in these two caves are genuine masterpieces of Buddhist iconography.

4. Group Four (515-524)

The waterfall-like voluminous and bulgy drapery represented in caves 5-10 and 5-11 are also seen in several other caves such as caves 23-1, 27-2, 32-12, 32-9, 32-11, 33-3, 35-1. These are the fourth group of caves in the third-phase. They are likely to have been executed after caves 5-10 and 5-11 and represent the final stage of Yungang. All of them were likely to have been executed between the Yanchang era (512-515) and Zhengguang era (520-525).

Stylistically, these caves, although they distinguish themselves in matters of detail, resemble each other and they resemble the images in caves 5-10 and 5-11. The
workmanship is not as refined as that of cave 5-10 and cave 5-11 and the images are often disproportionate and are not as dignified and stately as the earlier images. The rendition of the draperies and robes are clumsy. The folds are no longer flat but are bulgy and uneven. The draperies hang down over the pedestal excessively long without rhythm, which makes the bottom of the image heavy and the head light. These images stylistically resemble the image (fig. 3.66) in the trabeated niche of cave 19-2 and dated to the 4th year of Yanchang (515).

Another clue to help us to date these caves is the decoration of the trabeation front which is adorned with so-called “folding screens” which are also observed in many other caves such as in cave 27-2 and the niche in the east side of entrance of cave 35 which is coincidently dated to 515 as well. This further suggests that these caves are not far from 515 in time and are the last stage of Yungang. Thus, it is not unreasonable to infer that these caves were executed around that time or a little after that.

This group of caves, though the workmanship is not as refined as earlier caves, possesses unique features and represents the final stage of Yungang.

**Cave 23-1**

Cave 23-1 (fig. 3.156) is a small and elegant cave with one pointed arch in the north wall (fig. 3.157) and two trabeated niches in the sidewalls. The rest of the space is filled with thousand Buddha niches neatly arranged. The seated Buddha with legs crossed in the north wall appears serene and stern. The body is disproportioned with small head and heavy drapery. The slit eyes and eyebrows are long, and the nose is sharply carved. The face is oval-shaped and the ears are elongated. The robe is in covering mode and the folds are flat and balanced. The neckline is in a “U” shape, the bottom of which is very
thick, tied together with the right hem of the robe. The inner robe with a double-layered “V” neckline covers both shoulders and pulls down low so the chest is shown. The drapery is placed flat to the front instead of over the pedestal. The edges flare out at each side. The Bodhisattvas attending the Buddha look slender and tall. The west wall (fig. 3.158) trabeated niche houses a seated Buddha with both legs crossed. This image compared with the main Buddha in the north wall appears even more slender with thin material and flat folds of the robe. The image is carved so shallowly that the folds are represented with incised lines. It is significant to notice the two segments of the drapery between the knees are not represented with series of parallel arcs. Instead, they are rendered with vertical lines. The attending Bodhisattvas look slender and elegant with shallow carving. The trabeation is simple and flat, and is adorned with dots only.

The ceiling is unique (fig. 3.159). The coffered panels are shallowly carved and the lotus is not in the center, as is usual. The coffers are connected with round circles.  

**Cave 27-2**

Cave 27-2 (fig. 3.160) is a small cave with three niches on three walls. The ceiling (fig. 3.161) is decorated with lotuses and flying celestials but it is not coffered as is usual. The east wall (fig. 3.162) of cave 27-2 contains a trabeated niche in which a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed is represented. The trabeation front (fig. 3.163) is decorated with the unique “folding screen” on which seven bas-relief Buddhas seated with legs crossed are represented. The robes of the Buddhas are also unique. Instead of covering the left shoulder, as is usual, it covers the right shoulder. The incised vertical lines are rendered on the robe. The left side of the robe is hidden at the back, but the hem is pulled to the front to go around the left knee forming parallel circles. The unique
rendition of covering the right shoulder is represented in all the so-called “folding screen” trabeations and some of the arch fronts such as in caves 24-1, 26, 35, 38, 5-10, 5-11. However, they differ slightly from one another. The representative rendition is the cave 27-2 trabeation. This unusual representation seems to be a popular rendition in cave 27-2.

The seated Bodhisattva (fig. 3.164) is disproportioned with large torso and short legs. The flat celestial robe crosses in the front through a large ring forming the conventional “X”. The skirt tucked underneath the legs is flat with any fold. The hem of the skirt flares out at both sides. The necklace is in inverted tear drop shape. The attending Bodhisattvas with one leg pendant are also disproportionate. The legs are extremely short and tapering towards the ankles. The draperies are angular and spread out like a fish tail. The main Buddha in the north wall is appears slender with sloping shoulders. The folds are bulgy and unbalanced. The right shoulder folds are wider that those of left shoulder. The “U” shaped neckline of the outer robe is double hemmed. The right hem of the neckline is tied together to cross the front and hang over the left arm. The “V” shaped inner robe is pulled down low so that the chest is exposed. The drapery is rich and unbalanced. The series of arcs are not paralleled as is usual. The material seems thick and uneven. The overall impression of this image is reminiscent of those in the south wall of cave 35 and the Bodhisattva on the east side of the entrance dated to the 4th year of Yanchang (515). Thus cave 27-2 was likely to be executed around that time too.

The iconographic similarities also further prove that this group of images is not far from the year of 515 in time.
Cave 33-3

Cave 33-3 (fig. 3.165) is a small cave with storeyed niches on the side walls and one niche on the north wall. The images resemble those in cave 27-2 and are crudely carved. The subject matter is richly diversified. It is rare to have so many motifs in such a small cave. The main wall (fig. 3.166) contains two Buddhas seated side by side. The Buddhas appear slender and elegant with sloping shoulders. The drapery is rich and hangs over pedestal voluminously. This image echoes those in the south wall of cave 35 but the workmanship is crude.

The west wall (fig. 3.167) bears two storeys. The seated Buddha (fig. 3.168) with legs crossed in the upper niche of the west wall is exceptional. The outer robe is in covering mode but the right hem does not cross in the front to hang over to the left arm. Instead, both sides of hang down over the arms like a cape. The inner robe covers both shoulders with series of arcs in the chest. The patch covering the right shoulder and the vertical lines on the robe are noteworthy. The drapery is voluminous and hangs down low over the pedestal. Worshipers and Bodhisattvas are represented on the side posts as is usual. The debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri is represented in the west wall. The Vimalakirti appears fleshy and disproportionate. The head is large and the cheeks are full. The drapery hangs over the pedestal and flares out at each side at the bottom. The seated Bodhisattva with one leg pendant under a tree and a kneeling figure in front of him (fig. 3.48) in the lower level of the west wall depicts the First Meditation of the prince. The east wall (fig. 3.169) bears the life stories of the Buddha. Some, such as the prince riding on an elephant and the miracle birth of the Buddha, can still be discerned.

5. Group Five (520-524)
Beside the caves in Group Four which have bulgy and voluminous drapery, another group of caves (24-1, 26, 36, 33-4 and 38) share similar iconographic features and composition, as well as architectural structure. This is the fifth group of caves in the third-phase. The fourth and fifth groups represent the last stage of the Yungang work and they are highly likely to have been executed in the final decade of Yungang, i.e. the Zhengguang era (520-525).

Caves 24-1, 26, 33-4 and 38 all have one niche in the north wall with two Buddhas seated side by side with legs crossed, and have small and compact storeyed niches in the sidewalls. Moreover, they all have the so-called “folding screen” in the trabeated front. Another suggestive clue in dating them is the stylistic features of the images which resemble each other closely. Based on this evidence, I infer that this group of caves was close in time to the aforementioned group five caves and that perhaps were executed in the last decade of Yungang (515-524).

**Cave 24-1**

Cave 24-1 (fig. 3.3) contains slender and elegant images. The two Buddhas (fig. 3.170) seated side by side in the main wall look slender and dignified with sloping shoulders and long necks. The attending Bodhisattvas appear elegant and humane with a gentle smile. The west wall (fig. 3.171) contains two storeys. The vertical composition of the images in the west wall is noteworthy as previously mentioned. It is a rarely seen composition: that of a seated Buddha with both legs pendant, a seated Buddha with both legs crossed and a standing Buddha. It is noteworthy that the seated attending Bodhisattvas with one leg pendant (fig. 3.172) in the west wall are sitting on rattan stools.
The arrangement of the niches on the side walls correspond to each other. The east wall (fig. 3.173) is partially damaged.

Cave 26

Cave 26 (fig. 3.2) resembles cave 24-1 in style, structure, composition and subject matter. The seated Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed in the sidewalls (figs. 3.174 and 3.175) in cave 26 resemble closely those in cave 24-1. The main wall (fig. 3.176) is also of interest. It contains a trabeated niche in which two Buddhas seated side by side attended by two seated Buddhas with both legs pendant, a rare representation, observed elsewhere only in cave 7, the anteroom of cave 12, caves 27, 29 and 30. However, these are the only Buddhas seated with both legs pendant attending two Buddhas seated side by side with legs crossed. The others are attending either seated Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed or seated Buddhas with legs crossed. It is interesting to note that only in the “folding screen” fronts do we find seated Buddhas with the robes covering the right rather than the left shoulder. The ceiling (fig. 3.177) is decorated with flying celestials (fig. 3.178) which give a strong sense of movement. It is also significant to note that the seated Buddhas in small niches on the sidewalls resemble closely that in the west wall of cave 28-2 which is dated to the 3rd year of Yanchang (514). This further indicates that cave 26 is a late rendition of the Yungang caves and close to cave 28-2 in time.

Cave 36

Cave 36 (fig. 3.11) is a small rectangular cave with compact composition. For unknown reasons, the cave is not finished. The north wall (fig. 3.179) contains two storeys, stylistically resembles cave 27, most particularly, in the seated Bodhisattvas (fig. 3.180) with ankles crossed in north wall. They all have the high crown, long legs and the
bodies are well-proportioned. The seated Buddha (fig. 3.181) appears stately and dignified, and the workmanship is skillful. The outer robe neckline is in a “V” shape with a thick bottom across the front to hang over the left arm forming the series of arcs in the abdominal area.

Both side walls have storeyed niches as well, with the left wall (fig. 3.182) containing the First Sermon episode in the upper niche. The arrangement of the niche on the east wall (fig. 3.183) does not correspond to that of the west wall. The seated Buddhas with legs crossed in the upper level niches are similar to those in the sidewalls of cave 27. They appear slender and serene with flat and well-balanced folds.

The standing Buddhas (fig. 3.184) on the south wall of this cave appear bulky and disproportioned. The heads are small and the lower bodies are long and heavy. They are reminiscent of those in the south wall of cave 35.

These iconographic features suggest that this cave was executed in the late period of Yungang.

**Cave 33-4**

Cave 33-4 (fig. 3.185) is a small cave. The north wall bears only a pointed arch niche inside of which twin Buddhas are represented. The sidewalls contain storeyed niches with compact composition. The motifs are diversified, and the Asoka episode (fig. 3.186) is represented twice. The seated Buddha (fig. 3.187) on the left wall resembles the images in the east wall of the entrance gateway dated to the 4th year of Yanchang (515) of cave 35 and the image in the west wall of cave 28-2 dated to the 3rd year of Yanchang (514). The likeness is so striking that I believe that these caves were carved by the same group of artisans. I therefore infer from style that cave 33-4 was executed around this
time or a little bit later than this date. The vertical arrangement of the images in small niches in the sidewalls is found only in cave-24-1.

**Cave 38**

Cave 38 (fig. 3.4) is a small cave (so small and inaccessible that it is difficult to get a photograph of a full view of each wall), yet it contains subject matter which is among the richest and the most diversified of all the caves of Yungang. Some motifs represented in this cave such as Buddha’s ascent to Tavatimsa to preach for his mother Queen Maya (fig. 3.60) and the Gridhrakuta Hill episode (fig. 3.61) are found nowhere else. The north wall contains a pointed arched niche (fig. 3.188) and many illustrations of Buddha’s life. The Great Departure (fig. 3.189) and the prince riding an elephant episodes (fig. 3.190) are depicted at the bottom of the wall. The Buddha’s meeting with his son Rahula (fig. 3.62) and the Parinirvana (fig. 3.191) episodes are portrayed above them.

The east wall (fig. 3.192) contains three storeys. The Asoka story (fig. 3.193) and the Dipamkara legend (fig. 3.194) are depicted on the second level.

The west wall (fig. 3.195) contains only one niche inside of which is a seated Buddha with legs pendant.

The south wall is filled with Buddha’s life story. The Conversion of the Three Kāśyapas (fig. 3.196), the Buddha’s ascent to Tavatimsa to preach for his mother and the Gridhrakuta Hill episode are depicted in the east niches of the south wall one above the other. Mara’s assault (fig. 3.197) and Buddha’s First Sermon are illustrated in the west niches of the south wall.

Stylistically, it is close to others in group five, though it is significant to notice that the draperies are arranged in both the earlier styles which have only one large series
of arcs in the front, and the later styles, which have two series of parallel arcs in the front. The folds of the robes are so shallow that they seem to be incised lines. The artisans of this cave embraced the multiple traditions of previous times and mastered several different styles. The seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed in the trabeated niche in the east wall is reminiscent of that in the east wall of the entrance gateway of cave 35. The arrangement of the robes and drapery resemble each other so closely that I believe that these two caves were created by the hands of the same artisans. It is highly likely that these two caves were executed at around the same time since the images in cave 38 look similar to those in cave 5-33.

V. Dating and Chronological Sequence

The caves we have examined in chronological sequence can be divided into five groups according to their architectural structure and the iconographic features.

The earliest group begins with caves 21, 31 and 39, followed by caves 22, 23 and 33, which in turn are followed by caves 25, 28, 24, 27, 29, 30 and 28-2. This group constitutes almost half of the third-phase caves. It represents the refined rendition of the third-phase caves, particularly the representations we find in caves 27, 29 and 30 where several images can be considered as masterpieces of Yungang. The inscriptions with explicit dates (507 and 514) in cave 28-2 provide important information to date the caves supplementing the iconographic style, composition and architecture structure. This group is the earliest in the third-phase and was started immediately after the capital was moved to Luoyang. As suggested previously that it is possible that cave 21 was started even before the transfer of the capital. Since cave 28-2 was executed before 507 and other
caves in the first group were constructed before cave 28-2, it is highly likely that the other caves were all constructed before 507 or near this date.

The second group of caves (37, 35, and 34) stylistically followed the older tradition in style. But at the same time, innovations were made, the imagery presents a very different picture. The icons appear robust and solid with broad chests and full faces. The workmanship is not as refined as the previous group, and these caves are in larger in scale and size. Thus the images are larger than other caves. This group, I believe, was executed between 507 and 515 because the images do not resemble those executed before 507. Neither do they possess any of the iconographic features appearing around 515. This group can be considered as transitional and was constructed between the two highpoints (494-507 and 515-524) of the third-phase. After this group, patrons hired different style artists. As I mentioned before, it is likely that the artisans were hired to work only on these caves.

The third group includes only caves 5-10 and 5-11. These two small caves are colored, well preserved and are masterpieces of the third-phase. The structure is unique. The north wall does not have a niche, the images are placed on a low altar. The images in these two caves appear dignified and elegant, and the seated Bodhisattva in cave 5-11, in particular, I would consider as a masterpiece of the third-phase caves. Compared to the earlier caves, and judging by style and coloration these two caves seem to have been created by a different and more talented group of artists. The seated Buddhas resemble the image (fig. 3.66) dated to 515 in cave 19-2 but the workmanship is far more refined. These two caves were therefore built around this date, likely during the Yangchang era (512-515).
The fourth group includes caves 23-1, 27-2, 32-12, 32-9, 32-11, 33-3, 35-1. In style they follow caves 5-10 and 5-11 closely, however, the workmanship is not as nearly skillful as the latter. They are small in scale, and the outstanding feature of this group is their waterfall-like draperies which are bulgy and voluminous. The folds are not as flat as those represented earlier. Rather they look uneven without rhythm.

The last group includes caves 24-1, 26, 36, 33-4 and 38. These caves resemble one another in style, structure and iconographic composition. Generally the north wall of these caves contains only one niche in which two Buddhas seated side by side with legs crossed, whereas the sidewalls have tiered niches one on above the other. The compositions in these caves are compact and the images are small.

These last two groups share similarities in style and yet demonstrate iconographic differences. The last group is clumsier than the former and the images often look disproportionate. Most of the renditions are not smooth, nor are the folds of the garments flattened but rather uneven and bulgy.

It is clear to me that the last two groups belong to the final work of Yungang and were executed in the last decade between 515 and 524. Judging from the imagery, I would also suggest that the fifth group was executed at the very years of Yungang (520-524).

VI. Conclusion

The third-phase caves are generally modest in scale compared with the caves in the first two phases, and it should be noted that the locality of each cave does not indicate the sequence of their execution. In other words, the most westerly of the caves may not have been executed last. Cave 39, for example, one of the earliest caves, is located near
the westernmost end of the Yungang complex. Nor were these caves constructed under a completed plan like the caves from first two phases. It seems clear that they were not commissioned by the royal court, but rather, were sponsored by different patrons such as local officials, Buddhist devotees and wealthy laity. They were hewn at different times over a time span of 30 years, i.e. from 494 to 524. Finally the third-phase caves are usually very small; some of them only big enough to accommodate one person to sit in meditation.

In fact, many caves functioned as meditation cells, and were constructed for that purpose. The *Fufazang yinyuan*, translated by Ji Jiaye and Tan Yao, tells us clearly that meditation should be conducted inside a cave and the cave should be situated in the tranquil mountains and valleys regardless how bitter cold or windy it may be.\(^{110}\)

When Tan Yao was translating sutras in Yungang, he was simultaneously in charge of the construction of the Yungang caves. It is thus natural to assume that many ideas in regard to the building of the cave complex were inspired by his translations and the contents of the scriptures. The translation of the *Fufazang yinyuan* might have been one of the inspirations for Tan Yao to execute the caves as meditation cells.

In addition, Northern Wei Buddhism emphasized meditation practice including cave meditation whereas Buddhism in the south laid emphasis on scriptures and translations. This is one of the reasons why Buddhist caves are found in north China instead of south China.

Tao Yao’s translation of scriptures also had a profound impact on the subject matter. Many stories of Buddha’s former lives depicted in Yungang are derived from

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\(^{110}\) *Fufazang yingyuan zhuan*, T50:2058:304b05.
and as I have pointed out, visual representations and Buddhist scriptures are closely connected.

Another indication of the close relationship between words and images is the popularity of the subject of Dharma protectors during the second-phase. They were depicted in almost every cave, this development is closely related to Tan Yao’s translation of the *Dajiyi shenzhou jing.* Further evidence to prove that the subject matter of Yungang was directly influenced by the scriptures is that both the *Dajiyi shenzhou jing* and the *Zabaozang jing* emphasize the three Buddhas in three *kalpas* which is the most popular subject in Yungang throughout all three phases. The close connection between Buddhist literature and visual representation will be discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

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111 *Zabaozang jing* was translated by Ji Jiaye and Tan Yao as well.
112 *Dajiyi shenzhou jing* was translated by Tan Yao between 462 and 472, see Lidu Yi, “The translation of the *Dajiyi shenzhou jing* and the Imagery of Yungang,” forthcoming.
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CHAPTER FOUR

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE THIRD-PHASE CAVES

In this chapter, I look at the third-phase Yungang caves, focusing upon the origins and development of a distinctive architectural structure, iconographic composition, subject matter and artistic style. To do this, I compare them with the typical caves of the first two stages of construction, emphasizing the transitional nature of the stage-two caves in the progression from the five Tan Yao caves to the final development of the western-end caves which form the core of my inquiry.

I will attempt to show that the artists and artisans who were responsible for the final stage of construction not only followed well-established models, but also added significant innovations of their own. I will also show the close connection between the subject matter and the sacred Buddhist literature current in the Northern Wei. The nexus between words and images, I believe, sheds a good deal of light upon the beliefs and practices of Buddhism in northern China during the Period of Disunion.

I. Comparative Analysis of the Architectural Structure of the Western-end Caves and the Caves of the First Two Phases
As we have pointed out in Chapter Three, Buddhist caves can generally be classified as two types: shrine caves and monastery caves, with none of the latter type found in Yungang. The shrine caves there are usually subdivided into statue caves and stupa caves, and since there are only five stupa caves (1, 2, 6, 11 and 39), the statue caves constitute the great majority.

The early statue caves in Yungang are mainly elliptical in shape with a slightly domed ceiling, a feature particularly true of the five Tan Yao caves in the first-phase. In most cases, there is no clear line between walls as the cave tapers upwards to join the ceiling and the corners of the caves are round. All elliptical caves contain colossal statues and hence are often called the “colossal statue caves.”

The small caves located outside caves 11 and 13 (fig. 3.22) such as caves 13-18, 13-31 and 13-32 are transitional caves evolving from the elliptical to a square or rectangular shape at the same time that the ceilings became more flat, while the corners remained slightly rounded.

There were no niches in the early caves, but instead, the common motif of the three Buddhas of three kalpas was placed in front of each wall. The dominant architectural layout of later times, three niches on three walls, was inspired by this placement of the statues.

Early second-phase caves such as cave 13, which is elliptical and has no niches, followed the first-phase architectural layout. Later second-phase caves like 7, 8 (fig. 2.19) and 12, began to demonstrate a more Chinese architectural tradition. The north wall of

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113 Fu Xinian傅熹年 divided the Yungang caves into three categories: colossal cave, Buddha hall cave and stupa cave, see Fu Xinian. Ed. Zhongguo gudai jianzhushi 《中國古代建築史》 (History of Chinese Ancient Architecture), vol. 2, 206.
these caves bear two storeys and the side walls bear four storeys, all with niches for the statuary.

In some cases, such as that of caves 9 and 10, the north wall is devoid of niches, which appear only on the side walls. They also feature an arched passage behind the main image so that the devotees could practice pradaksina (circumambulation). This type of cave may be considered a simplified version of caves 7, 8 and 12.

Along with these three types of statue cave in the second-phase, we find four stupa caves, numbers 1, 2, 6 and 11, so that in this phase of construction, there are four distinct cave types.

The third-phase also contains both statue and stupa caves, and as we discussed in Chapter Three, the statue caves there are divided into six distinct styles, demonstrating a growing confidence in architectural and artistic expression. Cave 39 is the only stupa cave in the third-phase.

Compared to other stupa caves, cave 39 (fig. 3.76) is unique in architectural structure although it shares some similarities with caves 1 and 2.

In it, the stupa pillar in the center has five storeys, all showing traditional Chinese wooden roofs covered by tiles, whereas cave 1 (fig. 4.1) has two and cave 2 (fig. 4.2) has three storeys, and their top storey is a canopy. Each storey of the stupa pillar has five compartments with arched or trabeated niches, whereas cave 1 has only one niche on each face of the stupa, and cave 2 has three niches on each storey. The stupa pillar tapers towards the top where it is surmounted by the Mount Sumeru adjoining the ceiling and tapering outward (fig. 4.3). The shape of the Mount Sumeru appears similar to that of caves 1 and 2, but lacks the intertwined dragons found there.
All three stupa pillars show elements of traditional Chinese wooden architecture, such as the tiled roofs, rafts, the inverted ‘V’ and brackets; however the stupa pillar in cave 39 seems to have been modelled after an actual indigenous wooden pagoda.

Another difference between these caves is that the second storey of the stupa pillars in cave 2 has four pillars at each corner. Judging from the traces, it seems that the first storey of the pagoda had four pillars as well before they were destroyed. The second storey of the stupa pillar of cave 6 (fig. 4.4) also bears four pillars at the corner, but they are nine-storey pagoda pillars, and at the bottom of each are four Indian style stupas (fig. 4.5). The nine-storeyed pagoda in cave 6 is similar to the stupa pillar of Cave 39, but the cave 6 pagoda has only three compartments on each storey with pointed arch niches only, whereas the cave 39 pagoda has five compartments in each face and each one contains both pointed and trabeated niches.

Cave 39 also differs substantially from caves 6 (fig. 4.6) and cave 11 (fig. 2.26). The latter two are large niche pagodas, but are not modeled after Chinese wooden pagodas. Cave 6 is most similar to cave 1, but the former is more elaborate and larger in scale. In the case of cave 11, the stupa pillar is divided into two storeys, the lower level of which contains four large niches on each side and is surmounted by a canopy. The south face of the upper storey contains one niche housing a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed. The other three faces bear two niches at each side. The top of the stupa pillar is not surmounted by the Mount Sumeru as seen in caves 1, 2 and 39, but rather, it is a pedestal (fig. 4.7) adorned with three-faced, four-armed Devas and floral patterns.

Among the five stupa pillar caves, Cave 39 is the only one wholly modeled after the Chinese wooden pagoda, with the others only adopting certain elements, and the
lower pillars in cave 6, for instance, still show a characteristically Indian influence. It
seems clear, therefore, that by the time Cave 39 was executed, Yungang artists had freed
themselves from western models and just as the Buddhist religion was becoming more
sinicized, so too, was its artistic expression.

The subject matter of the stupa pillar in Cave 39 is rather simple: a seated Buddha
with legs crossed or pendant, a Bodhisattva with ankles crossed and the figures of
Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side at the bottom storey of the south face.
Stories from the life of the Buddha are not represented in cave 39 as they are in cave 2
and in some other extant individual pagodas.\textsuperscript{114}

We should stress that although it is unique in architectural structure, cave 39
shares some similarities with other pagoda caves from the second-phase of construction.
All the pagodas are square, and all are placed in the center of the cave. The four faces
of the pagoda are parallel with the sidewalls of the cave leaving a passageway for devotees
to practice circumambulation. All the pagodas are connected to the ceiling, and thus
function as a mechanical support for the ceiling of the cave. As the only stupa cave in
phase-three Yungang, cave 39 with its pagoda-pillar, is worthy of special study both as a

\textsuperscript{114} The arch front of the middle niche in the first storey on the north side of the stupa pillar in cave 2 is
decorated with the episode of Mara’s assault. Also Prince Siddhartha’s farewell with his white horse
Kanthaka is represented in the second storey on the west side of the stupa pillar in Cave 2. Interestingly the
Buddha’s life story is not represented on the stupa pillar in Cave 39. The life story of the Buddha is a very
popular subject matter in individual pagodas such as in Cao Tiandu’s pagoda 曹天度, Cao Tianhu’s pagoda
曹天護 and the Nanchansi pagoda 南禪寺 in Wutaishan, see Shi Shuqing 史樹青, “Beiwei Cao Tiandu zao
qianfo shita” 北魏曹天度造千佛塔 (Thousand Buddha stone stupa dedicated by Cao Tiandu in Northern
Wei), Wenwu, 1980, 1; Han Youfu 韓有富, “Beiwei Cao Tiandu qianfota tacha” 北魏曹天度千佛塔剎
(Thousand Buddha stupa dedicated by Cao Tiandu in Northern Wei), Wenwu, 1980, 7; Chen Bingying 陳
炳應, “Beiwei Cao Tianhu Zao fangshita” 北魏曹天護造方石塔 (Square stone stupa dedicated by Cao
Tianhu in Northern Wei), Wenwu, 1988, 3; and Li Yuqun, “Wutaishan Nanchansi Juicang Beiwei Jingang
baozuo shita” 五臺山南禪寺舊藏北魏金剛寶座石塔 (Northern Wei stupa with vajra pedestal formerly
housed in Nanchan temple on Wutai Mountain), Wenwu, 2008, 4. These pagodas present rich illustrations
of the life of the Buddha.
significant example of Northern Wei architecture, and as a repository of meditation imagery used by the faithful at the time for prayerful visualization.

As we mentioned above, with the exception of cave 39, all the other caves in third-phase Yungang are statue caves, and of these, caves with three niches on three walls (sanbi sankan) predominate. This architectural layout I believe to be a third-phase innovation, though it was clearly evolved from earlier architectural designs. As we have noted, the second-phase caves were built with only storeyed niches (caves 7, 8 and 12) or with no niche at all (cave 13). The design of one niche on each of the three walls did not exist.

The layout of three niches on three walls first appeared in small caves located in the area between caves 11 and 13, and thereafter emerged rapidly in the western-end caves to become the most popular architectural design. In most of the examples of this new design, we find a trabeated niche on the east wall housing a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed. The north and west walls generally contain a pointed arch niche bearing a seated Buddha or the pairing of Sakyamuni and Prabhatarata. We should note that this layout was continued in Gongxian caves such as cave 5 (fig. 4.8) but does not appear in Longmen.

Caves with three niches on three walls usually have a square floor-plan and a flat ceiling, a layout probably based on, but simplifying, the design of such storeyed-niche second-phase caves as numbers 7 and 8. At the same time, the structure was inspired by the early elliptical caves in which three images were placed in front of three walls. Here we see the blending of continuity and innovation which is the hallmark of third-phase Yungang.
There are, however, a number of third-phase caves which mimic the architecture of the second-phase without innovation, for example, the storeyed caves (caves 27, 29, 30, 31, 32-9 and 36), reviewed in the previous chapter. These are rectangular in plan and the ceilings are flat with coffers, usually numbering nine. The north wall is divided into two storeys with two large niches one above the other, and the sidewalls usually contain four storeys, two niches on each storey. This is very nearly identical to the architectural structure of the twin caves of the second-phase. The only real difference, and it is minor, lies in the number and distribution of the niches with the third-phase caves presenting a somewhat simplified version of those in the second-phase.

As suggested earlier, third-phase caves with one niche on the north wall and storeyed niches on the sidewalls (21, 22, 24-1, 26, 33-3, 33-4 and 38), also evolved from the architecture of caves 7 and 8. The layout of the caves is basically the same, and the only difference is that the north wall bears only one niche. This type can be best exemplified by Cave 21.

In the case of caves which contain no niches at all (caves 23, 25-2 and 28-2), and constitute the fourth type architectural type of the third-phase, I would propose that they were based on the model of those second-phase caves located in the area between caves 11 and 13, such as cave 11-8 (fig. 4.9). The architectural layout is similar, and is similar also to the elliptical plan of the Tan Yao caves where the main image is placed on a plain pedestal in the center of the north wall attended by two Bodhisattvas. Caves 25-2 and 28-2 appear very similar to these caves. The main difference is that the later examples are deeper, and the corners of the cave are no longer round, but square and angular. The floor-plan of cave 28-2 is in fact, square rather than rectangular. Cave 23 has an altar, on
which all the images are placed, in front of three walls, and in this way, resembles cave 13-31 (fig. 4.10) in which the images are placed on an altar as well. These are just a few examples of the similarities of the architecture between the caves located outside of caves 11 and 13 and some of the western-end caves. It is for this reason that I believe that they were the inspiration for the caves without niches which we find in the third-phase. And we should not forget that the Tan Yao caves also had some influence.

Third-phase caves 5-10 and 5-11 belong to a different category of architecture. Here we find that there is an altar with images rather than a niche on the north wall, and there is only one niche on each of the sidewalls. In my view, this layout is an attempt to combine two of the other styles – caves without niches, and those with three niches on three walls.

Twin caves, as we have seen, emerged during the second-phase and soon became so popular that of the twelve second-phase caves, eight of them (7, 8; 9, 10; 1, 2, and 5 and 6) are twin caves. This is a result, I believe, of the fact that Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-99) and empress dowager Wenmin (442-490), who are usually called the “two sages,” were essentially joint rulers during the period of construction. Perhaps as sign of respect, or more likely as an attempt to curry favor with the Court and win its patronage, the twinning of caves was undertaken. These twin caves in the second-phase were normally connected and shared a wooden structure in front, probably added in a later period.

Caves 27 and 29 of the third-phase, although they are not connected in the same way as caves 7 and 8 or caves 9 and 10, and do not have a wooden structure surmounting them, share many similarities with them. The composition of the images, the arrangement of the niches, the layout of the architecture and the style are so similar that one cannot
help but suggest that these two caves were built as twin caves. The north wall of both caves is filled with six-storeyed niches, three on each level. Both sidewalls are occupied by four niches in a vertical arrangement with two on top of each other. Both caves are rectangular in plan and the size of the caves is almost the same. The ceilings of both caves are decorated with lotus flowers and flying deities, and both have windows above the entrance. Stylistically, the images in these two caves are rendered in a similar manner – sinicized, slender and graceful. The striking similarities between caves 27 and 29 lead me to believe that these two caves were conceived and executed as twin caves. They were likely commissioned by high local officials with some connection to the Court, officials or by a nearby Buddhist community (yi she).

In reviewing the architecture of the three phases, we can only conclude that the third-phase architecture was primarily based on the first two phases. At the same time, the artists of the third-phase, now freer of western influences, made important innovations. The cave with three niches on three walls evolved during the third-phase and became the predominant feature of Buddhist architecture thereafter.

II. Subject Matter and Visual Representations

As we have suggested in the previous chapter, the subject matter of the third-phase is richly diversified. The Buddhist pantheon of the Buddha, Bodhisattva, disciples, flying celestials, donors and Dharma protectors were, with a more diversified composition, continued to be represented. In addition, the life of the Buddha, the jataka stories, the nidana stories, the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side, the Sakyamuni and Maitreya, and the legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri,
all of which are visual representations of the influential sutras, further enriched the already diversified motifs and constitute a significant part of the subject matter.

After we carefully deciphered the imagery of the third-phase in previous chapter, it is evident that the subject matter of the third-phase is closely related to Buddhist scriptures. I argue that the motifs appeared in the third-phase were mainly inspired by the most influential sutras of the time such as the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, and more importantly, by the sutras such as the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* (A History of Indian Patriarchs), the *Zabaozang jing* (the Sutra of the Miscellaneous Treasures) and the *Daiyi shenzhou jing* (Sutra of Great Auspicious Significance of Magic Spell) translated by Tan Yao and others. I am convinced that what Tan Yao and others had translated during the construction of Yungang was the primary inspiration for the Yungang artists who represented scriptural words visually. The imagery of Yungang is a visual representation of literary words.

1. Words and Images

The close connections between words and images are evident as we shall review the significant motifs (the three Buddhas in three *kalpas*, the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri, the Maitreya and Shakyamuni, the life stories of the Buddha and the episodes from his former lives) one by one and investigate their didactic function beyond the visual narration.

(1) The Three Buddhas of the Three *Kalpas*

This subject is an eternal theme in Buddhist arts. It is the main motif of each cave represented in various ways throughout three phases. It is most likely, as is usual, based on the most influential sutra of the time, the *Lotus Sutra*, as we read through chapter two
Furthermore, the introduction of the sutra describes how the three Buddhas succeeded one after the other, without intervention, and, in due time, expounded the great Dharma. Before the Buddha entered nirvana he assured the countless multitudes of succeeding the Buddha:

When I enter the extinction, you must not be concerned or fearful! This Bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse has already fully understood in his mind the true entity that is without outflows. He will be next to become a Buddha, bearing the name Pure Body, and he too will save immeasurable multitudes.

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115 Chapter Two of the sutra (the Expedient Devices) frequently mentions the three Buddhas of the three *kalpas*: “Sariputra, the Buddhas of the past by resorting to incalculable and numberless devices and to various means, parables and phrases proclaimed the Dharma to the beings. These Dharma were all directed toward the One Buddha Vehicle. These beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddha, all attain thoroughly to knowledge of all modes. Sariputra, future Buddhas shall come into the world, and they, too, by resorting to incalculable and numberless devices and to various means, parables, and phrases, shall proclaim the Dharma to the beings. These beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, shall all attain thoroughly the knowledge of all modes. Sāriputra, the Buddhas, the World-honoured Ones, in the incalculable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Buddha-lands in the ten directions of the present time have many beings whom they benefit and put at their ease. These Buddhas also, by resort to incalculable and numberless devices and to various means, parables, and phrases, proclaim the dharmas to the beings. These dharmas are all directed toward the One Buddha Vehicle. Eng. Trans by Leon Hurvitz, with minor changes, *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (The Lotus Sutra)*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 30.

116 “When the Buddha Sun Moon Bright had finished preaching this sutra over a period of sixty small *kalpas*, he spoke these words to the Brahmans, devils, shramanas and Brahmans, as well as to the heavenly and human beings and asuras in the assembly, saying ‘tonight at midnight the Thus Come One will enter the nirvana with no remainder.’ “At this time there was a Bodhisattva named Virtue Storehouse. The Buddha Sun Moon Bright bestowed a prophecy on him, announcing to the monks, ‘this Bodhisattva Virtue Storehouse will be the next to become a Buddha. He will be called the Pure Body, tathagata, arhat, samyak-sambuddha.’” “After the Buddha had finished bestowing this prophecy, at midnight, he entered the nirvana of no remainder.” Eng. Translation by Burton Watson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 16.

The key concept of a succession of Buddhas promoted in the *Lotus Sutra* was exactly Tan Yao’s primary concern. He had just gone through a bitter experience of Buddhist persecution by Emperor Taiwu who argued that Buddhism and its teaching are untrue. The purpose Tan Yao and others to translate and compile sutras was to assure that the great law would be carried down forever without interruption. We are told that Tan Yao, together with Chang Na Ye She 常那邪捨, and others translated fourteen sutras while he was in charge of the construction of Yungang. Among the three extant sutras (the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan*, the *Zabaozang jing* and the *Daiyi shenzhou jing*), both the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* and the *Daiyi shenzhou jing* actively advocate the significance of the succession of becoming a Buddha and the transmission of the Dharma. It is the same purpose that he urged the emperor to carve the colossal images along the Wuzhou Mountain. Protecting and transmitting the Buddha Dharma was a key concept after the first Buddhist persecution.

It is not unreasonable to believe that the motif of the three Buddhas in three *kalpas* represented in Yungang was inspired by the sutras translated by Tan Yao and others, as well as by the *Lotus sutra*. It is more likely that the first-phase caves were based on the *Lotus Sutra* and the second and third-phase caves were more inspired by the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* and the *Daiyi shenzhou jing*.

The *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* is a compilation, excerpted from a number of other sources, of biographical details of the twenty-four Indian patriarchs who succeeded the Buddha after he entered nirvana. These biographies were carefully chosen by Tan Yao in order to establish a legitimate and uncorrupted line of the succession of the Buddha and

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118 *Weishu*, 114:3034.
119 *Weishu*, 114:3037. Monk Chang Na Ye She is only mentioned here, otherwise he is unknown. Among the fourteen sutras, three are extant: *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan*, *Zabaozang jing* and *Daiyi shenzhou jing*.
of the transmission of the Dharma-pitaka. When the Buddha entered the nirvana, he was succeeded by Mahakasyapa who, in turn, was succeeded by Ananda. The succession continued until the twenty-fourth patriarch. It is as such the Buddha’s disciples succeeded him and transmitted the Dharma one after the other without any intervention.

This was exactly what Tan Yao strove to promote after the first persecution, and for the very same reason he translated the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* twice. To the Chinese mind, it was critical that there be only one patriarch at any given time, just as there could only be one legitimate Chinese emperor at any given time. He chose the biographies of the twenty-four eminent monks to testify the authenticity of the Dharma-pitaka and the legitimate succession of the Buddha. The first four chapters of the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* were derived from the *Ayuwang zhuan* 阿育王傳 (The Biography of King Asoka) in which the transmission of the Dharma-pitaka by the five disciples of the Buddha was recounted.

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120 As we are told in the sutra that the World-Honored One transmitted the Dharma to Mahakasyapa and entered the nirvana; Mahakasyapa transmitted it to Ananda and entered the nirvana; Ananda transmitted it to Madhantika and entered the nirvana; Madhantika transmitted it to Sanakavas and entered the nirvana; Sanakavas transmitted it to Upagupta and entered the nirvana; and Upagupta transmitted it to Dhitika… until the twenty-fourth disciple. T50:2058:297b06 and T50:2058:301a23, etc.

121 Evidently this is a rather important sutra to Tan Yao and he was not satisfied with his first translation. Thus he invited Ji Jiaye to collaborate with him in 472. The promotion of Buddhism and the protection of Buddha Dharma were so important to Tan Yao who just survived the seven years of Buddhist persecution that he felt great need to translate the sutra twice to assure the transmission of the Dharma and continuation of the relay.

122 The World-Honored One transmitted the Dharma to Mahakasyapa and entered the nirvana; Mahakasyapa transmitted it to Ananda and entered the nirvana; Ananda transmitted it to Madhantika and entered the nirvana; Madhantika transmitted it to Sanakavas and entered the nirvana; Sanakavas transmitted it to Upagupta and entered the nirvana; and Upagupta transmitted it to Dhitika, see T50:2043:152c14. The *Ayuwang zhuan* was translated by An Faqin 安發欽, a certain monk from An Xi (Parthia), who came to Luoyang in 281 during the reign of Emperor Wu of the Western Jin dynasty. There is another Chinese text narrating the legendary account of the life of King Asoka called the *Ayuwang jing* 阿育王經 which was translated into Chinese by Samghapala (459-524) 僧伽婆羅 who was a monk from the kingdom of Funan (eastern part of present Thailand). He came to China during the Qi dynasty (479-501) and stayed in the Zhengguan Monastery 正觀寺 in the capital and studied Mahayana texts with the Indian monk Gunabhadra and “comprehended the languages of several countries,” see *Gaoseng zhuan*, T50:2059:345b09 and *Xu gaoseng zhuan*, T50:2060:426a09. Judging from the time of the translation of the
Tan Yao was evidently still haunted by the fear of persecution or any unpredictable events that might interrupt the succession and transmission of the great law. He excerpted biographical materials from many other sutras in order to adapt the Dharma closer to the Chinese culture and make it accepted as authentic, arguing against the edict issued by Emperor Taiwu in the 7th year of Taipingzhenjun 太平真君 (446) when Buddhism was persecuted:

昔後漢荒君，信惑邪僞，妄假睡夢，事胡妖鬼，以亂天常，
自古九州之中無此也。夸誕大言，不本人情。叔季之世，聞君亂主，莫不眩焉。自此以來，代經亂督，天罰亟行，生民死盡，五服之內，鞠為丘墟，千里蕭條，不見人跡，皆由於此。朕承天緒，屬當窮運之弊，欲除僞定真。復羲農之治。其一切盪除胡神，滅其蹤跡，庶無謝於風氏矣。自今以後，敢有事胡神及造形像泥人，銅人者，門誅。雖言胡神，問今胡人，共云無有。皆是前世漢人無賴子弟劉元真，呂伯強之徒，接乞胡之誕言，用老莊之虛假，附而益之，皆非真實。至使王法廢而不行，蓋大熾之魁也。有非常之人，然後能行非常之事。非朕孰能去此歷代之僞物！有司宣告征鎮

two sutras, evidently Tan Yao excerpted the accounts of the transmission of the Dharma-pitaka by the disciples of the Buddha from the Ayuwang zhuàn not the Ayuwang jing which is a much later translation.
諸軍、刺史，諸有佛圖形像及胡經，盡皆擊破焚焼，沙門無少長悉坑之。

Formerly a reckless sovereign of the Later Han believed in and was led astray by evil and deceit. On the false pretext that he had dreamt of them, he served the malignant demons of the barbarians and thereby disturbed Heaven’s order. It had never happened since ancient time within Nine Provinces (China). Its exaggerated grandiloquence is not based on human nature. In later ages, the foolish subjects misled the sovereign, there was not one who was not dazzled by it. Therefore the legislations and rules could not have been implemented, propriety and righteousness have greatly decayed. The evil teaching developed quickly, and looked upon the law of kings as it were naught. Since then each generation has passed through disorder and calamity. Heaven’s punishment had been quick to come, and the people have perished utterly. Within the five ministering areas all became mounds and ruins. There is desolation even over a thousand li away, and one does not see human traces. All is because of this. I inherited the throne with the Heavenly order, as it has chanced, amid the evils of exhausted fortune. We desire to remove the false, establish the true, and restore the rule of (Fu) Xi and (Shen) Nong.
We will completely shake off the barbarian gods and annihilate their vestiges, and thereby, we hope, have no occasion to beg forgiveness of the clan of Feng. If from now on there be any who dare serve the barbarian gods or make images, statues, or figures in clay or bronze, they shall be executed with their whole households. Although one speaks of the barbarian gods, when one questions the barbarian of today, they all say that they do not have such. They are all the work of followers of men of the former age Han, two unreliable youths, Liu Yuanzhen and Lü Boqiang who sought false words of the barbarians, used the Emptiness of Lao and Zhuang, and arbitrarily grafted it to Buddhism to benefit it. What they did was dishonest. And this made the law useless and can not be implemented. They were the instigators of great unrighteousness. When there are extraordinary men, only then can there be extraordinary acts. Were it not for I, who could do away with this age-old counterfeit? Let the officials proclaim to the generals of garrisons and the governors that all Buddhist reliquaries, images, and barbarian scriptures are to be completely destroyed and burnt, and that the sramanas, without distinction of youth or age, are all to be buried alive.  

It was against the claim of “using the (concept of) the Emptiness of Lao and Zhuang and grafting it (to Buddhism) to benefit from it” that Tan Yao compiled the *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* to ascertain the authenticity of the Dharma and protection of it.

The *Fufazang yinyuan zhuan* was not the only sutra translated by Tan Yao that promotes a succession of Buddhas and the transmission of the Dharma-*pitaka*. The *Dajiyi shenzhou jing* advocates the three Buddhas in three *kalpas* as well. In the beginning of the sutra, it emphasizes the significance of the seven Buddhas of the Past, the Sakyamuni Buddha and the Maitreya Buddha. It also mentions the Buddhas in the Past, Present and Future.\(^{124}\)

As it was suggested earlier, the Yungang artists drew their inspiration from Tan Yao’s translations. It is possible that the principle inspiration of the first-phase of Yungang was the *Lotus Sutra* and that from the second-phase onwards Tan Yao’s translations began to have a profound impact on the iconography of Yungang.

We have another piece of evidence to support our suggestion of the connection between the imagery of Yungang and the translations of Tan Yao.

The *jataka* and *nidana* stories appeared in caves 9 and 10 are mostly based on the *Zabaozang jing* translated by Tan Yao and Ji Jiaya. Though they are extremely popular motifs, they are not found in any other caves. The well known stories of Hariti losing her son; the Brahmana (the seller of human skulls) and the story of the woman who hated desire and become a nun are not observed anywhere else. The interesting thing is that caves 9 and 10 were constructed shortly after the *Zabaozang jing* had been translated.\(^{125}\)

The fact that caves 9 and 10 contain most of the *jataka* and *nidana* stories in Yungang

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\(^{124}\) *The Dajiyi shenzhou jing*, T21:1335:568a06.

\(^{125}\) Caves 9 and 10 were suggested to be executed between 484 and 489, see Su Bai “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun,” in *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu*, 77.
and other caves bear only one or two stories further indicate that Tan Yao’s translation was the iconographic inspiration for the Yungang artists. It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that the jataka and nidana stories represented in caves 9 and 10 are the visual narrations of the Zabaozang jing.

It is evident that Tan Yao’s translations did have a profound impact on the imagery of Yungang and that the words and images are indeed closely connected. The Yungang artists were motivated by the ideologies and concepts promoted in the sutras. To protect the Dharma-pitaka and hand it over endlessly to the following generations is an urgent mission to conduct. Therefore the three Buddhas of the three kalpas became a universal theme in Yungang throughout three phases.

(2) Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna

The three Buddhas of the three kalpas was not the only important motif which drew their inspiration from Buddhist scriptures. The second most prominent motif is the Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side. Without a doubt, the visual representation is based on the Lotus Sutra as we read Chapter Eleven “the Emergence of the Treasure Tower.”

126 The Lotus Sutra or Saddharmapundarikasutra, translated by Kumarajiva in 406 in Chang’an, is one of very few sutras whose original text in Sanskrit survives. Chapter Eleven of the sutra, “Apparition of the Jewelled Stupa,” describes that a seven-jeweled stupa, five hundred yojanas in height and two hundred and fifty yojanas in breadth, emerging out of the earth and suspending in mid-air, appeared in front of the Buddha and the Buddha explains to his listeners that in the treasure tower is the complete body of a Thus Come One. Long ago, an immeasurable thousand, ten thousand million asamkhya of worlds to the east, in a land called Treasure Purity, there was a Buddha named Many Treasures. When this Buddha was originally carrying out the Bodhisattva way, he made a great vow saying, “if, after I have become a Buddha and entered the extinction, in the lands in the ten directions there is any place where the Lotus Sutra is preached, then my funerary tower, in order that I may listen to the sutra, will come forth and appear in that spot to testify to the sutra and praise its excellence.” When that Buddha had finished out the Buddha way and was on the point of passing into extinction, in the midst of the great assembly of heavenly and human beings he said to the monks, “after I have passed into extinction, if there are those who wish to offer alms to my complete body, then they should erect a great tower.” That Buddha through his transcendental
The remarkable popularity of this motif does not lie only in the popularity of the sutra. It is also related to the political situation. At this time, emperor Xiaowen was still a boy and political power was in the hand of his grandmother, empress dowager Wenming. Under this regency, his grandmother instructed the future emperor just as the Buddha of the past to the Buddha of the present. The sovereign by the “two sages” is reflected in pictorial arts. It is for the same reason, as has been suggested earlier, that the twin caves were constructed during the second-phase. Buddhism and Buddhist art in north China functioned as political devices, as well as religious didactic tools. The twin Buddhas therefore became a much favored subject matter in the third-phase and is represented in almost every cave. They were even represented as the primary icons of the cave on the north wall of many caves.  

(3) Vimalakirti and Manjusri

powers and the power of his vow, insured that, throughout the worlds in the ten directions, no matter in what place, if there are those who preach the Lotus Sutra, this treasure will in all cases come forth and appear in their presence, and his complete body will be in the tower, speaking words of praise and saying, Excellent, excellent! Now this tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, because it heard the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, has come forth out of the ground and speaks words of praise… Shakyamuni Buddha with the fingers of his right hand then opened the door of the tower of seven treasures. A loud sound issues from it, like the sound of a lock and crossbar being removed from a great city gate, and at once all the members of the assembly caught the sight of Many Treasures Thus Come One seated on a lion seat inside the treasure tower, his body whole and unimpaired, sitting as though engaged in meditation. And they heard him say, “Excellent, excellent, Shakyamuni Buddha! You have preached this Lotus Sutra in a spirited manner. I have come here in order that I may hear this sutra.” … At that time the four kinds of believers, observing this Buddha who had passed into extinction immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of kalpas in the past speaking in this way, marvelled at what they had never known before and took the masses of heavenly jewelled flowers and scattered them over Many Treasures Buddha and Shakyamuni Buddha. At that time Many Treasures Buddha offered half of his seat in the treasure tower to Shakyamuni Buddha, saying, “Shakyamuni Buddha, sit here!” Shakyamuni Buddha at once entered the tower and took half of the seat, seating himself cross-legged position. T09:062:33a:19. The visual representation of the Shakyamuni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha (the twin Buddhas) seated side by side is doubtlessly based on this chapter. With the popularity of the sutra and the “two Sages” sovereign, the visual depiction is repeatedly represented in many Buddhist caves. Watson, the *Lotus Sutra*, 170.  

127 For the subject of twin Buddhas and twin caves, also see Eugene Y. Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2005), 6.
The third significant motif to support our argument that images are indeed closely connected with literary words is the legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri. Without a doubt, the motif is derived from the *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

The *Vimalakirti Sutra*, one of the most influential sutras of the Mahayana Buddhist canon, particularly important to the Chan sect, was translated into Chinese seven times and enjoyed popularity at least equal to the *Lotus Sutra*. Uniquely the central figure of the sutra is not the Buddha, or Buddhas, as is usual. Rather it is a wealthy layman Vimalakirti, who idealizes lay believers’ life style. One of the reasons why the *Vimalakirti Sutra* evoked such positive responses was the life of Vimalakirti himself. He rejected the idea of abandoning of household in order to become a Buddhist. In the sutra he said to Ruhala, the Buddha’s son:

> You should not speak of the benefits and blessings gained by leaving the household life. Why? Because to be without benefits and without blessings is to leave household life...Leaving the household life is not that, not this, and not in between. It means abandoning the listy-two erroneous views to reside in nirvana; it is accepted by the wise and carried out by the sages. It means conquering by and subduing the host of devils, moving beyond the five realms of existence, purifying the five eyes, acquiring the five powers, and cultivating the five roots of goodness. It means not troubling others but removing oneself from
sundry evils, refuting the non-Buddhist doctrines,
transcending the realm of makeshift names, without
personal possessions, without thought of possessions,
without fluster or confusion. It means harboring joy within,
guarding the minds of others, pursuing the practice of
meditation, and freeing oneself from all faults. If one can
do all this, then one has truly left the household. **128**

If the goal of becoming a Buddhist cleric can be achieved by a devout householder, Why
should leave home at all?

The second reason for its considerable popularity primarily lies in the key concept
of dong 動 (activism) and jing 靜 (quietism) implied in the sutra. It fits squarely into the
gentry’s mind between Daoist’s chushi 出世 (withdraw) and Confucius’ rushi 入世
(participation). The Daoist recluses desired to influence the world by withdrawing it. In
chapter three of the sutra Vimalakirti explains what quiet sitting means:

Quiet sitting means that in this threefold world you
manifest neither body nor will. This is quiet sitting. Not
rising out of your Samadhi of complete cessation and yet
showing yourself in the ceremonies of daily life—this is
quiet sitting. Your mind not fixed on internal things and yet
not engaged with externals either—this is quiet sitting.

**128 Vimalakirti Sutra, T14:475:541c07. Eng. trans by Burton Watson, the Vimalakirti Sutra (New York:
Columbia University, 1997), 49.**
Unmoved by sundry theories, but practicing the thirty-seven elements of the Way—this is quiet sitting. Entering nirvana without having put an end to earthly desires—this is quiet sitting. If you do this kind of sitting, you will merit the Buddha’s seal of approval.\(^{129}\)

Vimalakirti, with his own attitude, combined the idea of *dong* and *jing* and exhibited the classic conflict of between Daoist’s *chushi* and Confucius’s *rushi*.

The third reason why it is appealing to Chinese mind is the remarkable similarity between Daoist *xuanxue* (Arcane Learning) and Buddhist *Prajna* (Wisdom). Vimalakirti’s silent definition of Non-duality described in Chapter Nine matches perfectly with Daoist ideal of “books do not fully express words, words can not fully express meaning (*書不盡言, 言不盡意*);“ and “he who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know (*知者不言, 言者不知*);”\(^{130}\) and “words exist because of meaning, once you got the meaning, you can forget the words (*言者所以在意, 得意而忘言*).”\(^{131}\)

The fourth reason is that Emperor Xuanwu (r. 499-515) personally lectured the *Vimalakirti Sutra* for the monks and ministers.\(^{132}\) Emperor Xuanwu is a devout Buddhist and he deeply loved the Buddhist teachings and often lectured the doctrines in the Palace.\(^{133}\) I believe this is one of the important reasons that the twins became increasingly popular in the third-phase of Yungang.

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\(^{129}\) *Vimalakirti Sutra*, T14:475:539c19. Watson, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, 37.


\(^{131}\) Wang Xianqian, *Zhuangzi Jijie* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju1987), 7:244.

\(^{132}\) *Weishu*, 8:209.

\(^{133}\) *Weishu*, 114:3042.
A fifth appeal of the sutra was the legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri set a perfect scene for the Chinese Daoists to have a qingtan (Pure Conversation). The chapter five (Inquiring about the illness) describes Manjusri’s visit to Vimalakirti and their legendary debate. The Buddha said to Manjusri: “You must go visit Vimalakirti and inquire about his illness.” Manjusri replied to the Buddha:

That eminent man is very difficult to confront. He is profoundly enlightened in the true nature of reality and skilled at preaching the essentials of the Law. His eloquence never falters, his wisdom is free of impediments. He understands all the rules of Bodhisattva conduct, and nothing in the secret storehouse of the Buddha is beyond his grasp. He has overcome the host of devils and disports himself with transcendental powers. In wisdom and expedient means he had mastered all there is to know.  

Nevertheless, Manjusri proceeded to the city of Vaishali with eight thousand Bodhisattvas, five hundred voice-hearers, and hundreds and thousands of heavenly beings to visit the sick and expound the wonderful law.

It was this legendary debate setting that provoked great appeal to Chinese educated mind and it became an eternal popular subject for artists throughout Chinese history. The frequency of theme in pictorial arts is the best piece evidence of the popularity of the subject. In Dunhuang and Yungang, the motif is represented frequently.

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134 Vimalakirti Sutra, T14:475:545a19. Watson, 64.
In Longmen it was represented in every cave and almost every niche. The lively and eloquent dialogue between Vimalakirti and Manjusri is narrated visually in numerous Chinese pictorial arts.

(4) Maitreya and Shakyamuni

The fourth significant motif that testifies the close connection between words and images is the representation of the Maitreya and Shakyamuni above top of each other. The motif became popular from the second-phase and it was frequently represented in the third-phase. The motif is derived from the Chapter Fifteen (Emerging from the Earth) in the *Lotus Sutra*. The Bodhisattva Maitreya received a prophecy from Shakyamuni Buddha that he will be the next hereafter to become a Buddha.

(5) Dharma Protectors

Another testimony to lead me to surmise the close connection between words and images is the subject of the Dharma protectors. I speculate the reason why the motif was so popular during the second and third-phases is because of the translation of Tan Yao’s *Daji yi shenzhou jing* which emphasizes that the Dharma protectors will protect the rulers and rid of disasters. The four Heavenly Kings began to appear in the second-phase caves and after that they disappeared. The Dvarapalas are represented both in the second-phase and the third-phase. This testifies that the translation of the *Daji yi shenzhou jing* inspired the Yungang artists and influenced the iconography of the second and third-phase. Tan Yao had just experienced the catastrophic persecution.

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137 For detailed research of the Dharma protectors in Yungang, see Lidu Yi, “The *Daji yi shenzhou jing* and the Imagery of Yungang,” forthcoming.
Thus protecting the great law was his primary concern. He also needed the support from the court. The five colossal images from the first-phase were modeled after the five emperors from Taizu to Gaozong because Faguo had suggested that the emperor is the current Thus Come One. Protecting the Dharma with the support of the court is what the Buddhists in north China tried to do. We are told that he urged the emperor to carve colossal images along the Wuzhou Mountain so they will not be destroyed if there is another persecution. The multiple headed and multiple faced Dharma protectors consequently are represented in all the caves in the second-phase and many caves in the third-phase. When the second-phase caves were executed, Tan Yan had just finished his translation of the sutra. It is thus not surprising to see the Dharma protectors so frequently.

Not only are the popular subjects we discussed above closely related to Buddhist literature, but the life of the Buddha and the *jataka* stories are also all derived from Buddhist literature. We will use several prominent incidents of Buddha’s life to further testify the close connection between words and images and to trace the origins of the subject matter in the third-phase.

The life of the Buddha as depicted in Yungang is primarily based on three sutras. These are *Puyao jing* 普曜經 (Lalitavistara), the *Fo suoxing zan* 佛所行讃 (Acts of the

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139 *Weishu*, 114:3037.
140 It is also called *Fangdeng Benqi jing* 方等本起經, eight *juan*. Translated by Dharmaraksa in 308 during the Western Jin period (265-317).
Buddha)\[141\] and the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經 (Sutras on Causes and Effects of the Past and Present).\[142\]

Judging from the depictions and the selections of the subject, I believe that most of the incidents in Buddha’s life represented in Yungang were based on the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing*. At least all the visual narrations can be found in the sutra.

The Buddha’s life is both history and legend, truth and fiction. Some biographies are more historically based, others are full of miracles. The incidents in Buddha’s life can be represented in visual arts very differently simply because we are left with different versions of the very same incident. If the artists use, for example, the *Puyao jing*, which was written at the time when Buddha’s life was much elaborated with many supernatural and miraculous episodes, then the visual representations are not the narration of the actual events in his life. Instead, they will be more elaborated with incredible miracles. In some sutras, the prince was depicted as an infant when he conducted the First Meditation in Krshugam (the farming village), whereas in *Puyao jing*, the Bodhisattva is a young man

\[141\] Also called *Fobenxing jing* 佛本行經, five juan. It was written by Asvaghosa 馬鳴, a Buddhist, a scholar and above all, a gifted poet who lived in the first century C.E. and translated by Dharmaraksa 憲無譯 (385-433) during the Northern Liang dynasty (397-439).

\[142\] Translated by Gunabhadra 求那跋陀羅 (394-468) of the Liu Song period (420-479). These three sutras are closest to the time of the construction of Yungang and they were most influential at the time. Therefore, it seems reasonable to consider these three sutras as the most influential works on the iconography of Yungang. Other important Chinese translations of sutras, such as *Zhongbenqi jing* 中本起經 (Madhyamitiyukta Sutra) translated by Tan Guo 曽果 and Kang Mengxiang 康孟祥 of the Later Han dynasty (25-220), *Xiuxing benqi jing* 修行本起經 (Sutra on the Origin of the Practice of the Bodhisattva) translated by Zhu Dali 竺大力 and Kang Mengxiang 康孟祥 of the Later Han, the *Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經 (Sutra on the Origin of the Lucky Fulfillment of the Crown Prince) translated by Zhi Qian 支謙 of the Wu (222-280), *Yichu pusa benqi jing* 異出菩薩本起經 translated by Nie Daozhen 聶道真 of the Western Jin (265-317), *Fobenxing jing* 佛本行經 (Buddhapurvakaarya-Sutra) translated by Bao Yun 寶雲 of the early Liu Song dynasty, might have possibly influenced the iconographic representations of Yungang as well.
who went to the farming village with his friends and performed his first meditation under
the jumbo-tree (rose-apple tree).\footnote{In Gandhara art, the symbols for the incident are the oxen and plough. In Chinese pictorial arts, the incident is identified by a young man with a kneeling figure in front of him. The kneeling figure, needless to say, is his father, Sudhhodhana who makes obedience to the prince. The oxen and plough are never shown in Chinese pictorial arts.}

We have abundant evidence to further prove the close connection between the
iconography and literature.

Early Chinese translations, which differ considerably from the Sanskrit, do not
include the entire career of the Buddha. Many sutras ended with early incidents in his life.
Both the \textit{Puyao jing} and the \textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing} ended with his first sermon in the
Deer Park. Consequently the visual narration of Buddha’s life ended with the first sermon.
It is therefore not surprising that we rarely find the depiction of Buddha’s final nirvana in
Yungang. There are thirty-seven illustrations of incidents in Buddha’s life in cave 6.
However, they only ended with the first sermon. The final nirvana is not depicted.

Another piece of evidence leading us to suggest the close connections between
words and images is the fact that the Buddha’s archery competition and tossing the
elephant episode are depicted together on the same wall in cave 37. These two episodes
are intertwined in literature to highlight his athletic ability. On the south side of the arch
front of the west wall is the archery competition scenes, whereas the right side is the
tossing the elephant scenes. Some of the scenes of the archery competition are eroded
badly so only the archery, the drum and one of the brothers are still seen. The tossing the
elephant story illustrates three people: Nanda, his half-brother, Devadatta, his cousin and
the Bodhisattva as we are told in the \textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing}.\footnote{\textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing}, T3:189:628b05.} The figure on south
side with his left hand held to his chest and his right hand holding the elephant is meant

\textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing}, T3:189:628b05.
to represent Decadatta. He killed the elephant with a blow of his right fist and left the
elephant half way through the city gate. Nanda, the image on the right, who saw the city
gate blocked, had to pull the gigantic beast out of the way. Nanda is seen here pulling the
beast’s trunk instead of its tail as described in the sutra.\footnote{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing, T3:189:628b09.} The figure in the centre is
doubtless the Bodhisattva who is holding the elephant is about to toss the beast over the
seven ramparts and seven moats surrounding the city. The scene of tossing the elephant
did not describe Bodhisattva’s chariot by which he arrived at the scene.

I am more convinced that these two competitions were based on the Guoqu
xianzai yinguo jing due to the fact that the literature intertwined the two stories and the
visual narration depicted them together.

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter when we deciphered the iconography
of the third-phase, several episodes in Buddha’s life were particularly favored by the
Yungang artists and they function as didactic tools to worshippers.

(6) The Great Departure

The great departure, one of the important moments in Buddha’s life, was certainly
the most favored subject as it is the most frequently represented episode. The subject
denotes the Buddha’s renunciation of this worldly life. In the third-phase caves, the
episode is often seen on the south wall beside the entrance gateway as it is observed in
caves 5-10, 5-11, 5-33 and 5-38.

I believe that the representation is meant to persuade lay people, when they exit
the cave, to renounce this worldly life to become a Buddhist cleric no matter how
difficult it is. When the prince was nineteen years old, he convinced himself that it was
time to leave home although he knew his father would be against it. He wanted to relieve
the pain of rejection and separation of all living things from the one they love. His father
grieved greatly but still gave his son permission to leave. On the night of the departure, as
we are told in the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing*, the prince was thinking of departure. In the
second watch of the night, the Guardian kings and Devas fully filled the sky and spoke to
the prince spontaneously “Inside and outside of the palace everyone is in sound sleep.
Now it is time to leave.” Then the prince himself went to Chandaka’s room and woke
him up. He explained to Chandaka, when he questioned “why do you want the horse
bridled suddenly in the middle of the night?” that he wanted to overcome life’s troubles
for humanity. He wanted to leave the affairs of this world to follow the path of truth. He
knew it would be extremely difficult to go. In his lion’s voice, he roared: “In the past the
various Buddhas left home, and now so do I.” Then the Devas carried the Kanthaka,
the white horse, upholding his four hoofs and Indra, holding the canopy followed. The
Devas then commanded the north gate to open without making any sound. So the prince
departed through the gate.

The prince then made several solemn vows: “if I do not eliminate the griefs of old
age, sickness and death, I will not return to the palace. If I do not achieve complete
Enlightenment, if I cannot turn the wheel of the Dharma, I will not return to my father.
Until I exhaust all feelings of love and attachment, I will not go home to see
Mahaprajapati nor Yashodhara.”

This episode is considerably popular in Chinese visual arts and it is certainly a
favored subject in Yungang.

(7) The Assault by Mara

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146 *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing*, T3:189:632c27.
147 *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing*, T3:189:633a18.
The Yungang artists also very much favored the incident of the assault by Mara. The motif is often represented in the arch front of the large niche, and is often seen, together with the episode of the Conversion of the Three Kasyapas, as a pair, on the south wall by the entrance as observed in caves many of the third-phase caves.

The subject is about the temptation, the endurance to resist against the lure of lust and desire and most importantly, to endeavor the difficulties encountered during meditation. The ultimate goal of the Bodhisattva is to detach himself from this world. But Mara, the deity of death and desire, attempted to prevent the Buddha from Enlightenment. He sent his three daughters to seduce the Bodhisattva and his army to threaten him as well. The conflict between the Bodhisattva and Mara almost became a metaphor, like the temptation, of the ordeals one has to endure before ultimately he gets Enlightened. It is encouraging for a lay person or even a devotee to look at the visual representations of the episode.

When Mara could not distract the Bodhisattva with neither his bow and arrows, nor with his three daughters and kind words, he used to army to threaten the Bodhisattva. Each one of his soldiers had a different kind of body and head. Some of them held scabbards and swords or wore large trees on their heads. Others carried the golden batons. They held all kinds of weapons ready to fight. Some had the heads of a pig, fish, donkey, horse, lion, dragon, bear, tiger, or some other animal head. Some had multiple heads or multiple faces with one eye and some had many eyes. Some had long feet and large knees. Some had sharp teeth. All kinds of ferocious looking soldiers surrounded the Bodhisattva shouting out noise. The ground shook but Bodhisattva’s heart was peaceful. He was like a
lion sitting among a flock of deer. After the defeat of Mara, the Bodhisattva continued in meditation until he was without any doubts.

Both the assault by Mara and the great departure are meant to convince lay persons to renounce the secular life to be converted to Buddhists no matter how extremely difficult it is. As long as one is determined, he will eventually achieve the ultimate goal, nirvana. These two motifs are represented repeatedly in Yungang to serve as didactic narrations of literature.

The essential dogma of reincarnation and karma in Buddhism inspired the Yungang artists who, as a result, favored jataka and nidana stories. In Yungang, most of the jataka and nidana stories are based on the Zabaozang jing, translated by Tan Yao. There are only three jataka stories (the Asoka jataka, the Mahaprabhara and the elephant trainer jataka, and the Shyama jataka) which were not derived from the Zabaozang jing.

The stories of the Asoka offering a handful of earth to the Buddha and the Mahaprabhara and the elephant trainer are derived from the Xianyu jing (The Sutra of the Wise and Foolish) and the Shyama story is based on the Liudu ji jing 六度集經 (The Sutras on Practice of the Six Paramitas). The special selections of these stories from other sutras to be represented together with those from the Zabaozang jing indicate the significance of these episodes.

149 Liudu ji jing, edited and translated by Kang Senghui 康僧會, a Sogdian monk who came to Jiankang in 241 and died in 280, is known to have been greatly influenced by Confucian key concepts of benevolence and filial piety. His translation of Liudu ji jing clearly demonstrated his combination of Confucianism and Buddhism thoughts. The biography of Kang Senghui is collected in both Chu sanzang ji ji and Gaoseng zhuan. Both works suggest that Kang Senghui was well versed in Tripitaka and Six Classics. See Gaoseng zhuan, 01:14 (Zhonghua shuju, 1992) and Chu sanzang ji ji, 13:513 (Zhonghua shuju, 1995).

Paramita is a Sanskrit word, which means to cross over to the other shore. It implies that crossing over from the sea of suffering to the shore of happiness, from the Samsara of birth and death to Parinirvana and from ignorance to Enlightenment. A Bodhisattva who practises the Six Paramitas (perfection of charity [dana], moral conduct [sila], tolerance [ksanti], diligence [virya], meditation [dhyana], and, most important of all, wisdom [prajna] can take across the Sea of Suffering and enter Parinirvana and attain Enlightenment.
Among the Buddha’s various previous reincarnations from animals to human being, and his extreme compassionate and self-sacrificial stories, the Dipamkara \textit{jataka} and the Asoka \textit{jataka} are most favored subjects to Yungang artists. Both stories are represented throughout the three phases. The Dipamkara prophecy promises us a future Buddha when the present Buddha enters final nirvana. The Asoka King is the Dharma king who turned the Dharma wheel. The story promises all sentient beings a favorable reincarnation.

(8) Dipamkara Legend

Many sutras of the Buddha’s life started with his former existence when he was born as a Brahmin youth in the time of the Buddha Dipamkara. In the story we are promised that not only there were many Buddhas in the past, there will always be a Buddha in the future and that the transmission of the Dharma will be handed over by the succession of his disciples infinitely.

The Brahmin youth was named Sumadhi. He was just a Bodhisattva who lived a secluded life in the mountains meditating. When the Buddha was coming to the city, the boy spent five hundred pieces of silver, which is all he had, to buy five flowers from a girl to present to the Buddha. When the Bodhisattva approached the Buddha to toss his five flowers, they stopped in the air and stayed there above the Buddha. They seem to have taken root there and suspended in the air. The Buddha who knows the reason for this, said to the Bodhisattva: “for innumerable \textit{kalpas}, you have practiced the way of a pure recluse. You disciplined your heart, rejected life, you cast off desire, kept your mind empty with no desire, with mercy even for a mad dog. Because you accumulated virtue and held fast to your vows, now you have achieved the goal. Thus, know that you
yourself, are next, in nine-one kalpas time, in the kalpa named wisdom, you will be a Buddha by the name of Sakyamuni.”\textsuperscript{150} The Bodhisattva heard these words and his questions were answered, his desire stopped. All at once his mind went blank, and silently he entered the state of nothingness. As he lightly raised his hand, he ascended in meditation. Even if one is pure, he cannot ascent to the Way suddenly. His body became light and he ascended to kowtow at the Buddha’s feet. When he saw the ground wet with puddles, he laid out his deerskin clothing to cover them. Seeing they were insufficient to cover the puddles, he spread out his hair on the ground and told the Buddha to tread on it and walk by.\textsuperscript{151} The Buddha said: “Your spirit had progressed undauntingly, you will be a Buddha.”\textsuperscript{152} The Buddha Dipamkara promised that all sentient beings by practicing the six Paramitas will be able to attain Enlightenment and enter nirvana. The spread of hair story is a promise of achieving one’s ultimate goal. The virtuous young man’s story, the Dipamkara \textit{jataka}, is often depicted with his hair spreading out on the ground as we observed in many caves of Yungang and in Gandhara art when we deciphered imagery in previous chapter.

(9) The Asoka Episode

The second popular motif in Buddha’s previous life is the story of the India emperor Asoka which promises that the good karmic practices will result in favorable reincarnation.

King Asoka (?-?) was one of the greatest rulers in Indian history performing good deeds and accumulating merits. It is believed that under his sovereign, thousands of Buddhist stupas were erected and many Buddhist monuments were built, some of which

\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing}, T3:189:622b14.
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing}, T3:189:622b24.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing}, T3:189:622b27.
are still standing today. He dispatched Buddhists to promote the teaching of Buddhism. King Asoka was considered as the Dharma King who turns the Wheel of the Dharma, and was later called Dharmasoka.

In the Asoka story, we are told that when Buddha was living in the city of Sravasti at the Jetavana monastery in Anathapindika’s park, upon a certain occasion, the Buddha and Ananda were going on the alm-round, there were some children playing along the roadside, building toy treasure houses. One of the children, seeing the Buddha approaching, rejoiced, and thinking that he would acquire merit, took a handful of earth and tried to offer it to the Buddha, but because he was so tiny could not reach the alms-bowl and asked another boy to let him climb upon his shoulders. The boy did this and when the Buddha lowered his bowl, he dropped a handful of earth into the begging bowl. The Buddha accepted it, and handed the bowl to Ananda, and said: “Take this earth to the monastery and scatter it. Ananda, a hundred years after I have attain final nirvana, this little boy, by virtue of having made an offering in great joy and by virtue of its having been scattered at the monastery, will be reborn as the Emperor Asoka. The child who let him climb on his shoulders will be reborn as minister. The emperor will rule all India and will make known to all the blessings of the Three Treasures. He will venerate my relics by erecting eight-four thousand stupas.” As it is, the King Asoka did erect infinite stupas and built many Buddhist monuments.

The story is often identified with three boys, one of them standing on the other, trying to reach the Buddha’s begging bowl and the Buddha is lowering his bowl to accept the earth.

\[\text{Xianyu jing, T4:202:368c7.}\]
This subject is observed everywhere in Yungang, evidently a much favored motif by the Yungang artists because by depicting the story they emphasized the similarity between King Asoka and Chinese emperors who therefore could validate their claim to resemble King Asoka who earned his favorable rebirth by practicing karmic deeds.

The story implies the close relationship between politics and religion, and politics and art. Rulers, particularly in the Northern Dynasties, attempted to gain good karma and to imitate King Asoka as the Dharma king by extending their support to Buddhist activities and the Buddhist church.

By reviewing these nine most favored motifs in Yungang, I am more convinced that Yungang artists were inspired by the popular sutras of the time and represented the words in pictorial art. The connection between visual representation and Buddhist doctrine is evident.

2. Visual Representations

The eternal theme of the three Buddhas in three kalpas is usually represented in the three niches on three walls, and the thousand Buddhas are often depicted in the small niches around the three Buddhas filling the space. During the third-phase, the twin Buddhas, with their increasingly popularity, are often represented on the north wall as the main icon of the cave.

The life of the Buddha and his former existence stories (jataka) are usually represented in three ways: in friezes in bas-relief, in large niches, or without any frames.

The life of Buddha is usually represented in small friezes and in bas-relief during the second-phase as we observe them in caves 1, 2 and 6 (fig. 4.11). It is often represented in a casual way without formal frames during the third-phase as we observe
them in caves 37 ((fig. 3.59) and 38 (fig. 3.191) as we observed when we read the iconography in previous chapter. Several prominent motifs are always represented in large niches throughout the two phases. The Buddha’s first sermon, the assault by Mara and the conversion of the three Kasyapas of Uruvila are as such. They seem to be the favored subjects for Yungang artists. The Mara’s assault, in particular, is a popular theme. It is often depicted, together with the conversion of the three Kasyapas of Uruvila as a pair, in a large niche on the south wall. The episode accounts the Buddha’s unshakable determination to become Enlightened and his unmovable resistance against the lure of lust and desire. It encourages worshippers to achieve the ultimate goal no matter what ordeal they need to go through, knowing that as long as they are determined, they will eventually reach to the other side of the shore. These motifs are depicted as significant didactic tools for devotees and laymen alike.

The life of the Buddha and the jataka stories in Yungang are mostly represented in one single panel to highlight the episode. For example, the birth of the Buddha is usually represented by the depiction of Maya standing reaching for a branch of a tree and the baby coming underneath her arm. The great departure is often illustrated with the scene of the prince, the groom, Kanthaka and the four guardian kings holding the hoofs. The conversation between the prince and the groom has never been shown. Neither was the groom saddling the horse, nor the prince’s farewell to the groom and Kanthaka. One depiction narrates the entire story. They are rarely depicted in series of scenes. The Shyama story is the only exception. The story is based on Liudu ji jing which was compiled by Kang Senghui who is known for being well versed in Confucian Classics, as

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154 “I am so very fond of you two,” said the prince, “soon, I will leave the affairs of this world to follow the path of truth. I leave home because it is my destiny, but it is extremely difficult to go.” See Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing, T3:189:633a22.
well as Buddhist doctrines. The filial piety implied in the *Shyama* story fits the Confucian ideology perfectly. After all, Confucianism is their indigenous philosophy and the root of their thoughts. The way that Shyama took care of his blind parents is more appealing to Chinese minds. By performing karmic deeds Shyama was revived after he was mistakenly killed by the king and was later taken back to his parents.\footnote{Liuduji jing, T03:152:25a06.}

The key concepts of reincarnation and karma in Buddhism were influential and the Yungang artists favored the subject more than any other themes. The story is represented in great detail like an unfolding painting in successive panels. This visual representation also suggests that although Buddhism assimilated all over China by the fifth century and eventually survived, it was constantly challenged by the indigenous ideologies of Confucianism and Daoism. Buddhist monks had to readjust the Buddhist teachings and concepts in order to be accepted by Chinese and to fit the Chinese ideological standard. The successive scenes of the *Shyama jataka* represented in the anteroom of cave 9 are good examples of Buddhist assimilation in a different culture.

Several other subjects are also represented in unique ways and because the issues remain unsolved, they deserve further deliberation. We will deal with the problematic representations (the Maya’s dream, the prince’s sports life in youth and the pensive figures in Yungang) only.

On the south side of the east wall in cave 37, a vivid depiction of a female lying down with her right hand holding her chin, to the left of the female figure is a young man riding on an elephant which is descending from above (fig. 3.53). Evidently, this illustration was meant to depict Maya’s dream of conception. Interestingly Yungang artists depict the Bodhisattva riding on an elephant trying to enter Maya’s body. The
episode is usually illustrated only with Maya lying down and elephant beside her. The Bodhisattva has never been shown as far as my knowledge goes in any other pictorial arts. The representation in cave 37 is unique. It is very likely that the Yungang artists attempted to solve the miracle and contradiction in Buddha’s life by depicting the Bodhisattva mounting the elephant. We are told the Bodhisattva entered Maya’s body in the form of a white elephant with six tusks, as the Bodhisattva was suggested when he had consulted his friends from the Tusita Heaven in what guise he should enter his mother’s womb. He indeed entered his mother womb in the form of an elephant with six tusks and in due time, he left in the form of a six month old baby. The Yungang artists were not able to deal with the miracle. Thus the illustration of the Bodhisattva mounting the elephant, to them, would solve the riddle. This illustration is not found anywhere else. The east wall of cave 37 was meant to depict the episodes in the Buddha’s early life and the west wall depicts his youth life.

Another problematic representation, which also concerns the illustration of a figure riding on an elephant, is the motif of the prince riding on the elephant as it is observed on the south wall of the cave 5-10 (fig. 3.144) and cave 5-11 (fig. 3.153). This episode is often depicted together with the great departure as a pair on the south wall. I believe that this depiction is meant to narrate the prince riding on an elephant. It illustrates the sport’s life of the prince. To learn how to ride an elephant was one of the four important physical trainings (equitation, the art of riding elephant, driving chariots and handling arms) of the young prince.
Strangely some scholars interpreted the depiction of the prince riding on an elephant as “mounting the elephant entering Maya’s womb 乘象入胎.” They consider the depiction to be the same as the conception dream. However, in this depiction, neither Maya nor the elephant descending from the Tusita Heaven is shown. It is hard to imagine how the depiction can represent the conception dream without Maya. Besides it is more reasonable to depict the great departure and the prince riding on an elephant, which are closer in time, together as a pair. In addition, the Maya’s dream is not nearly as significant as the great departure. The physical training of the young prince is much more important than Maya’s dream of conception. It is thus more reasonable to interpret the depiction of a figure on an elephant as one of the prince’s physical trainings rather than as “mounting the elephant entering Maya’s womb.”

We have another piece of evidence to support our interpretation of the elephant depiction as the prince’s athletic training. There are thirty-seven illustrations of the episodes in Buddha’s life in cave 6. Many of them are represented clockwise on central pillar. The depiction of the prince riding on the elephant is on the east side of the north face of the central pillar in the lower storey (fig. 4.12). The west side of the north face illustrates the ascetic Asita divining the prince’s future (fig. 4.13). The depictions are clockwise (fig. 4.14) and if Asita’s divination is depicted before the riding of the elephant, it is obvious that the incident must have happened before the prince’s riding of the elephant. Thus it is impossible that the illustration is about Maya’s dream of conception. I am convinced that the illustrations of riding on an elephant together with the depiction of

156 Wang Heng, *Fojing gushi*, 11. Also see Yan Wenru, *Yungang shiku*, 332.
the great departure represented in caves 5-10, 5-11 and other caves are meant to portray the prince’s essential athletic training in youth.

Another problematic representation I would like to address is the pensive figure. The question of who this figure represents remains problematic.

The pensive figure was a rather important iconographical theme and it is observed throughout the second and third-phase caves. The pensive figure is often represented as an attendant figure beside the cross-ankled Bodhisattva as observed in many other caves (fig. 3.49). Sometimes it is represented individually as a single image as seen in Cave 6 in the window reveals (figs. 4.15 and 4.16). However we are not able to identify the figure in many cases. Some scholars identify it as pensive Bodhisattva, others as prince’s meditation. Mizuno identified the figure as prince Siddhartha’s farewell to his white horse although there is no horse represented in the east reveal.157

In cave 7 and 8 the pensive figures are represented at the corner of the north wall as attendant figures beside the main icons (figs. 4.17 and 4.18).

In cave 33-3 on the north side of the left wall, the pensive figure (figs. 3.48) is represented with a small figure kneeling in front of him. This evidently depicts the prince’s first meditation in Krshugam (farming village) as it is described in many sutras.

The pensive figure first emerged in Gandhara art depicting the first meditation of the prince. The first meditation and the four exits motivated the prince to “cross the bridge that has never been crossed” and to renounce the worldly life. The description of this episode differs remarkably by different sutras. Some sutras depict the prince as a young man who went to the farming village with his friends and performed his first meditation under the jumbo-tree (rose-apple tree), others describe the prince as an infant.

157 Mizuno, Unkō sekkutsu, III, 120.
as we discussed in previous chapter. Nevertheless, all told us that when the Buddha’s
father, King Suddhodana, arrived at the farming village to look for his son and stop him
from meditating, he did not recognize the son from the distance. When the king saw the
miracle of a rose apple tree branch moving to make shade for the prince, he thought it
was the supernatural power of a spirit, not knowing that it was his own son. The king alit
from his horse and made obeisance. This episode is a very popular subject and it is often
identified by a pensive figure meditating under a rose apple tree and a figure kneeling
down in front of him. Sometimes the king is illustrated with his entourage looking for his
son as observed in Weizidong cave (fig. 3.51) in Longmen.

The episode of the first meditation must illustrate his father who was looking for
his son. Otherwise it is just an illustration of a pensive figure. Therefore it is argued here
that the depiction on the west wall of cave 33-3 illustrates his first meditation. The prince
is seen sitting under the Jumbo-tree (rose-apple tree) in pensive posture with his right
hand holding his chin. This is the only first meditation depiction in Yungang. Other
pensive figures do not depict the first meditation episode. Rather, they represent
Bodhisattvas in meditation, not the prince.

The prince’s first meditation is a much favored subject in Longmen. We often
find the depiction in the trabeated front in many caves. The attribute of the episode is the
pensive prince and his father kneeling down in front of him making obeisance.

I am proposing that most of the pensive figures in Yungang do not represent the
pensive prince. Rather, they only represent pensive Bodhisattva. Only the pensive figure
with a kneeling figure represents the First Meditation of the prince who was bothered by
the cruelty of the human beings and witnessed creatures devouring each other. In
Gandhara art, the scene often shows the oxen plowing the field (fig. 3.50). In Chinese pictorial arts, the oxen and plow have never been shown.

III. The Stylistic Evolution of the Third-phase Caves

The images of Yungang mainly underwent two fundamental stylistic changes from its inception to the end.

The images in Cave 6 demonstrate the first monumental change in style and the icons in the third-phase caves exhibit further stylistic innovation.

The images in cave 6 for the first time are rendered in traditional Chinese baoyi bodai with both shoulders covered (fig. 4.19). The tanyou robes as observed in the Tan Yao caves and the early caves of the second-phase are not seen in cave 6 any more. Neither was the tongjian robe. The folds of the robe became flattened step-like. The cord-like folds observed in cave 20 disappeared. The rendition is more natural and smooth now.

The images in cave 6 essentially differ from the earlier icons of the five Tan Yao caves and those in the early second-phase caves.

The images in the third-phase caves exhibit further fundamental changes in style (fig. 4.20). Not only are they clad in baoyi bodai, but they are also slender, graceful and natural. The faces are not full any more, the body is no longer fleshy and the shoulders are not broad any longer but narrow and slanting. The sternness of the images in cave 6 is

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158 The robes of the seated Buddha can generally be divided into three types: tanyou 禿右 (right shoulder bare), baoyi bodai 褖衣博带 (loose robe and wide girdle) and tongjian 通肩 (both shoulders covered with round collar turning outward and parallel lines in the front). The tanyou robes are mostly seen in the first and early second-phase of Yungang. The baoyi bodai robes emerged only from cave 6. It became the most popular robe style in the third-phase. The earliest images with baoyi bodai robe, to the best of my knowledge, are the Maitreya-Amitayus Buddhas dated to 483 and discovered in Maoxian, Sichuan Province. The tongjian robe is only rendered in small Buddhas such as the thousand Buddhas or the seven Buddhas in the arch front.
no longer seen. Rather, the images in the third-phase appear natural and human with gentle smile.

These two stylistic changes profile the evolution of the iconography in Yungang throughout three phases.

The earliest images in the Tan Yao five caves appear non-Chinese, masculine, weighty and colossal. The main Buddha in Cave 20 perhaps can best exemplify the features of the early icons in Yungang (fig. 2.4). The image looks solemn with the sense of weightiness. The face is full, the neck is thick and the shoulders are broad. The robes are thick and appear heavy. The outer robe covers only one shoulder (tanyou) and its hem covers the tip of the other shoulder. The pleats look like cords sticking to the robe. The attendant Buddha on the left side of the main Buddha wears thick robe as well but it closely clings to the body. The same style is also seen in the standing Buddhas in Cave 18. They are reminiscent of Mathura images as we examined one of the representative images of the Gupta Buddha (fig. 2.9).

The images in the first-phase were hybrids of different cultures and prototypes. The Yungang artists in the first-phase copied the western models while creating their own arts at the same time.

Generally speaking, the images in the first-phase are massive and solemn. The later images, which we are about to examine, are more relaxed and natural. By the third-phase, the images are human and graceful.

The images from the early second-phase caves (Caves 13, 12, 11, 7, 8, 9 and 10) did not show much difference from the earlier images (fig. 4.21). Stylistically they look very similar with the early images. The robe of the Buddha still covers only one shoulder
(tanyou). The face is still full and round. However they look more relaxed than the first-phase images with gentle smile on their face. The cordlike folds disappeared; instead they are rendered with incised lines. So the overall impression of the early second-phase images is natural and realistic. They still closely resemble the first-phase images but they appear more relaxed and refined.

The fundamental change in style did not emerge until Cave 6. The images differ essentially from any other earlier caves. The stylistic innovation is dramatic. The Buddhas are now clad in traditional Chinese robes, the so-called baoyi bodai (loose robe and wide girdle). They no longer wear the tanyou robes. Instead, both shoulders are covered now. The cordlike folds or incised lines are not seen any more. Instead the pleats are step-like. They are flattened and rhythmic. The Buddhas look much more human with gentle smile and swirl hair. The rendition is smoother than earlier images.

The standing Buddha (fig. 2.21) in the west niche of the south wall of cave 6, for example, wears the loose robes with both shoulders covered. The contour of the body is still full and the face is still round. But the icon differs from the earlier images essentially. The Buddha looks more realistic with smooth rendition and a gentle smile on the face. The three layers of robes, each wavy hem of which is observed at the bottom, cover the entire body. The earlier images cover only left shoulder with cordlike folds. The end of the robes flares out layer by layer which accentuate the sense of weightiness of the image. The folds of the robe are smoothly rendered with flattened step-like pleats. They are not formed by the incised lines or cordlike folds any more as seen in the early caves. The neckline of the robe is pulled down low forming a “V” shape and showing much of the chest. The sash of the inner robe is placed outside of the robe naturally. The pleats in the
middle are symmetrical. The image differs from those in caves 20 and 18 fundamentally. It differs from those in the early second-phase caves.

The seated Buddha in cave 6 is shown a different style as well. The twin Buddhas (fig. 4.22) in the north face of the central pillar in cave 6 differ from that in the east niche of the south wall in cave 8 (fig. 4.23). The former is clad in baoyi bodai in two layers of robes with shoulders covered. The drapery falls down low over the pedestal like a fishtail whereas the latter has very short drapery and the robe covers only one shoulder. The folds in the former are flattened and smooth. The latter has only incised lines. The usnisha in the latter is flat whereas the former shows the swirl wave. The entire body of Buddha in cave 6 is covered, whereas only the left shoulder is covered in cave 8. Both images appear more realistic and natural than the five Tan Yao cave images.

The Bodhisattvas represented in caves 6 and 8 distinguish themselves as well. The Bodhisattvas in cave 6 (fig. 4.24) appear heavy with the entire body covered by layers of robes which flare out at the edge. The celestial robes form an “X” in the front without a ring then pulled over the arms. The Bodhisattvas in the east niche on the south wall in cave 8 (fig. 4.25), on the other hand, appear light with their robes thin covering one shoulder and clinging closely to the body, and the thin celestial robe fluttering around.

Evidently the first imagery innovation did not emerge until the late second-phase when cave 6 was constructed right before the capital was moved south to Luoyang in 494. The stylistic change also indicates the beginning of sinicization. The alien icons were made wear Chinese scholar’s robes with their entire body covered. They look more realistic and human with gentle smile and soft gaze.
We have just briefly compared several images with those in cave 6 to support our proposal that the first fundamental stylistic change was only undertaken in cave 6. Other second-phase caves essentially followed the style of the first-phase. When we put some representative images of the Buddha, Bodhisattva, flying celestials and donors from different phases, in particular, the second and third phases, together to compare them, the evolution of styles can be better mapped out and the origin of the third-phase images can gradually be traced.

For example, when we compare several representative seated Buddhas from various periods, the development of the iconography is evident.\footnote{The images for iconographic comparison include: the seated Buddha in cave 20, the attendant Buddha on the east wall of cave 17, the twin Buddhas in the anteroom of cave 10, the seated Buddha in the south niche on the third level of the east wall of cave 7, the seated Buddha in the east niche on the third level of the south wall in cave 8, the seated Buddha in the lower level of east side of the south wall in cave 6, the seated Buddha in cave 11-8 and cave 12-1, and the Buddha in caves 37, 29 and 30 on the west wall, and the seated Buddha in cave 5-11 on the west wall.}

The images in caves 20 (fig. 2.4) and 17 (fig. 4.26) still carry the western influence. The Gandhara (cave 20) and Mathura (cave 17) influences can still be sensed. The images in caves 7 and 8 (fig. 2.19) are smaller and more relaxed. The sternness and massiveness of the earlier icons are not observed any more. The rendition of the robe became more natural. The folds are more flattened. The cordlike folds disappeared. But the Buddha still wears the \textit{tanyou} robe. It is only in cave 6 that the fundamental stylistic changes emerged. It is from cave 6 that sinicization started. The images were sinicized and clad in traditional Chinese scholar’s robe as we just discussed. The right shoulder and arm are no longer bare and the chest is not revealed any more. The body is covered. The drapery falls voluminously like fishtail with series of arcs in the center. The seated Buddha (fig. 4.27) in cave 12-1 resembles the Buddha in cave 6 closely. Both are clad in
baoyi bodai. Both faces are full and the hair is wavy. And yet there are stylistic changes. The former became slender with elongated neck and slanting shoulders. The broadness of the latter is no longer sensed. The drapery is not as exaggerated as that of cave 6. The fishtail was replaced by two parallel arcs. The series of arcs in the center is no longer rendered. It is a simpler representation in cave 12-1.

When we compare these two images together with the seated Buddha (fig. 4.20) in the lower level of the east wall in cave 29, further stylistic innovation is evident. The image in cave 29 is even more slender than that of cave 12-1. The face is not full any more. Rather it is elongated. So is the neck. The hair is no longer wavy. The two arcs of drapery are longer and narrower. The series of “V” lines in the center of the image in cave 29 accentuates the slimness and grace of the image. It is a realistic and sinicized representation.

Similarly when we compare these three Buddhas with the seated Buddha on the north wall of cave 5-11 (fig. 3.146), we observe more stylistic innovation. The latter reflects more complicated rendition. The image still appears slender with elongated face and neck and slanting shoulders as seen in caves 12-1 and 29. However, the drapery is considerably voluminous draping down like waterfall, which provides heaviness of the image. The grace and simplicity shown in the image of cave 29 are lost in the new image. The fishtail-like drapery as seen in cave 6 is not seen any more. It was replaced by waterfall-like drapery. The folds began to be bulgy, not as flattened as those in cave 29. This is the last stage of Yungang visual representation. The workmanship is not as refined as previous icons. The images in caves 27, 29 and 30 can represent the iconography of the third-phase.
The evolution of stylistic changes can be reflected from the standing Buddhas as well.

The earliest standing Buddha is seen in caves 17 (fig. 4.26) and 18 (fig. 2.11). These are typical Mathura style images with robes closely clinging to the body. The series of “V” shaped lines are rendered in the front. The neckline is round. The robe covers both shoulders, even entire body. Evidently the first-phase images absorbed the western elements. However, the standing Buddha (fig. 2.21) in cave 6 presents a total different iconographic style. Instead of thin robes clinging to the body, the standing Buddha in the central niche on the west wall is clad in traditional Chinese thick robes with the entire body totally covered. The Buddha wears three layers of robes, the end of which flares out in an exaggerated way which accentuates the weightiness of the icon. The seven standing Buddhas (fig. 3.80) on the west wall of cave 11 closely resemble that of cave 6. They were likely modeled after the image of cave 6. The seven standing Buddhas (fig. 4.28) in cave 13 look similar with those in cave 11 but the workmanship is not as refined as the former. Presumably, they were added to the cave at a later time by different artist group. Evidently the images from caves 11 and 13 were inspired by cave 6.

The standing Buddha carved a little bit later represented in cave 23 (fig. 3.79) shows the similarities with the images in cave 11. The way that the folds are arranged with series of arcs in the front is the same. So is the mudra, but the overall contour of the image does not appear as weighty as the latter. The robes are thinner and lighter and the body is slender.

The standing Buddhas represented on the south wall of caves 25 (fig. 3.91) and 29 (fig. 4.29) a little bit later than that of cave 23, are shown even more slender and elegant.
The face is elongated and the whole body is not as fleshy as those in caves 6 or 11. They are even slimmer than the image in cave 23. However, the models evidently were from cave 6, considering the many similarities.

We can also look at several seated Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed, some of which have an explicit date, to further trace the development of the imagery in Yungang and the origin of the third-phase style.

The Bodhisattva (fig. 4.30) on the east reveal of the window in cave 17, dated to the 13th year of Taihe 太和 (489), exhibits a sense of roundness with full face, broad shoulders and short legs. The drapery tapers down at the cross of the ankles which accentuates the fullness of the body. The Bodhisattva in the east niche of level four of the south wall in cave 7 resembles this image but the latter is a refined work (fig. 4.31). This perhaps is one of the most beautiful Bodhisattvas in Yungang.

The seated Bodhisattva (fig. 3.67), commissioned by a certain Zhou for her husband, dated to the 19th year of Taihe (495) on the east reveal of the window in cave 11 shows the tendency of becoming slim. The body appears slender and more proportioned than the Bodhisattva dated to 489. The Bodhisattva (fig. 4.32) on the west wall of cave 27 appears even more slender than the image dated to 495. The waist is slim. The celestial robe tapers down from the shoulders which accentuates the slimness of the image.

The most elegant and graceful Bodhisattva (fig. 3.40) in Yungang perhaps is the one on the east wall of cave 5-11. The body of the image is very slim and the rendition is natural and smooth. The gentle smile, tranquil gaze and detailed carving all make the icon a masterpiece of Yungang. The celestial robe is wide around the shoulder area and gradually tapers down to cross in the center then goes around the arms fluttering down.
The image gives a strong sense of movement with celestial robe curling up and drapery flaring out. The image is well proportioned unlike the Bodhisattva in cave 17, the torso of which is long and the legs are short. Evidently the images gradually become slimmer and slimmer over time. This is not just reflected through the seated or standing Buddhas, but also demonstrated in the seated Bodhisattvas as we have just reviewed.

We can also review few representative attendant Bodhisattvas to trace the development of the iconography.

The attendant Bodhisattva on the third level of the south wall of cave 8 gives a tranquil and friendly countenance with gentle smile. The celestial robe, which covers the left shoulder only, as well as the skirt, is rendered with incised lines. There are no cordlike folds or step-like pleats. The right hand holds a lotus bud and the left hand holds a kalasa (ewer). The center of the large chignon is an animal mask holding the tassels in its mouth.

The attendant Bodhisattva (fig. 4.33) in the central niche of the upper level on the west wall in cave 6 presents a very different iconography. The entire body of the Bodhisattva is covered with layers of heavy skirt and celestial robe. The hem of the skirt flares out like fishtail. The celestial robe crosses at the center without a ring. Like the seated Buddha, the attendant Bodhisattva appears weighty and stiff.

However, the attendant Bodhisattva (fig. 4.34) in cave 12-1 is, although it still shows many similarities with that of cave 6, slender and more natural with elongated face and neck. The skirt, as well as the celestial robe, is thinner and lighter. The Bodhisattva appears more elegant. The attendant Bodhisattva (fig. 4.35) on the left wall in cave 27 resembles the former, but it is simpler. The chignon has no decoration. Evidently, these
two icons were modeled after that of cave 6 but they are in a simpler and lighter format. The later the image is, the slimmer it gets.

Several surviving images with explicit dates (483, 489, 495, 507 and 515) will provide further clues to trace the evolution of the iconography. So that we can best describe the stylistic changes in Yungang and trace the origin of the third-phase.

The images (fig. 2.30), dated to the 7th year of Taihe (483) on the east wall of cave 11 show archaic style. They are reminiscent of those in caves 7 and 8. The folds are rendered with incised lines and the robes cover only left shoulder.

The twin Buddhas (fig. 3.68), dated to 489, in cave 11-14, on the other hand, demonstrate a very different iconography. The Buddhas are clad in traditional Chinese baoyi bodai. The face is still full, a reminiscence of that of cave 6. The folds tend to become flattened. The usnisha is smooth. The thickness of the robes reflected on the images in cave 6 or even in caves 11-8 and 12-1 is not seen. Rather it is a more natural representation. The Buddhas appear elegant and graceful with gentle smile and refined workmanship.

The seated Buddha (fig. 3.67), dated to 495, on the east reveal of the window in cave 11 exhibits further iconographic change in style after cave 6. The exaggerated fishtail-end of the drapery, typical of cave 6, disappeared completely. Instead, the drapery is formed by series of arcs in the center. This new trend is also observed in the seated Buddha on the east wall of cave 21 (fig. 3.72), which is considered as the earliest third-phase cave.

The seated Buddha (fig. 3.118) in cave 28-2, which bears two dated inscriptions (507 and 514 respectively) demonstrates similarity with the Buddha image dated to 495,
but the arrangement of the drapery differs. We see two parallel series of arcs. The face still shows fullness and the chest is still broad. The old tradition of caves 11-8 and 12-1 after cave 6 was continued but the rendition is more natural. The seated Buddha (fig. 4.20) on the east wall of cave 29 and the Buddha (fig. 3.113) on the west wall of cave 30, compared with 489 images in cave 11-4 and the image in cave 28-2 demonstrate greater change in style. These images are much more slender and elegant. The chubbiness seen in the images of cave 6 is not observed any more. The full face seen in the image in cave 28-2 is gone. Rather, we see elongated face and neck with tranquil expression on the face. The contour of the images strongly suggests elegance and grace. The rendition is very smooth. These images are representative iconography of Yungang. They followed the earlier tradition in style. In the meanwhile the fundamental innovation is clear. It is a transition from masculine, full to a gradual slender and elegant iconography. The elegant and graceful images in caves 29 and 30 reached the highlight of the third-phase and can be considered as the best works of the third-phase. After that, we see new stylistic innovation.

The seated Buddha (fig. 3.66) dated to the 4th year of Yanchang 延昌 (515) shows quite a change in style compared with the image in caves 29 and 30. The workmanship is not as good as before. The body is even skinner with slanting shoulders. The greatest difference is the arrangement of the drapery. It drapes down low over the pedestal like a waterfall. The folds on the drapery are more densely rendered and they are not as smooth as the 489 images or those in caves 29 and 30. The image gives a sense of roughness other than smoothness. The seated Buddha on both north and west walls resembles this image in iconography. So does the seated Buddha in cave 23-1 (fig. 3.157) and cave 33-3
(fig. 3.168). We see many similar representations in the late third-phase caves. The workmanship during this period is crude. The waterfall rendition became a new stylistic trend around the Yanchang era (512-515). This stylistic trend was continued down to the end of Yungang.

The images in cave 4, which bears a dated inscription indicating that the image on the south wall was executed in the 5th year of Zhengguang 正光 (524), closely resemble the image dated to 515 in style. The drapery is long and looks like waterfall. The inscription dated to 524 in cave 4 is the last inscription in Yungang and it corresponds well with what the transcription Jin stele suggested that Yungang was end in the Zhengguang era.

By reviewing the images with an explicit date one by one, we just examined the stylistic evolution of third-phase and mapped out the development of imagery in Yungang.

It is significant to mention that another stylistic trend emerged along with the style of the image dated to 515. The images (figs. 3.135 and 3.136) in cave 35 became chubby again. The body appears full and the faces are round again.

The seated Bodhisattva on the east wall of cave 40 (fig. 4.36) and that on the east wall of cave 4-1 (fig. 4.37) demonstrated fuller faces again. These two images resemble each other. The eyes are huge and the faces are full. The body is disproportioned with big head, slim waist and full face. This is the final work of Yungang.

The east reveal of the entrance of cave 35 bears an inscription suggesting that the seated Bodhisattva (fig. 4.38) was executed in the 4th year of Yanchang 延昌 (515). This
image provides important clues for dating the caves. Many late images resemble the Bodhisattva in the east reveal of the entrance.

After we compared the representative seated Buddhas and Bodhisattvas from various periods, the stylistic development is evident. Clearly the origins of the third-phase images can be traced back to the second-phase, more accurately, they can be traced back to cave 6, in which the fundamental iconographic changes took place. The third-phase images were mostly inspired by those of cave 6. They evolved out of the images in cave 6. The roots are in cave 6.

However, as we have examined, there is a bridge between the images in cave 6 and those in the third-phase. The images located between the cave of 11 and cave 13 stylistically connect these two essentially iconographic transitions in Yungang. They are the transitional experiments between the western-end caves and the late second-phase cave, i.e. cave 6. The seated Buddha (fig. 4.27) in cave 12-1 clearly demonstrates the similarities with the seated Buddha on the south wall of cave 6. The overall rendition and contour are very similar. However, the image in cave 12-1 appears slender with slanting shoulders and elongated neck. Both images have their sash outside the robe. The drapery of the image in cave 12-1 shows two arcs at the end unlike that of cave 6 image. The arcs are not flaring out as dramatic as that of cave 6 image. The seated Buddha on the east wall of cave 29 resembles that of cave 12-1 but it is a simpler and more elegant version of it. The whole body of the Buddha in this cave shows a clear iconographic change. It is a much slender image with elongated the neck and face. The image shows great tranquility through its gaze. The end of the drapery forms two arcs at the end as seen in cave 12-1 image. But this image is more graceful with simplicity.
It should be mentioned that the seated Bodhisattva on the east wall of caves 4-1 and 40 resemble the seated Bodhisattva (fig. 4.39) on the east wall of Zihongzhen Cave in Shanxi province. These three images resemble one another so strikingly that one cannot help but suggesting that these caves were likely to be executed by the same group of artists.

Yungang late images also resemble some images in Longmen. The question is how far the Yungang style went and how much Yungang influenced other caves in Henan and Shanxi? These are the issues that will be addressed in the following two chapters.

IV. Conclusion

We have interpreted and analyzed the imagery of the third-phase which we had deciphered carefully in chapter 3. We have traced the origins of the architecture, the subject matter and the style of the third-phase and mapped out the evolution of Yungang.

It is argued here that the architecture of the third-phase evolved from that of the first two phases with innovations. The caves with three niches on three walls evolved from the elliptical caves and the caves with storeyed niches and became the predominating cave structure in the third-phase.

By reviewing the subject matter one by one, we have ample evidence to testify that the subject matter of Yungang is the visual representation of literary works, in particular, the works translated by Tan Yao and others, and that the origins of the subject matter are Buddhist literature and political motivation. The imagery of Yungang well exemplifies the close connection between words and images.

In Yungang, the eternal theme of the three Buddhas in three kalpas was more based on the Fufazang yinyuan zhuan and the Daji yi shenzhou jing than the Lotus Sutra,
as is usual. In order to protect the Dharma-pitaka and assure its transmission, Tan Yao compiled and translated many sutras, some of which are major inspirations for the Yungang artists.

The subject matter in Yungang is also social, political and ideological expressions as we have explored. The primary icons in the first-phase caves were modeled after the five emperors to validate Faguo’s claim that the emperor is the Thus Come One (Tathagata). Buddhism in north China was supported by the court, and in return, it served the court. The twin Buddhas was a more favoured subject because it symbols the soverengn of the “two sages.” These subjects served as political tools, as well as the artistic representations. The Vimalakirti’s life style set a perfect example for the educated and laymen alike. His dialogue with Manjusri provided an appealing platform for the “Pure Conversationists.” Vimalakirti’s silent explanation of Non-duality fits perfectly with Daoist idea of “once you have got the meaning, you can forget the words.” It is thus not surprising that the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri is repeatedly represented in pictorial arts.

It is argued here that several prominent episodes such as the great departure and the defeat of Mara in Buddha’s life, and the Dipamkara Buddha and the Asoka jataka in his previous lives were represented as didactic tools. These favored subjects were carefully chosen by the Yungang artists and they were depicted more than other motifs.

Stylistically the fundamental change first took place in cave 6 and the third-phase images, evolved out of it, exhibits further iconographic changes in style. The images located between caves 11 and 13 are the transitional icons connecting the two
fundamental changes. Based on the earlier iconography, the third-phase images emerged and developed.

In this study, the third-phase caves were categorized into five groups according to the changes of the style. The imagery of these five groups were highly likely rendered by several different artistic groups who were hired to work on specific caves only, and some of them were possibly from the south. It is also possible that the Yungang artists went south to Luoyang and southeast area of Shanxi because we find remarkable resemblance of images in these areas.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE YUNGANG THIRD-PHASE AND ITS RELATION TO LONGMEN

This chapter examines the interrelationship between the third-phase caves in Yungang and the early caves in Longmen. By comparing and contrasting the architectural structure of the caves, the composition, the subject matter and the style in some detail, this chapter traces the evolution of the central plain caves in the late Northern Wei. It ultimately attempts to deal with two major issues: firstly how far did the “Yungang style” go? Did Yungang influence Longmen or Gongxian? Secondly, was the sinicization of Buddhist imagery completed in Longmen or in Yungang?

I. Longmen

The Longmen caves (fig. 5.1) are located thirteen kilometers south of Luoyang city along both banks of the Yi River hewn into the Longmenshan limestone Mountain (known as Western Hill) and Xiangshan Mountain (Eastern Hill). They comprise more than 1300 caves, 700 niches and 100,000 images with more than 3000 inscriptions. The majority are located on the Western Hill. The Eastern Hill contains only later caves, namely the Tang caves, seven large ones and several small ones. All the early caves are located on the Western Hill. The caves stretch out north-south, unlike the east-west Yungang caves, for half a mile.
The Longmen Caves were commenced under Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499). The earliest is the Guyang cave 古陽洞, but we do not, hitherto, have a concrete answer as to when it was started due to the lack of literary sources and hard evidence. However it is perhaps safe to say that the construction was started before the capital was moved to Luoyang in 494 and it was started in the early Taihe era (477-499). The pointed niche (fig. 5.2) on the south wall dedicated by Sun Qiusheng 孫秋生 and some 200 others dated to the 17th year of Taihe (483) testifies that the construction of Longmen was started before the transfer of the capital. The niche (fig. 5.3) dedicated to Niū Jue 牛橛 by Lady Yūchí 尉遲, wife of Qiumu Lingliang 丘穆陵亮 and dated to 495 on the north wall of the Guyang Cave further proves that the Longmen Caves were started earlier than this date.

The Longmen Caves reached their first apogee under Emperors Xiaowen 孝文 (r. 471-500) and Xuanwu 宣武 (r. 500-515) during which time the Northern Wei was enjoying a relative peace. In Weishu, we are told:

世宗篤好佛理, 每年常於禁中親講經論. 上既崇之, 下彌企尚. 至延昌中, 天下州郡僧尼寺積有一万三千七百二十七所,徒侶逾眾.

Many speculations have been made in previous studies in regard to the commencement of the construction of the Longmen caves. Some suggested that the Longmen caves were started in the 2nd year of Taihe (478); and others suggested the 7th year of Taihe (483) and the 12th year of Taihe (488), see Liu Jinglong 劉景龍, “Longmen shiku kaizao niandai” 龍門石窟開鑿年代 (Date of the execution of the Longmen Caves), Guyang dong 古陽洞 (Guyang Caves) (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 2001), 94-95. It is quite possible that the Longmen caves were executed as early as 483 as Liu Jinglong suggested judging from the iconographic style. It is not unreasonable to suggest that small scale construction of the Longmen caves was started a few years before the transfer of the capital in 494.
Shizong (Xuanwu) deeply loved Buddhist Dharma. Every year he personally often lectured on the scriptures and doctrines in the inner palace. Since the emperor admired the Buddhist Dharma, all his people believe in it faithfully. Up to the Yanchang era (512-515), Buddhist temples and nunneries were accumulated up to more than 13,727 and there were many Buddhist followers.\(^{161}\)

It is under such political steadiness and fervent belief in Buddhism that many important caves such as the Binyang Caves 宾阳洞, Lianhua Cave 莲花洞, Huoshao Cave 火烧洞 and Weizi Cave 魏字洞 etc. were constructed. After that, during the Eastern Wei (534-550), Western Wei (534-557), Northern Qi (550-557), Northern Zhou (557-581) and Sui (581-618), caves and niches were executed here and there, but in general these were the declining periods of Longmen and there was no large scale construction. It was not until the High Tang period under Gaozong 高宗 (650-684) and Wu Zetian 武则天 (684-705) that Longmen reached its second acme. The construction of Longmen continued to the Song dynasty but with no major work.

The Longmen Caves, which were primarily commissioned either by the court or high officials, are usually are divided into four evolutionary phases.\(^{162}\)

During this long span of construction and among hundreds of caves, more than twenty caves were executed during the Northern dynasties. These caves were categorized

\(^{161}\) Weishu 114:3042.
\(^{162}\) Gong Dazhong 宫大中, Longmen shiku yishu 龍門石窟藝術 (Art of the Longmen Caves) (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2002), 80. The first phase was from 495 to 528; the second-phase was 528-557; the third 500-618 and the final which is the second highlight after the first phase and it was from 618-756.
into five phases: 1) Continuation of Yungang (493-499); 2) Formation of Longmen (500-510); 3) Development of Longmen (511-517); 4) Flourishing of Longmen (518-534); 5) Decline of Longmen (535-580). In this periodization, Wen Yucheng suggested that the second and third phases are the formation and development periods of the Longmen Cave Complex. He included the Lianhua Cave, Binyang Central Cave and Huoshao Cave in the third-phase, the development period of Longmen. However, reading the imagery of the second and third phases, one can’t help but realize that the Lianhua Cave, Binyang Central Cave, and Huoshao Cave still closely resemble that of second and third phases of Yungang in iconography. The Longmen style had not yet formed, let alone developed.

The Binyang Central Cave still follows the iconographic tradition of cave 6 and cave 11 in Yungang with some regional innovation. Even the images (fig. 5.4) in the Cixiang Cave 慈香, dated to 520 (fig. 5.5), demonstrate an iconographic resemblance to those in caves 35 and 27-1 of Yungang.

A distinctive Longmen Style gradually emerged only from the Weizi Cave, Putai Cave 普泰洞 and Huangpugong Cave 皇普公窟. The earlier caves, in imagery, are the continuation of the Yungang with their own creation. The formation of Longmen style is a gradual process of continuation of Yungang and innovation of its own.

In this chapter, I will examine the representative caves which are close to the Yungang third-phase caves in time, by comparing and contrasting them with the third-phase caves in Yungang in order to trace the interrelationship. These include: the Guyang cave, Binyang central cave, Lianhua cave, Huoshao cave, Cixiang cave, Weizi cave,

Putai cave and Huangpugong cave, among which the Guyang cave is the closest to the Yungang caves in time and style. Early inscriptions in Longmen, prior to the Shengui 神龜 (518-520) and Zhengguang 正光 (520-525) reign eras, are mostly found in Guyang cave. The inscription on the stele in front of the Huangpugong cave tells us that the cave was executed in the 3rd year of Xiaochang 孝昌 (527). After Xiaochang reign, “there was chaos under heaven.” The construction of Longmen was dramatically slowed down and not many caves were executed, so that we have found only 16 inscribed small niches during this period.

II. Highlights of Longmen

1. Guyang Cave

Among all the Longmen caves, the Guyang cave (fig. 5.6) is the earliest. The imagery in this cave resembles closely that of caves 7 and 8 in Yungang. The cave was hewn from a karsk cave and is horse-shoed in shape with a half-domed ceiling and storeyed niches on the side walls each of which bear four niches on each of the three levels. Every single space of the cave is taken, no spare space at all. The main wall (west) is occupied by a seated Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. Reading the inscriptions in the cave, one is led to believe that the large niches on the top of the side walls were executed first, so that the construction on side walls was started from the top instead of the bottom. The closer to the floor, the later they were executed. The earliest niche in this cave was dedicated by Sun Qiusheng and some 200 others in 483. It was followed by Lady Yüchi’s niche (495), Yi Fu’s 一弗 (496) (fig. 5.7), Hui Cheng’s 慧成 (498) (fig. 5.8) and many others before the Jingming 景明 era of emperor Xuanwu (r. 500-515). All the

164 Weishu, 111:2888.
early inscriptions in Longmen are found in Guyang cave. This suggests that the Guyang cave was the only large cave which was under construction before emperor Xuanwu. The niche front in this cave is rather ornate and complicated compared with that of Yungang third-phase. In general, the Longmen caves are more complicated and ornate.

2. Binyang Central Cave

According to the *Weishu*, the cave was executed at the beginning of Jingming era 景明 (500-504) for Emperor Xiaowen and Empress Dowager Wen Zhao and it was costly to hew it on the mount:
chi from the ground. By the 2nd year of Zhengshi (505) only twenty three zhang was hewed out of the mount. By the time when Wang Zhi became the director of the Palace Domestic Service, he said that the cave ceiling was too high [lit. mount had been hewn too high] and the expense and labour would be hard to supply. From the 1st year of Jingming (500) to the six month of the 4th year of Zheng Guang, the work had required eight hundred and two thousand three hundred and sixty-six man-days.165

The cave (fig. 5.9) is in horse-shoe shape with half-domed ceiling. There is a low altar in front of the three walls. The main (fig. 5.10) wall bears five large images, one seated Buddha, two attendant Bodhisattvas and two disciples, Ananda and Kasyapa, whose attendance suggests that the seated Buddha is meant to represent Sakyamuni, Buddha of the Present kalpa. Each of the side wall (figs. 5.11 and 5.12) contains a standing Buddha flanked by two attendant Bodhisattvas. Thus the primary motif in this cave is the Three Buddhas of the three kalpas. The front (east) wall (figs. 5.13 and 5.14) bears four levels of bas-relief panels from the bottom to the top on both sides of the doorway. The top is the depiction of the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri (fig. 5.15), below which is the jataka stories166 and the processions of the emperor (on the

165 *Weishu*, 114:3043.
166 The story on the north wall depicts Prince Mahasattva and the starving tigress, and the story on the south wall illustrates the Prince Sudana giving away the white elephant and what happened afterwards. The figure of Vimalakirti was stolen. Formerly it was in a private collection in New York. Now it is in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.
north wall) and the empress (south).\textsuperscript{167} The bottom register is the ten spirit kings (shenwang) five on each side.\textsuperscript{168} The ceiling (fig. 5.16) is decorated with a large lotus flower in the center surrounded by flying celestials which presents strong sense of movement (fig. 5.17).

The motifs in this cave are richly diversified. Beside the three Buddhas of the three kalpas, the processions of the emperor and empress; the jataka stories; the discourse of Vimalakirti and Manjusri, and the Dvarapalas are also represented.

Stylistically, the images are reminiscent of those in cave 6 (fig. 2.21) and cave 11 (fig. 3.80) in Yungang with round face, gentle smile and swirling hair. The Buddhas are all clad in baoyi bodai. The Bodhisattvas appear rather elaborately wearing high jeweled crowns, long strands of jewels, pendant necklaces and bracelets.

3. Lianhua Cave

There is a large lotus flower on the ceiling, hence the name. The plan of the cave is rectangular. The walls lean slightly towards the ceiling (fig. 5.18). The main image in this cave is a standing Buddha attended by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas (fig. 5.19). The disciples (fig. 5.20) are carved in bas-relief. The sidewalls bear storeyed niches, but the arrangement differs. The south wall (fig. 5.21) has three levels of niches whereas the north wall (fig. 5.22) contains unorganized niches. Presumably, these randomly executed

\textsuperscript{167} Judging from the dress and the headwear of figures, it is inferred that the worshippers are the emperor and the empress and their entourage. The depiction of the processions is also a good example reflecting the progress of sinicization since all the figures are clad in Chinese clothes.

\textsuperscript{168} These shenwang are not identified as those on the Luo Zikuan 骆子寬 stele, dated to 543, housed in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. However from their attributes, they can be identified as wind, dragon, river, tree and lion shenwang on the north side of the doorway; and mountain, pearl, fire, elephant and bird shenwang on the south side. They are the same shenwang as those on the Luo Zikuan stele. These ten shenwang are the earliest visual representations in Buddhist caves. Later on, they are seen in Caves 3 and 4 in Gongxian caves, Binyang caves, Shuiyusi caves 水浴寺 and Xiangtangshan caves 響堂山.
niches were added later on. The front entrance archway is decorated with floral designs and a beast mask in the center.

It is worth mentioning that this cave alone contains thirty-seven depictions of the discourse of Vimalakirti and Manjusri (fig. 5.23 and 5.24) which is the most popular subject matter in this cave. The motif is represented in various renditions (figs. 5.25), likely by different artists, and is illustrated in every Northern Wei cave in Longmen. The episode of the prince’s first meditation (fig. 5.26) is also a favored subject in Longmen. It is represented in many of the Northern Wei niches and caves (fig. 5.27).

This cave was executed at the same time as the Binyang Central Cave but after the main wall and the ceiling were finished, the construction was stopped due to political instability. The earliest inscription (fig. 5.28) for the sixteen niches on the north wall, dated to the 2nd year of Zhengguang 正光 (521), is dedicated by a group of “Woman of Pure Faith” (qingxinnu 清信女). Other inscriptions on the side walls are mostly from the Xiaochang 孝昌 (525-528), Putai 普泰 (531) and Yongxi 永熙 (532-534) eras. This indicates that the niches on the side walls are mostly executed in the last decade of the Northern Wei.

It should be mentioned that the sixteen seated Buddhas in the sixteen niches are still clad in tongjian robe. It suggests that the tongjian robe did not completely disappear after baoyi bodai became popular.

4. Huoshao Cave

One of the largest caves of the Northern dynasties and the most severely damaged cave in Longmen (fig. 5.29). The plan of the cave is vertical rectangular in shape with a half-domed ceiling (fig. 5.30). The five images, one seated Buddha attended by two
disciples and two Bodhisattvas, are severely eroded. Thus, the original contour of the images is hardly discernable. The inscriptions in this cave indicate that many small niches were executed during the reign era of Zhengguang (520-525). The small niche (fig. 5.31), dated to the 3rd year of Zhengguang (522), is well preserved. It is therefore inferred that the cave was executed at the latest before the Zhengguang era. Around the entrance arch, there are two flying deities riding on the dragon. The carving is elegant and refined.

5. Cixiang Cave

This is one of the few caves that bears an inscription (fig. 5.5) explicitly indicating the execution of the cave, the 3rd year of Shengui (520) and the donor, a nun Cixiang, hence the name of the cave. The cave architecture (fig. 5.4) is very similar with that of the caves outside of caves 11 and 13 in Yungang. It is square in plan with half domed ceiling. There is no niche in the cave; instead, a low altar in front of each wall. The subject matter of the cave is the three Buddhas in three kalpas, two seated Buddhas on the west and north walls with a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed on the south wall. Both Buddhas wear baoyi bodai. The drapery falls low over the pedestal. The rendition of the drapery on the north wall is a reminiscence of that of seated Buddha on west wall in cave 35 of Yungang.

6. Weizi Cave

This is one of the best preserved Northern Wei caves in Longmen (fig. 5.32). The plan of the cave is in horseshoe shape with slightly domed ceiling. The cave has only two niches instead of three, unlike most of the Yungang third-phase caves, most of which have three niches. The main wall does not have a niche. The five images (fig. 5.33), one seated Buddha with two disciples and two Bodhisattvas, placed on a high altar in front of
the main wall. Each sidewall (figs. 5.34 and 5.35) bears a large trabeated niche inside of which a seated Buddha is housed with two disciples and two Bodhisattvas.

It is significant to note that the imagery is different in this cave. The disciples (figs. 5.36 and 5.37) are placed next to the Buddha, not the Bodhisattvas who usually flank the Buddha, not the disciples. The iconographic arrangement innovation first appeared in this cave.

The trabeated niche front is ornate and elaborately decorated with the life story (fig. 5.38) of the Buddha and the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri (fig. 5.39) as seen in Guyang Cave and Lianhua Cave. The earliest inscription in this cave is dated to the 4th year of Zhengguang 正光 (523) in a niche (fig. 5.40) dedicated by a nun named Fa Zhao 法照. Another niche (fig. 5.41) dedicated by the wife of a certain Wang, Lady Tian 田氏 is also dated to 523. These inscriptions indicate that the construction of the cave was before this date (523). It is significant to note that the seated Buddha on the main wall is clad in baoyi bodai and a pianshan 偏衫 (fig. 5.42) is added to the right shoulder.

7. Putai Cave

The cave is square in plan with a flat ceiling. Like Weizi cave, there is no niche on the main wall. Instead, there is a high altar in front of it. Five images (fig. 5.43) are place on the altar. Each side wall (figs. 5.44 and 5.45) has a niche. The iconographic composition is the same as that of Weizi. According to the inscriptions dated to the 4th year of Yongping 永平 (511) on the south wall and to the 1st year of Putai 普泰 (531) on the west wall between the disciple and the Bodhisattva, scholars infer that the cave was executed before the 4th year of Yongping (511) under the reign of Emperor Xuanwu. Judging from the style, Putai images belong to the typical late Northern Wei sculpture.
The seated Buddha (fig. 5.46) is clad in *baoyi bodai* with *pianshan* on the right shoulder. In iconography, it closely resembles that of Weizi Cave. Like many other caves, this cave as well contains the life story of the Buddha including the first meditation and the Nirvana scene on the north wall in the trabeated arch front.

**8. Huangpugong Cave**

This is one of the few caves, which has an explicit date: the 3rd year of Xiaochang 密昌 (527). This is also one of the few caves in Longmen that was designed as a whole and completed all at once.

The cave is square in plan with slightly domed ceiling. Like many other Northern Wei caves, the walls lean inward towards the ceiling forming round corners between wall and the ceiling. The cave has two niches like Weizi and Putai, one on each sidewall. The images are placed on the high altar on the main wall, the same as the Weizi Cave and Putai cave. The floor is decorated with lotus flowers which are well preserved. The main wall (fig. 5.47) has seven images placed on the altar: one seated Buddha flanked by two disciples (fig. 5.48) and four Bodhisattvas, two standing and two pensive Bodhisattvas (fig. 5.49). The front wall has two standing Buddhas (fig. 5.50), one on each side of the entrance gateway. It is a reminiscent of those in the third-phase caves in Yungang such as cave 25 (fig. 3.91). The north wall (fig. 5.51) niche houses two seated Buddhas side by side, beside them are a disciple and a Bodhisattva. The south wall (fig. 5.52) is a trabeated niche inside of which a seated Bodhisattva attended by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas are housed.

**III. Yungang and Longmen**
Longmen continued Yungang tradition in many aspects even though the artisans of Longmen created their own masterpieces. The development of Longmen is a combination of Yungang and its own regional innovation. By comparing and contrasting the architectural structure, the iconographic composition, the subject matter and the style, I will identify which elements were initially from Yungang and which ones were the Longmen innovations so that a clear picture of how much Yungang is related to Longmen can be outlined.

1. Architectural Structure

As mentioned previously, Buddhist caves are generally divided into two kinds in terms of architecture: shrine cave and vihara (monastery) cave. The former can be subdivided into statue cave and caitya (stupa) cave. The Longmen caves are all statue caves as are the Yungang caves. There are neither vihara caves nor caitya caves. This is one of the outstanding features of the Longmen architecture. The colossal image caves as the five Tan Yao Caves in Yungang are not found here either. The caves with three niches on three walls 三壁三龕 (sanbi sankan), the typical architectural layout and the most popular cave structure in the third-phase of Yungang are not observed either.\(^{169}\) The caves with two niches on three walls 三壁兩龕 (sanbi liangkan), as cave 5-10 and cave 5-11 in the third-phase of Yungang, are popular in Longmen. There are no twin caves either, typical architectural structure in Yungang during the second-phase (caves 1 and 2; 5 and 6; 7 and 8, and 9 and 10). Nor do we find the porched caves with anteroom and

\(^{169}\) Su Bai mistakenly categorized the Weizi Cave, Putai Cave and Huangpugong Cave as the caves with three niches on three walls caves. As a matter of fact, these three caves are typical caves with two niches on three walls and an altar on the main wall, not three niches on three walls. There is no niche on the main wall (west wall). It is the same architectural layout as caves 5-10 and 5-11 in the Yungang third-phase. See Su Bai, “Luoyang diqu beichao shiku de chubu kaocha” 洛陽地區北朝石窟的初步考察, (Preliminary research on the Northern Dynasties caves in Luoyang area), Zhongguo shiku Longmen shiku 中國石窟龍門石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1991), 225.
main chamber as observed in many second-phase caves (7, 8, 9, 10 and 12) in Yungang. The caves of the Northern Wei in Longmen are relatively simpler in architecture compared with those in Yungang.

(1) Cave Architecture

According to the architectural layout of the caves, the Yungang and Longmen caves can generally be divided into three main types: (1) the horseshoe shaped cave with half-domed ceiling; (2) the square cave with flat ceiling and (3) the rectangular shape with either domed or flat ceiling. In general, if the cave is horizontal rectangle, the ceiling is flat; if it is vertical rectangle, the ceiling is then domed.

The representative horseshoe caves in Yungang, as discussed previously, are the five Tan Yao caves and cave 13. The small caves outside cave 11 and cave 13 carved between the second-phase and the third-phase also belong to this type as observed in caves 11-13, 12-3, 13-18 and 13-29. Cave 23 in the third-phase is also a horseshoe shaped cave. These caves are much smaller in scale compared with the five Tan Yao caves. The horseshoe caves were typical early Yungang architectural structure. They gradually disappeared in the third-phase. In Longmen, Guyang cave, the Binyang caves and Weizi cave followed the same architectural layout, as do the Yaofang cave 藥方洞 and the Lu cave 路洞, but these are later. The caves in Gongxian did not follow this tradition. All five Gongxian caves are square.

The early horseshoe caves are all colossal image caves, as are the five Tan Yao caves and cave 13. The gigantic image occupies most of the space in the cave. The attendant images are relatively small compared with the main image.
The horseshoe caves outside cave 11 (fig. 2.23) and cave 13 in the later period are smaller in scale and the main image is much smaller, so that the cave appears more spacious. There is no altar in the caves so the images sit directly on the ground. In Longmen, the Binyang caves and Weizi cave are typical horseshoe caves without an altar in front of three walls. In Gongxian caves, this architectural structure is not found.

Some of the horseshoe caves in Yungang third-phase have an altar in front of three walls such as cave 23 (fig. 3.12) and cave 5-22 etc. In Longmen, Cixiang cave, constructed in the first year of Zhengguang (520) and some later caves such as Longxiang Jiangjun 龍驤將軍 Cave, Liushi Cave 六獅, Dihua Cave 地花 and Bianzhou Cave 汴州 also have altars in front of three walls. But these caves were all executed in the later reign of Emperor Xiaoming 孝明 (r. 516-528).

The rectangular caves emerged during the second-phase in Yungang, and most of the caves (7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 1, 2 and 3) in the second-phase are rectangular in shape. This architectural structure was carried down to the third-phase as seen in caves 27, 29 and 30. The rectangular caves normally have storeyed niches on each wall, unlike the square caves, which usually have three niches on three walls, one on each wall. The Yungang rectangular caves are horizontal in shape, whereas the Longmen rectangular caves are vertical. The Guyang, Lianhua and Huoshao caves in Longmen are the typical vertical rectangle caves with domed ceiling. These huge caves were carved out of natural karst caves. So they are not necessarily in regular shape with clear division line of walls. The walls usually lean inward towards the ceiling (fig. 5.53). Unlike the Yungang caves, the main wall of these caves is occupied only by a main Buddha flanked by disciples and Bodhisattvas. There are no storeyed niches on the main wall as it is usual in Yungang
caves (7, 8, 27, 29 and 30 etc.). However, the side walls of these caves contain storeyed niches, the same as Yungang. The vertical rectangle cave with domed ceiling is not found in Yungang or Gongxian caves. This type of architectural structure actually evolved out of the horseshoe shaped caves with domed ceiling.

The square caves with flat ceilings emerged also during the second-phase of Yungang (cave 6 and cave 11). They became the predominant architectural structure during the third-phase. Over two thirds of the caves in the third-phase are square in shape with flat ceilings and there are usually three niches on three walls (sanbi sankan). The representative sanbi sankan examples are cave 24, cave 25 and cave 28 from the third-phase. It is interesting to note that the square caves in the second-phase, cave 6 and cave 11, are both caitya caves, not sanbi sankan.

The square caves in the third-phase, however, are different, most of them have three niches on three walls. The architectural structure of the caves with three niches on three walls had not yet to emerge in the second-phase. In Gongxian, cave 5 (fig. 4.8) is a typical sanbi sankan cave. In Longmen, the Cixiang cave, Putai cave and Huangpugong cave are square caves with flat ceiling. However they are not sanbi sankan caves as suggested by Su Bai. Rather there are only two niches on three walled caves (sanbi liangkan). There is no niche on the main wall but an altar on top of which all the images are placed. This is the same structural layout as in cave 5-10 and cave 5-11 in Yungang.

The caitya caves emerged in the second-phase of Yungang. They became one of the important architectural structures in Yungang and are found in both the second and third-phases. However, they are not seen in Longmen. Longmen caves are purely statue
caves. In Gongxian caves, this architectural structure is very popular. Four out of the five caves are *caitya* caves.

*Caitya* caves can be divided into two kinds according to the shape of the stupa which can be square from the top to the bottom, or tapered towards the top. The shaft which tapers towards the top is usually multi-storeyed. Cave 39 (fig. 3.76) perhaps can best exemplify this type. The stūpa has seven storeys and it tapers towards the ceiling. Cave 6 (fig. 4.6) on the other hand represents another type of *caitya* cave. The stūpa is square, so it has the same dimensions from the bottom to the top.

(2) Niche Architecture

The niches in Yungang, Longmen and Gongxian present a rich diversity. In Yungang they are simple without much elaboration. There are primarily the arched niches and trabeated niches. However, they become rather ornate and ornamental in Longmen. Many of them are garland festooned niches (fig. 5.54). The Gongxian niches in general are not as diversified as those in Longmen, but they are refined carvings.

The niches in these three caves can generally be divided into eight types: (1) pointed-arch; (2) trabeated; (3) roofed; (4) round (5) canopied; (6) square; (7) curtained and (8) stupa niches, among which the square niches emerged only in Longmen caves and became very popular. The pointed and trabeated niches are most popular representations in Yungang and are seen in almost every cave. They continued to be popular niche forms in Longmen.

In general, the niches at Longmen are far more elaborated and ornate because different niche front forms are often combined together. The square niche front is usually represented together with other niche front such as pointed arch front or trabeated arch.
front forming tiered niche front (fig. 5.55). Sometimes two types of different niches are represented together one on top of the other. The niches in Guyang cave are particularly decorative. The large flamed nimbus together with a row of *aupapadukas* holding ornate garland on top of it as the arch front of the niche make the Guyang cave niches rather elaborate. Lady Yüchi’s (fig. 5.3) niche (niche 94 on north wall) is a good example of such type.

The arched niches are the earliest niche form. They were the most popular niche form in Yungang. The square niche and roofed niche began to appear around Jingming 景明 (500-504) and Zhengshi era 正始 (504-508) according to the inscriptions in Longmen. There is no square niche in Yungang. The roofed niche was very popular in the second-phase of Yungang, and is represented in almost all the caves in the second-phase. It is not as popular in the third-phase nor was it popular in Longmen. The earliest roofed niche (fig. 5.56) in Longmen, dedicated by Prince of Anding Yuan Xie 安定王元燮 (west wall, niche 3), was dated to the 4th year of Zhengshi (507) and the first square niche was represented in the 1st year of Jingming (500). In Yungang, the roofed niches are all *wudianding* 廂殿頂 (hip) niche. The *xieshanding* 歇山頂 (hip plus gable) roofed niche is not represented in Yungang. They only emerged in Longmen. An example of a *xieshanding* niche is the one dedicated by the Prince of Anding Yuan Xie. The *xieshanding* roofed niche is more complicated than *wudianding* niche.

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170 *Wudianding* is also called *wujiding* 五脊頂 (five-spine roof), or *siading* 四阿頂 (four slope roof). It is the high status architecture style in China. Originated from southern China, the *wudianding* is a four slope roof with a ridge and a hip at each corner.

171 *Xieshanding* was called *jiujiding* 九脊頂 (nine-spine roof) in the Song dynasty. It is called *xieshanding* only in the Qing Dynasty. It is a lower level architecture compared with *wudianding*. The *xieshanding* is also divided into two kinds: single and double eave. The double eave is a higher level architecture.
The stupa niches used to be considered later forms of niches until the 2001 discovery of niche 92 (fig. 5.57) on the north wall in Lianhua cave was discovered. The niche bears an inscription indicating that this stupa niche was executed in the 1st year of Jianyi 建義 (528) dedicated by a nun Dao Hui 道慧. Therefore the stupa niche first appeared during the late Northern Wei period, not Northern Qi as some scholars have suggested. The canopied niche was not represented in Longmen or Gongxian.

The emergence and development of the niches in these caves can provide some clues for dating the caves. In all three caves, the arched niches emerged earliest and are the most popular representation. The trabeated niches continued to be popular in Longmen. The arched niche front and the trabeated arch front sometimes are represented together with other niche front such as round or square niche front so that the niche front is more complicated and ornate. It became a tiered form.

The curtained niche was only represented in Yungang. It is not observed in Longmen or Gongxian caves. The curtains are usually represented as decorative element tucked underneath the niche front to fill the space in Longmen. They are usually represented together with pointed niche or trabeated niche, not as a form of niche as seen in Yungang.

The so-called “folding screen” trabeated niche, popular in the third-phase of Yungang, is only seen in Shiniuxi cave 石牛溪 (fig. 5.58). But Shiniuxi niches, dated to the 2nd year Zhengguang 正光 (521) and □昌 (□ chang, likely Xiaochang 孝昌 525-528), are much later representations. In Yungang they emerged earlier around the Yanchang era 延昌 (512-515) as indicated in the niches both dated to the 4th year of Yanchang (515).
in Cave 19-2 and on the east side of the entrance way in Cave 35. Longmen artisans apparently imitated the form of Yungang.

The round niche is only represented in Longmen. There is no such niche form in Yungang. They became a regular representation, particularly in Guyang cave. Niches dedicated by Lady Yüchi (fig. 5.3) and Hui Cheng (fig. 5.8) are typical such examples. The round niches are normally festooned on the top by the ornate garland usually held by beasts or aupapadukas. The looping garlands look thick and decorative and they appear in almost every niche in the Guyang cave.

The niche fronts became richly diversified in Longmen. They usually are tired fronts one on top of the other. In Yungang, the niche front is comparatively simple. There is only one tier of niche front. Longmen artisans learned simple forms from Yungang and innovated in their own way and made Longmen niche front more decorative and elaborative.

2. Composition and Arrangements

The most popular iconographic composition and the eternal theme in Buddhist art is the three Buddhas in three kalpas. This applies to the Yungang, Longmen and Gongxian caves. The three Buddhas are represented in almost all the major caves in Yungang. All five Tan Yao caves have the three Buddhas. However the composition of the three Buddhas varies greatly. It can be one seated Buddha with two standing Buddhas as seen in cave 20 and cave 5; it can be seated Buddha with legs crossed with two seated Buddhas with legs pendant as observes in cave 19; it can be one standing Buddha with two attendant standing Buddhas as represented in cave 18; it also can be one seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed in the middle represented together with one seated
Buddha on the left and standing Buddha on the right as seen in cave 17; it can be one seated Bodhisattva in the middle together with two seated Buddhas as reflected in cave 37; it can be one seated Buddha with legs crossed in the middle, one seated Buddha with legs pendant on the left and one Bodhisattva with ankles crossed on the right (cave 35 and cave 32-12), and it also can be one seated Buddha with legs crossed together with two Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed (cave 11-7). The transitional caves between cave 11 and cave 13 are often represented with one seated Buddha with legs crossed and two Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed. The composition of the three Buddhas is richly diverse in Yungang. This composition was continued in Longmen where we see various compositions of the three Buddhas. In Binyang central cave, the composition of the three Buddhas is the same as represented in cave 20 and cave 5, one seated Buddha in the middle together with two standing Buddhas on the side. The Mile cave 1 (fig. 5.59), which was executed at a later time, followed this iconographic composition as well. It contains a seated Buddha in the centre and two standing Buddhas (fig. 5.60) on the side. Many such examples can well testify that the iconographic composition of Longmen followed the tradition of Yungang. The cave 5 of Gongxian has one seated Buddha in the main wall, one seated Buddha on the west wall (fig. 4.8) and one seated Bodhisattva on the east wall. This iconographic composition can be traced in cave 33-6 and cave 38-3 in Yungang.

It is worth mentioning that the Sakyamuni and the Prabhutaratna are often represented as the main icon of the cave in Yungang and they are often represented with either two seated Buddhas on side walls or a seated Bodhisattva Maitreya on the left wall and a seated Buddha on the right wall comprising the three Buddhas. This composition
was very popular during the third-phase of Yungang. However the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna are not represented as the main icon in Longmen or Gongxian caves.

Besides the three Buddhas, as the eternal motif, depicted on three walls, the images on each wall are also part of the diversified composition.

The simplest composition of the images on one wall is comprised of three images: one seated Buddha with two attendant Bodhisattvas. This composition is very common and can be seen almost everywhere. In the meantime, there are other compositions of the three images. It also can be one Bodhisattva with ankles crossed flanked by two attendant Bodhisattvas (they can be two pensive Bodhisattvas) as seen in cave 10, cave 37 and cave 35 in Yungang; one seated Buddha with legs pendant with two attendant Bodhisattvas (cave 9); or one seated Buddha with legs pendant with two Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed (cave 8); it also can be one seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed with two seated Buddhas with legs pendant (cave 7).

The composition of the images represented in one wall varies greatly. Early Yungang caves mostly only had three images on each wall. More images were added later on in some caves. For example, the composition of the north wall in cave 24 (fig. 3.102) is a little bit more complicated. The seated Buddha in the middle is represented together with a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed on the left and a seated Buddha on the right. In between them are two standing attendant Bodhisattvas making the composition into five images instead of three as discussed before. In cave 33 (fig. 3.82), disciples appeared standing beside the Bodhisattva, away from the Buddha. In the Guyang cave, three images are represented on the main wall (fig. 5.53) like most of the caves in Yungang: one seated Buddha with two attendant Bodhisattvas. In the Binyang
cave, however, there are five images (fig. 5.10): the seated Buddha, two standing disciples and two attendant Bodhisattvas are represented on the main wall. The same is true of the Weizi cave, Putai cave, Cixiang cave, Huoshao cave and Lianhua cave. It is worth noting that the disciples are standing beside the Buddha, unlike cave 33 in Yungang. The majority of the Longmen caves have five images, whereas in Yungang three images are as usual. In Yungang, there is only one example of seven images represented on the main wall (cave 13-10). In Huangpuqong cave and Lu cave, the images grew to seven on the main wall, one seated Buddha flanked by two disciples and four Bodhisattvas (fig. 5.47). In both Yungang and Longmen, the majority of the compositions are either three or five images. We only find very few examples of seven images represented on one wall in each cave. It is interesting to note that in Longmen the disciples are standing right beside the Buddha, whereas in Yungang, the Bodhisattvas are next to the Buddha. In Longmen, the two disciples are often represented as one young and one old man. Apparently, they represent Anada (young) and Mahakasyapa (old). This iconographic composition also suggests that the Buddha is Sakyamuni.

3. Subject Matter and Visual Representations

As previously discussed, besides the usual icons of Buddhist pantheon, the Yungang and Longmen caves portray richly diversified subject matter, and that subject matter is closed related to Buddhist literature.

The three Buddhas without a doubt is the eternal subject of Buddhist art. The thousand Buddhas and seven Buddhas are also the regular visual representations in both Yungang and Longmen. In addition to these primary motifs, the life of the Buddha; the jataka stories; the nidana stories; the legendary discourse between Vimalakirti and
Manjusri; the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna; the two standing Buddhas; the Mahesvara and Kumarakadeva and the Dvarapalas enrich the already diversified motifs and constitute the significant parts of the subject matter. Some motifs such as the life of the Buddha and the *jakata* stories are more popular in Yungang, whereas others are more favored in Longmen. Yungang and Longmen artists rendered the very same motif in a very different manner.

(1) Three Buddhas

The subject of the three Buddhas is the most popular theme in both caves. They are represented in almost every cave. All five Tan Yao caves are occupied by the three gigantic Buddhas. The Binyang Central, Weizi, Putai and Huangpugong caves in Longmen all have the three Buddhas as the main motif.

Two major questions emerge from this iconography. The first is the source of their popularity, and the second is just who they are meant to exactly represent. Some suggest that they represent the Kasyapa, Sakyamuni and Maitreya; Dipamkara, Sakyamuni and Maitreya, or Sakyamuni, Amitabha and Maitreya. I intend to believe that they just simply represent the three Buddhas of the Ten Quarters in the three *kalpas* of the Past, Present and Future in a broader sense. That the many Buddhas of the Past, Present and Future disperse in the Ten Quarters is a core concept of Mahayana Buddhism.

The three Buddhas in three *kalpas* are often mentioned in the *Lotus Sutra*, the most influential Mahayana Buddhist doctrine.

In Guyang cave, many Maitreya Buddha images and the inscriptions lead one to believe that they were inspired by the *Lotus Sutra* and that the subject matter of the visual representations is associated with Buddhist doctrines. The inscriptions by Lady Yüchi 尉
遲, Yang Xiaofei 楊小妃, Fa Seng 法僧, Hui Chang 慧暢 and many others all mentioned Maitreya Bodhisattva and their wishes to have the deceased ones ascent to the Tushita heaven. In *Lotus Sutra*, we are promised:

> If there are persons who accept, uphold, read, and recite the sutra and understand its principles, when the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousand Buddhas, who will free them from all fear and keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence. Immediately they will proceed to the Tushita heaven, to the place of Bodhisattva Maitreya. Bodhisattva Maitreya possessed the thirty-two features and is surrounded by a multitude of great Bodhisattvas. He has hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of heavenly women attendants, and these persons will be reborn in their midst. Such will be the benefits and advantages they enjoy.\(^\text{172}\)

Apparently these inscriptions were derived from the *Lotus Sutra* and the visual representation of the Maitreya Bodhisattva was inspired by the promise to proceeding to the Tushita heaven.

\(^\text{172}\) Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 322.
The Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, seated side by side with their legs crossed, the symbolic visual representation of the *Lotus Sutra*, are repeatedly represented in Yungang and Longmen. The Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna apparently are derived from the *Lotus Sutra* as previously discussed. They are particularly popular in Yungang. During the third-phase of Yungang, the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna even became the main icons represented on the main wall of many caves. The popularity of the motif in Yungang is not just because of the popularity of the sutra, it is also related to political situation of the time when emperor Xiaowen and empress dowager Wenming ruled at the same time.

The debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri was also a popular subject matter. They became increasingly popular in Longmen and were represented almost in every cave. In Lianhua cave itself, this subject was represented more than thirty times.

(2) The Life of the Buddha and *Jataka* and *Nidana* Stories

The very same motif is rendered differently in Yungang than in Longmen. The life of the Buddha is represented throughout the three phases of Yungang. Cave 6, in particular, bears more episodes of his life, thirty-six, than are found anywhere else in China, from the birth in Lumbini Garden to his first sermon in the Deer Park. Cave 37 also contains many episodes of Buddha’s life, some of which are unique to this cave and are found nowhere else in China. They are not seen in any other caves in Yungang or Longmen. The tossing the elephant episode on the west wall is illustrated only in this cave, and on the east wall, the episode of conception is depicted in a unique way which is not observed anywhere else.

Instead of the usual illustration of conception of Maya lying down on her side on a couch with an elephant beside her, the conception in cave 37 is rather unique. The
Bodhisattva enters his mother’s womb mounting on an elephant. Chinese artisans perhaps tried to explain how the Bodhisattva miraculously was transformed from a six-tusked elephant to a human form. In Lalitavisrtara, we read that before the Bodhisattva left the Tushita heaven he consulted his friends: “under what disguise shall I enter my mother’s womb?” They told him “in the form of a white elephant having six tusks.” We are not able to explain how he came out of his mother’s womb in the form of a human being. So Yungang artisans illustrated the episode with the Bodhisattva mounting on the elephant confused by the contradictions of the text. The Bodhisattva’s descent in the form of an elephant, as we are told, is simply a dream of Maya’s. This episode is not depicted in this form in any other caves in China.

Yungang caves contain rich illustrations of his life. But it is interesting to note that the life of the Buddha is represented only in single panels not in sequential series as they are represented in India, Gandhara or Central Asia.

The life of the Buddha in Longmen is represented in a different manner. First of all, it is not represented in chronological sequence of his life as in cave 6. Second, the selections of episodes of his life are not as diversified as those reflected in Yungang. The Buddha’s youth such as going to school in a cart or the archery competition is not depicted in Longmen. Third, the popular subjects of the assault by Mara or conversion of the three Kasyapas represented in large niches in Yungang as special motifs are not reflected in Longmen in large niches. Both of these episodes are didactic tools to emphasize to the faithful the truth of human suffering which even the Buddha endured before his enlightenment. Fourth, the episode of Siddhartha’s first meditation became increasingly popular in Longmen and was illustrated in many arch fronts of the niches.
This subject however is not a significant representation in Yungang where we see some pensive Bodhisattvas as attendant Bodhisattvas. Lastly, the subject of the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri became so popular that it replaces the illustrations of Buddha’s life. They often appear on the arch front of the niche.

A second major difference is that at Longmen *jataka* stories are rarely depicted but they are illustrated throughout the three phases in Yungang. The most popular ones are perhaps Asoka offering the dust to the Buddha and the Dipamkara *jataka* stories. They are usually portrayed in a single panel to represent the story not in successive series. The Syama *jataka*, a very important motif in Yungang (cave 9), is not illustrated in Longmen. It is worth emphasizing that the Syama *jataka* is the only story that was represented in successive series of panels rather than in one single panel as it is usual. The Syama *jataka* emphasizes filial piety concept which corresponds well with the teachings of the Confucianism. This perhaps is the core reason that this particular story is represented in a much more elaborated fashion. It is a unique representation.

(3) **Vimalakirti and Manjusri**

The subject was, needless to say, inspired by the *Vimalakirti Sutra*. The discourse between Vimalakirti and Manjusri was a popular theme in Yungang and was represented in many caves. The motif became even more popular in Longmen and is represented in almost every niche in many caves.

In the second-phase of Yungang, the subject is represented as an important theme in visible locations. The Vimalakirti and Manjusri are seen on the south wall beside the entrance in cave 7 and cave 2. In cave 1, they are represented in the left niche of the south wall. In cave 6, they are observed in a more visible place: above the entrance gateway.
(fig. 5.61). This representation is unique: the Buddha is sitting between the two icons, which is rarely seen. Vimalakirti is represented on the left side of the Buddha, Manjusri on the right. In Binyang cave in Longmen, Vimalakirti and Manjusri are also represented on the entrance wall (fig. 5.13). Later on, the subject matter is represented in less important locations and in smaller scale. In Weizi cave, Cixiang cave, Mile cave 2, Liushi cave and Putai cave, the motif is represented on both sides of the niches. In Lianhua cave, the subject is represented in almost all large niches. The representative illustration is the niche 42 on the south wall (fig. 5.25). Vimalakirti is depicted on the right of Manjusri like other representations. He wears loose traditional Chinese robes and holds his attribute, chiwei. Around him, five disciples are depicted.

In Gongxian cave 1, Vimalakirti and Manjusri (fig. 5.62) are depicted as main icons in one of the niches on the east wall. This visual representation is one of the finest works in Buddhist caves in China. The rendition is very natural and smooth. The folds are smooth and balanced. Vimalakirti appears serene, relaxed and humane.

(4) Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna

The subject of Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna was a very popular theme in Yungang. Without a doubt this subject was derived from the Lotus Sutra. They appeared during the first-phase caves in small niches in Yungang. During the second-phase, they began to be represented in many main niches such as in cave 7 as the primary icons on the north wall. The subject became even more prominent during the third-phase and it is represented almost in every cave and in many caves, it is represented as the primary icon on north wall. In cave 24, they are even represented on both east and west walls. However, the motif is not as significant in Longmen where the debate between
Vimalakirti and Manjusri is more popular. It is not represented as a primary icon in Longmen and is rarely seen even in small niches. In Gongxian, the subject is reflected twice only (east wall of cave 1 and on the central west face of cave 4).

(5) Two Standing Buddhas

The standing Buddhas are usually represented on the front wall beside the doorway in both Yungang and Longmen. The standing Buddhas are usually represented in two forms: the Buddha standing alone or the Buddha standing surrounded by other figures from the *jataka* stories.

The Buddha in standing pose is seen in both caves such as cave 11-16, cave 19-2, cave 5-10 in Yungang, and Putai, Huangpugong caves in Longmen.

In many cases, however, the standing Buddha represents *jataka* stories as we have observed when we deciphered the iconography of the third-phase in Yungang. The most popular ones are the Buddha meeting with his son Rāhula, the Dipamkara *jataka* and the Asoka story. For example, the standing Buddha with a kneeling boy on west of the south wall of cave 19 (fig. 2.10) narrates the meeting of the Buddha with his son Rāhula on his returning home six years after the boy was born. The very same story is also depicted in a small niche on the east of the south wall of cave 19 and on the west wall of the anteroom of cave 9.

The standing Buddha on the upper level on the west of the south wall of cave 35 is illustrated with a prostrating boy with his long hair spreading out in front of the Buddha. The depiction narrates the Dipamkara *jataka* story (fig. 3.64). The boy represents the young Brahmin Sumati who purchased the five lotus flowers and threw them at the Buddha on his visit to the city of Dipavani. The flowers hovered around the
Buddha and were suspended in the air. The boy spread his hair in the muddy road as a rug so the Buddha could cross. The same story is also depicted in cave 10 and cave 12.

The standing Buddha is also often represented together with three boys. This is of course the illustration of the story of Asoka offering the dust to the Buddha as we observed in Chapter Three. This theme became very popular in third-phase of Yungang and was illustrated in many caves (25, 28, 29, 33, 33-4, 34, 5-11 and 5-38). They are usually seen on the front wall of the cave. Sometimes the motif is represented together with the Dipamkara legend as seen in cave 34.

The Dipamkara or Asoka offering earth stories are rarely found in Longmen where the standing Buddhas are represented only as the Buddha in the standing posture as seen in Huangpugong cave and Putai cave. It is the same in cave 5 in Gongxian.

(6) Dvârapâlâ

The Dvârapâlâ motif appeared first on the entrance way in cave 7 and cave 8 in Yungang. There are four Dvârapâlâs (fig. 5.63) in cave 8. The two closest to the main chamber have wings on their heads. They hold a thunderbolt in their right hand and a trident in the left. The Dvârapâlâs (fig. 5.64) are also represented on the entrance way in other caves during the second-phase (13, 12, 9, 10 etc.). During the third-phase, they no longer are represented on the entrance way. Instead, they are placed outside the cave as seen in many of the third-phase caves (5-11, 24, 35 and 39) (fig. 3.132). Longmen and Gongxian followed this tradition. The Dvârapâlâs are seen outside Binyang central cave (fig. 5.9), Lianhua cave, Putai cave and Huoshao cave and many others. In Gongxian cave complex, they are found outside caves 1, 4 and 5.
It is important to be noted that the Dvârapâlâs were represented as attendant icons on the central pillar in cave 6. They wear Bodhisattva celestial robes and are standing beside the Bodhisattvas. Their winged head and up-lifted hands (fig. 5.65) suggest they represent Dvârapâlâs instead of Bodhisattvas. This visual representation was not popular in the third-phase. It appeared late in Longmen. To the best of my knowledge, it first appeared in the Yishi Hui Gan niche in Guyang cave, dated to the 2nd year of Shengui (519).173

4. Style

The representative Northern Wei caves (Guyang, Binyang, Lianhua, Huoshao, Cixiang, Weizi, Putai and Huangpugong) under discussion present close iconographic similarities with those in Yungang and yet, at the same time, they demonstrate new creative elements in the iconographic evolution from Yungang to Longmen. It is a process of continuity and creation in the development of iconography. It is unclear whether the Yungang artisans went south to Longmen to produce new images. However, it is clear that early Longmen images closely resemble those of Yungang.

The stylistic changes in Yungang have a chronological evolution from the first phase of non-Chinese, masculine images with right shoulder bare, to the images of cave 6 with both shoulders covered and to the third-phase of slender and elegant images of the third-phase. These changes are clear and significant, and enable us to trace the evolution of the caves by the style of the robes. The stylistic changes of the robes left a clear mark to trace. In Longmen such evolutionary changes can not be easily identified. Longmen

173 The niche is on the south wall, no.180. There is another Hui Gan niche in Guyang cave, but it’s on the north wall and dated to the 3rd year of Jingming (502), no.135.
artisans absorbed the Yungang elements of different periods from the beginning of its development.\(^{174}\)

The seated Buddha images in the large niches on the upper level of Guyang cave display close similarities with those in early Yungang. The seated Buddha appears masculine with broad chest and one shoulder covered. The folds are uneven. These are also the characteristics of the five Tan Yao images. The Guyang images not only resemble the early Yungang images, but they demonstrate iconographic closeness to the late Yungang images as well. The seated Buddhas (fig. 5.66) in niche 30 on the south wall of Guyang cave closely resemble those in cave 27 and cave 29 in Yungang. They also resemble the image on the west wall of cave 30.

It is obvious that the Guyang images continued the iconographic traditions of Yungang from the first phase to the third-phase.

It is significant, however, to emphasize that even from the very beginning of the execution of Guyang cave that Guyang artisans created a new style. The hair ribbons sticking out and fluttering scarf of the cross-ankled Bodhisattvas, such as the Yüchi Bodhisattva (fig. 5.3), on the north wall are all new elements invented in Longmen and they are not observed in Yungang. The Bodhisattvas in Longmen are much more ornate whereas the Bodhisattvas in Yungang are simpler and more natural.

\(^{174}\) The robes of seated Buddha normally can be divided into three types: *tanyou* (right shoulder bare), *baoyi bodai* (loose robe and wide girdle) and *tongjian* (both should covered with collar turning out and parallel lines in the front). The *tanyou* robes are mostly seen in the first and early second-phases of Yungang. In Longmen, the seated Buddha in Guyang cave followed this same style. It is not seen in any other caves in Longmen. The earliest *baoyi bodai* image in Yungang, dated to 13\(^{th}\) year of Taihe (489) appeared in cave 11-14. Interesting enough, the seated Buddhas, dated to the same year, in the east reveal of the window in cave 17 are still clad in *tanyou*. It indicates that when the *baoyi bodai* style began to emerge, the *tanyou* style did not disappear right away. They co-existed. The *tanyou* style is not seen in the third-phase of Yungang. The *tanyou* images in Guyang resemble closely those in cave 7 and cave 8 in Yungang.
The Bingyang caves, according to the *Weishu*, were executed in the 1st year of Jingming (500) for Emperor Xiaowen and Empress Wenzhao.\(^{175}\) Stylistically, the images of Binyang Central Cave follow those in cave 6 in Yungang. The rendition of the robes which cover the body of the Buddha entirely, the flattened folds, the swirling hair and round face with gentle smile; all of these, resemble those of cave 6. The end of the robe of the Buddha in Binyang cave is not as fluttery as that of cave 6 and it does not flare out like a fishtail as it does in cave 6. The Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, appear more ornate and decorative with long bead necklaces and buttons holding them on the shoulders. The Binyang cave is one of the finest carved caves in Chinese Buddhist cave temple development. The workmanship is matchless. The serene expression of the Buddha, the smooth rendition of the figures and the carving of the images are hard for any work to exceed. It is after all a masterpiece commissioned by the court. It continued the Yungang tradition, and yet the artisans created their own style.

The Lianhua cave began to demonstrate a new stylistic development. It is based on the traditional imagery with new inventions. The standing Buddha still displays the similarities with that in cave 23 in Yungang. The rendition of the robe and the arrangements of the folds are the same. However, the disciples and Bodhisattvas present new iconographic elements. The disciples are carved in bas-relief and the Bodhisattvas are much more ornate and decorative. The Buddhas in small niches show different iconography as well. The drapery of the Buddha is not divided into two arcs as seen in the third-phase caves in Yungang. Rather, the well arranged drapery falls down straight without flaring out as that of Yungang. The flying celestials present a great sense of movement and elegance. Lianhua cave perhaps can be considered as the beginning of the

\(^{175}\) *Weishu*, 114:3043.
“Longmen style.” It is a continuation of Yungang style with its own creation. The disciples and Bodhisattvas are more decorative than those in Yungang. The seated Buddhas in small niches are simple and natural. The famous debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri are represented in bas-relief.

Cixiang cave bears an inscription which indicates that the cave was executed in the 3rd year of Shengui 神龜 (520) which corresponds with the last period of Yungang construction. The seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed is reminiscent of those in the transitional period of Yungang from the second-phase to the third-phase located between cave 11 and cave 13.

After Cixiang cave, the Weizi cave, Putai cave and Huangpugong cave gradually formed the “Longmen style” evolved out of Yungang influence. The main Buddha of Weizi cave (fig. 5.33), Putai cave (fig. 5.43) and Huangpugong cave (fig. 5.47) resemble each other, and are clad in the loose robe and wide girdle. The neckline of the outer robe is pulled down low so that the inner robe, which is held in place by a bowknot, is revealed. The drapery falls down naturally without volumes as seen in the late third-phase of Yungang. The end of the drapery does not flare out like in Yungang. The Buddha presents strong sense of elegant and graceful with smooth carving and natural folds.

The development of the imagery throughout the Northern Wei in Longmen is a process of continuity of Yungang and creation of its own. The artisans absorbed the Yungang elements, and in the meanwhile they created their own icons. The Weizi cave, Putai cave and Huangpugong cave are the period of forming their own style. The early caves (Guyang, Binyang central and Lianhua) copied more of Yungang style but they added their own elements from the very beginning. Thus, the Longmen caves did not
exclusively follow the Yungang. Rather, the formation of the “Longmen style” is a combination of absorbing and reinvention.

IV. The Sinicization of Buddhist Imagery Re-considered

Numerous scholars have explored the transformation of Chinese Buddhist images. Most of these same scholars suggest that the process was not improved until Longmen. It is my belief that the process was perfected by the end of the third-phase of Yungang. It is also my belief that the sinicization does not result only from the 486 edict by emperor Xiaowen or from the close influence from the south. It is also associated with the monastic material life.

Chinese iconography during the late 5th century underwent a stylistic transformation from the masculine non-Chinese images with round face and broad chest to the slender and elegant icons of the Yungang third-phase and early Longmen, and from the images with one shoulder covered only to the icons with baoyi bodai and both shoulders covered. These sinicized visual transformations are usually attributed to the 486 edict issued by Emperor Xiaowen and to the southern influence. However, the reason why Buddhist images in the late 5th century began to wear baoyi bodai and to appear attenuated and angular is far more complicated than what scholars usually suggest.

First of all, the baoyi bodai robes appeared before the 486 edict adopting Chinese culture. The Maitreya-Amitayus stele (fig. 5.67) discovered in 1920 in Maoxian 茂縣,

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176 Laurence Sickman suggests that the process of sinicization was completed only after the capital was moved to Luoyang in 494. In his view, in Longmen, “the style of Buddhist sculpture becomes thoroughly consistent and Chinese in character.” See Laurence Sickman and Alexander Soper, *the Art and Architecture of China* (New York: Penguin, 1971), 90. Also see Stanley K. Abe, “Sinicization” in *Ordinary Images*, 173-259.

northwest of Sichuan, was dated to the 1st year of Yongming 永明 (483). Both Maitreya Buddha and Amitayus Buddha wear baoyi bodai robes with both shoulders covered. Apparently the sinicized baoyi bodai style existed before the edict of 486. The reform of Xianbei people adopting Chinese culture actually started as early as Emperor Daowu (r. 386-409) in the beginning of the Northern Wei, and it was continued through Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) and Emperor Xiaoming (r. 516-528). The edict in 486 just reinforced the development. In the 1st year of Tianxing 天興 (398), Emperor Daowu commanded Dong Mi 董謐 to compose different kinds of ritual ceremonials. In the 6th year (404), he commanded to have caps and gowns made according to the ranks. To the Taihe era 太和 (477-499) of Emperor Xiaowen’s reign, he commanded to have new style of caps and gowns made according to the established rules. The reform of clothes was also discussed during the reign of emperor Xuanwu and he made rules about it. In the Suishu, we are told again that even from the beginning of the Northern Wei during the reign of Emperor Daowu the adoption of Han clothing by the Northern Wei Xianbei people had started and after him, through the emperor Xiaowen and emperor Xuanwu the sinicization was continued.

Through this long process of adoption of Chinese culture, Emperor Xiaowen’s reform was perhaps most effective. It includes using Chinese name, speaking Chinese language, wearing Chinese clothes and transferring the capital to the south, Luoyang from the north Pingcheng. The sinicization took more than 14 years (481-494) to materialize.

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178 Weishu, 108:2817.
By the Northern Zhou (557-581), the reform of sinicization was already widely accepted at court and all officials wore Han clothes.

However, again, that is not to say that the edict decreeing the adoption of Chinese culture by Xiaowen did not play a role in Buddhist iconography. It did.

The development of Buddhism, a foreign religion, and its art, from its arrival to Chinese soil in the Han dynasty, had been in a process of adjusting to and adopting Chinese culture and Buddhist iconography is a reflection of this cultural assimilation. The changes of the garments of the Buddhist images were inevitably influenced by Han culture from the beginning. The earliest extant Han Buddha images discovered in the 1940s in Pengshan 彭山 and Leshan 樂山 tombs in Sichuan wear tongjian robes, though a reminiscence of Gandhara art, clearly demonstrate the Chinese Han culture influence with loose sleeves and a strong sense of linear (fig. 5.68). Besides, the life of the Buddha depicted in consecutive panels is apparently an influence by the Han brick reliefs. It is clear that from the very beginning Buddhist art is a hybrid of Chinese and western culture. Chinese art is an art of the linear. The figures on the frescos in Binling Cave Temple are another good example of Chinese linear art reflected in Buddhist iconography (fig. 5.69).

The second interpretation of the iconographic shift, which assigns much importance to Southern influence, cannot be wholly denied. There is, however, little evidence that Southern culture became dominant. The images in the Qixiashan Cave 栖霞山 in Nanjing do not wear baoyi bodai robes. A more valid position is that the well-known Chinese tradition of syncretism, of blending seemingly divergent traditions, was operative in the cave-art we are discussing. In this regard, we find an interesting discussion between Chen Qingzhi 陳慶之, a southern official, and Zhu Yi 朱異 (483-
Xiaoyan appointed (Chen Qingzhi) Governor of the Metropolitan province of Sizhou. Chen showed great respect for northerners and relied heavily on them. He was very different from the usual. Zhu Yi found it strange and asked him why. Chen replied: “Ever since the Jin and Song periods, people have been calling Luoyang a desolate land and said that anyone north of the Yangtze is a barbarian. On my recent visit to Luoyang, I just realized that the capped and gowned scholars all lived in the central plains where the ritual and etiquette flourish and people are prosperous. I can’t use words to express myself of what I have seen there. This is what we say the imperial capital
magnificent and the model of the four quarters. This is like those who have limbed Mount Tai think little of mere hills, and those who have been on the Yangtze or open sea despise the Xiang and Yuan. How can we not assign heavy responsibilities to the northerners?” Qingzhi therefore adopted the Northern Wei style of feathered canopy for insignia and costumes. Gentry and commoners south of the Yangtze quickly competed in imitating him. The loose robe with wide girdle (baoyi bodai) was worn in Moling (Nanjing). \(^{180}\)

From what Yang Xuanzhi tells us in his *Luoyang qielan ji*, we are confirmed that the northern culture actually inspired the south in the style of dress and that the *baoyi bodai* style is from the central plain, very likely Luoyang region, not from the south as scholars have suggested. This is not to say that south did not have an impact on the north. It did. In Buddhist iconography, North and South interacted.

The striking similarities between the Maitreya Buddha and Amitayus Buddha stele images (fig. 5.67) from Maoxian County and the main Buddha in Binyang Central Cave (fig. 5.10) completed in 523 in Longmen lead one to believe that Buddhist iconography in the north absorbed the south elements as well. The rendition of the robes in both examples is natural and smooth. The tension of the pleats seen in early Yungang images is not observed. The gentle smile of the Buddha makes the images rather personal.

\(^{180}\)Yang Xuanzhi 杨衒之, *Luoyang qielan ji* (Record of the Monasteries in Luoyang) (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2000), 107-108.
and Chinese. Buddhist icons are not just holy figures any more. The outer robe is pulled down so low that the inner robe is seen. A sash tied around the waist with a bowknot is put outside of the robe. The hand gesture is unique. The Maitreya Buddha extends three fingers instead of the usual five. The main Buddha in the Binyang cave was represented in the same way. Both the rendition of the robes and the figure gesture were represented in the same way. It is undeniable that the southern culture inspired the Buddhist iconography in the north.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors of Chinese Han culture, the north and south interaction and the enforcement of sinicization by the court that all have influenced the transformations of Chinese Buddhist iconography, other elements should not be overlooked. One of them is monastic practice. It is not unreasonable to suggest that monastic life must have played a significant role in the development of Buddhist images. In other words, Buddhist icons, as visual culture, must be, in a way, a reflection of monastic material culture.

Indian orthodox monastic clothing consists of three pieces of oblong cloths which are usually called the “Three Garments 三衣,” namely an undercloth, an inner robe and an outer robe.\(^{181}\) The outer robe is actually a thicker or heavier version of the inner robe. They are essentially the same. These three pieces of rag-like material are not supposed to be tailored or sewn but only be wrapped around the physical body.

Chinese monastic garments adopted and followed Indian orthodox “Three Garments” practice and were mainly inspired by both Gandhara and Mathura prototypes.

\(^{181}\) Three Garments, Pali, ticivara Sanskrit, tricivara and Chinese sanyi 三衣. They are consisted of Antarvasaka 安陀會, Uttarasanga 鬱多羅僧 and Samghati 僧伽梨. Usually people used Kasaya (jiasha) 袈裟 to refer to the totality of the habit.
They can generally be divided into two types: *fafu* 法服 and *changfu* 常服. *Fafu* is the formal monastic dress. It is also called *sengyi* 僧衣 (monastic dress) which are composed of three pieces of oblong clothing: an undercloth, an inner robe and an outer robe, similar to the orthodox Indian version of the “Three Clothes.” They are called *sanyi* 三衣 (Three Garments) in Chinese, which are essentially the same as the Indian. They are just worn in a different fashion/manner to suit the Chinese taste and climate, and the material is quite different from either Gandhara or Mathura. Chinese monastic clothing was often made of silk rather than cotton as it is usual in Gandhara.

It is largely because of the different material of the robes in monastic practice in Gandhara and China that visual representations in these two regions are very different.

In Gandhara, where the weather is often cold, Buddhist icons are often clad in thick cotton robes so that the folds are very deep and thick like ropes sticking to the surface of the robe, whereas in China, the robes are made of silk, so the pleats are represented in a much more relaxed manner. The folds are smoother and more natural, and are not as deep as those illustrated in the Gandhara art. There is no exaggeration of the outlines of the material. Visual representation is therefore a window of material culture through which the monastic life is reflected. The *baoyi bodai* garments are just a way of Chinese monks wearing their Three Garments. The standing Buddha with the *baoyi bodai* robe in cave 6 of Yungang (fig. 2.21) is mostly likely a visual illustration of Chinese Buddhist monks’ dress.

Many literary sources tell us that the Indian orthodox Three Garments, upon arrival China, were considered inappropriate for Chinese culture even though the Chinese
monastic sangha adopted the tradition. Thus the Indian orthodox cloths were altered to be assimilated in Chinese culture.

Three Garments is often in “open mode” with the right shoulder of the Buddha uncovered. This does not fit the Chinese ethical norms. Therefore a pianshan 偏衫 (patch) was added to the monastic dress so that the physical body would not be revealed since “that is not appropriate (不以為善).” In one of the Yuan sources, the Zengxiu jiaoyuan qinggui 增修教苑清規, we are told:

西土人多袒膊, 恐生譏過, 故須掩之…至魏時宮人見僧袒一肘, 不以為善, 始加右袖, 兩邊縫合, 謂之偏衫. 截領開裾, 猶存本相, 故知偏衫左肩即本祇支, 右邊即覆肩也.

People from the western land mostly have their arm uncovered. (Monks) were afraid that criticism will arise for this mistake. Thus the arm must be covered. To the Northern Wei period, people from the Palace saw the bared arm of the monks. They thought this is not appropriate.

Then a right sleeve was added, both sides of which were sewn. It is called pianshan. It is open from the collar in the front so the original appearance was maintained. Therefore
we learned that the left of *pianshan* was actually just the inner robe, and the right of it is to cover the shoulder.\footnote{Zengxiu jiaoyuan qinggui, Ed. by Zi Qing 自慶 in the 7th year of Zhizheng 至正 (1347) of the Yuan based on Tiantai jiaoyuan qinggui 天台教苑清规. The codes are divided into ten disciplines. It is an important source for the study of the Tiantai monastic life of the Song and Yuan dynasties.}

It is clear that the Indian Three Garments did not look appealing to Chinese monks and were considered “inappropriate.” Thus a *pianshan* was added.

In the *Sifenlu juiji jiemoshu zhengyuanji* 四分律隨機羯磨疏正源記, we are told that there was initially no such a thing as *pianshan* in the West (India or central Asia). It was added only during the Northern Wei in China. Here we read:

西土本無. 蓋元魏宮人見僧袒膊. 不以為善. 遂施此衣. 綴祇支之上. 又云偏袖衣.

There is no such thing in the western land. It is likely that Palace people saw the monks with bare shoulder and considered it inappropriate. Therefore they donated this kind of clothing (with *pianshan*) to be worn over the inner robe. It is also called *pianxiouyi*.\footnote{Sifenlu sui ji jiemoshu zhengyuanji, 8 juan, annotations by Yun Kan 允堪 of the Song dynasty. X40:0726:847:c24.}

It was only to cover the “ugly physical body” that *pianshan* was added as we are told in *Fozhi biqiu liuwutu* 佛制比丘六物图. Here we read:
In this passage we are also told that it is not until the Northern Wei that the right sleeve was added to the robe so that both shoulders and both arms are covered. People were confused about it and thought that monks must wear it. Therefore, more layers were added to the robe.  

This monastic material phenomenon is clearly reflected in visual representations. We find Buddhist images with *pianshan* as early as in the pagodas of the Northern Liang (397-439) and the standing Buddha images in Bingling Cave Temple (fig. 5.70). By the time of the execution of the Yungang, *pianshan* already became part of the iconography as we observe it in the seated Buddha in Cave 20 (fig. 2.4). It is highly likely that Yungang monks absorbed the monastic tradition from the west as we are told in *Weishu*:

太延中，涼州平，徙其國人於京邑，沙門佛事皆俱東，
象教彌增矣。

During the Taiyan regin era, Liangzhou was pacified. Its people migrated to the capital. The Sramanas and Buddha

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184 Yuan Zhao 元照 (?-1116) of the Song dynasty, *Fozhi biajiu liuwutu*, 1 juan, T45:1900-901:b17.
teachings all went east (along with the immigrants). The images and Buddhist teaching developed rapidly.  

It seems to me, therefore that the artisans who sculpted the images reflected the monastic life visually. In this sense, visual culture is closely related to material culture. It is significant to mention that in *Da Song sengshi lue* 大宋僧史略, it is said that the *pianshan* was added during the Northern Wei period:

> 後魏宮人見僧自恣. 偏袒右肩乃一施肩衣, 號曰偏衫. 自魏始也.

The palace people of the Northern Wei saw the monks doing whatever they wanted leaving their right shoulder bare. Thus they donated only robes to which a cloth covering called *pianshan* was added. This began in the Northern Wei.  

There is one source however called the *Shishi yaolan* 釋氏要覽, however, it says that the *pianshan* was added during the Cao Wei of the Three Kingdoms (220-265).  

There is no evidence for such an early appearance *piahshan*.

The earliest extant evidence of *pianshan* is on the Northern Liang (397-439) pagoda images. By the 5th century most images had *pianshan* as observed in several

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185 *Weishu*, 114:3032.
extant individual images such as the Zhang Yong 張永 (455) image (fig. 2.7), the Song Dexing 宋德興 (457) image (fig. 2.8), the Feng Aiai 馮愛愛 (466) image (fig. 5.71) and the seated Buddha in Cave 20 in Yungang.

It is significant to note that the earliest images with baoyi bodai in Yungang, the seated Buddhas in Cave 11-14 (fig. 3.68), dated to 489, did not have pianshan. Neither did the images, seated or standing, in Cave 6. This further proves that pianshan initially was added only to the open mode robes with the right shoulder revealed to cover the “ugly physical body.”

However, we find that in Longmen the baoyi bodai images have a pianshan on the right shoulder as we observed in most of the Northern Wei caves (Binyang Central, Weizi, Putai and Huangpugong caves) and on the images (fig. 5.72) discovered in Wanfosi 万佛寺 in Chengdu. It seems that Chinese people did not know what pianshan was and were confused about it so more layers were added, even on the baoyi bodai robes as we read in Sifenlu xingshichaozichiji 四分律行事鈔資持記:

但世人不識褊衫即是祇支覆肩二物. 故復於其上重更覆耳. 當知褊衫右邊即是覆肩.

People at that time did not know that the inner robe and

fujian (pianshan) are two separate things. Therefore they

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188 Yang Hong suggested that the earliest images with pianshan were the Zhang Yong image dated to the 1st year of Taian 太安 (455) and Feng Aiai image dated to the 1st year of Tianan 天安 (466). See Yang Hong, “Shilun Nanbeichao qianqi foxiang fushi de zhuyao bianhua,” in Kaogu, 1963, 6, 334.
again added another one on top of it. It should be noted that
the right side of pianshan is the fujian.189

From what we have discussed about the monastic life and Buddhist images so far, it is clear that the monastic practice, as material culture, was the inspiration for visual representations. Buddhist iconography is a reflection of monastic life. Both pianshan and baoyi bodai are the sinicized monastic garments of the Indian orthodox Three Garments. They were what the monks worn at that time. Accordingly, the material culture is illustrated in visual arts.

To summarize the points I have made above, the process of sinicization started as early as emperor Daowu. The 486 edict was only one of the factors which enhanced the process, and it is not the major reason for sinicization. In this process, northern culture and southern interacted, and influence each other. The southern influence is undeniable particularly in the late stages of Yungang and throughout the construction of Longmen. The influence of the South, due mostly to migration to the district of the Northern Wei capital, made itself felt in Buddhist images of the caves. Supple and slender bodies replaced the stiff formalism of the earlier images.

I would suggest that northern culture also had a profound influence on south China. The baoyi bodai dress style started from the north rather than south as we are told in Luoyang qielan ji.

I also argue that the iconography of the Buddhist images both at Yungang and Longmen continued the Indian tradition of garb by following the “three-cloths” model, based as it was on the Gandhara and Mathura models. The robes of the figures, however,

were modified in stages to fit more closely into the Chinese tradition, with the largest early change based on the fact of Chinese monastic culture since it was common in China for monks to wear silk rather than the stiffer cloth more common in Gandhara. This leads to a greater degree of naturalism in the depiction of the body in Chinese Buddhist sculptures. At the same time, Chinese and Confucian ideas of bodily modesty led artisans to discard the naked shoulder depiction so common in earlier sculptures, and to adopt a patch or pianshan to cover the shoulder. In later times, it seems clear that the Chinese forgot the original meaning of the patch, but continued to use it in their Buddhist images.

Therefore pianshan is still seen in the baoyi bodai robes as reflected in the Longmen images of the Northern Wei.

As I mentioned earlier many scholars have taken the position that the iconographical sinicization was not completely until the Longmen period. As I have argued above both regard to piahsan and other iconographic features of both Yungang and Longmen, sinicization was perfected during the third-phase of Yungang not during the Longmen time as other scholars have suggested. The images in the third-phase of Yungang appear much more elegant and graceful. They are the genuine xiugu qingxiang 秀骨清像 (graceful and refined) icons demonstrating a strong sense of linear, one of the outstanding features of Chinese art. The elongated seated Buddha on the west wall of cave 30 can be considered as the masterpiece of the third-phase. It is delicate and supple. The gentle smile makes the image more personal.

My final argument against simplistic explanations for the iconographic shift in cave sculptures is based on the largely-unexplored relationship between painting and sculpture in China during the period under discussion. It is my belief, based largely on
this relationship, and on the fact that many renowned artists like Dai Kui 戴逵 (?-396), Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (345-406), Lu Tanwei 陸探微 (?-485), Zhang Sengyou 張僧繇 (?-?), a contemporary of Emperor Wudi (r. 502-549) of the Liang 梁武帝 and Cao Zhongda 曹仲達 of the Northern Qi (550-577) were both painters and sculptors, that the art of the brush had a profound influence on the shaping of the figures in the Buddhist caves of Yungang and Longmen.

I will now examine more closely some of the representative exemplars of this phenomenon.

The sinicization is not only reflected in the changes of Buddhist garments. It is also reflected in the iconographic transformations from the non-Chinese masculine colossal images of five Tan Yao icons to the attenuated and elegant Buddhas (fig. 5.73) in Cave 125 in Bingling Cave Temple 炳靈寺; the masterpiece of Buddha image on the left wall of Cave 31 (3.113) in Yungang; the slender seated Bodhisattvas with ankles crossed in Guyang cave and Buddha images in Binyang central cave, Lianhua cave and others in Longmen, and to the fleshy and heavy images of Xiangtangshan caves (fig. 5.74) and Qingzhou (fig. 5.75).

These iconographic transformations took place simultaneously with the transformation of style in painting.

As sculptures were mostly painted, the sculptors were often required, as a foundation for sculpture, to be adept in paintings as well. Sufficient evidence demonstrates to us that distinguished sculptors, in general, excelled both in painting and sculpture. Chinese painters therefore had a profound impact on the transformation of Buddhist sculpture.
Dai Kui, a contemporary of Gu Kaizhi, is well-known for being good at both painting and sculpture. He was good at playing the lute and was skilled in calligraphy and painting. “He excelled in painting Men of Antiquity and landscapes. 其画古人山水极妙.”  

When he was just over ten years of age he did a painting in the Temple of Tile Coffin 瓦棺寺 and was highly praised by Commandant Wang Changshi: “this child can not only can paint, but he will eventually enjoy great fame. 此儿非独能画, 终享大名.”  

Dai was also skilled at casting Buddhist images and carving them. Whenever he sculpted a Buddha image he analyzed and pondered until it achieved brilliance. It once took him three years to complete the wooden images of Amitayus and his attendant Bodhisattvas. “The accuracy was measured with the tip of hair. 視准度於毫芒.”  

Dai also sculpted five “image of Buddha taken in procession” 行像 images. This time it took him ten years of contemplation and analysis, in his search for a Chinese way of depicting Buddhist icons, to finish. He also painted the Traveling Buddha image as we learned from Lidai minghua ji: “The Traveling Buddha image painted by him in his middle ages was rather refined and marvelous. 戴安到中年画行像, 甚精妙.”  

Dai Kui’s son, Dai Yong 戴顒, inherited his father’s talent. “The simplicity of his rendering of images was charming and profound. 素韻淵澹.”  

Once the Prince of the Song was casting a 1.6 zhang bronze image for the Tile Coffin Temple, but when the image was completed, he noticed that the face was too thin, but the artisans were unable...
to correct it. So the Prince asked Yong what to do about it, to which he replied, “It is not that the face is too thin, but that the arms are too thick”. Thus the size of the arms was reduced, so that the image appeared proportioned. People praised his refinement of thought. “The images made by both Dais were unequalled in all generations 二戴像製，歷代獨步.”

Jiang Shaoyou 蒋少遊 (?-501) of the late Wei period was said to be skilled in calligraphy and painting. According to Lidai minghua ji, he excelled in both painting the human figure and carving (善畫人物及雕刻).

Another example was Yang Huizhi 楊惠之 of the Tang dynasty who was also known both as painter and sculptor. In Wudai minghua buyi 五代名畫補遺, Liu Daochun of the Northern Song tells us that both Yang Huizhi and Wu Daozi 吳道子 (680-759) learned the brushwork of Zhang Sengyou 張僧繇 during the Kaiyuan era 開元 (713-741) and they called each other ‘painting pal’. They were both highly skilled, yet, only Daozi achieved great fame. Huizhi therefore burned his brushes and ink stones and threw himself into sculpting. He was adept at echoing Sengyou’s paintings and rivaled Wu. People at that time commented that “Wu’s paintings and Yang’s sculptures skillfully grasped the spirit of Sengyou’s brush (道子畫，惠之塑，奪得僧繇神筆路).”

According to Jutan lu 劇談錄 (Records of Talks on Drama) of the Tang dynasty, all clay images of the immortals in Taoist temples during the Kaiyuan period were

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195 Dao, 16:543.
196 Zhang, 8:95.
197 Liu Daochun 刘道醇 Wudai minghua buyi (Supplement to Famous Paintings of the Five Dynasties) in SKQS.
198 Liu, SKQS.
sculpted by Yang Huizhi. They were cleverly made and appeared refined. Those who saw them grew to respect him more (竒巧精嚴, 見者增敬). 199

That good sculptors were also adept at painting is well demonstrated in all of the examples mentioned above, and a close inspection of cave 328 (fig. 5.76) at Dunhuang gives one a better idea of how painting and sculpture are closely associated as an integral whole. The consistency of the configuration and a uniformity of modeling and style are clear. We are even led to believe that in many cases it is one single artist creating both painting and sculpture since they echo one another so remarkably.

Both from literary evidence and observation of actual work, it is believed that painting and sculpture are interconnected and synchronized. When painting style changes, sculpture style changes as well.

To demonstrate this point we might look at some of the renowned painters, each representative of his own time: Gu Kaizhi of 4th century, Lu Tanwei of the 5th century and Zhang Sengyou of the 6th century and their painting style and look at the style of the contemporary sculpture.

Gu Kaizhi remains a legend in China even today revered as the father of Chinese painting. Gu, it is said, often left the eyes of his figures undotted for years to decide how to transmit the spirit. “Transmitting the spirit in sketching a portrait lies precisely in the eyes 傳神寫照, 正在阿睹中,” he wonderfully puts it when was asked. 200 He made the eyes of his figures speak. The eye contact between the figures in the Nushizhen tu 女史箴圖 (Admonitions to the Court Ladies) and the direction of their gazes bring them to life

200 Zhang, 5:68.
and make the viewer feel as one of them. In his *Lidai minghua ji*, Zhang Yanyuan commented on Gu’s brushstrokes as such:

(They are) firm and powerful connecting with one another without interruption. Each stroke follows each other in succession and goes beyond the mundane. (In this way he made) his style lofty and unique. His strokes are as swift as the wind and like a flash of lightening. His intent existed in his mind before it emerged from his brush. When the painting was completed, his intent remained in it. This is entirely because of the vitality of spirit. 201

Master Gu understood the subtle principles so well in painting the worthies of antiquity that even after looking at them all day one did not feel weary. 202

Gu Kaizhi created a revolutionary innovation when he depicted the Indian layman, Vimalakirti. It was revolutionary because it satisfied Chinese eyes and taste by making this Indian layman a Chinese scholar.

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201 Zhang, 2:22.
202 Zhang, 2:24.
Master Gu was the first to created the portrait of Vimalakirti. His face gives the impression of emaciation and delicacy suggesting his illness. He is shown resting again a small table having forgotten how to speak.\textsuperscript{203}

He created this delicate and emaciated style to fit the Chinese taste, and more importantly, he transformed the Indian layman into idealized Chinese scholar to satisfy Chinese eyes and taste, so much so that the Chinese elite hoped to find reflections in the image of Vimalakirti. This became the model in depicting Buddhist icons.

It is important to note that Gu was not alone in creating this new style. His contemporary, Dai Kui played an important role as well in this stylistic innovation.

Dai was perhaps more influential after all since he sculpted many Buddhist icons. “Dai’s style was delicate and his integrity was lofty. He was a recluse of Wu County [Jiangsu] 風清槩遠, 肥遯舊吳.”\textsuperscript{204} His famous \textit{Zhulin qixian yu Rong Qiqi} 竹林七賢與榮啓期 (The Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi), now a lost piece, was, according to Gu Kaizhi, a masterpiece beyond comparison with the work of any other painters 以比前諸竹林之畫, 莫能及者.\textsuperscript{205}

Gu also painted “Seven Sages” but it was not as good as Dai’s. Although unfortunately this work did not come down to us, we can still nevertheless trace the very

\textsuperscript{203} Zhang, 2:25.
\textsuperscript{204} Dao, 16:543.
\textsuperscript{205} Gu Kaizhi, \textit{Lun Hua} 論畫 in \textit{Lidai minghua ji}, 5:73.
root from the extant stamped-brick tomb murals of the *Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove and Rong Qiqi* which was excavated in 1960 at Xishanqiao 西善橋 near Nanjing and dated as a work of the 5th century. The authorship of this work may never be known, but it perhaps is not too unreasonable to infer that the designer(s) was (were) influenced by Dai Kui since it is so close to Dai Kui both in time and in place. Besides since Dai was the “leader of all craftsmen”, who wouldn’t want to copy his work? Xie He critiqued that “Dai excelled in depicting Wise Men and Sages. They have become the models for all craftsmen. He became a true leader 善圖聖賢, 百工所範, 實為領袖.” 206 The biography of Dai Kui in *Songshu* records that Buddha images began to emerge from the Han dynasty, but that the rendering of the forms was not yet skillful. Dai Kui uniquely excelled in this matter 自漢世始有佛像, 形制未工, 逵特善其事. 207 “Both Dais, father and son, excelled in painting, and believed in Buddhism. In sculpting and painting, they created new models in every move. 戴氏父子皆善丹青, 又崇釋氏, 範金賦采, 動有楷模.” 208 These new models were copied by painters and sculptors of all times.

After him, Cao Zhongda of the Northern Qi, Zhang Sengyou of the Liang dynasty and Wu Daozi and Zhou

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206 Xie He 謝赫 (southern Qi), *Guhua pin lu* 古畫品錄, 1 juan, in *Congshu jicheng chubian* 籍書集成初編, ed. Wang Yunwu 王云五, (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1936), 1:7.
207 Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513), *Songshu* 宋書, 93:53:2274.
208 Zhang, 5:75.
Fang of the Tang dynasty all showed their advantages and
disadvantages.\(^{209}\)

But the root was Dai Kui. The later styles, Cao style, Zhang style, Wu style, and
Zhou style initially copied Dai Kui’s model though they each later invented their new
mode.

Lu Tanwei was the third painter in the tradition of Dai Kui and Gu Kaizhi and was
also known for “transmitting the spirit” and portraying figures of elegance. He is usually
regarded as the key figure in the stylistic evolution of Chinese plastic arts: “Lu embraced
what went before him and gave birth to what succeeded him. He stands alone from
ancient times up till now. 包前孕後, 古今獨立.”\(^{210}\) Both Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei were
graded as the first man in the first class 第一品第一人 by Zhang Yanyuan:

陸公參靈酌妙, 動與神會, 筆迹勁利, 如鋤刀焉. 秀骨清像, 似
覺生動, 人象人風骨, 陸得其骨, 顧得其神.

Master Lu contemplated subtlety combining with his souls.
Each brush stroke joined together with spirit. His strokes
are powerful and sharp as if chiseled with a knife. The
appearances of his figures look elegant and refined. They
seem to be actually living. In capturing the whole person,
Lu gets the bones right, but Gu gets the spirit right.\(^{211}\)

\(^{209}\) Zhang, 5:75.  
\(^{210}\) Xie, 1:2.  
\(^{211}\) Zhang, 6:77.
It is this “elegant and refined appearance 秀骨清像” that was favored by Chinese connoisseurs and soon copied by Chinese artists in both painting and sculpture forms.

The new appearance in Buddhist sculpture can be best exemplified by the two Buddha images seated side by side in cave 125 at Binglingsi Cave Complex. The gazes of their eyes with gentle smiles on their elongated faces make these two icons seem alive. The serenity of their looks and baoyi bodai make them look indeed like a member of Chinese scholarly class. This is truly what is called the “elegant and refined appearance” created by Lu Tanwei.

The earliest datable example of Buddhist icons in this new trend was first observed in cave 11-14 (fig. 3.68) outside cave 11 at Yungang. The inscription below indicates that the figures were executed in the thirteenth year of the Taihe era 太和 (489 A.D.). Buddhist icons thereafter all appeared, with baoyi bodai, emaciated bodies and elongated faces, transformed into the Chinese scholar. Most of the images from the third-phase of Yungang demonstrate these features and the masculine, non-Chinese looking Buddha disappeared from Chinese soil from the late 5th century. The essential qualities of the elongated style are also exemplified by the images in the Guyang cave at Longmen.

This trend of slender and elegant style is not only illustrated in Buddhist sculpture, but is also observed in other non-religious art, and became of a dominant feature of the 5th century Chinese art. The earliest known example of non-Buddhist of this type are illustrated on the lacquer screen in the tomb of Sima Jinglong 司馬金龍 (fig. 5.77) and his wife, discovered in the village of Shijiazhai 石家寨, Datong, dated from the fourth year of Yanxing 延興 (474) to the eighth year of Taihe 太和 (484).
Another example is the slender figures on the brick-relief walls (fig. 5.78), excavated in 1958, in the tomb at the village of Xuezhuang, Dengxian Prefecture, Henan province and the terracotta figures there exhibit the same feature.

All of them are typical of the linear emphasis in Chinese painting.

A different trend gradually began to emerge in the late 5th century and would become dominant throughout the 6th century. Typical examples of this trend are found in the figures from the stone steles unearthed from the Wanfo Temple dated to 523 A.D. and 529 A.D. The figures are fleshy with plump shoulders and full-moon faces.²¹²

From these images we do not see Gu Kaizhi’s “transmitting the spirit” through eyes shown in Nushizhen tu, or the emaciated Vimalakirti; nor do we see Lu Tanwei’s clear-cut elegant figures reflected in the images in Cave 125 at the Bingling temple mentioned above. Rather we seem to observe Zhang Sengyou’s “fleshy” figures.

In rendering Buddhist images, Zhang Yanyuan tells us, Zhang was skilled in:

千變萬化, 詭狀殊形. 經諸目, 運諸掌,得之心, 應之手, 前

唯六法精備, 實亦萬類皆妙.

A thousand changes and myriad transformations, (creating) strange shapes and unique forms. He let them pass before his eyes and then transferred to his hand; receiving them with his mind, he echoed them with his hand [he masters them with his mind and hand]. In reality it is not only that

he reached perfection in the Six Laws (of Xie He); in truth he mastered all the wonders of myriad categories. 213

The trend toward simpler draperies and fleshier bodies was increasingly noticeable at the end of Northern Wei. It continued into the mid-sixth century under the Eastern Wei, Western Wei and Northern Qi dynasties and gradually underwent a process of softening. The bodies and faces of the figures became less narrow and the pleats of their robes lost their sharp, angular character. The decorative linearity which characterized the Northern Wei treatment of drapery lost its tension and rhythmic dynamism, becoming somewhat mechanical and repetitive, while the images’ countenances became milder.

The simplicity in the rendering of the images further demonstrates the influence of Zhang Senyou who created “spare style 疏体”. Zhang Sengyou “acquired his talent from Heaven, so that after only one or two strokes the image already existed in them 取資天造 筆纔一二 而像已應焉.” 214 Mi Fu 米芾 (1050-1107) of the Northern Song described his images as “short of face and heavily painted 面短而艷.” 215

Zhang’s style is also clearly reflected in the mural paintings in Xu Xianxiu 徐顯秀 tomb (fig. 5.79) excavated in 2000 in Shanxi Province. The figures on the mural appear rather fleshy and are simply sketched.

Another example is the cavalrymen in the murals (fig. 5.80) at the tomb of Prince Lou Rui 婁�� dated to the 1st year of Wuping 武平 (570 A.D) of the Northern Qi dynasty.

213 Zhang, 7:91.
214 Zhang, 7:91.
215 Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (1329-1410), Shuofu 說郛, 92:1226 in SKQS.
They were depicted with fuller, rounder faces and bodies. The murals are drawn with simple but forceful lines, showing great vitality.

One literary source, the Jiankang shilu records that Zhang adopted the three-dimensional method (凹凸法) from Indian and Western Regions painters who were invited to Jiankang by Emperor Liang Wudi. Zhang was also often invited to paint Buddhist icons in temples for Emperor Liang Wudi:

寺門遍畫凹凸花, 代稱張僧繇手跡. 其花乃天竺遺法, 朱及青緑所成. 逺望眼暈如凹凸, 就視即平. 世咸異之, 乃名凹凸寺.

Three-dimensional flowers [with bright and dark colors] were painted all over the temple gate. They are said to be Zhang Sengyou’s hand traces. These flowers were [painted] in Indian traditions with red, green and blue colors.

Viewed from a far distance they look three-dimensional making one dizzy; viewed from a near distance they look flat. People of the time all think they are very unique, therefore named it the Temple of Flower of Three-dimensions. ^216

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^216 Xu Song 許嵩, Jiankang shilu 建康實錄 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987), 17:481.
Zhang’s “three-dimension method” is not only reflected in the way of the “light-heavy” turns used in the calligraphy, it is also displayed in the skills of “bright-dark” way influenced by the West.

It is significant to note that Zhang Sengyou is not alone in contributing to the second transformation in the evolution of Chinese Buddhist sculpture. Cao Zhongda 曹仲達 of the Northern Qi dynasty played a fairly important role in this innovation.

According to *Lidai minghua ji*, Cao Zhongda of the Northern Qi was by origin a native of the realm of Cao 曹國 (in today’s Uzbekistan near Samarkand) and acknowledged his supremacy in painting icons of the Indian type. Guo Ruoxu 郭若虛 of the Northern Song made a vivid description of Cao Chongda’s and Wu Daozi’s styles in his *Tuhua jianwen zhi*:

吴之笔，其勢圜转而衣服飄舉，曹之筆，其體稠疊而衣服緊窄，故後輩稱之曰：‘吳帶當風，曹衣出水’.

Wu’s strokes in form were round and curving and his robes fluttered upward. Cao’s strokes were dense and layered. His robes were tight and clinging. Therefore later generations said Wu’s girdles flutter in the wind, while Cao’s garments had just come out of the water.\(^{217}\)

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Since none of Cao’s works survive today, we must rely on Guo Ruoxu’s record and some recently discovered (1996) Buddhist sculptures of Qingzhou in Shandong Province. The Buddhist icons found there are primarily from Northern Wei and Northern Qi dynasties. Luckily most of them are still painted. The robes (fig. 5.81) of the Northern Qi images all cling tightly to the bodies. They appear to be wet and just out of the water, exactly as what Guo Ruoxu had depicted of Cao Zhongda’s style.

The Qingzhou Buddhist icons as they continue to be studied they will provide invaluable and abundant evidence for scholars to investigate Zhang Sengyou’s and Cao Zhongda’s styles further and to study the cultural exchange between the south and the north.

By examining these renowned painters and their styles, I have attempted to demonstrate how painting was synchronized with sculpture during the 4th, 5th and 6th centuries. These stylistic innovations perfectly correspond to what Zhang Huaiguai summarized in the evolution of Chinese painting:

張得其肉, 陸得其骨, 顧得其神.

Zhang gets the flesh right, Lu gets the bones right, and Gu gets the spirit right.  

In other words, in the 4th century, Gu (Kaizhi) gets the spirit right; in the 5th century, Lu (Tanwei) gets the bones right; and in the 6th century, Zhang (Sengyou) gets

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218 Zhang, 6:77.
the flesh right. These three great painters had a proud impact on the evolution of Buddhist sculpture.

These three preoccupations of the three painters correspond perfectly with the Buddhist images produced in their times. In the first phase the images by Gu emphasize the spirit; the second-phase, by Lu, emphasize the bones and the third-phase by Zhang, emphasize the fleshiness.

In these periods Chinese sculpture experienced two successive stylistic changes. It first emerged from the simple, powerful and virile forms of Yungang to the elongated, refined and slender figures of the Yungang third-phase and Longmen. We find, in this process, that alien Buddhist icons were transformed into Chinese scholar clad in *baoyi* and *bodai*. Then in turn, this changed to the full-moon faced, fleshy figures of Qingzhou and Xiangtangshan.

V. Conclusion

The Longmen Caves can be broadly divided into three phases in their relation to the Yungang caves:

1) Continuation and Innovation. This very first phase includes Guyang, Binyang and Lianhua caves;
2) Emergence of Longmen Style and its Development. The caves are Huoshaodong, Cixiangdong, Weizidong, Putaidong and Huangpugongku;
3) Independent of Longmen Style. The masterpiece of the third-phase is Fengxiansi.

Through the evolution of these three stages, the Longmen Cave Complex became one of the greatest Buddhist monuments in China. Reading the iconography, one is led to believe that the early caves were a continuation of Yungang. However, it is significant to
emphasize that even in the earliest period, the Longmen artisans created their own innovations to fit their taste and please their eyes.

The earliest cave, Guyang cave, continued the iconographic traditions of early caves (five Tan Yao caves and caves 7 and 8) in Yungang. The seated Buddha still appears masculine with broad chest and one shoulder covered. The iconography resembles the Yungang early caves greatly. The images are not yet clad with baoyi bodai yet. In Yungang, the earliest baoyi bodai image appeared in Cave 11-14 dated to 498 during which time baoyi bodai icons had yet to emerge in Longmen. Most of the icons at that time still resembled those in Caves 7 and 8 in Yungang. The seated Buddha (fig. 5.8) dedicated by the monk Hui Cheng 慧成 for his father, the duke of Shiping 始平公 was also coincidentally dated to 498. However the iconography remains the same as that of Cave 7 and 8 in Yungang. The new baoyi bodai trend had yet to emerge. Another example was the seated Buddha (fig. 5.82) dedicated by the monk Fa Sheng 法生 for Emperor Xiaowen, Prince Beihai (Yuanxiang) 北海王元詳 and his mother. This image was even dated to the 4th year of Jingming 景明 (504) but it still presents a similar iconography to that of cave 7 and 8. The images in the Guyang cave followed that of Yungang with its innovation.

The Binyang cave and Lianhua cave are the continuation of the Yungang cave 6 with innovation. In these two caves, the Buddha is clad in the closed mode robe with both shoulders covered. The folds are flat and smooth.

From Weizi cave and Putai cave to Huangpugong cave, the “Longmen Style” began to emerge and develop. In these caves, the rendition of the images is refined and natural. The tension of the early images is no longer seen. In terms of imagery, the main
wall bears more images. It is not the three images of one seated Buddha with two attendant Bodhisattvas of Binyang central cave or with two disciples of Lianhua cave. Rather, we see five images on the main wall in Weizi cave and Putai cave and seven images of Huangpugong cave. In these caves, the niche fronts are ornate and are usually represented with the life story of the Buddha. The most popular motif is the first meditation of the Buddha. The debate between the Vimalakirti and Manjusri is often represented in the arch front as well.

In general, the visual representation of Longmen is more complicated than that of Yungang. The Longmen caves are more decorative and complicated.

The sinicization of Buddhist images was a long process. Buddhism and its art underwent assimilation from the time of its arrival on Chinese soil in order to survive. It was a process of absorb and innovate. Chinese art is the art of linear and Buddhist art became linear under Chinese influence. The garments of Buddhas are in a way a reflection of monastic life. It is not just the results of the political reform of sinicization or the southern influence. The cultural influence is mutual through interaction as we have literary sources tell us. The sinicization is not just reflected in the change of the garments of the icons. It is also reflected in the elegant and attenuated iconography. This transformation is closely related to the famous painters. As we have pointed out Zhang Huanguan perceptively suggested:

張得其肉，陸得其骨，顧得其神。
Zhang gets the flesh right, Lu gets the bones right, and Gu gets the spirit right.  

The iconographic transformations of painting and sculpture took place simultaneously in China. The great painters had a profound impact on the evolution of the sculpture from the 4th to the 6th centuries.

From Yungang to Longmen, from north to south, there is a clear map of evolution and yet they each have their own principles of creating their own aesthetic principles and each created a distinctive art form.

And as I have suggested, these art forms were not only result from the two usual explanations of art historians. I agree that the sinicization edict of emperor Xiaowen and the growth of southern influences after the court moved to Luoyang played a part. I have attempted to amplify these explanations by suggesting two additional factors: the role of Chinese Buddhist monastic material culture, and the synchronization of painting and sculpture. Together these four factors combined to create some of the great monuments of world art history.

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219 Zhang, 6:77.
CHAPTER SIX

THE UNEXPLORED CAVES IN SHANXI AND THE THIRD-PHASE CAVE OF YUNGANG

This chapter examines the architectural structure, the imagery, subject matter and style of the unexplored caves in Shanxi. It further compares these caves with the Yungang third-phase caves and the Longmen caves to seek an interrelationship between them and to trace the iconographic origins of these caves. The chapter also attempts to explore the issues of patronage and function. It ultimately aims to date these caves and to map out the iconographic evolution of the central plain caves. The study of these caves will shed new light on the iconography of central plain caves as a whole, and their interrelationship with the third-phase of Yungang caves.

I. Introduction

Between 2001-2006, as part of my project on Northern Wei Buddhist caves and complexes, I examined, measured and photographed some thirty caves which are largely unknown, and in most cases, unexplored by scholars. Some are almost inaccessible, some have since been looted, and in general, few have been related in previous scholarship to the complexes at Yungang and Longmen. I call them “unexplored caves,” and in this chapter, will attempt to relate them to the larger complexes at Yungang and Longmen.
Some of these caves have been subjected to scholarly scrutiny, but to the best of my knowledge, there has been no attempt to categorize them, date them, nor to relate them to the larger complexes at Yungang and Longmen.

It is my purpose in this chapter, to divide these caves into three construction phases, and by studying their architecture, their imagery, and their subject matter, to establish the time and circumstances of their creation.

It is also my purpose by showing the gradual process of sinicization in images and even in the function of the caves and their relation to nearby temples, to shed some light on how the Chinese came to see Buddhism not as a foreign religion, but as a means to their own salvation.

For this reason, I have divided the caves and cave complexes into three phases, though the lack of inscriptions and other textual evidence makes my dating tentative. And, of course, because I cannot discuss all the caves, I chose eighteen representative examples from a total of thirty-one, all of which are listed in an appendix to this chapter. I also provide a full case study of the Fushan Cave because nowhere else do we find such a rich variety of motifs in such a small cave. I base my assessment on architecture, iconography, subject matter, function and placement, as well as their relationship to Yungang and Longmen.

The three phases of construction I have identified are as follows:

a. 477-494
b. 520-534
c. 534-550
The first-phase caves were executed, at roughly the same time as the late third-phase of Yungang, during the early Taihe era under the reign of Emperor Xiaowen before the transfer of the capital to Luoyang. After the division of the Northern Wei (534) into Eastern Wei and Western Wei, the Buddhist center was moved to Ye, the capital of the Eastern Wei and later the Northern Qi. With the transfer of the capital, Shanxi became a less important Buddhist mecca and Buddhist caves were rarely constructed. It will become clear that the most active construction took place during the second-phase.

The Shanxi area (fig. 6.1) began to emerge as a political, economic and cultural center when the Emperor Daowu 道武帝 (Tuoba Gui 拓跋圭) moved his capital from Shengle 盛樂 (present-day Hohot in Inner Mongolia) to Pingcheng in the year 398. At the time, there existed rival Xianbei states, and not until 439, was North China re-united under the Tuoba. The new capital was located in the northeastern sector of Shanxi province, which throughout the Northern Wei, Eastern Wei and Northern Qi was the political and military power base of each dynasty. Throughout the period of the Northern dynasties (383-518), the city of Pingcheng continued to flourish, and came to form the apex of a triangle with the Buddhist centers and later capitals of Luoyang in the south and Ye in the east as vertices.

Since many of the Tuoba emperors and court officials were fervent Buddhists and patrons of Buddhism, and since the Taihang range mountains provided ideal sites for caves and monasteries, it is not surprising that this axis became perhaps the richest repository of Buddhist monuments in northern China.

According to Hui Jiao’s Biographies of eminent monks, numerous monks emigrated to Pingcheng, Luoyang and Ye during the Northern dynasties to instruct,
translate and practise. We are told, for instance, of the eminent monk Xuan Gao who moved from his hermitage at Maiji Cave Complex to Pingcheng to practice and instruct in Chan Buddhism, and Tan Yao, famous in own lifetime for the practice of Chan, moved there as well.\textsuperscript{220} Dao An 道安 (312-385) and Hui Yuan 慧遠 (334-416) came to Ye to establish monasteries on the Taihang Mountains.\textsuperscript{221}

Pingcheng was not only the capital of the Northern Wei, it was an active Buddhist center as well. Northern Wei Buddhism continued the Northern Liang (397-439) Buddhist tradition which emphasizes meditation practice and a ruler of the Northern Liang (397-439) from the clan of the Xiongnu tribe Juqu Mengxun 汲渠蒙遜 (r. 401-433), a devout Buddhist, often personally lectured on Chan Buddhism. Translating Buddhist doctrines and practicing meditation were very popular in the Northern Liang capital Guzang 姑臧 (now Wuwei 武威). When Northern Liang was pacified during the Taiyan 太延 (435-440) era, Buddhism and Buddhist monks were forced to migrate to the east and settled around the capital of Pingcheng. The center of Buddhist culture was thus moved to Pingcheng from Guzang. After that, Buddhism soon began to flourish in Pingcheng.

Among the migrants were monks like Shi Xian and especially, Tan Yao, who found favour at court and personally succeeded in convincing the emperor to hew five huge caves and carve five colossal images along the Wuzhou Mountains, just west of the capital.\textsuperscript{222} We can only surmise that many other eminent monks of the meditation sect were active in Shanxi during the Wei period, since our major source, the \textit{Gaoseng zhuan},

\textsuperscript{220} \textit{Gaoseng zhuan}, 11:409. \\
\textsuperscript{221} \textit{Gaoseng zhuan}, 6:211. \\
\textsuperscript{222} \textit{Weishu}, 114:3037.
was written by a southerner from today’s Zhejiang province who was less familiar with eminent northern monks than those from the south. At the time he penned his work, probably in the 550’s, Pingcheng was a city in ruins, its glory days long past. It is unlikely that he had ever seen or heard of the splendor of the Buddhist monuments which surrounded Pingcheng in its heyday, nor of the accomplished Buddhist scholars and translators assembled by Tan Yao at Yungang. *Weishu* told us that Tan Yao, together with the Indian Śrāmanasa Changna Yeshe 常那邪捨 and others translated fourteen new scriptures.²²³

Pingcheng had ceased to be the Wei capital in 493, when emperor Xiaowen moved it to Luoyang, and along with the Court, many of the leading Buddhist figures migrated to the new capital, rapidly turning it into the new center of Buddhist culture. We are told in Dao Xuan’s *Xu gaoseng zhuang*, that Dao Bian 道辯, Fo Tuo 佛陀, Seng Da 僧達, and Seng Shi 僧寶, among others moved to the new capital at this time.²²⁴ All of these men were meditation Buddhists, and they rapidly set about establishing new foundations in Luoyang. Dao Xuan uses the conventional number of 10,000 (“myriad”) Buddhist monks in the city at this time, among them, about 3,000 “foreign monks.”

By the end of the Northern Wei in 534, we are told that Ye, capital of the new Eastern Wei dynasty, had already become an important Buddhist center, and Fo Tucheng 佛圖澄 (?-348) and Seng Chou 僧稠 (480-560) were the two most renowned promoters of Buddhism there. Ye therefore completed the triangular formation inside of which most of the caves and monasteries were scattered.

²²³ *Weishu*, 114:3037.
²²⁴ *Xu gaoseng zhuang*, T50:2060-552.
It is within this triangle shaped Buddhist centers that Buddhism in southeast of Shanxi therefore inevitably flourished quickly, and many Buddhist caves were commissioned for merit accumulation, good fortune and for Chan meditation.

Some areas of Shanxi are richer than others in Buddhist monuments. Gaoping County 高平 itself in this area has many unexplored Buddhist caves and monasteries (Yangtoushancave complex 羊頭山, Shitanghui cave complex 石堂會, Gaomiaoshan cave 高廟山 and Fushan cave 釜山, and Dinglin monastery 定林 and Kaihua monastery 開化 etc.). Besides that, Changzhi 長治 County, Lingchuan 陵川 County and many other counties are also filled with Buddhist caves and monasteries.

Some of these unexplored caves are too valuable to be overlooked and they deserve special academic attention. Therefore they will be examined first individually from the perspectives of architecture, subject matter, the composition and style.

II. Highlights of the Shanxi Caves—Reading the Imagery

225 The Shitanghui Cave Complex has 6 caves in total; three dated to the Northern Wei and the other three to the 32nd year of Wanli 萬曆 reign of the Ming Dynasty (1604). There are no images in these three caves. I discussed this cave complex in detail in another article, see Li Yuqun and Lidu Yi, “Shanxi Gaoping Shitanghui shiku 山西高平石堂會石窟” (Shitanghui Cave Complex in Gaoping Shanxi Province), Wenwu, 2009. 5. 65-87. For Gaomiaoshan cave and Yangoushan cave, see Li Yuqun 李裕群, “Shanxi Gaoping Gaomiao shan shiku de diaocha yu yanjiu 山西高平高廟山石窟的調查與研究” (Examination of Gaomiaoshan Cave in Gaoping Shanxi Province), Kaogu, 1999, 1, 60-73; and “Shanxi Gaoping Yangoushan shiku diaocha baogao 山西高平羊頭山石窟調查報告” (Report on Yangtoushan Cave Complex in Gaoping Shanxi Province), Kaogu xuebao, 2000, 1, 63-88.

226 I have examined more than 30 unexplored caves in Shanxi. Due to limited space, in this study, I had to only include relatively more important caves: Lianghoudian Cave 良侯店 in Wuxiang County 武鄉; Zihongzhen Cave 子洪鎮 in Qixian 祁縣; Yuanzishan Cave 圓子山 and Xiangtangsi Cave 響堂寺 in Yushe 榆社; Shifosi Cave 石佛寺 in Zuoquan 北山; Beishanqianfo Cave 北山千佛, Wangqing Cave 王慶 and Jiaodingshan Cave 交頂山 in Changzhi 長治; Yunlongshan Cave 云龍山 in Heshun 和順; Fushan 釜山, Shitanghui 石堂會, Yangtoushan 羊頭山, Dinglinsi 定林寺, Gaomiaoshan 高廟山 in Gaoping 高平; Baoyingsi Cave 寶應寺 in Lingchuan 陵川; Shimasi Cave 石馬寺 in Xiyang 昔陽 and Kaihesi Cave 開河寺 in Pingding 平定. The rest of the caves will be discussed in detail in the forthcoming book entitled “Unexplored Caves in Shanxi.”
Although the dating of the caves can be accurate only to a factor plus and minus ten years, in the following section I have placed them in chronological order to the best of my ability.

**Phase One**

(1) **Lianghoudian Cave** 良侯店

The cave is located 1 kilometre south of Lianghou village in the Wuxiang County 武鄉. The cave, facing west, is rectangular in plan with three niches on three walls (*sanbi sankan*) and a truncated pyramid-shaped (*fudou fudou* 覆斗) ceiling. The three large niches are all square. Inside each niche is two seated Buddhas (fig. 6.2) seated side by side. It is a rare occurrence. The Bodhisattvas (fig. 6.3) are outside the niches and placed at the joint corners where the walls meet. Therefore there are only two Bodhisattvas (fig. 6.4) attending six Buddhas on three walls. There is no altar in front of each wall as is usual. The Buddha images (fig. 6.5) are clad in both *tongjian* and *tanyou* style robes. The *tongjian* robe is rendered with parallel U-shaped folds in the front and the *tanyou* robe shows archaic cordlike (fig. 6.6) folds which echo those in the early Yungang images. The Bodhisattvas appear heavy with thick under robe covering the entire lower body. The sash of the Bodhisattvas presents a strong sense of fluttering like a ribbon.

(2) **Yangtoushan Cave 5a** 羊頭山石窟

Yangtoushan cave complex consists of nine caves.\(^{228}\)

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\(^{227}\) *Fudou* ceiling became very popular in the late Northern Wei and it became one of the most popular ceiling styles. It was very common in the Maijishan Cave Complex.

\(^{228}\) Please note that my numbering of the Yangtoushan caves differs from that of Zhang Qingjie and Li Yuqun, see “Shanxi Gaoping Yangoushan shiku diaocha baogao,” *Kaogu xuebao*, 2000, 1, 63-88. He numbered the caves from the top of the mountain, whereas I started my examination from the bottom of the mountain. Since the caves were executed into scattered outcrops and were commissioned by different donors at different times, these caves can be divided into three phases. The details will be discussed later in this chapter, “Dating the Shanxi Caves.”
They are hewn into scattered outcrops on Yangtou Mountain (fig. 6.7), 23 kilometres north of Gaoping city. Since some of the outcrops are small, so are the caves. These caves will be examined according to the chronological sequence which I will propose.

The plan of the cave is rectangular with three niches on three walls and a pyramid (sijiao zanjian 四角攢尖) ceiling. It’s a small and simple cave at the end of the outcrop (fig. 6.8), the long side of which bears Caves 5 and 5b.

The main and the sidewalls all bear a pointed niche inside of which a seated Buddha and two Bodhisattvas are represented. The seated Buddha on the main wall was looted. The Buddha on the left wall is clothed in tongjian robe with parallel V folds in the front (fig. 6.9). The drapery forms two parallel arcs, reminiscent of those in the third-phase of Yungang. The arms of the Buddha are very long, which is also a symbol of early icons, such as those in Lianghoudian cave.

It is very likely that this cave was executed earlier than any other caves in the Yangtoushan cave complex judging from the iconographic style.

The Dvarapalas (fig. 6.10), outside of the cave stand straight unlike the other ones which stand with exaggerated postures.

(3) Yangtoushan Cave 5b

Cave 5b is between cave 5 and cave 5a. It is a large rectangular niche (fig. 6.11) inside of which Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side flanked by two Bodhisattvas. The arms of the Buddha are disproportionally long and the waist is very

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229 The left and right side refers to the main Buddha’s left and right, not the viewer’s left and right.
narrow. Both Buddhas are wearing tanyou robes but interestingly enough there is no fold rendered, only the doubled rim. It seems that the cave was not finished.

(4) Zihongzhen Cave Complex 子洪鎮

Zihongzhen cave complex is located in the southeast part of Qi County 祁縣 by the Changyuan River 昌源河. There were 8 caves, all facing east, currently only three survived, the rest are eroded. To the west of the cave complex, there used to be a monastery, but only a Lama pagoda is extant. The monastery became ruins. Japanese scholar Ryōshū Michihata 道端良秀 visited the caves in 1941 and suggested that cave 1 was executed during the Tianbao 天保 era of the Northern Qi (550-559). Dating of the Shanxi caves will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Cave 1

The cave is square in plan with slightly domed ceiling. The walls lean inwards towards the ceiling forming a shallow dome. It is a typical sanbi sankan cave. The main wall (fig. 6.12) bears a pointed niche inside of which is a seated Buddha with legs crossed flanked by two attendant Bodhisattvas. The right wall has a trabeated niche (fig. 6.13) inside of it is a seated Bodhisattva with legs pendant flanked by two Bodhisattvas. The left wall also contains a trabeated niche (fig. 4. 39). Inside of it is a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed and two attendant Bodhisattvas. The upper part of the wall shows that the wall used to be filled with Thousand Buddhas.

Cave 2

230 Ryōshū Michihata 道端良秀, Chūgoku no sekibutsu to sekkyō 中国の石仏と石経 (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1972), 41-47.
The plan of this cave is square with three niches, all pointed niches, on three walls and a flat ceiling. The niches house one seated Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas.

Phase Two

(5) Xiangtangsi Cave Complex 響堂寺

The cave complex is located on Miaoling Mountain in the southwest of Yushe County. There are two caves and a monastery, the latter unfortunately has become a ruin. Cave 2 does not contain any image. Cave 1 is square in plan with a pyramid (sijiao zanjian 四角攢尖) ceiling (fig. 6.14). There are two niches surrounded by small thousand Buddha niches in the cave (sanbi liangkan). The main wall contains no niche. The cave bears one seated Buddha on the main wall and two standing Buddhas (fig. 6.15) on the left and right walls. Above the standing Buddha, a small seated Buddha (fig. 6.16) is represented. The Buddha is clad in the archaic tongjian robe. The other Buddhas in this cave are all wearing baoyi bodai robe.

(6) Yuanzishan Cave 圓子山

The cave is situated northwest of Yushe County 榆社 on a hill by the Wuyuan River 武源. The plan of the cave is square with a fudou ceiling. There is no niche but a low altar on which all images are placed in front of each wall. The main wall contains one seated Buddha flanked by two disciples; the left wall bears a standing Buddha and two Bodhisattvas, and the right wall contains one seated Buddha with legs pendant flanked by two Bodhisattvas.

The Buddha images in this cave appear elegant and graceful with baoyi bodai and smooth carving. The Bodhisattvas appear dignified and sumptuous. The hair ribbon sticks out then falls down to the shoulder, a symbolic visual representation of those in Longmen.
The inscriptions in the cave indicate the names and official titles of the donors, such as the governor of Xiang Commandery (郷郡太守), the governor of Xinxing (新興太守), a Buddhist biksus Hui Xiang (法主比丘惠相) and an official of the fief Sun Bo (邑政孫伯), etc. These inscriptions, more importantly, provide clues in dating the cave, which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

(7) Shitanghui Cave Complex 石堂會石窟

Shitanghui cave complex is located in Shitanghui village, 15 kilometres east of Gaoping city. Currently there are 6 caves situated in two sections, east and west, 60 metres apart. There are three Northern Wei caves (Caves 1, 2 and 3) in the western section and three Ming caves (4, 5 and 6) in the eastern section, all facing south. The Ming caves were executed in the 32nd year of the Wanli era of the Ming Dynasty (1604).

Cave 1

The cave consists of an anteroom and a main chamber (fig. 6.17). The anteroom was originally modelled after Chinese wooden architecture. The main chamber is rectangular in plan with three pointed niches on three walls (sanbi sankan) and a truncated pyramid-shaped (fudou fudou 覆斗) ceiling. The whole cave tapers towards the ceiling. The altar in front of each wall is rather low. The iconographic arrangements and visual representation on each wall echo each other. The center of the wall is a pointed niche, inside of which is a seated Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas. Around the niche are small Thousand Buddha niches filling the space. The front wall (fig. 6.18) is

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231 For detailed inscriptions in this cave, see Li Yuqun, “Shanxi Yushe shikusi diaocha 山西榆社石窟調査” (Investigation of Yushe Caves in Shanxi), Wenwu, 1997, 2, 69-79. I visited the Yushe caves in 2003 but the images had been unfortunately stolen leaving only fresh traces of chiseling.

232 From the traces of the cave ruins, it is very likely that there used to be more caves. Only three early caves survived.
completely occupied by the inscriptions of the donors. So is the bottom of the other walls. Some of the inscriptions have the official titles of the donors, such as the *daduweina*²³³大都唯那 (chief Buddhist Deacon) in the west wall and the *gongcao* 功曹 (local official) in the front wall. The *gongcao* Wei Yaoluō 魏遥罗 inscription at the bottom of the right side of the front wall is important since Wei Yaoluō also commissioned the Yangtoushan cave 3 which will be examined later in this chapter. The inscription *dabaguanzhai* 大八關齋 (Eight Abstinences) on the right pillar of the main wall indicates that the donors practice the Eight Abstinences (eight rules that the Buddha established for laity) which were first popular in south China.

The seated Buddha (figs. 6.19 and 6.20) on the main and left walls is clad in *baoyi bodai* robes with two layers of inner robes, the neckline of which is low and revealed. The seated Buddha on the right wall wears *tongjian* robe with paralleled arcs in the center (fig. 6.21). The disciples in this cave are in bas-relief, and the disciple on south side is unusual with spiral-shaped coil (figs. 6.22 and 6.23).

The entrance archway (fig. 6.24) bears floral patterns as is usual in the third-phase of Yungang and other caves in Shanxi. There are two Dvarapalas outside the cave. Beside the west Dvarapala, there is an inscription: “宋景祐五年 (1038) 二月/三日晋州石匠人□贵 (The stone artisan □ Gui, 1038-03-02).” This perhaps was written by a tourist, not the donor as it is impossible that the cave was executed during the Song dynasty judging from the style of the image and the architectural structure of the cave.

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²³³Duweina (weena) is a Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit term *karmadāna* meaning an assigner of duties, commonly the second most important senior member of a Buddhist monastery.
Cave 2

The plan of the cave is square with sanbi sankan and a fudou ceiling. The cave tapers towards the ceiling as in cave 1. The altar in front of four walls is low. Each wall except the front wall bears a pointed niche with one seated Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. There are no thousand Buddha niches around the main niche as seen in Cave 1. The front wall is narrow without any carving or inscription.

Each seated Buddha (fig. 6.25) on the main wall and left wall (fig. 6.26) is wearing baoyi bodai robe which falls down low over the pedestal, the same rendition as in Cave 1. The seated Buddha (fig. 6.27) on the east wall is clad in a tongjian robe as observed in Cave 1.

(8) Yangtoushan Cave 3a

The plan of the cave is rectangular with sanbi sankan and a sijiao zanjian ceiling. It is very small and located at the end of the outcrop (fig. 6.28), the south side of which is where cave 3 is hewn. The iconographic arrangements on each wall echo one another: one seated Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas (fig. 6.29) housed in a pointed niche, around which are small Thousand Buddha niches. The front wall is very narrow with two vertical niches one above the other.

The Buddha images (fig. 6.30) are all clad in baoyi baodai. The neckline is low so that the inner robe is revealed. The rim of the robe is thick. The pedestal on the main wall is high and the front of it is a Buddha head with radiate halo. This is a rare occurrence. The drapery of the Buddha (fig. 6.31) on the sidewalls falls over the pedestal naturally. It is reminiscent of that of cave 19-2 dated to 4th year of Yanchang (515) in Yungang. The Bodhisattvas appear slender and elegant. The ceiling is plain without any decoration.
(9) Yangtoushan Cave 4

The cave is located near the bottom of the Yangtou Mountain (fig. 6.32) on an individual outcrop (fig. 6.33). This is a typical sanbi sankan cave with a sijiao zanjian ceiling. The niches are large and wide with slender images inside. The cave plan is rectangular.

The iconographic arrangements on the three walls appear the same: one large pointed niche in the center surrounded by small thousand Buddha niches. Inside the large pointed niche are a seated Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. The front wall is filled with small thousand Buddha niches.

The main Buddha (fig. 6.34) is clad in baoyi bodai. The neckline is pulled down low so the inner robe held in place by a bowknot is exposed. The folds are flat and smooth. The outer robe of the left Buddha is unique. It covers both shoulders and the neckline is stretched down by the right hand. The left Buddha (fig. 6.35) is also clad in baoyi bodai as the main Buddha. However, because both hands of the Buddha are put together one on top of the other, the neckline of the robe is pulled down low as if the Buddha were wearing a bandage. The right Buddha (fig. 6.36) wears a tongjian robe and both hands are put together as observed in Shitanghui cave 1 and cave 2.

There are two Dvarapalas outside the cave. The right side Dvarapala (fig. 6.37), with one foot standing on the lion and the other on a small round pedestal, looks towards the entrance of the cave and appears ferocious, whereas the left one (fig. 6.38), looking forward, appears calm and friendly with a Bodhisattva’s robe. The outside surface of the cave is filled with small thousand Buddha niches around the Dvarapalas and the entrance arch front which is decorated with floral patterns (fig. 6.39).
The Dvarapalas outside Yangtoushan caves are unique visual representations. Many of them are represented in exaggerated manners and postures which are not seen anywhere else.

(10) Shifosi Cave Complex 石佛寺

The cave complex is located in the west part of Zuoquan County 左權 hiding in the beautiful forest (fig. 6.40). There are two caves (fig. 6.41), both are relatively well preserved. Judging from the square holes on the cliff, there were wooden structures originally. According to local a Buddhist devotee, there was a large monastery but unfortunately it was destroyed during the Sino-Japanese War. Now a new monastery near the caves was built.

Cave 1

The cave is square in plan with three niches on three walls and a fudou ceiling. The walls lean inward toward the ceiling which is occupied by a lotus and flying celestials. There is a low altar in front of the walls.

The main wall bears a seated Buddha (fig. 6.42) in a pointed niche flanked by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas, which are represented outside the niche. The left disciple appears old with bones and sinews (fig. 6.43); the right disciple (fig. 6.44) is young with gentle smile. It is very likely that they represent the Mahakasyapa and Ananda, the two closest disciples of the Buddha. The main Buddha therefore is no doubt the Sakyamuni Buddha. Above the niche, there are two small square curtained niches inside of which Vimalakirti (fig. 6.45) with his symbolic zhuwei, on the left, and the Manjusri, on the right, are represented.
The left wall is a pensive Bodhisattva (fig. 6.46) attended by two standing Bodhisattvas. The right wall (fig. 6.47) bears a seated Buddha with legs pendant and two standing Bodhisattvas. The iconographic composition (a seated Buddha, a pensive Bodhisattva and a seated Buddha with legs pendant) is a rare occurrence.

Around the niches on three walls are small thousand Buddha niches filling the space. On each side of the front wall is a shallow rectangular frame, inside of which a donor (figs. 6.48 and 6.49) with spiral-shaped coil is represented in bas-relief. The donor with spiral-shaped coil is also seen in Shitanghui cave 1.

The workmanship in this cave is fine and meticulous. The images appear elegant and graceful. The flying celestials present a fluttering sense of movement. The entrance of the cave is arch-pointed with floral patterns on it.

Cave 2

The cave is trapezoid in floor plan with three niches on three walls and an inverted V (renzipi 人字披) ceiling. There is a low altar in front of the main and sidewalls forming an inverted “U” shape.

The main wall (fig. 6.50) bears a seated Buddha flanked by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas. The disciple and Bodhisattva to the right of the Buddha are separated with a pillar; whereas the disciple and the Bodhisattva on the left are represented in the same panel. The imbalanced distribution of the iconography leads one to speculate that perhaps the images were not carved at the same time.

The left wall (fig. 6.51) bears a seated Bodhisattva with one leg pendant and the other on top of it, similar to the pensive Bodhisattva but the hand is not placed
underneath the chin. Instead it is raised to the chest. The left hand is placed on the right leg.

The right wall (fig. 6.52) contains a seated Buddha with legs pendant and two standing Bodhisattvas. The front of the Buddha’s robe has parallel arcs.

The small thousand Buddha niches are represented above the three niches on three walls to fill in the space. The front wall has two Heavenly Kings (figs. 6.53 and 6.54), which are later, perhaps Ming works.

It is highly likely, judging from the style of the iconography, that this cave was unfinished and some of the images were later added such as the Heavenly Kings or even the drapery of the Buddha images.

(11) Yunlongshan Cave Complex 云龍山

Yunlongshan Caves are located on Yunlong Mountain in Heshun County 和順. There are two caves, facing south, 50 meters apart and a monastery in this complex. The images in cave 2 were badly eroded and it is difficult to identify the iconography, it is therefore not included in this study.

Cave 1

A well reserved cave with fine workmanship. The plan of the cave is rectangular with three roofed niches on three walls and a fudou ceiling. It is rare to see three roofed niches within the same cave. This perhaps is the only case in China. There is a low altar in front of each wall as is usual in many other caves.

Each wall contains five images (fig. 6.55): one Buddha (Bodhisattva on the left wall) flanked by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas. The latter are represented outside the niche. The head of the Buddha on the main is evidently a replacement. The right wall
Budhha (fig. 6.56) appears elegant and serene. The iconographic composition in this cave is two seated Buddhas with legs crossed and one Bodhisattva with legs pendant (fig. 6.57), which is a rare occurrence. The seated Bodhisattva with legs pendant appeared rather late. It is not seen in Yungang or Longmen, but Zihongzhen cave 1 contains one on the right wall. The pillars for the niche on the north wall are supported by elephants, whereas the west wall was bolstered by two dwarfs (fig. 6.58) and the east wall by two lions.

The iconographic arrangements in this cave are well-balanced and planned. This indicates that the cave was completed as it was initially designed.

The Buddha images in this cave appear slender and elegant, typical of late Northern Wei iconography. The neckline of the robe is pulled down low so that the inner robe, which is held in place by a bowknot, is revealed. The bowknot is reminiscent of those in Longmen. The drapery falls down naturally over the pedestal. The Bodhisattvas also appear graceful and supple. Their hair ribbon sticks out then falls down along the ears to the shoulders, a symbolic visual representation of the Bodhisattvas in Longmen.

There are two Dvarapalas (fig. 6.59) outside of the cave. The left one is damaged and the right one appears ferocious.

(12) Wang Qing Cave Complex 王慶石窟

Wangqing Caves are situated 2 kilometres southeast of Wangqing Village in Changzhi County. There are 3 caves in total, but they are ruined by local devotees when they re-painted the images and added new icons. Judging from the style of images, I believe that only Cave 1 is from the early period (Northern Wei), the other two caves were highly likely to have been executed during the Tang Dynasty or even later. Thus
they are not included in this study. The inclusion of Cave 1 in this study is intended to provide an example of the current religious situation in some rural areas in China.

**Cave 1**

The plan of the cave is square with three niches on three walls and a *sijiao zanjian* ceiling. The cave (fig. 6.60), facing south, has an anteroom and a main chamber. The anteroom used to be a wooden structure as in Shitanghui cave 1. The entrance is arch-pointed with floral patterns as is usual. There are two Dvarapalas on each side of the entrance.

Above the entrance, there is a small niche inside of which a seated Buddha is represented. To the left of the Buddha is a prostrated devotee facing the Buddha worshiping (fig. 6.61). The inscription between them tells us that the donor’s name is Guo Daolin 郭道林 who was the governor of Shangdang (上党太守). To the right of the Buddha, there is another inscription indicating that the donor was a certain monk Dao Jin 道进. The south wall of the anteroom is filled with the names and titles of the donors such as *duweina* 都唯那 (chief Buddhist Deacon), *weina* 唯那 (Buddhist Deacon). This suggests clearly that the local *yishe* 邑社 (Buddhist community) was involved in commissioning the cave. The drapery of the seated figure (fig. 6.62) on the left wall indicates that this is a typical late Northern Wei cave. Above the entrance, the *Parinirvana* episode (fig. 6.63) is illustrated.

**Shitanghui Cave 3**

The cave is rectangular in shape with three niches on three walls and the *fudou* ceiling. The whole cave tapers towards the ceiling (fig. 6.64). The main wall (fig. 6.65) and west wall (fig. 6.66) each bear a pointed niche inside of which is a seated Buddha.
and two attendant Bodhisattvas. The east wall (fig. 6.67) has a standing Buddha with two Bodhisattvas. The iconographic composition is the same as the Fushan cave.

The front wall is filled with inscriptions, in the center of which above the entrance lintel are two biksus with an incense burner in bas-relief. One important inscription (fig. 6.68) indicates that one of the donors is Guo Gao 郭高, rectifier (Zhongzheng) of the Jianxing 建興 Commandery. This inscription provides a useful clue in dating of the cave which will be discussed later in detail. One of the inscriptions (fig. 6.69) on the left side of the front wall indicates that one of the donors is Yang Faying 楊法英, wife of Guo Yaoluo who was one of the donors for Cave 1.

The seated Buddha in the main wall is clad in baoyi bodai robe. The neckline is pulled low so the inner robe is revealed. It should be mentioned that the inner robe is not covering the left shoulder as is usual in other images. Instead, it is held around the waist by a belt. The drapery falls down low and forms voluminous folds which are reminiscent of those in Maijishan caves.

The Buddha images in this cave present different visual representations from other icons of Shanxi. They appear fleshy and bulky and provide a sense of heaviness. The workmanship is slack.

(14) Yangtoushan Cave 3

The cave (fig. 6.70) is located on an individual outcrop, the end of which is cave 3a. The floor plan is rectangular with a sijiao zanjian ceiling. It is a typical sanbi sankan

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234 The inscription reads: “建興郡中正郭高, Guo Gao, the rectifier of the Jianxing Commandery.” Jianxing, used to be Jianxing Commandery. During the Yongan Era (528-530), it was changed to a region and called Jianzhou, see Weishu, 106: 2481. Mention of the inscription was neglected in my article “Shanxi Gaoping Shitanghui shiku,” Wenwu, 2009, 5. 65-87.
cave. There is a low altar in front of the walls as in many other caves. The walls lean inward towards the ceiling, which is plain without any decoration.

The main wall (fig. 6.71) is primarily occupied by a large pointed niche housing one seated Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. Around the large niche, small thousand Buddha niches are rendered. The Buddha is clothed in *baoyi bodai* robe. The drapery falls low with voluminous folds. The images on this wall appear fleshy and bulky. The inscriptions at the bottom of the wall indicate the names of the donors.

The left wall originally bore a seated Buddha with two Bodhisattvas (fig. 6.72) as well. Unfortunately the Buddha image was looted. The rest of the wall is filled with small Thousand Buddha niches. At the bottom, there is a small Tang niche.

The right wall (fig. 6.73) also bears a large pointed niche, inside of which a seated Buddha and two Bodhisattvas are represented. The upper level of the wall is filled with small thousand Buddha niches. The Buddha wears *tongjian* robe with parallel U shaped folds in the centre. The collar of the inner robe is thick. The drapery falls over the pedestal naturally. The Bodhisattvas appear slender with fluttering scarves and long skirts, but the rendition of the celestial robe is different. The celestial robe of the right Bodhisattva clings to the body closely and the posture of the Bodhisattva, which is reminiscent of the Tang Bodhisattva. It is likely that this icon was added to the cave later on during the Tang. The bottom of the wall bears an inscription indicating the name of the donor, Zhang Funu 张福女, wife of Li Xin 李欣.

The front wall is filled with small thousand Buddha niches (fig. 6.74) and inscription. Outside the cave on either side of the entrance, there is a Buddha, instead of a Dvarapala as seen in other caves. The Buddhas appear elegant and slender. The arch front
of the entrance is decorated with floral patterns. The end of the arch front is a dragon looking inward. The upper level of the front wall is filled with small thousand Buddha niches, and the lower level is occupied by the names of the donors.

(15) Yangtoushan Cave 5

Caves 5, 5a and 5b were hewn along a large outcrop (fig. 6.11). Cave 5a and cave 5b are earlier caves and were discussed before. Cave 5a is at the end of the outcrop facing east, whereas cave 5 and 5b are facing south.

Cave 5

The plan of cave 5 is rectangular with a sijiao zanjian ceiling and three pointed niches on three walls. The niches and nimbuses are large and wide without any decoration. The niche is wide enough to occupy the entire wall.

The iconography on the main wall (fig. 6.75) and sidewalls (fig. 6.76) echo one another: a seated Buddha flanked by two attendant Bodhisattvas. The seated Buddha on the right wall is a refined work (fig. 6.77).

The Buddha images are all clad in baoyi bodai. They appear slightly fleshy and bulky compared with other images of Shanxi caves. The voluminous drapery of the robes drapes over the pedestal fishtail shape. The folds seem very thick. So is the neckline which turns outward and is pulled down low forming a U shape. The inner robe is held in place by a bowknot. The iconography of this cave is reminiscent of cave 3 and Shitanghui cave 3.

On either side of the front wall, there used to be a standing Buddha which was looted. Beneath the standing Buddha, there are small thousand Buddha niches and bas-
relieved donors. Above the entrance, there is a small pointed niche inside of which is a seated Buddha.

Outside of the cave, there are two Dvarapalas (fig. 6.78) standing on lions with fluttering ribbons over their heads. The lions look toward the entrance. The arch front of the entrance has well-preserved floral decorations and the arch ends with a bird and a phoenix.

Above the entrance, there are small Tang niches, added later on to the wall.

The inscription below the right Bodhisattva on the main wall indicates that one of the donors is Yang Faying, wife of Guo Yaoluo. She also commissioned Shitanghui cave 3. The styles of the imagery resemble each other in these two caves.

(16) Jiaodingshan Cave 交頂山

The cave is located in Changzhi County 長治. The plan of the cave is square with four niches on three walls with a fudouding ceiling, which is plain without any decoration. The cave faces west and leans forward slightly (fig. 6.79). There is a low altar in front of the walls as is usual.

The main wall (fig. 6.80) and right wall (fig. 6.81) each bear a pointed niche inside of which is a seated Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. The Buddha appears fleshy and bulky, reminiscent of those in Yangtoushan Cave 5 and in Shitanghui Cave 3. The neckline of the robe is pulled down low forming a U shape revealing the inner robe which is held in place by a bowknot. The rendition is very similar to that in Shitanghui Cave 3. It is also reminiscent of those in Maijishan caves.
One of the inscription on the right wall below the Bodhisattva shows that the donor’s name is Li Mai 李賣 whose name also appeared in the Wangqing Cave. He apparently sponsored both caves.

The left wall (fig. 6.82) bears two niches connected to each other. This is a rare occurrence. One niche houses a seated Buddha and the other bears a standing Buddha.

(17) Baoyingsi Cave Complex 寶應寺

The Baoying cave complex is located 20 kilometres northwest of Lingchuan County 陵川. It includes four caves and one monastery (fig. 6.83). The date of the original monastery is unknown but the current surviving hall is a Ming structure.

Cave 1

The cave is on a rock which is tilted 45 degree from the mountain (fig. 6.84). There are five images in this cave, three on the main wall (fig. 6.85), and one on each sidewall (fig. 6.86). The main wall bears one seated Buddha and two disciples. Each sidewall (fig. 6.87) bears a Bodhisattva, which appear heavy with thick and long under cloth. The rendition of the sanyi is unique as the pleats are rendered with incised lines. The Buddha is clad in covered mode and the neckline of the robe, turning outward, is in “U” shaped and is tied with a bowknot. The drapery falls down over the pedestal. The celestial robe of the Bodhisattva crosses at the abdomen through a large ring. The iconography presents a unique archaic visual representation with incised lines.

Cave 3

The plan of the cave is square with a fudou ceiling. There is no niche on each wall unlike most of the Shanxi caves but a low altar as is usual.
The iconographic arrangements on three walls echo one another. Each wall (fig. 6.88) bears a seated Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattvas on the left wall (fig. 6.89) were damaged. The seated Buddha (fig. 6.90) on the right wall is elongated.

The workmanship is crude and the rendition is uneven and rough. The images are represented disproportionally with small head and long torso and arms. The drapery is long and voluminous falling over the pedestal forming a 八 shape. The neckline of the robe is pulled down low in a “U” shape exposing the inner robe which is held in place by a bowknot. The collar, which is thick, is upturning outward.

**Cave 4**

It is a rectangular cave with four niches on three walls and a cone ceiling. The workmanship in this cave is crude and the visual representation is rather unique. The main wall (fig. 6.91) has two niches inside of each a seated Buddha is represented. The left wall (fig. 6.92) bears a pointed niche whereas the right wall (fig. 6.93) has a trabeated niche inside of which a seated Bodhisattva, attended by two Bodhisattvas, is represented. The Bodhisattva is rather ornate with necklaces and jewels. The Bodhisattva’s feet are held by a lotus-born figure. The crown ribbon sticks out upward then curves down to the shoulder. The celestial robe crosses at abdomen through a large ring. The Buddha on the east wall is disproportioned with small head and large body and loose robe, the center of which shows paralleled arcs. The iconographic composition of the cave (two Buddhas seated side by side on the main wall, one seated Buddha with legs pendant one the east wall and one seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed) is rarely seen in any other caves in Shanxi.
Phase Three

(18) Gaomiaoshan Cave 高廟山

Gaomiaoshan is located southwest of Gaoping city on the north side of the Gaomiao Mount (fig. 6.94). There is only one cave (fig. 6.95) on the cliff with six niches around it. The cave is moderate in scale, and the images are well preserved. The inscriptions in this cave provide many names of the donors and names of the places. They also indicate official ranks of the donors and what Buddhist literature they excelled. They are valuable sources for study of the history of the places and the development of Buddhism in this area.

The plan of the cave is square with rounded corners and a domed ceiling. The center of which is a lotus (fig. 6.96) surrounded by eight flying celestials (fig. 6.97). There are no division lines between the four walls, which lean inward towards the ceiling. There is a low altar in front of the main wall and side walls forming an inverted “U”, atop of which five images are placed.

The main wall (fig. 6.98) bears one seated Buddha and two disciples, beside which are two Bodhisattvas at the corners between main wall and side walls.

The left wall (fig. 6.99) bears a roofed-niche, inside of which Vimalakirti is represented. Around the Vimalakirti are many disciples. The rest of the left wall is occupied by biksus and donors. The inscriptions indicate that one of the donors is Tan Shou, the chief Śramana of Jianzhou (建州沙門統, 曇夀). Other donors include the

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235 According to Weishu, Jianzhou 建州 used to be the Jianxing Commandery called Jianxing 建興. It was abolished as a commandery during the Yongan era 永安 (528-530) and became a region, the capital was Gaodu 高都 (today’s Gaodu town in Jincheng 晉城, 20 kilometres from Gaomiaoshan cave), Weishu, 106:2481.
Corresponding to the left wall roofed-niche, the right wall (fig. 6.100) bears a curtain-niche topped by Cintāmani jewels. Inside the niche is Manjusri who is surrounded by disciples. The inscription on the left pillar of the niche suggests that the right wall (images of the donors) was commissioned by a certain Chen Xianming, a chief Buddhist Deacon (石室大維那陳顯明). The inscription on the right of the niche indicates that the images of the biksus are sponsored by a certain Tan Zhi, the deputy chief śramana of Yang’a County (陽阿縣沙門都曇智).

The front wall is filled with donors in bas-relief and inscriptions of their names.

The images in this cave appear slender and elegant as often seen in the late Northern Wei images. The Bodhisattvas have the ribbons sticking out and then falling down to the shoulders. The celestial robe crosses through a large ring at the abdomen. The rendition is so smooth as if there are no pleats on the robes.

Since the Fushan cave 釜山, among all Shanxi caves, is unique, it will therefore be examined as a case study at greater length than any other cave. This cave presents a richly diversified subject matter and demonstrates a representative case of the close relationship between visual arts and Buddhist doctrines. It is a rare occurrence that a small cave contains such rich motifs.

III. Fushan Cave—a Case Study

(1) Reading the Imagery

236 Both Shamentong and Shamendu are rank titles of Buddhist community, but shamendu is one level lower than Shamentong.
The Cave is situated near the top of the yellowish sandstone Fushan Mountain (fig. 6.101) in Fushan village, 22 kilometers northeast of Gaoping County in Shanxi Province. The elevation is 1081m and the coordinates are N 35° 54’586, E 112° 49’190. The cave consists of an anteroom and a main chamber facing west. The main chamber is square in plan, while the anteroom to the west of it is rectangular with shallow left and right walls.

On either side of the entrance gate stands two secularized Dvarapalas with typical exaggerated large eyes and forehead. Neither of them wears armour nor holds a trident.

The ceiling of the anteroom is ornamented with two finely sculpted lotus blossoms side by side in the middle and two floral design circles of the same size beside them at both ends.

The left wall of the anteroom (fig. 6.102) is occupied by two simple arched niches superimposed with four worshippers between them. The upper pointed niche contains a seated Buddha with its legs crossed. The Buddha wears baoyi bodai and appears slender with gently sloping shoulders and a high chignon. The drapery hangs down straight like waterfall. Beside the drapery are two worshippers prostrating completely. Below them, two kneeling worshippers are depicted; between them is an incense burner. The lower niche is placed in the lowest register of the left wall. It is so shallow that it can hardly be called a niche. Two Buddhas inside sit side by side, apparently representing the Sakyamuni Buddha and the Prabhutaratna Buddha.

It is worth noting that to the east of the upper niche a hooded bhikṣu in Dhyana concentration is represented in bas relief.
The overall plan of the right wall of the anteroom (fig. 6.103) does not correspond with that of the left wall except that they each have a meditating bhikṣu at the top corner near the main wall. It is occupied by three arched niches also arranged vertically.

The main room is square in plan (fig. 6.104). The ceiling is coffered with a large lotus blossom in the center. A low and narrow altar, upon which all images are rendered, was built in front of each wall, except the front wall, forming an inverted “U” shape on the floor plan. The main wall and the left wall each contain a seated Buddha and the right wall bears a standing Buddha. The front wall is filled with small thousand kalpa Buddha niches.

The main (east) wall (fig. 6.105) is occupied by five images: the Buddha in the center flanked by four attendants: two Bodhisattvas by the Buddha and two disciples beside them in the corner. Atop the Bodhisattva’s halo, to the right, a spirit king is carved in low relief, with its arms stretched out and squatting with legs apart, facing right towards the Buddha. There are six this kind of creatures, five seemingly ox-headed and one human-headed (right wall, east side) in this cave, two on each wall except the front, flanking the upper part of the nimbus of the central Buddha. Close to the pointed top of the Buddha’s nimbus, two shaven heads of disciples are depicted, one on each side. To the left of the left spirit king near the conjunction of the main wall and the left wall, a standing Buddha holding an alm bowl and three children kneeling down in front of him are portrayed. Evidently, this depicts the Asoka jataka (fig. 6.106).

There are three main images: one Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas on the left wall (fig. 6.107). The Buddha, finely rendered, is seated on a pedestal with both legs crossed and hands together on the lap in meditation mudra. To the left of the Bodhisattva,
i.e. at the very end of the left wall, seven rows of small thousand kalpa Buddha arched niches arranged vertically are carved. Above the thousand kalpa Buddha niches is a curtained niche which looks like a suspended square box (fig. 6.108). Inside the box niche is a seated Bodhisattva with legs crossed. Above this niche, seven shaven heads of disciples are carved to fill the space.237

The right wall (fig. 6.109) contains three main images: one standing Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. To the left of the Bodhisattva, a standing disciple in low relief fills up the space between the Bodhisattva and the disciple Ananda from the main wall. Between the Bodhisattva on the left and the Buddha, near the bottom of the wall, Prince Siddhartha attended by his white horse at his feet is illustrated. The Prince is represented in seated posture under a tree with one leg pendant and one hand raised to his chin in pensive meditation. Apparently, this depicts Siddhartha’s farewell to his white horse Kanthaka. Above the halos of the attendant Bodhisattvas and near the top of the Buddha’s nimbus, shaven heads of disciples and spirit kings are portrayed as on the other two walls. Noteworthy is that the spirit king on the north side is not ox-headed like the other ones. Rather, it is a human-headed figure (fig. 6.110).

To the right of the Bodhisattva on the right, i.e. at the extreme end of the right wall, are four tiers of niches arranged vertically. The top niche (fig. 6.111), suspended and corresponding to the one on the left wall, contains a seated figure with both legs crossed and hands joined together on the lap. The rendition of these two figures is reminiscent of the images of Vimalakirti and Manjusri represented in the Gaomiaoshan cave. In both places, the images are draped in a unique upper garment like a cape and are surrounded by Bhiksus and donors. They are also seated in the same posture. Thus, one

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237 A group of shaven-headed disciples is also illustrated in Lu cave in Longmen.
assumes that the figures in the suspended niches facing each other also represent Vimalakirti (left) and Manjusri (right). Although Vimalakirti does not have a *zhuwei* (fly whisk) in his hand, it is represented in the exact same unique arrangement as that in the Gaomiaoshan. Above the suspended niche, a group of nine shaven heads of disciples carved in low relief are depicted as on the left wall.

The front wall is fully covered with small thousand *kalpa* Buddha niches and a cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva in the center. The Maitreya Bodhisattva whose feet are held by a genius has a large nimbus behind; its right hand is raised up to his chest and the left hand is placed on the lap.

(2) Subject Matter and Buddhist Doctrines

The iconographic subject matter in the Fushan cave is of a diversity that occurs rarely even in larger caves.

The main motifs are the three Buddhas and thousand *kalpa* Buddhas. Other themes (the Sixteen Buddhas; the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna Buddhas; the cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva; Dvarapalas; Vimalakirti and Manjusri; spirit kings; the farewell of Prince Siddhartha from his white horse Kanthaka; shaven-headed disciples, prostrating devotees and dhyana *bhiksu*) are also represented. Noteworthy is the fact that the dhyana *bhiksu* motif was rendered three times in such a small cave.

The subject of the three Buddhas is one of the most popular and frequently represented themes in Northern Dynasties Buddhist art. The iconographic composition of the three Buddhas, however, often varies. Sometimes they are represented by Kasyapa, Sakyamuni and Maitreya or Dipamkara, Sakyamuni and Maitreya, or Sakyamuni, Amitabha and Maitreya. At the same time, in many cases, the three Buddhas do not
represent any specific Buddha. Rather, they are the representations of the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters in the three kalpas of the Past, Present and Future in a broader sense. That the many Buddhas of the Past, Present and Future disperse in the Ten Quarters is a fundamental concept of Mahayana Buddhism.

The three Buddhas, two seated and one standing, represented in the Fushan cave belong to this imagery. Lacking of iconographical attribute and inscriptions, and judged from the overall rendition of the motifs in the cave, they therefore can only be said to be intended to represent the Buddhas of the three kalpas. The representation of the three Buddhas is closely associated with Buddhist texts, the Lotus Sutra being the most influential.

With the development of Mahayana Buddhism and the increasing number of translated sutras, the number of Buddhas multiplied quickly. It was no longer a one Buddha world and the Gautama Buddha was not the only object for reverence any more. Rather, there were three, seven, sixteen, thirty-five, fifty-three, a thousand and even up to three thousand or more Buddhas, among which the thousand kalpa Buddhas became a popular subject matter and a frequent visual representations in Northern dynasties Buddhist art.238

The identification of the thousand kalpa Buddhas however is often uncertain. They can be interpreted as the thousand Buddhas of the Bhadra kalpa based on the Bhadrakalpa Sutra or the Buddhas of Past, Present, and Future and the manifestation of

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238 The earliest extant illustrations of the thousand kalpa Buddhas with an explicit date (420 AD), to the best of my knowledge, is represented on the east wall of Cave 169 in the Bingling Cave Temple, Gansu, but in terms of frequency of the visual representations, the Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, possess the greatest number of the thousand kalpa Buddhas.
the Sakyamuni Buddha dispersed in the ten directions based on the *Lotus Sutra*. They can also refer to the three thousand Buddhas of the three consecutive times as observed in the text *Sanqian foming jing* 三千佛名經 (Sutra of the three thousand names of the Buddha).

Seiichi Mizuno and Nagahiro Toshio identified the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas around the niches of Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna as the manifestation of Sakyamuni Buddha dispersed in the ten directions, and as the thousand Buddhas of the Bhadra *kalpa* while around the a single Buddha niche.

The thousand *kalpa* Buddhas represented in the Fushan cave, judging from the arrangement of thousand Buddhas with the future Buddha in the center, and the future Buddha on the front wall directly facing the Sakyamuni Buddha, I presume, most likely represent the thousand Buddhas of the three times.

The subject matter of the sixteen Buddhas, although not as popular as the three Buddhas, the seven Buddhas or the thousand Buddhas, is also frequently illustrated in Northern dynasties Buddhist art, and is often associated with the sixteen sons of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence as we read Chapter Seven (the Parable of the phantom city) of the *Lotus Sutra*. We are told in the text that sixteen princes left their

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239 The images and the inscriptions in the Mogao Cave 254 indicate that the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas are connected with many sutras such as *Guoqu zhuangyan jie qianfo mingjing* 過去莊嚴劫千佛名經 (Sutra on the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Past Majestic *Kalpa*), T14:446a:365a11; *Xianzai xianjie qianfo mingjing* 現在賢劫千佛名經 (Sutra on the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa), T14:447a:376a26; *Weilai xingsu jie qianfo mingjing* 未來星宿劫千佛名經 (Sutra on the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Future Constellation *Kalpa*), T14:448a:388b12; *Foshuo guan yaowangyaoshang erpusa jing* 佛說觀藥王藥上二菩薩經 (The Two Bodhisattvas Bhaisajyarakaja and Bhaisajyasamudgala), T20:1161:664c15; *Foshuo jueding pini jing* 佛說決定毘尼經 (*Upaliparipacccha*), T12:325:37b24, to mention only a few. Therefore this subject matter is not merely a product of the *Lotus sutra* although the latter is perhaps the most influential text.

240 See Seiichi Mizuno and Toshio Nagahiro, 8:75.
household and became sramaneras. They later attained anuttara-samyak-sambodhi (full Enlightenment), became Buddhas and preached in the lands of the ten directions.

Is it possible that the Sixteen Buddhas rendered in the Fushan Cave illustrate the sixteen Sramaneras from the Lotus Sutra, or is their numbering sixteen a mere coincidence?

The visual representations of the three, sixteen and thousand kalpa Buddhas present in the Fushan cave are also the main subjects throughout the Lotus Sutra.

Furthermore, the theme of Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, a symbolic visual reminder of the Lotus Sutra, is represented in the Fushan Cave as well.

Reading these four motifs as an integral whole, I believe that they are all inspired by the Lotus Sutra, the most influential doctrine during the Northern dynasties. The three, sixteen and thousand kalpa Buddhas, thus, represent the many Buddhas of the three kalpas of the Past, Present and Future. Abundant evidence shows that the subject matter

241 Sramaneras are the novices (male or female) who made vows to observe the Ten Commandments. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest representation of the sixteen Buddhas motif is illustrated in Yanshi Shuiquan Cave 嶽師水泉 in Henan province. They are also represented in the South Xiangtangshan Cave 2, Hebei Province and the Baifoshan Caves, Shandong province; and on the base of the Eastern Wei Mahabhijnananbhibhu Buddha image from Zhengding County, Hebei; on the stele dated to the second year of Wuping (571) now housed in the Shanxi museum and on the Ju Shiguang 巨始光 stele from the Western Wei, etc. In Hong Bao’s inscription dated to the second year of Tianping (535) some of the names of the sixteen Buddhas are mentioned. See Tai’an shi wenwu kaogu yanjiushi 泰安市文物考古研究所, “Shandong dongping Baifoshan shiku zaoxiang diaocha” (Investigation of images in Baifoshan Cave in Dongping Shandong Province), Kaogu, 1989, 3, 231-233; Zhang Zong 張琮, “Baifoshan de shiliu wangzi xiang” (Images of sixteen princes in Baifoshan), Dunhuang yanjiu, 1998, 3, 28; Seiichi Mizuno and Takeo Hibino, Sansei Kosekishi, (Kyoto: Nakamura Insatsu Kabushiki Kaisha Shuppanbu, 1956), pls. 26, 27 and 29; Zhao Yongping 趙永平 and Chen Yinfeng 陳銀風, “Dongwei Datong zhisheng hanbaiyu fo” (The Marble Image of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence of the Eastern Wei), Wenwu chunqiu, 1995, 1, 87-88; Zhou Zheng 周鍾, “Xiwei Ju Shiguang zaoxiangbei” (A Western Wei Stele by Ju Shiguang), Zhongguo lishi bowuguanguankan, 1985, 90-94 and Ōmura Seigai, Shina bijutsushi chōso hen, 252-53.

242 They are the Buddhas of Aksobhya and Sumeru dwelling in the Land of Joy in the east; Lion Sound and Lion Sign Buddhas in the southeast; Space-dweller and Ever Extinguished in the south; Sovereign Sign and Brahm Sign Buddhas in the southwest; Amitāyus and Savior of All Worlds from Pain and Woe Buddhas in the west; Supernatural Penetration of the Fragrance of Tamālapatra and Cadana and Sumeru Sign Buddhas in the northwest; Cloud Self-Master and King of the Cloud Self-Masters in the north; and He who Demolishes the Fears of All the Worlds Buddha in northeast and Śākyamuni Buddha as the last one. Some of these names are carved on the walls of the caves or steles mentioned above. Leon Hurvitz, Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma, 146-147.
of Northern dynasties Buddhist art is closely associated with the *Lotus Sutra*, as we gauge from reading the inscriptions in the Guyang cave, Longmen.\(^{243}\)

The close connection between visual representation and literary texts in Fushan is not just limited to the *Lotus Sutra*. The legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjushri derives undoubtedly from the famous *Vimalakirti Sutra*.

The Fushan cave demonstrates a representative case of the close connections between the visual arts and Buddhist literature.

The subject matter of the Spirit Kings is a common scene in Six dynasties visual arts. They are often carved in Buddhist caves (Longmen, Gongxian, Xiangtangshan, Xumishan and Anyang Caves, etc.), tombs and on Buddhist steles, and they are normally arranged in the lower level near the base.\(^{244}\)

The six Spirit Kings in the Fushan cave, however, are rendered in the upper area for unknown reasons. These peculiar looking deities often appear at the bottom of Buddhist works. Only Dharma-protectors are usually represented in the upper space. For instance, in Yungang Cave 12, the Dharma protectors are all rendered in the upper space. They are on the ceiling of the main room watching over from high up. It is perhaps safe to infer that the six Spirit Kings were meant to represent Dharma protectors as well.

\(^{243}\) Many inscriptions in Guyang cave show that they are inspired by the *Lotus Sutra*. For instance, the inscriptions of Yang Xiaofei executed in the third year of Zhengshi (506) and those of Hui Rong in the second year of Zhengguang (521). See Seiichi Mizuno and Toshio Nagahiro, *Kanan Rakuyō Ryūmon sekkatsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo: Zayuhō Kankōkai, 1941), 367 and 371.

judging from their high position and the fact that they all face the Buddha with their arms stretched out, ready to fight. Dharma protection is a very popular motif in Yungang and is repeatedly represented in numerous Yungang caves.

(3) Style and Dating

The images of the Fushan cave demonstrates a sinicized visual form. The bodies are slender, the faces elongated, the necks emphatically long, and the shoulders gently sloping. The Buddhas wear *baoyi bodai* and the Bodhisattvas, with exceptionally attenuated bodies, have their celestial robes hanging down low and criss-crossing in front through a large ring. These are typical features of late Northern Wei style as displayed in the images belonging to the Yungang third-phase (494-524).

The subject matter of the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri and the cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva are also popular motifs in the late Northern Wei caves in Longmen, Gongxian and in the Yungang third-phase caves.

The representation of the three Buddhas, two seated and one standing, is also present in the late Northern Wei Yuanzishan Cave in Yushe County, Shanxi.

Additional evidence helpful in dating the Fushan cave is the design on the ceiling with a large lotus in the center and floral patterns at the corners. It is similar to that of Gongxian Cave 5 which is dated between 528 and 538.\(^{245}\)

Judging from the subject matter, the stylistic features, architectural layout and the iconography, I believe, that the Fushan cave was executed no later than the end of the Northern Wei dynasty (534), prior to the split into Western and Eastern Wei. In other words, it was constructed in the last decade of the Northern Wei. It was inspired by the

Yungang third-phase caves and then fully developed into a more sinicized form with attenuated images. The rendition is not as refined as that of the Yungang third-phase caves.

(4) Function and Patronage

The representations in the Fushan cave, besides their being derived from Buddhist texts, have also a specific function. First, the seated hooded dhyana bhiksu under a tree are depicted three times in such a small cave. Second, prostrated figures with incense burners, which are indicative of devotees preparing for meditation practice, are represented twice. Third, the shaven-headed Buddhist monks are repeatedly illustrated and they are represented in the same cave with the dhyana bhiksu, which is a rare occurrence. This leads one to infer that these shaven heads are likely to be the self-portraits of the dhyana bhiksu who practiced Chan guan (visualizing meditation) here. Chan guan is “a special kind of mystical building-up of visual image, each as complete and precise as possible, in sequence from the simple toward the complex.”

It refers to “a class of visualization exercises in which the practitioner mentally constructs an eidetic image of some specific object or scene.” These specific object or scenes include the images of the Sakyamuni Buddha, the three Buddhas of the three kalpa, the Buddhas of the Ten Quarters and Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, all of which are represented in Fushan.

It is clear that the Fushan motifs are closely associated with the practice of visualizing meditation and that the cave was constructed as a meditation chamber,

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perhaps sponsored by a dhyana bhiksu or meditation master. It is not unusual that a
meditation master sponsored a Buddhist rock-cut cave. Many such examples exist: the
monk Yue Zun 樂樽 at Mogao, Xuan Gao at Majishan, Tan Yao at Yungang, Dao Ping
dao兜 at Da Liusheng caves 大留圣窟, and Seng Chou 僧稠 at Xiaonanhai 小南海. All
these examples demonstrate that the making of Buddhist caves was associated with Chan
masters and that Buddhist caves and the practice of visualizing meditation are inseparable.
Buddhist caves were constructed for meditation and similar practices. Numerous literary
sources mention that Buddhist monks sat in caves and meditated, and eminent Chan
masters left bustling, hustling cities to “execute divine caves to cultivate dhyana
concentration.”

The depictions of meditating bhiksus are the images for the bhiksus to follow
when they practice the dhyana concentration, and the shaven heads on the walls might be
their portraits. The prostrating figures and incense burners possibly refer to devotees’
preparatory rituals prior to their visualizing the Buddha images. Such necessary
procedures for visualizing Buddha images are, for example, recorded in the Sutra on the
Sea of the Samādhi of Buddha Visualization. It is possible that many dhyana bhiksus
resided in Fushan as groups of shaven-headed bhiksus are shown in the cave. To
assemble bhiksus to practice dhyana concentration is quite common during the Northern
Dynasties. “Tan Yao was well known for dhyana practices,” and “he built a cave
temple large enough to hold three thousand bhiksu.” It is believed that Tan Yao

249 Guan fo sanmei hai jing 觀佛三昧海經, T15:643:690c.
250 Gaoseng zhuang, 11:409.
251 Xu gaoseng zhuang, T50:2060:427. This is Cave 3 in Yungang.
constructed such a large temple to assemble bhiksus to practice Chan guan.\(^{252}\) This practice continued through to the Yungang third-phase caves many of which were constructed as Chan guan cells. This is clearly shown from their motifs and the architectural layouts. Caves 38 and 39 for instance are good examples of chan guan caves. Many of the third-phase caves in Yungang were excavated as chan cells.

It is worth noting that Buddha figures are not the only chan guan images. The Spirit Kings are also visual objects of meditation practice.\(^{253}\) Uniquely rendered high up on the walls, these Spirit Kings represent Dharma protectors as discussed before, while simultaneously functioning as visualization aids, integral motifs of chan guan. It is not uncommon for the practitioner to construct an eidetic image of a Buddhist protector while exercising visualization. Maheshvara, a Dharma protector and guardian, riding on an ox, for example, is also a visual image as represented in caves 8 and 35 in Yungang.

Fushan, though a small cave, is unique with diversified subject matter, many of which are rarely represented in any other caves in China. It was executed perfectly in size for the monks to practice Chan and to chan guan. The Northern Wei Buddhism emphasizes Chan practice as it followed the tradition of the Northern Liang.

**IV. General Features of the Shanxi Caves**

Shanxi caves under discussion are generally modest in scale. There are no colossal images or large sized caves as seen in Yungang and Longmen. Neither are there Caitya caves. They are all shrine caves. According to the architectural structure, Shanxi caves can be divided into three types. The dominant one is the square or rectangular structure with three niches on three walls (sanbi sankan) and a fudou (truncated


pyramid-shaped) or *sijiao zanjian* 四角攒尖 (pyramid) ceiling. Some caves have a low altar in front of the walls, forming an inverted凹. *Sanbi sankan* is almost seen in every cave as is usual in the third-phase of Yungang.

The second type of cave structure is square with no niche but a low altar in front of four walls and a *fudou* ceiling. The images are represented on the altar.

The horseshoe shaped cave with a domed ceiling, the third type, is not as popular as in Yungang and Longmen. There are only few cases in Shanxi.

The arch front of the entrance gateway of the Shanxi caves is usually decorated with a floral scroll pattern, reminiscent of those in cave 35 and cave 39 in Yungang. The arch ends usually are a bird and a phoenix turning inward resting on a lotus blossom or reed bundle.

Another architectural feature of the Shanxi caves is that many (Yangtoushan, Baoyingsi and Dinglinsi etc) caves are part of the monastery complex. They were executed for devotees to practice Buddhist rituals, to worship and to make offerings. The monastery and cave were constructed as an integral whole in a large compound although they are not connected. Temples and caves are individual buildings. The practice of constructing a Buddhist cave together with a Buddhist monastery was common in history. The Yungang cave complex had many temples as we are told in many sources.²⁵⁴

In some other cases, however, the cave and temple are connected with one another. Some caves used to have a wooden structure in front of the cave as a façade. The cave was attached to the temple wooden structure. So that when a devotee comes to the

²⁵⁴ *Weishu* mentioned about “Wuzhou shan shikusi 武周山石窟寺 (Wuzhou mountain cave temple) and Lingyansi 靈岩寺 (Lingyan temple), 114:3306; also Jin stele inscriptions mentioned about the ten temples and Xi gaoseng zhuans 襲高僧傳 mentioned about Tonglesi 通樂寺, T50:2060:427c24.
monastery complex, one walks into a temple first before going into the cave. This is the same structure as Caves 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 in Yungang. But the Shanxi caves are much smaller and the façade is shallower.

Several of Shanxi caves consist of an anteroom and a main chamber. The Fushan cave exemplifies this structure.

Almost all of the Shanxi caves have two ferocious Dvarapalas on either side of the entrance. They become part of the cave structure. It is interesting to note that cave 3 in Yangtoushan cave complex bears two standing Buddhas outside of the cave instead of two Dvarapalas. This is the only case in Shanxi.

The subject matter in Shanxi caves is not as complex as in Yungang. Only the Fushan cave possesses the richest diversified themes among all the Shanxi caves. The rest of the caves only have the three Buddhas of the three kalpas as the primary motif with the Thousand Buddha around them.

The popular themes such as the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri, and the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna seated side by side are not regular visual representations. It seems that the caves in Shanxi were mainly constructed for practice. They are not heavily influenced by Buddhist literature as is usual in Yungang.

The life story of the Buddha, a rather popular subject in Yungang, is rarely represented. It is only seen in the Fushan Cave and Wangqing Cave. The jataka stories are almost not observed. The Shanxi caves present a simplified subject matter except for the Fushan Cave.

The composition usually is a seated Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas, some times also by two disciples on each wall and three Buddhas in each cave. The
composition of the three Buddha varies. It can be three seated Buddhas, as is often the case; it also can be one seated Buddha with legs crossed, one seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed and one seated Buddha with leg pendant. This composition is best exemplified in Zihongzhen cave. It also can be two seated Buddhas and one standing Buddha as seen in the Fushan and Cave 3 of the Shitanghui cave complex. These various iconographic compositions are usually seen in Yungang and Longmen.

Several unique iconographic compositions appeared for the first time in Shanxi caves. In Jiaodingshan Cave, the left wall (fig. 6.82) bears two niches inside each of which a seated Buddha and a standing Buddha are represented and the main wall and right wall each have a seated Buddha with the legs crossed. This is a rather unique visual representation and it is not seen in any other caves in central plain China. The Cave 4 of the Baoyingsi cave complex demonstrates another peculiar iconographic composition. On the main wall two Buddhas, probably the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna, seated side by side are represented; the right wall bears a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed and the left wall has a seated Buddha with legs pendant. This iconographic composition is not seen in any other caves. Apparently local artisans made innovations. They continued Yungang tradition but at the same time, they invented new visual representation. In Cave 33 of Yungang, the Sakyamuni and Prabhutaratna are also seen on the main wall, but they are represented together with two seated Bodhisattvas both with ankles crossed.

The composition of one seated Buddha represented together with Thousand Buddhas around it is also unique. In Thousand Buddha Cave of Beishan 北山千佛窟 in Changzhi County, the main wall bears a pointed niche housing a seated Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. The rest of all the walls in the cave are all filled with small Thousand
Buddha niches. Cave 9 of the Yangtoushan Cave complex shares the same iconographic composition. It is also seen in Cave 39 of Yungang and Cave 4 of Gongxian Caves.

The Three Buddha and Thousand Buddha motifs are popular subjects in Shanxi Caves. They are observed in all the caves in Shanxi and are the primary iconographic compositions.

Stylistically, images in Shanxi caves belong to the typical xiugu qingxiang iconography. The contour of the images presents a different visual dynamic. They appear slender and elegant. The weightiness of the early images is no longer sensed in these images and the rendition is smooth and natural. The three usual types (tanyou, tongjian and Baoyi bodai) of robes of the seated Buddha are all represented here. The earlier Buddhas wear tanyou or tongjian robe and the later ones, the majority, are clad in baoyi bodai. The cordlike pleats seen in the first-phase of Yungang imagery is only seen in the Lianghoudian cave. After that it disappeared. The seated Buddhas in cave 5b of the Yangtoushan cave complex are clad in tanyou robe, same as the Lianghoudian images, but no cordlike folds are seen. The seated Buddha on the right wall in many caves is clad in tongjian robe. This is one of the features of the Shanxi caves.

The folds of the baoyi bodai robes are step-like and flat. The rendition is natural and smooth. The drapery falls down over the pedestal like waterfall; some of them form a \(\backslash\), some of them straight down. The neckline of the outer robe is usually pulled low so that the inner robe is revealed.

The Bodhisattvas of Shanxi caves appear slim as well with long skirts and fluttering celestial robes, many of which cross through a large ring in the center. Some of the Bodhisattvas, as seen in Lianghoudian cave and Shimasi cave, have hair ribbons
sticking out then falling down to the shoulder. This is the representative feature of the Bodhisattva in Longmen as it is exemplified by the seated Bodhisattva in Yüchi niche, dated to 495, north wall, Guyang cave.

The flying celestials in Shanxi caves are light and supple providing a strong sense of movement.

The Dvarapalas of the Shanxi caves present a dynamic and exaggerated physical posture. It became one of the iconographic features of the Shanxi caves. The Dvarapalas of cave 5 and cave 7 in Yangtoushan cave complex even have fluttering ribbons on their heads, which is not seen in any other caves in China.

Another feature of the Shanxi cave is that the inscriptions usually contain only the title of the donor and their names. We rarely see a date of the execution of the cave and what the function of the cave is. The only example of the cave with an explicit date of the construction is the Kaihesi Cave 開河寺 (fig. 6.112) in Pingding County 平定縣. Kaihesi cave complex consists of three caves and a temple. According to the inscription above the entrance of the cave, Cave 2 was executed in the 5th year of Wuding 武定 of the Eastern Wei (547), Cave 1 in the 2nd year of the Heqing 和平 (563) and Cave 3 was in the 2nd year of Huangjian 皇建 (561) in the Northern Qi. This is the latest cave to be examined.

V. Dating and Stylistic Origins of the Shanxi Caves

By reading the imagery, we have now examined the highlights of Shanxi caves in regard to architecture, imagery, subject matter and style. Since most of the caves in Shanxi do not bear inscriptions with a date, it is almost impossible to date the caves with exact precision, and I have earlier suggested that we can probably date the construction of most to a period of plus or minus ten years. By using typology methodology to compare
the Shanxi caves with those which have a date or period of the construction of the caves, I will make some tentative suggestions of the time period of the caves.

As suggested earlier, the Shanxi caves can generally be divided into three time periods according to the iconographic style and the indications of the inscriptions. The first period is the late Taihe era 太和 (477-499) under emperor Xiaowen, and the second period is from the Zhengguang era 正光 (520-525) under emperor Xiaoming to the end of the Northern Wei, i.e. 520-534. Some of the caves were executed right before the split of the Northern Wei (534). The second-phase is the pinnacle of the execution of the Shanxi caves and most of them were constructed during this period. The third-phase is between the end of the Northern Wei and the end of the Eastern Wei (534-550). The Gaomiaoshan cave and Kaihesi caves belong to this phase.

Phase One includes only four caves: the Lianghoudian cave, cave 5a and cave 5b in Yangtoushan, and Zihongzhen cave.

The crude rendition and iconographic style suggest that these caves belong to early works, and some of them were perhaps executed right after the Tan Yao five caves. The images remarkably resemble those from the five Tan Yao caves and individual survival images. The cordlike crude folds, the flaming halo with seated Buddhas and floral designs, the masculine and broad chest of the Buddha, the weightiness of the images and the way that the robe covers one shoulder are all reminiscence of the Tan Yao five cave images. The Buddhas with covering mode robes on the left and main walls of Lianghoudian have U-shaped flat folds. The robe clings to the body which is similar to those of the standing Buddhas in the five Tan Yao caves. The face of the Buddha is full and the chest is broad. Lianghoudian and Yangtoushan 5b images also resemble the
Zhang Yong 張永 (fig. 2.7), Song Dexing 宋德興 (fig. 2.8) and Feng Aiai 馮愛愛 (fig. 5.71) images, dated to 455, 457 and 466 respectively. Therefore, the Lianghoudian Cave and Cave 5b in Yangtoushan are believed to have been executed right after the five Tan Yao caves. Ichnographically, they were influenced by the images from Yungang and the individual images extant.

Following the execution of those caves (Lianghoudian, Yangtoushan cave 5a and cave 5b) was the Zihongzhen Cave complex, which also belongs to Phase One although the iconography distinguishes one from the other. Cave 1 is a typical sanbi sankan cave with a slightly domed ceiling and four walls leaning inward towards the ceiling. This is one of the typical architectural features of the third-phase caves in Yungang.

The iconographic composition of the three images on three walls is unique: one seated Buddha represented together with two Bodhisattvas, one seated with ankles crossed and the other with legs pendant. Its origin is unknown. This is a rare occurrence. Rather we often see one seated Buddha rendered with a seated Bodhisattva with ankles crossed and a seated Buddha with legs pendant. The seated Bodhisattva suggests the future Buddha Maitreya is still in Tushita Heaven as a Bodhisattva waiting for his turn to come down to us. And the seated Buddha with legs pendant indicates that the future Buddha, Maitreya, has already come to us as the future Buddha. But it is not certain what the composition of the one seated Buddha with two Bodhisattvas, one with ankles crossed and one with legs pendant, indicates. The two Bodhisattvas perhaps are meant to represent Maitreya.

Stylistically the Bodhisattva with ankles crossed on the left wall appears stunningly similar to that of Cave 40 in Yungang. The incredible resemblance makes one
believe that these images were produced by the same artisan. It also resembles the seated Bodhisattva on the east wall of Cave 4a in Yunagang. The head of the Bodhisattva is square and broad. The torso is long but the legs are short so the body of the Bodhisattva is disproportioned with heavy head and slim and short legs. These three visual representations of the Bodhisattva remarkably resemble one another so that one cannot help but infer that the Yungang artisans went down south of Shanxi to execute more caves. Apparently the Zihongzhen cave complex was constructed not far from cave 40 and cave 4a of the third-phase of Yungang in time. It was perhaps executed right after the Yungang third-phase caves. Ryōshū Michihata suggested that cave 1 was executed during the Tianbao 天保 era of the Northern Qi (550-559) because he mistakenly took the date of the niche, which was added to the front wall, as the date of the execution the cave. The inscription was for the niche not for the cave. It is impossible that cave 1 was executed as late as Northern Qi judging from the iconographic style and architectural structure.

The second-phase of Shanxi caves starts from the Zhengguang era (520-525) during emperor Xiaoming’s reign and it ended with the end of the Northern Wei (534). Most of the Shanxi caves were constructed during this time. This is the pinnacle of the construction of the Shanxi caves.

Xiangtangsi Cave and Yuanzishan Cave in Yushan County perhaps are the earliest caves executed during the second-phase and they are not far from the Yungang third-phase caves in time judging from the architectural layout and iconographic style.

Both Xiangtangsi Cave and Yuanzishan Cave are square in plan, the former has the sijiao zanjian ceiling and the latter has a fudou ceiling, the typical architectural features of the late Northern Wei caves.
The seated Buddha on the main wall in the Xiangtangsi cave is reminiscent of the Buddha in Cave 5-11. The rendition of the robe, the drapery, the folds and the ushnisha appear similar to one another. The Buddha in Xiangtangsi Cave looks rather elegant and slender. The entire visual representation presents a strong sense of naturalness and smoothness. It is one of the refined images in the late Northern Wei Buddhist arts. The standing Buddha on the left wall also appears graceful and serene. It resembles the standing Buddha in Cave 5-11 in Yungang and that of the Fushan Cave. The large halo is also similar to that of Cave 5-11.

The three Buddhas in Yuanzishan cave are all clothed in the baoyi bodai, belong to the typical xiugu qingxiang iconography of the Yungang third-phase. The rendition of the robes is very natural and smooth. The hair ribbons of the Bodhisattvas stick out and fall down to the shoulders, an iconographic symbol of the early Longmen visual representations. The celestial robe of the Bodhisattva crosses through a large ring at the abdomen and then goes around the arms, a characteristic of the late Northern Wei iconography.

The standing Buddha is reminiscent of that of Binya Central Cave. It seems that Yuanzishan cave was inspired by both Yungang and Longmen iconography.

In general, Xiangtangsi and Yuanzishan caves possess the typical characteristics of the late Northern Wei caves. Judging from the architectural features and the iconographical styles, I believe these two caves were executed earlier than many of the other Shanxi caves and the Xiangtangsi cave is even earlier than the Yuanzishan cave. They are not far from the execution of the Zihongzhen cave, and perhaps were constructed not long after the Yungang third-phase caves and Binyang middle cave.
Another important clue for dating the cave is the inscriptions, many of which mentioned the official titles of the donors such as the Governor of Xiang Commandery (鄉郡太守) and the Governor of Xinxing Commandery (新興太守). The Xiang Commandery was established in the 2nd year of Yanhe 延和 (433) and was abolished during the Sui. The Xinxing Commandery was changed to Yongan Commandery during the Yongan era (528-530). Thus, it is clear that the name Xinxing Commandery was used only before 530 after that it was called Yongan Commandery. Therefore Yuanzishan cave was executed before that date. Judging from the iconography, it is believed that the Xiangtangsi cave and Yuanzishan cave seem to, in time, be close to the Zihongzhen cave complex and likely were constructed during the Zhengguang era (520-525).

The Shitanghui cave 1 and cave 2, Yangtoushan cave 4, Shifosi, Wangqing and Yunlongshan caves, judging from the rendition of the images, the style of the icons and the architectural plan of the caves, were likely to have been executed right after that. They belong to the first stage of the second-phase and are earlier than the Shitanghui cave 3; Yangtoushan cave 5 and cave 7; Fushan cave; Jiaodingshan cave, Baoyingsi cave and Shimasi cave 3, which are the second stage of the second-phase and were likely to be executed at the very end of the Northern Wei and even beginning of the Eastern Wei (534).

The Shitanghui cave 1 and cave 2 were the earliest caves in this group. They are either rectangular (Cave 1) or square (Cave 2) in plan with a fudou ceiling and both caves have three niches on three walls. These are typical architectural layout of the third-phase

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255 Weishu, 106:2467 and Suishu, 30:849. Also see footnote 234.
caves in Yungang such as cave 25, cave 28 and cave 37. The arch front of the entrance with floral decoration is also a regular scene of the third-phase caves in Yungang.

The motif of the Shitanghui caves is primarily the three Buddhas of the three kalpas, which is the most popular motif during the late Northern Wei. The rendition of the baoyi bodai robe and the archaic tongjian robe is reminiscent of that of Yungang third-phase.

Yangtoushan cave 4 seems to have been constructed at the same time as Shitanghui caves 1 & 2. The images look rather similar and the rendition of the iconography seems to be from the same hand. Both caves are rectangular in plan and both have three niches on three walls. The three Buddhas on three walls are all surrounded by the small Thousand Buddha niches, typical feature of the late Northern Wei caves. The shape of the halo and nimbus are similar as well.

It should be mentioned again that the inscriptions in the caves indicate that Guo Yaoluo 郭遙儸 family commissioned Yangtoushan cave 5 and they were the patrons, along with others, for the Shitaghui caves 1 & 3 as well. I believe, reading the iconography, they commissioned the Shitanghui cave 1 first and then Shitanghui cave 3 and Yangtoushan cave 5. These two caves should have been executed not far from each other in time, or possibly at the same time.

The images of the Shifosi caves appear slender and elegant. They perhaps are the most refined and graceful images in all of the Shanxi caves. The seated Buddha of both caves is clad in the baoyi bodai. They can best exemplify the typical xiugu qingxiang of the late Northern Wei iconography. The rendition is so natural and smooth that the viewer may forget the media of the sculpture. They look like coloured silk rather than
stone. The flying celestials are elegant and fluttering as in the wind. They resemble the graceful flying celestials in Caves 30 and 33-1 in Yungang. The supple body and the fluttering scarves present a strong sense of the elegance. The rendition of the Bodhisattvas is reminiscent of the Bodhisattvas in Shiniuxi Cave in Longmen.

It should be mentioned that the Cave 2 was not completed and some images were added to the cave later such as the Dvarapalas. They apparently are the Ming works. The drapery of the seated Buddha seems to have been added later as well. It is likely that cave 2 was started at the same time as Cave 1, however it was never finished.256

Yunlongshan and Wangqing Caves perhaps were the next ones to be constructed. They should not be too far from the Shitanghui and Shifosi Caves in time based on the architecture of the caves and the style of the icons.

Yunlongshan cave 1 is also a square cave with a fudou ceiling and sanbi sankan. These are all late Northern Wei architectural features. Yet, the Yunlongshan cave has its regional innovation. All three niches in this cave are roofed ones, which is not seen in any other Shanxi cave. The tradition of integrating Chinese wooden architecture into Buddhist cave temples started as early as the second-phase of Yungang such as those in cave 9 and 10.

The images in this cave appear slender and elegant. The Buddhas on the main and right walls look serene and peaceful. The outer robe covers both shoulders and the neckline is pulled down low in a U shape. The rendition of the bowknot which holds the

256 In his article, Li Yuqun suggested that the Cave 2 was executed in the Tang or Song period because of the rendition of the drapery. It is highly unlikely that the cave was constructed in the Tang or the Song periods since the architectural layout of the cave, the iconographical style and composition all indicate that the cave is a typical late Northern Wei work, but it has never been completed. Some images might have been added to the original cave such as the Dvarapalas. See “Shanxi Zuoquan shifosi shiku yu ‘Gao Huan Yundong’ shiku 山西左權石佛寺石窟與高歡云洞,” (Shifosi Cave and Gao Huan Cave in Zuoquan Shanxi Province) in Wenwu, 1995, 9, 58-71.
inner robe in place, is reminiscent of that in the late northern Wei caves in Longmen such as in Binyang central cave, Weizidong cave and Putaidong cave. The drapery falls down naturally over the pedestal without exaggeration.

Each Bodhisattva wears a hair ribbon which sticks outward and then drapes down to the shoulders. The celestial robe narrows down towards the abdomen. They resemble the Bodhisattvas observed in Guyang cave in Longmen. The celestial robe of the seated Bodhisattva with legs pendant on the right wall crosses through a large ring at the abdomen and wears a hair ribbon sticking out as observed in many of the Bodhisattvas in Guyang cave.

It seems that this cave has been influenced both by the Yungang caves and the Longmen caves, perhaps more Longmen elements in style. It possesses typical features of late Northern Wei caves.

Another clue in dating the cave is the iconographic composition on each wall. There are five images on each wall instead of three as is usual. The Buddha (Bodhisattva on the left wall) is flanked by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas. The five icon composition appeared rather late in the third-phase of Yungang. It first appeared in cave 35, which is near the end of the Yungang third-phase. In Longmen, it appeared in Binyang central cave which was completed in 523. It is therefore reasonable to infer that the Yunlongshan cave was executed after 523.

The Wangqing cave 1 also belongs to the late Northern Wei work judging from the architecture, style, subject matter and iconographic composition. Reading the iconography, the Wangqing cave 1 followed the Yungang third-phase tradition from the representation of the Buddha, Bodhisattva to the intertwined dragons on the ceiling. They

257 *Weishu*, 114:3043.
resemble Yungang third-phase iconography closely. The cave seemed to have been executed after the third-phase caves in Yungang. Cave 2 and cave 3 are of later construction, perhaps Tang caves.

The second-phase (520-534), though a short period, is the peak of the construction of the Shanxi caves. Most of the caves were executed during this time. The Yangtoushan cave 3 and cave 5, Shitanghui cave 3, Fushan Cave, Jiaodingshan Cave, Baoyingsi Cave 3, Danzhuling Cave 1, Shimasi cave 3 and Dinglingsi Cave 1 also belong to the second-phase but they were likely, judging from the iconography, to have been executed after the above discussed caves and in the last decade of the Northern Wei (524-534).

As mentioned before, Yangtoushan cave 5 and Shitanghui cave 3 were sponsored by the same patron (Guo Yaoluo family) and in iconography they resemble one another. Thus, it is not unreasonable to infer that these two caves were executed not far from each other in time. The inscription (建興郡中正郭高, Guo Gao, the rectifier of the Jianxing Commandery) in Shitanghui cave 3 suggests that the cave was executed before 530 when the name of Jianxing was changed to Jianzhou. 258 Other caves (Fushan, Jiaodingshan, Baoyingsi, Danzhuling, Shimasi and Dinglingsi) were also executed close to this date judging from the iconographic style and the architectural structure.

These caves are either square or rectangular in plan with either fudou or sijiao zanjian ceiling. This is a typical characteristic of the late Northern Wei architectural feature. Most of them bear three niches on three walls except for the Fushan cave and Baoyingsi cave 3 which have no niches on three walls but an altar on which the images are placed. The cave with three niches on three walls was very popular during the late

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258 Jianxing Commandery was changed into a region and renamed as Jianzhou during the Yongan era (528-530). Therefore, the inscription must be before that date and the cave must have been executed before that date. See also footnote 234.
Northern Wei period and was the predominant architectural layout of the Yungang third-phase caves. They compose almost two thirds of the third-phase caves. The arched entrance with floral designs resembles those in Yungang caves 35 and 39. They look so similar that one is led to believe perhaps the design is from the same prototype.

The images in these caves all belong to the late Northern Wei icons. The Buddha is clad in the *baoyi bodai* robe. The cord-like folds seen in earlier images are not observed in these images. The drapery falls down over the pedestal and form a 八. The right foot is exposed and form two series of parallel arcs in the front. Some of them form voluminous folds and look like waterfalls as observed in Jiaodingshan images. These are all features of the late Northern Wei iconographic style.

The Shimasi cave 石馬寺 and Dinglinsi cave 定林寺 perhaps were the last ones, among all the second-phase caves, executed during the Northern Wei judging from the iconographic style and the poor workmanship. The images in these two caves demonstrate slack rendition and clumsy visual representations.

Shimasi cave is located in Xiyang County. There are only three caves and more than 300 niches hewn into large outcrops. This is a massive Buddhist cave complex. Judging from the images, the niches were continuously executed throughout the Tang, Song and Ming. Among the three caves, cave 3 is the best reserved one and the only cave that still bears images. The cave is square in plan with three niches on three walls and a flat ceiling. The Buddha and Bodhisattvas stylistically possess the features of the late Northern dynasties images. The attendant Bodhisattvas have the symbolic fluttering

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ribbons sticking out. The seated Buddha on the north wall is clad in two robes. The neckline of the outer robe is so low that the inner robe is exposed. Interestingly, the inner robe also covers both shoulders, which is a rare occurrence.

The inscription “Record of the Execution of the Images in Shimasi cave” on the stele inside the Shimasi cave indicates that the cave complex was executed in the 3rd year of Yongxi 永熙 (534).

Reading the imagery and judging from the architectural layout and the iconographic composition of the cave, it is quite possible that the stele is authentic. Shimasi cave 3 is likely to be the last one of the second-phase caves. The iconography in the third-phase caves (Gaomiaoshan and Kaihesi) is very different.

Gaomiaoshan cave, among all the Shanxi caves, is a perfect example of a transitional cave between the late Northern Wei and Eastern Wei. The visual representations demonstrate both the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei characteristics.

In imagery (one seated Buddha flanked by two disciples and two Bodhisattvas), it suggests the late Northern Wei representation; in style, it indicates the combination of the Northern Wei and Eastern Wei. The rendition is smooth and simple; hardly see any pleats on the robes of the Buddha. The drapery falls over the pedestal, yet it does not drape down low like that of the late Northern Wei. It is very short and its edge is a rounded format unlike the late Northern Wei drapery, which is long and voluminous. It resembles the image dated to the 2nd year of Xinghe 興和 (540) and discovered near Taiyuan and

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The inscriptions were composed by Wang Gu 王谷 and Wang Jun 王君 respectively. I suspect that Wang Gu and Wang Jun are the same person. The content of the inscription is the same.
the image dated to the 6th year of Wuding 武定 (548) and discovered in Xiyang. In the meanwhile Gaomiaoshan cave maintains many late Northern Wei cave stylistic features. The Bodhisattvas still demonstrate the late Northern Wei iconography. The fluttering ribbons of the Bodhisattvas, the symbol of the late Northern Wei visual representation, are still observed.

In architecture, the Gaomiaoshan cave continues the tradition of the Yungang third-phase caves. The cave is square in plan with a slightly domed ceiling and a low altar in front of three walls. Cave 23 in Yungang is a typical example of this architectural structure. The entrance archway is exactly like those of Cave 35 and 39 in Yungang. The carving of the floral resembles one another and it even leads one to believe that the ornaments were carved by the same artisans.

In subject matter, the legendary debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri is a popular theme during the late Northern Wei visual representations. One other important clue in dating the cave is the inscriptions which mentioned many names of places. Jianzhou was mentioned several times in the inscriptions. According to Weishu, Jianzhou was changed into a region only during the Yongan era (528-530). The name Jianzhou was not used before that date when it was changed into a region. It is therefore clear that the cave was not executed before that date, i.e. the earliest date of the cave is 528. Suishu told us that Jianzhou was changed to Zezhou 澤州.

261 For the Shanxi images, see Guo Yong 郭勇, “Shanxi Taiyuan Xijiao faxian shike zaoxiang jianbao 山西太原西郊發現石刻造像簡報” (Report on the stone images discovered in western suburb of Taiyuan Shanxi Province), Wenwu cankao ziliao, 1955, 3; for the Xiyang image, see Qu Shengrong 瞿盛榮 and Yang Chunyuan 杨純淵, “Shanxi Xiyang chutu yipi beichao shizaoxiang 山西昔陽出土一批北朝石造像” (The images unearthed in Xiyang Shanxi Province), Wenwu, 1991, 12, 38-41.

262 The fluttering ribbon of the Bodhisattva is still seen in the Eastern Wei icons but it disappeared during the Northern Qi and Northern Zhou. The Avalokitsvara Bodhisattva excavated in Xiyang and dated to the 6th year of Wuding (548) still has the fluttering ribbons, see Qu Shengrong and Yang Chunyuan.

263 See footnote 15.
during the Kaihuang era (581-600). Thus the cave must be executed before that. Reading the iconography in this cave, it is a combination of the late Northern Wei and Eastern Wei.

Another cave complex with inscriptions in Shanxi is the Kaihesi Cave in Pingding County. There was a temple named Kaihesi to the west of the caves. Hence the name of Kaihe caves.

There are, from east to west, three small caves, each of which bears an inscription explicitly indicating the date of the cave: the 2nd year of Heqing (563) of the Northern Qi; the 5th year of Wuding (547) of the Eastern Wei and the 2nd year of Huangjian (561) of the Northern Qi. To the east of Cave 3, there are two small niches on the cliff. The inscription below each niche indicates that the upper niche was executed in the 2nd year of Huangjian (561), same year Cave 3, and the lower niche was in the 2nd year of Heqing (563), same year as Cave 1. The seated big Buddha with two attendant Bodhisattvas on the cliff bears an inscription as well and suggests that the images were executed in the 1st year of Kaihuang (581) of the Sui dynasty. Thus there are six inscriptions in this Buddhist complex, three for the caves, two for the niches and one for the cliff image.

Although the Kaihesi cave complex executed from the Eastern Wei to the Sui is beyond the scope of this study, the inscription of the 5th year of Wuding (547) in Cave 2 is rather important. It provides significant clue in dating the caves. The iconography in this cave clearly demonstrates that after the split of the Northern Wei in 534, Buddhist images are substantially different. The rendition is so smooth and natural that it leads one

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264 *Suishu*, 30:849.
265 For the full inscriptions, see Shanxisheng Jianzhu Baohu Yanjiusuo, “Shanxi Pingding Kaihesi Shiku” (Kaihesi Cave in Pingding Shanxi Province), *Wenwu*, 1997, 1, 73-85.
to believe that the image is not clad in any clothing. There are no pleats represented. The drapery falls down but is very short, unlike the late Northern Wei ones which fall down low like waterfalls providing a voluminous sense. The Eastern Wei and Northern Qi images are simple and smooth. Kaihesi cave complex is such an example.

VI. Conclusion

I have attempted in this chapter, which examines the “unexplored caves” of Shanxi, to establish three things:

First, by looking at these largely unexplored caves, we can establish the importance of Shanxi as a Buddhist center, and particularly a center of Chan activity, during the Northern Dynasties,

Second, by placing the caves in the chronological order of their construction, we can shed further light on the evolution of the Buddhist caves in central plain China and on the process of the sinicization of Buddhist iconography and practice,

Third, the magnificent complex of caves at Yungang came to exert a profound and lasting influence on Buddhist iconography long after the last cave there was constructed.

I have suggested, first of all, that the movement of capital cities - Pingcheng, Taiyuan, Luoyang and Ye, created an important crossroads in Shanxi province. The imperial courts, with their many patrons of Buddhism, attracted to these cities thousands of eminent and ordinary clerics who not only fostered a better understanding of Buddhism and a Buddhism which was more congenial to the Chinese mind, but also persuaded their patrons to enhance their karma and honour their ancestors by establishing temples and caves for prayer and meditation.
In the case of some of the smaller Shanxi caves, local communities of believers and even individuals seem to have sponsored construction. In any case, what we might term a “commute” among these urban centers fostered an interchange and a cross-pollination of Buddhist ideas, arts and culture over those centuries which preceded the unification of China in 589. During the Sui and Tang dynasties, the Buddhism which emerged was wholly Chinese both in its theology and its culture. The role of Shanxi in this development was pivotal, and the caves I have examined help to shed a little more light on this evolution.

I have attempted secondly to provide for the first time a chronological dating and categorization of the Shanxi caves, and by dividing their construction into three phases, and by reading their iconography, to make it possible to observe more closely the bridging effect of this group of caves between the Yungang style and the later Longmen style.266

266 The reason I proposed that the first-phase caves were likely to have been executed during the early Taihe reign era (477-499) of Emperor Xiaowen (r. 471-499) before the capital was transferred to the south Luoyang. They imitated the Yungang iconography. In Gaoping xianzhi 高平縣誌 (Gaoping Gazetteer), the Qinghua monastery 清化寺 was constructed during the Taihe era on the Yangtou Mountain range where the many Yangtoushan caves are located. Initially the monastery was named Dingguosi 定國寺, it was changed to Hongfusi 宏福寺 during the Northern Qi (550-577). At the end of the Sui (589-618), the monastery became a ruin and was not rebuilt until the 2nd year of Tianshou 天授 (691) under the Empress Wu Zetian’s reign and was named Qinghuasi 清化寺 as we are told in “Yangtoushan xinji 羊頭山新記” from the Gaoping xianzhi 高平縣誌 (Juan 19). It is questionable whether the monastery was named only during the Tianshou era under the reign of Empress Wu Zetian. We have literary records mentioning the name of Qinghua si 清化寺 even during the northern Qi period. Dao Xuan in his Xu Gaoseng Zhuan 謝高僧傳 mentioned that eminent monk Hui Yuan 慧遠 and many others preached during the Northern Qi period at the Qinghua monastery. The Qinghua monastery ruin is near Yangtoushan Caves 5, 5a and 5b, the first-phase of the Shanxi caves. I believe when the monastery was constructed, the cave 5a and cave 5b were constructed as well as part of the monastery. The whole Yangtoushan complex was started from this area and later on many caves were executed on scattered outcrops. The second-phase caves were assumably executed after the transfer of the capital to Luoyang from the Zhengguang era (520-525) to the end of the Northern Wei (520-534). This is the peak of the development of the Shanxi caves. The early second-phase caves still closely follow the iconography of Yungang whereas the second stage of the second-phase caves (Yangtoushan cave 3 and cave 5, Fushan, Jiaodingshan, Baoyingsi, Danzhuling, Shimasi and Dinglinsi) adopted both Yungang and Longmen elements. The two
As we have suggested that the early Shanxi caves were influenced by Yungang whereas the later ones were influenced by Longmen.

Finally, I have attempted to demonstrate the enormous influence of Yungang on Buddhist architecture and iconography. By showing that the first-phase of the Shanxi caves beginning during the early Taihe period (477-494), was already influenced by the final stage of Yungang construction, I have attempted to show the nature of the relationship between Yungang and Buddhist construction in a very different geographical area. This, as much as anything else, validates the view that the Yungang cave complex deserves its reputation as one of the great monuments of Buddhist artistic achievement not just in China, but in the entire world.

third-phase caves (Gaomiaoshan and Kaihesi) demonstrate rather distinguished iconography. Gaomiaoshan cave presents the combination of the late Northern Wei and the Eastern Wei.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

It was just over seventy years ago that the well-known Japanese scholars Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio conducted the first comprehensive studies of the first two phases of the Yungang Cave Complex in Shanxi. Inspired by their meticulous research, this study represents the first attempt to examine fully the third-phase caves and to integrate them into the previous work done on the earlier two phases. It focuses on the reading of the iconography of the third-phase caves, and examines both the origins and development of the caves as well as what lies inside them.

The third-phase caves have long been neglected as small and insignificant compared to the colossal images of the five Tan Yao caves and the dazzling ornate artistry of the second-phase caves. However, it is these late caves which first reveal the sinicization of artistry and artisanship in all its fullness, and it is also these caves that had a profound impact upon the early Longmen caves as well as upon a number of little-known caves in Shanxi, studied here for the first time.

It was to investigate the significance of the third-phase caves that this project examined the inter-relationship between them and both the early Longmen caves and the unexplored Shanxi caves. Although we have no literary evidence to tell us whether the Yungang artists and artisans went to Luoyang or even to southeastern Shanxi when the capital was moved from Pingcheng, we
have ample hard evidence to support our surmise that the Yungang style was a key inspiration for the later Longmen and Shanxi artists and artisans. The iconographic resemblance between these caves provides us with a clear map of the development of Buddhist imagery in central plain China.

All scholarship involves assumptions, and this study is no exception. I have used extant images with explicit dates as an anchor, and proceeded from there, to posit what I believe to be the first dating and chronological sequence of the third-phase caves and the unknown Shanxi caves. In so-doing, I hope that I have succeeded in providing a better understanding of the iconographic evolution which accompanied the transfer of the Northern Wei capitals and Buddhist centers from Pingcheng to Luoyang.

One question often posed by art historians is what do the images tell us? By reading the iconography carefully, I have argued that the iconography of Yungang is closely connected to Buddhist doctrine as expressed in the sutras most current at the time. The visual representations at Yungang, I suggest, are actually a means of literary expression. Words were carved in images.

The sinicization of Buddhist iconography in northern China was a long process, and far more complicated than previous explanations, such as reforms by the court or influences from the south, would have us believe. I have tried to show, by studying such iconographic features as the shape and form of the images, and the garments they wear, that over the three phases of Yungang, western influence gradually weakened and finally disappeared altogether. The iconography, instead, came to reflect Chinese aesthetic taste and even came to reflect the appearance of the robes worn by Chinese monks. Chinese ideas of modesty, for instance, found their expression in the *pianshan* (patch) covering the Buddha’s shoulder which was naked in India and in Gandhara images.
Finally, by looking into the connections between painting and sculpture, my study has attempted to open another avenue of inquiry to add to the conventional explanations which surround the sinicization of Buddhist imagery.

One of the key questions for this research has been: how far did Yungang style spread both temporally and geographically? By studying the early Longmen caves and the unknown Shanxi caves, I have tried to offer at least one answer. A question for further research is whether this style extended even further the west along the Silk Road or to the east to the Wanfotang Caves in Yixian, Liaoning Province. I am currently conducting research on this question.

I believe, finally, that there remain other fruitful lines of inquiry. Among them, are a cluster of questions around the donors who sponsored the caves, and the nature and training of the artists, artisans and labourers who built them. And undoubtedly, a more comprehensive study of the Shanxi caves is overdue.

I very much hope that this study will inspire further research.
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