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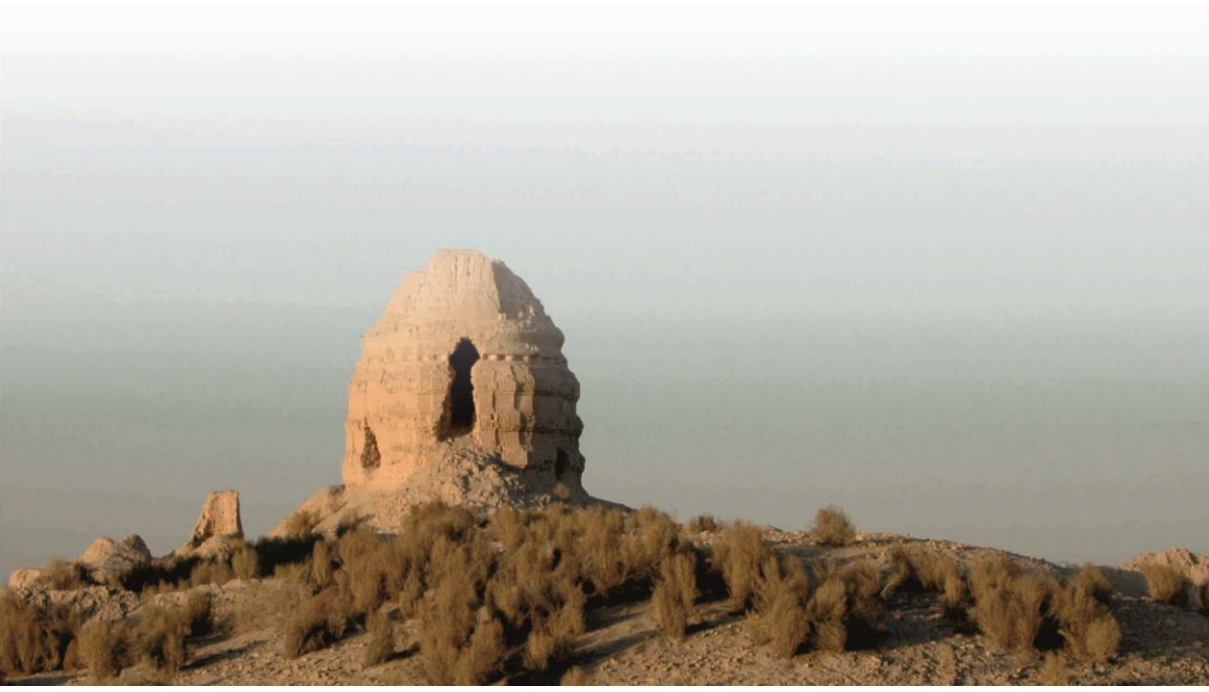
GIVING AND THE CREATION OF MERIT: BUDDHIST DONORS AND DONOR DEDICATIONS FROM 10TH CENTURY DUNHUANG

HENRIK H. SØRENSEN



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CONTACT:
Principal Investigator: Prof. Dr. Carmen Meinert
BuddhistRoad | Ruhr-Universität Bochum | Center for Religious Studies (CERES)
Universitätsstr. 90a | 44789 Bochum | Germany
Phone: +49 (0)234 32-21683 | Fax: +49 (0) 234/32- 14 909
Email: BuddhistRoad@rub.de | Email: carmen.meinert@rub.de
Website: https://buddhistroad.ceres.rub.de/

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GIVING AND THE CREATION OF MERIT: BUDDHIST DONORS AND DONOR DEDICATIONS FROM 10TH CENTURY DUNHUANG

HENRIK H. SØRENSEN

Abstract

This essay is devoted to a presentation and discussion of the manner in which Buddhist offerings and donations were made in the context of Buddhism in Dunhuang (敦煌) during the 10th century. It investigates the motives for making offerings, with special attention to religious paintings and holy books. I provide several elucidating case stories for each category, as well as a number of special or unusual examples. The basic idea is to give detailed insight into the motives and typologies underlying the activities of Buddhist donors and patrons under Guiyijun rule (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army).

1. *Introduction*

When looking at the phenomena of giving in a specific Buddhist context, it is clear that the creation and operation of Buddhist enterprises, whether they be proper temples and monasteries, cave-sanctuaries, *stūpa*s, etc., or entire holy sites, such as is the case with many of the Buddhist nodes of the Silk Road, could not exist or function without the support of donations, even generous ones at that, or income in some form. Hence, the presence of systems of donations and formalised modes of patronage were vital to the upkeep of the Buddhist communities existing in any given locale.[1]

Religious paintings and copies of holy scriptures were among the most common votive offerings presented to the Buddhist communities existing along the Silk Road, not the least of which is the Mogao Caves (Chin. Mogao ku 莫高窟) at Dunhuang, from which numerous examples of both kinds of offerings have been documented. This documentation expresses

[1] For a recent but general study on the practice of giving (Skt. *dāna*) in mainly Indian Buddhism, see Jason M. McCombs, "Mahâyâna and the Gift: Theories and Practices" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2014).

itself primarily in texts of donor dedications that record the deed of donation. These records are common for offerings of both paintings and scriptures. In connection with the former, many paintings have portrait images of the donor or donors.

One may see the textual dedications and those concerned with paintings, including portraits, as forms of self-representation, in which the official and the private spheres of the donors are merged. While portraits and texts of dedications in many ways reflect individual efforts and individual concerns, they often occur in contexts where entire assemblies of donors appear side by side, as in the donor portraits found in the caves. And even though each donor is often identified by a cartouche carrying his or her name as an individual marker, the manner in which the portraits are 'enshrined' in the setting of a given cave clearly makes the portraits, and the good deeds they celebrate—at least on the functional level as formal documentation—into official events in the most direct sense of the word.

While donor colophons attached to books, whether printed or manuscripts, tend to reflect individualised concerns, they are in many cases made by rulers or members of the local elite, thereby signaling acts of piety which go well beyond the more narrow, personalised motives of ordinary Buddhist believers. This is so because a member of the political and social elite in a given locale not only made donations as an individual but also as a leading member of a given society, namely as someone belonging to a specific and noteworthy group at the top of the social hierarchy. In other words, they were made from a place whence norms, including codes of behaviour, were dispensed to the larger community in a hegemonic manner. Therefore, as soon as such donation events become 'public', in the sense that they display a specific ordering system of power and status, they tend to take on a more distinctly official character.

The present essay highlights both the conceptual and the concrete world of the Buddhist donor in the late medieval period, based on material derived from Dunhuang. While the main focus is on donations of books and votive paintings, I also give a few examples from caves and their wall paintings. I especially want to elucidate here the concerns of the various donors, their socio-religious typologies, and the motives and beliefs underlying their actions. All of the cases discussed here derive from the

period of the Guiyijun's domination of Dunhuang, i.e. from 851 to around 1036.[2]

2. *Motives for Making Donations*

Before presenting and discussing the cases of donations and how giving is conceptualised in the material under consideration here, it is worthwhile to examine those issues and agendas that were the driving forces behind the donations. The following list of motivations is compiled based on a large number of primary sources primarily from Dunhuang, since it is my area of expertise, although I feel confident that a similar list could also be compiled based on donor records from elsewhere in the Buddhist world. The manner in which it is presented is not meant to follow a particular order, structured logic, or system of gradation:

(1) Repose and bliss of deceased parents and ancestors: Reference to seven generations of ancestors is relatively common. It is a typical element in the traditional Chinese ancestral cult, and therefore represents the invasion of a non-Buddhist type of belief into a basic Buddhist practice.

(2) Healing of self and others: This concern gives itself. We encounter this type of dedication as part of general or specific prayers for getting rid of sicknesses.

(3) Blessings for the ruler and the territory: Wishes or prayers of this kind are more numerous than one might think. In the material surveyed here, it is more commonly encountered during the time of the Northern Song (960–1126, 北宋) than in earlier periods. It would appear to reflect two different concerns, on the one hand, a heartfelt and genuine feeling of loyalty and support to the ruler, and on the other, something in the order of a mandatory convention.

(4) Blessings for society at large: This type of dedication is usually expressed as a general prayer, and is of course meant to reflect the donor's altruism and concern for his or her fellow human beings.

[2] The mechanics of the 'circuit of giving' in relation to medieval Chinese Buddhism is discussed at length in Jacques Gernet's classic study, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History from the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York: Columbia University Press 1995), 195–247. Many examples from Dunhuang during the 10th century are provided.

(5) Blessings for self (specific religious merit): This is a fairly common and frequently met category, often expressing a desire to alleviate evil *karma* committed in the past or the hope for spiritual attainment. While the former type seeks to avoid descending into the hells upon one's death, the latter expresses aspiration to ascend to a Pure Land, or to the assembly of Maitreya. Both types extend to self and others. This category of dedications is a general one, found in several contexts.

(6) Getting rid of suffering: It is interesting to note that many examples of this category conceptualise problems that cause suffering as a result of living and dead debtors, who each in their own way come to afflict the sufferer. Debt from the past may also involve karmic debt, i.e. unfinished or unresolved issues, such as enmity or acts of wrong-doing that come to haunt the donor later.

(7) Being protected from harm (diseases, depredation of demons, prosecution from officials, bandits, etc.): This is a rather general category, in which a donor seeks protection for one's self and one's family from various kinds of harm.

(8) Seeking longevity: The wish to extend one's lifespan is a very popular and important theme in Sinitic cultures. It is also often encountered in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism. However, Chinese culture does have a special focus on the attainment of long life, an almost cultic one, and that fact does play out in much of the material discussed here.

(9) Harmony in the family: This category is a common motif, often met with in the donor dedications. It is rarely a major motif, but commonly appears as a secondary concern.

While the above thematic categories of donor motivations are identified in order to provide an easy overview, in reality they often appear as parts of the same dedication, or as differently oriented prayers. Moreover, they may—and often do—overlap, creating a more complex and intertwined picture. However, one can also say that donor inscriptions and dedications usually have a leading or primary motivation, to which a number of secondary motivations may be added.

One often finds dedications in which the resulting accumulation of merit addresses the fear of falling into the hells, or the hope for rebirth in a paradise, connected with the production of specific icons or the copying of certain scriptures. On the face of it, this does not appear so surprising, since it makes sense to direct one's prayer to the best possible divine agent, to ensure that it may be fulfilled. Hence it is common to find paintings

depicting major Buddhist heroes of salvation, such as the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara or Kṣitigarbha, or scriptures relating to their cults, commissioned in relation to this major concern.[3] Likewise, we often find King Yama and the Ten Kings invoked when the supplicant fears an evil rebirth that could land him or her in the hells for an extended time. Rebirth in paradise, in a Pure Land (Chin. *jingtu* 淨土), naturally enough, is often expressed in connection with images and scriptures belonging to the cult of Amitābha/Amitayūs or Maitreya, the Future Buddha. Likewise, the desire for healing may appear with paintings or scriptures concerned with Bhaiṣajyaguru, the Medicine Buddha. In spite of this, one should not expect too rigid a correspondence between image/scripture and a given type of donor concern, as there are many instances where merit-making *per se* is the overwhelming concern, no matter the donor's specific situation. The various types of dedications and their prayers often occur together in the same text.

The practice of the transfer of merit (Skt. *parīnāma*, Chin. *huixiang* 迴向)[4] to others is in the Sinitic cultural sphere to which Buddhism during the Guiyijun period in Dunhuang mainly belonged, was, therefore, specifically targeting ancestors and recently deceased family members, and sick relatives advanced in age, and as such tends to express concerns for their future well-fare, especially that they avoid ending up in the offices of torture in the Netherworld.[5] Even though offerings like those

[3] This issue has been dealt with in Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press and Kuroda Institute, 1994). See also Françoise Wang-Toutain, *Le Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha en Chine du Ve au XIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Presses de L'École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1998).

[4] The beliefs and practices which combine to make up the conceptual foundation for the transference of merit are manifold, and although there can be little doubt that it originated in Indian Buddhism quite early, in the context of Chinese Buddhism alone it goes quite a way back in time. For definitions, see FDC, vol. 4, 3784a–3785a. For a scripture of somewhat dubious origins that deals with transference of merit, see the *Fo shuo shen shen da huixiang jing* 佛說甚深大迴向經 [Scripture on the Exceedingly Deep and Great Transference of Merit] (T. 825.17). This scripture purports to be a translation from the first half of the 5th century.

[5] See Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Meeting of Daoist and Buddhist Spatial Imagination: The Construction of the Netherworld in Medieval China," in *Locating Religions: Contact, Diversity and Translocality*, ed. Reinhold F. Glei and Nikolas Jaspert (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017), 234–292.

recorded in the dedications from Dunhuang were often made on behalf of deceased parents and family members, it would not be correct to only see them as reflecting mortuary concerns or as expressions of filial piety. Hence, as far as offerings and donations go, I tend to disagree with Michel Soymié, who sees the donations of religious paintings as primarily concerned with the Chinese cult of the dead.[6] Certainly, many of the dedications and cases involving transference of merit do relate to mortuary practices, but as already indicated, concern for the souls of the dead was only one of many motives—albeit an important one—for providing offerings and making donations to the Buddhist institutions at Dunhuang (and elsewhere).

It is sometimes possible to set up a distinction between lay and clerical donors' motivations for making offerings. Stated in very general terms, the former tends to be more concerned with their own families and more immediate concerns of the so-called 'worldly' type, while monks and nuns in many cases are focused on 'spiritual' concerns. Again, this is a distinction that may only be upheld on the basis of tendency or densification of cases, but it is not to be taken as a general rule. As we shall presently see, there are many dedications by Buddhist clerics that are rather worldly in nature, and also many lay dedications that show a heightened sense for spiritual goals. The circuit of donations in Dunhuang during the reign of the Guiyijun took place, after all, in what can best be described as an ideal Buddhist context, and fervent Buddhist piety would seem to an integral part of this.

3. *Donating Buddhist Icons: Paintings and Images*

A majority of donations to the Buddhist communities in Dunhuang by members of the elite take the form of religious or votive paintings. These paintings are special in many ways, not so much for their variegated iconography, but because most of them include generic portraits of donors and of their deceased relatives. It is interesting to note that although the appearance of donor-portraits in paintings—especially as part of the production of religious art— was a phenomena that became increasingly prominent during the later Tang (923–935, 後唐) and Five Dynasties

[6] See Michel Soymié, "Les donateurs dans les peintures de Dunhuang," *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 11 (1999–2000): 1–24.

(906–978, 五代) period in China, relatively few paintings with donors have survived outside of those found in Dunhuang.[7] This makes these paintings both invaluable and unique.

The votive paintings found in Cave 17, together with the hoard of manuscripts, represent donors following a sort of iconographical template, in that they usually display a fixed convention for depicting portraits. When we say 'portrait' we are not talking about portraits in the usual sense of the word, i.e. a rendering of a living or dead person resembling his or her physical likeness. Most of the donor portraits from Dunhuang are, with few exceptions, generic in nature, and the primary way of identifying them is through captions with their names, and sometimes also a statement regarding the reason for the offering. Only in a few, isolated cases do these donor portraits approach something akin to an actual physical likeness, but even so, they are usually idealised.[8]

One significant feature of the donor-portraits from Dunhuang is their respective size. In earlier donor-portraits, the images of the donors were usually rather small, often completely dwarfed by the main icon to which a given painting was dedicated. Moreover, it was common to have the portrait of the donor (or the person for whom the donation was made) inserted into the primary composition itself, i.e. placed next to the main icon. During the reign of the Guiyijun, in the 10th century in particular, we see a marked tendency for donor-portraits to become relatively larger than before, more numerous and familial, and take up much more of the actual surface of the painting. At the same time, the donor portraits are removed from the main iconographical composition. In effect, donor portraits divided the picture frame into two or more separate parts. This development signals that the act of donation takes on added importance, and it becomes increasingly paramount for donors to signal and display

[7] Portrait images, often of entire families or groups of donors, are fairly common to the Buddhist sculptural art of Sichuan (四川) during the 10th century and slightly before. For a prime example, see the outside lintels of the Pure Land group no. 245 at Mt. Bei (Chin. Bei shan, 北山) in Sichuan. An extensive discussion of this significant group is found in Tom Suchan, "The Eternally Flourishing Stronghold: An Iconographic Study of the Buddhist Sculpture of the Fowan and Related Sites at Beishan, Dazu ca. 892–1155" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2003), 406–422.

[8] For the portraits of the Khotanese royalty in Cave 98, see *Zhongguo bihua quanji* 中國壁畫全集 [Complete Collection of Chinese Wall Paintings], *Dunhuang 9: Wudai - Song* 五代 - 宋 (Shenyang: Liaoning meishu chubanshe, 1990), 9, 3, pl. 6.

their piety in the painting. Such 'usurpation' of significance, in effect an 'iconification' of the donor role in the practice of Buddhist offerings, may have had to do with a growing importance of religious and social status for the donating families. It could also be because in many cases deceased people and ancestors are included among the donors, making them partake directly in the merit of the offering on their own behalf. One could, therefore, easily read this practice as revealing that an extended form of ancestral cult had become the norm. Or, perhaps, it simply happened because of an increase in religious competition among the important, local clans.[9]

Illustrative examples of donor-portraiture and donor-dedications from Dunhuang are manifold. In the following I discuss two representative cases. The first is MG 17664, which is an icon of Kṣitigarbha as lord of rebirth, flanked by two figures, the Lads of Evil Karma and Good Karma, who are lower officials of human destinies, usually associated with judgement in the Netherworld.[10] The bodhisattva's role as saviour of those unfortunate ones in the hells is alluded to in the secondary tableaux behind him, which depicts rebirth in the so-called Six Destinies (Chin. *liudao*, 六道) is depicted (fig. 1).

[9] In a recent paper I made an outline of religious paintings and donors in Dunhuang, taking as my point of departure an Avalokiteśvara paintings with multiple donor portraits representing several of the local clans. See Henrik H. Sørensen, "Donors and Image at Dunhuang: A Case Study of OA 1919,0101,0.54," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 4.1 (2019).

[10] For a similar iconographical theme, see OA 1919,0101,0.19 in Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Road* (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), 46–47, pls. 19AB.

Figure 1. Painting of Kṣitigarbha. Dunhuang, 10th century. MG 17664.

The donors are portrayed below the divinities, set inside a separate panel. The captions for their names and the central panel dividing the male and female donors—to be used for the text of the donor dedication—have been left empty. The principal male donor is shown on the far right, evidently a person of status. He is dressed in the typical formal frock of a Song official and wears the butterfly cap on his head. He sits with his hands placed in front of his chest in devotional greeting (Skt. *añjali*). In front of

him is a young Buddhist nun, possibly newly ordained, and in front of her (?) is the image of a nun officiating over the act of worship. She holds a tray with offerings before her. The second figure to the left on the other side of the central cartouche is the principal female donor. She is a well-dressed lady in her finest, with a lavish hair-ornament and heavy make-up, as was common for women's fashion in this remote part of Sinitic culture during the 10th century. In front of her is another officiating nun, holding the customary handled incense burner, and at the very back there is a young male child (fig. 1).

Since we have no way to know who this pair of donors were, because their names and the colophon text are absent, we may let their portraits speak for themselves. Evidently, we are dealing with a married couple of upper-class background, who could be either the deceased parents of the painting's donor, or the actual donors themselves. The fact that the painting is dedicated to the cult of Kṣitigarbha, i.e. a divinity closely associated with salvation from rebirth, could indicate that the first option is more likely. The three clerical figures could be their relatives from a clan-sponsored temple, or they may be the donors themselves, and the married couple, their parents. In any case, we do know that they are representations of nuns because of the rouge applied to their cheeks.[11] Again, the presence of both nuns and lay figures underscores the close relationship that persisted between officials and other lay-Buddhist followers on the one hand, and the members of Buddhist temples at Dunhuang on the other. Monks and nuns often acted as mediating agents during rituals.

The second representative case of s painting that shows the offering of a votive painting by clerics on behalf of what I presume was their spiritual master, a venerable nun, is a fairly non-descript painting from the Stein Collection depicting Avalokiteśvara in the form of Water–Moon Avalokiteśvara (Chin. Shuiyue Guanyin 水月觀音) (fig. 2).[12]

[11] It is not known whether Buddhist nuns actually wore make-up in Dunhuang under the Guiyijun, but most likely they did not, given the injunctions in the *vinaya*. Therefore, we should read this iconographic feature as a gender marker, or otherwise as an artistic convention, rather than taking it as concrete evidence that nuns actually wore make-up.

[12] OA 1919,0101,0.28.

Figure 2. Water–Moon Avalokiteśvara. Dunhuang, 10th century.
OA 1919,0101,0.28, BM.

The donors appear in a single row and are set, as usual, in the bottom section of the painting. There are six (?) donors in total, three on the left side and three on the right. In contradistinction to many of the later paintings with females placed on either side of the central panel bearing the donor dedication, in this case the donors, consisting of both clerics and lay-people, show a mix of gender.

Starting on the left side, the first portrait is that of the main donor, the monk Zhigang (fl. second half of 9th c., 智剛), who sits holding the usual long-handled incense burner. Behind him, second in the line, is a woman dressed in a comparatively subdued manner. Behind her is a portrait of a youthful male holding a flower. The cartouches in front of each read (fig. 3):

Offering by Zhigang.
Wholeheartedly offered by the Miaozhen.

Offering by Hezi.[13]

Figure 3. Detail of OA 1919,0101,0.28.

On the right side are three nuns. The first is the nun Shengming (fl. second half of 9th/early 10th c., 勝明), holding a tray of offerings, succeeded by another nun, shown holding a flower with both hands, and finally another nun depicted in similar fashion. The cartouches read (fig. 4):

Offering by Sun Shengming.
Pujing, [and]
Mingxiang.[14]

[13] 智剛供養
妙真一心供養
和子供養.
[14] 孫勝明供養
普淨
明祥.

Figure 4. Detail of OA 1919,0101,0.28.

The dedication itself reads (fig. 5):

> The time being the third day of the 12th month of *jiashen* in the 3rd year sequential *renzi* year of Dashun of the Tang [(i.e. 892)], the relative, the *śramāna* Zhigang, the nun Shengming, and others on behalf of the deceased nun, the *vinaya* and *dharma ācārya*, had respectfully one image of Avalokiteśvara, Rescuer from Sufferings, painted as an eternal offering.[15]

[15] 時唐大順三年 歲 次壬子十二月甲申朔三日, 孫沙門智剛, 尼勝明等奉為亡尼法律闍梨, 敬繪救苦觀世音菩薩 一軀, 永充供養.

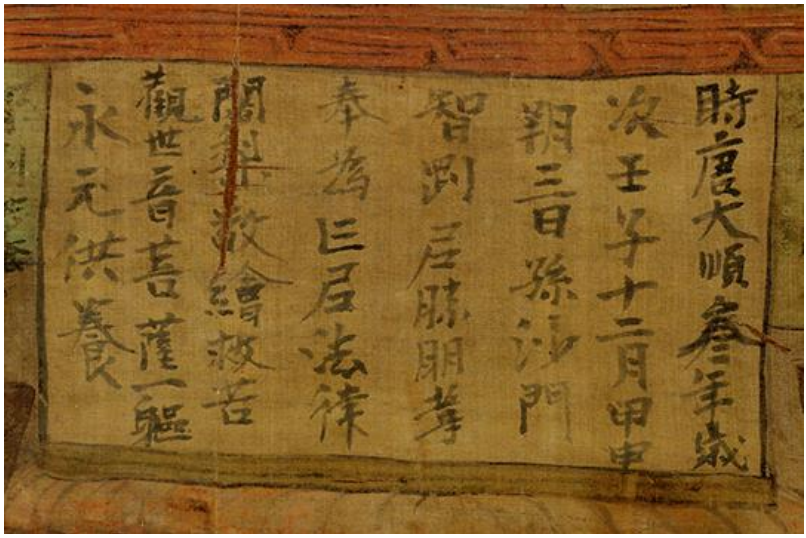

Figure 5. Fig. 5. Detail of OA 1919,0101,0.28.

The exact family relationship between the deceased nun and the donors in the painting is not immediately clear for all of them. It would seem that both Zhigang and Shengming were blood-relatives of the Sun (孫) clan. Madame Zhen is stated to be a sister, so again the indication is that the painting was a commemorative offering on behalf of a nun, who was both a senior family member and a spiritual leader. The last may be deduced on account of her designation as *ācārya*, a title usually reserved for masters of Esoteric Buddhism only.[16] I suggest that the two other nuns, Pujing (d.u., 普凈) and Mingxiang (d.u., 明祥), are disciples of the deceased person, like the two other clerics.

Another example of a painting with donor portraits and dedication is that of MG 23079, which represents what appears to be a late rendering of

[16] See also Yao Meiling 姚美玲, "Dunhuang shu gongyang ren tiji geshi jiedu 敦煌畫供養人題記格式解讀 [An Explanation of the Style of Writing in the Donor Inscriptions on the Silk Paintings from Dunhuang]," in *Biaoyi wenzi tixi yu Hanzixue kejian she* 表意文字體系與漢字學科建設 [Displaying the Idea of Literary Styles and the Founding of the Department for the Study of Chinese Characters], *Shijie Hanzixue hui di sijie nianhui* 世界漢字學會第四届年會 [The 4th Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Chinese Characters in the World], 142–148 (Pusan, 2016 June 24–28, 2016 (Han'guk Pusan Kyŏngsŏng Taegak - Han'guk Hanja yŏngu 韓國釜山慶星大學 韓國漢字研究).

the Bodhisattva Amoghapāśa, yet another form of Avalokiteśvara, here depicted in a standing form that is somewhat unusual for this divinity. This painting also features a section in the bottom containing the donor portraits, their personal identifying labels, and a donor dedication. As seen in other Dunhuang paintings of this kind, deceased members of the family are represented in the painting. There are three portraits on either side of the central cartouche, of which the last one on the male side is an unnamed child or youth. The condition of the painting is not very good, and some characters are no longer legible in the text of the dedication. Beginning with the male donors on the right side of the painting, the labels read:

> Offered wholeheartedly by the deceased Compassionate Father Deng Wenhuo
>
> Offered wholeheartedly by the son Deng Xingquan.[17]

Then follows the text of the dedication:

> The disciple of pure faith Deng Xingquan commissioned the painting of one image of the Bodhisattva Amoghapāśa.[18] First it is respectfully presented on behalf of the people of the realm, that they may be at peace […],[19] next on behalf of previously deceased parents to secure that they are reborn in the Pure Land, next that the family be harmonious and without […][20] displayed eternally as an offering.
>
> Recorded on a day in the fourth month in a *gengxu* year.[21]
>
> The daughter and deceased wife
>
> Offered wholeheartedly by the new wife of the Du clan [(杜氏)].
>
> Offered wholeheartedly by the compassionate mother of the Zhang clan [(張氏)].[22]

---

[17] 故慈父鄧文或一心 [供養]
男鄧幸全一心供養

[18] Here Amoghapāśa's name appears in phonetic transcription.

[19] One character missing.

[20] Two characters missing.

[21] This date corresponds to either 950 or 1010. Both are possible given design and iconography, but the latter date is perhaps more plausible. Of course, if correct, this means that Cave 17 was not walled-up before this date.

[22] 清信弟子鄧幸全敬造
伯空卷索菩薩 壹軀
先奉為國人安□一為
過往父母秉生淨土二為
合家無□□彰永充
供養 庚戌年四月日記

The portraits of the deceased parents are placed at the front of both groups, next to the text of the dedication, in accordance with the Chinese system of ancestral family ranking. Their identifying labels are, moreover, painted in a different colour than those of the other members of the family. The prayers voiced in connection with the transfer of merit are rather straight forward, peace on earth, rebirth in the Pure Land, and harmony in the family. The dedication does not mention why Amoghapāśa was singled out for depiction in the commissioned painting, so it is not clear whether it was a random motif or whether it reflects a special cultic association with the Deng family.

4. *Donating Buddhist Scriptures*

There are not substantial differences between donor dedication motifs found in colophons appended to Buddhist scriptures and those found in paintings. However, given that commissioning one or more copies of religious books was a relatively inexpensive enterprise, and therefore within the province of most Buddhist devotees and pilgrims coming to Dunhuang, the textual donor colophons reflect a wider and more common practice than the practice of ordering paintings for donations. In contrast, only the Guiyijun rulers and the wealthy clans could afford to have entire sets of Buddhist scriptures copied or, as became increasingly popular as the 10th century wore on, printed.

I have selected a number of examples of donor dedications we find appended as colophons to Buddhist scriptures in order to give a representative overview of the practice of having books copied for donation or offering. Let us begin with a case of a scriptural donation by a member of Dunhuang's elite, namely that made by Cao Yansheng (fl. second half of 10th c., 曹延晟),[23] one of the four sons of the Guiyijun ruler

女住娘
新婦杜氏一心供養
慈母張氏一心供養

[23] Very little is known about his life and activities except that he was a devout Buddhist, as were his father and brothers. He was transferred to Guazhou (瓜州) in or around 980. See *Song huiyao jigao: Cao xing ziliao huibian* 宋會要輯稿: 曹姓资料汇编 [Collation of Materials Relating to those with Cao Family Names in the *Song huiyao jigao*], ed. Cao Ziqiang 曹自强, accessed September 13, 2018. http://www.caoguo.org/xiazai/download/cxzlhb.pdf.

Cao Yuanzhong (r. 944–974, 曹元忠), who commissioned the copying of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (T. 220.5), which he then donated to the local Xiande Temple (顯德寺) (Beijing 1429).[24] We might suppose that the library of this temple—one of the major Buddhist temples in Dunhuang—was in need of its own copy of this central Buddhist *sūtra*.[25] Yansheng's donor colophon is a relatively lengthy one, which underscores the importance of the scriptural offering. It is couched in the typical literary hyperbole characteristic of self-congratulatory donation projects of this type. It reads:

> The disciple of pure faith, Controlling Messenger of the Army of the Guiyijun Government, Acting Censor and Left Retainer to the Imperial Emissary, the Great Person Cao Yansheng, took out a part of his small wealth, in order to have one set of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* copied [together with] brocade wrappers, which he bestowed upon the Xiande Temple. It was respectfully [offered] on behalf of the Martial Country [(Chin. *jun guo* 軍國),[26] that it may be eternally at peace, that the ancestral *karma* [(Chin. *zuye* 祖業)] be prosperous; that the roads of the world may be clean and level, that the people may be tranquil and happy. that the Great King may enjoy long life, that precious ranks may be secure [like] hills and mountains, that favourable treatment may daily be renewed, and that blessings may surpass rivers and oceans. [Moreover, he wishes that] his wife of immortal complexion and rich appearance will eternally drive up to the Mushroom Palace in her ornamented carriage [(Chin. *yuxuan* 魚軒)], and that her beautiful appearance may remain for a long time in the phoenix mirror [(Chin. *luanjing* 鸞鏡)] and continue to illumine the Phoenix

http://www.caoguo.org/xiazai/download/cxzlhb.pdf. A brief biographical note can also be found in *Dunhuang suijin*, 86.

[24] The colophon is found added to rolls 274–275 of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*. For the text of the dedication, see also *Dunhuang yuanwen ji*, 933–934.

[25] The importance of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* in Chinese Buddhist history is undisputed, and the same would appear to hold true for Dunhuang throughout the Guiyijun rule, as documented in the extensive number of copies we find of this scripture among the manuscripts. For a study of this, see Zheng Binglin 鄭炳林, "Wan Tang Wudai Dunhuang diqu *Dabanruo jing* xinyang yu difang zhengquan de guanxi 晚唐五代敦煌地區 大般若經 信仰與地方政權的關係 [On the Relationship between Faith in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* and Local Government in Dunhuang during the Late Tang and Five Dynasties Period]," *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 [Pumen Journal] 34 (2006): 1–19 (cf. esp. 14).

[26] This is undoubtedly a reference to the newly established Song Dynasty, which at that time was still in the process of unifying China.

> Pavillion.[27] Bowing down, he has reflected how he, as a youth [(Chin. *housheng* 後生)] was brave and fierce, giving free rein to his thoughts and unrestrained feelings without realising that he was extensively creating karmic obstacles for himself. [This included] hunting sentient beings with great arrows and the longbow, such as the flying goose, thereby causing injury to the lifespan of others. He only vows to undertake this copying of [Buddhist] books as meritorious virtue, respectfully bestowing it as cause and effect, so that [earlier] transgressions may be eliminated and blessings be born, and that he may be without all calamities. Furthermore, that those previously deceased and distant generations, will be acquainted with and entrust themselves to the Western Direction, [so that they may] journey to the halls of the Pure Land, and testify to the fruit of the unborn [(Chin. *wusheng zhi guo* 無生之果).] This was written on the 1st day of the 5th month in the fourth *pingyin* year of Qiande [(966)].[28]

Despite the self-depreciating tone at the beginning of the text regarding the donor's economic status, this is obviously a classical example of Chinese pseudo-humility in literary form. In fact, copying the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, even if Cao Yansheng's offering was not of the entire set, would have been no mean accomplishment in economic terms. Surely such a project would have been a costly affair to be borne by a single person, even at the standards of that time. Although the inscription commemorates the scriptural offering of a pious lay Buddhist, martial metaphors abounds, underscoring the role and identify of the donor as an important man of the local military establishment.

The statement on the transference of merit is somewhat formulaic and impersonal, as if the listed concerns in the prayer are mandatory items rather than expressions of real wishes. In other words, they convey a kind of official air, something which undoubtedly reflects on the elevated status of the donor. Only further in the colophon do we see the more personal

[27] These are poetic references to the elegance of the royal palace in Dunhuang. The allusions to phoenix and longevity mushrooms are literary tropes to denote the lofty and hallowed halls there.

[28] Beijing 1429, *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*: 清信弟子歸義軍節度監軍使檢校尚書左僕射兼御史大夫曹延盛, 剖割 小財, 寫大般若經一帙並錦帙子, 施入顯德寺者. 奉為軍國永泰, 祖業興隆; 世路清平, 人民安樂. 大王遐壽, 寶位堅於丘山; 龍蔭日新, 福祚過於江海. 夫人仙顏轉茂, 魚軒永駕 於芝宮;美貌長滋, 鸞鏡恒輝於鳳閣. 伏惟己躬, 後生雄猛;縱意恣情, 不覺不知, 廣造業 障:或飛鷹走犬, 拽捉眾生;或大箭長弓, 傷他性命. 惟願承斯書寫功德, 奉施因緣, 罪滅 福生, 無諸憂惱. 然後先亡遠代, 識托西方, 遨遊淨土之宮, 速證無生之果. 於時乾德四年丙寅歲五月一日寫記.

intentions of Cao Yansheng play out, as when he, in typical literati-style, admonishes the reader of the importance of practicing Buddhism in order to avoid evil *karma*. Indeed, it would appear that in the course of his life he had come to entertain regret concerning certain former deeds, including hunting (and possible warfare, as well), for which he sought atonement with the above offering. Hence, and despite the somewhat formulaic tone of the dedication, there can be no doubt that Cao Yansheng was a devout Buddhist. In fact, he had previously demonstrated his support of Dunhuang's Buddhists when he commissioned a 949 printing of the *Vajracheddikāsūtra*, meant for distribution among the faithful.[29]

Another case is a lengthy donor dedication recording a more extensive scriptural offering by a member of the Cao clan, a young girl, who is suffering from an illness. Evidently, the text of the dedication reflects her state of mind at the time of the donation. The colophon appears appended to an abbreviated version of the *Mārīcīdevīdhāraṇīsūtra* (P. 2805). The colophon reads:

> On the 13th day of the 10th month of the 6th *xinchou* year of the Tianfu [reign-period, i.e. 941], the female disciple of pure faith, the young woman of the Cao family, commissioned the copying of the *Hṛdāyaprajñā-pāramitāsūtra* [(T. 251.8)] in one roll, the *Xuming jing* [續命經 [Scripture on the Extension of the Span of Life] (T. 2889.85)] in one roll, the *Yanshou ming jing* [延壽命經 [Scripture on Longevity and the Span of Life] (T. 2888.85)] in one roll, and the *Mārīcīdevīsūtra* [(T. 1256.21, P. 2805, P. 3136, P. 3824, etc.)][30] in one roll, respectfully offered on behalf of herself, as she suffers from difficulties. Today she presents a number of scriptures, since the medicine dumplings [(Chin. *yao'er* 藥餌)][31] that were bestowed again

[29] This case is discussed in Henrik H. Sørensen, "Donations and the Production of Buddhist Scriptures in Dunhuang during the 10th Century," *Hualin International Journal of Buddhist Studies* 3 (forthcoming 2020). See also Fang Guangchang 方廣錩, "Dunhuang wenxian de zhong Jingang jing ji qi zhushu 敦煌文獻的中金剛經及其注疏 [The *Vajracheddikāsūtra* as Found Among the Dunhuang Writings and Its Circulation]," accessed Juli 25, 2018. http://big5.xuefo.net/nr/article31/311984.html.

[30] Most of the copies of this scripture found among the Dunhuang hoard of manuscripts are short, abbreviated versions deriving from the translation by Amoghavajra (705–774, Chin. Bukong 不空) (T. 1255.21).

[31] These medicinal buns are documented in the Chinese primary sources from the early Tang onwards. One earliest Buddhist cases of their use are found in Sengchou's (480–560, 僧稠) biography in the *Xu gaoseng chuan* 續高僧傳 [Continuation of the Histories of Famous Monks] (T. 2060.50, 553a–c), and in Bodhiruci's monumental version of the *Amoghapāśakalparāja* (T. 1092.20, 324a). They are also found in the celebrated *materia*

> and again in the morning still have not made her well, and she now lies sick [in bed]. Beginning to realise her former misdeeds, she humbly begs the Great Holy Ones to relieve her hardships and lift her out of danger, and that the mirror [(Chin. *jian* 鑒)][32] will reflect the virtue of the copying of scriptures. She [therefore] hopes to be protected, that this troublesome danger will be eliminated, deceased family debtors [(Chin. *zhaizhu* 債主)][33] will receive their capital [when] the merit is divided, and that they will [subsequently] go for rebirth in the Western [Pure Land]. With a mind full of prayer, she eternally supplies these [scriptures] as eternal offerings […].[34]

Form this text of dedication we learn that the primary motif of the donor is to recover from her sickness, and that since the medicinal dumplings have failed to effect a cure, she has resorted to the donation of holy scriptures. Here it is significant to see how she prays the enemies of her family will be appeased by the offering and that they will attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Sukhāvatī. She also wishes her deceased parents will be at ease. It is noteworthy that family issues play such a dominant role in this dedication, something which surely reflects a deep-seated adherence to traditional Chinese cultural and ethical values.[35]

Given these two scriptural offerings by members of Dunhuang's elite, let us continue with a number of other representative cases of donations of holy texts made by clerics and lay persons. Among the interesting and instructive donor dedications found in connection with copying Buddhist

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mater, *Qian jin yifang* 千金醫方 [Medical Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces] from 682. For an easy-to-access-version of the *Medical Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces*, 417, 459, etc., accessed April 3, 2018. http://seirouoosone.web.fc2.com /SennkinnYokuhouHanntai.pdf.

[32] This undoubtedly refers to the Mirror of *karma* in the Netherworld, in which King Yama can see the karmic deeds of those coming before him. For more on this, see Henrik H. Sørensen, "The Meeting of Daoist and Buddhist Spatial Imagination," 234–292.

[33] I read this to refer to so-called unresolved karmic debts from the past.

[34] P. 2805: 天福六年 [(941)] 辛丑 歲十月十三日清信女弟子小娘子曹氏敬寫般若心經一卷, 續命經一卷, 延壽命經一卷, 摩利支天經一卷, 奉為己躬患難, 今經數晨, 藥餌頻施不蒙抽; 今遭卧疾, 始悟前非, 伏乞大聖濟難拔危, 鑒照寫經功德, 望仗危難消除, 死家債主領資福分, 往生西方, 滿其心願,[…].

[35] Even though it is well-established that traditional Indian Buddhism also promoted filial piety, including the respect for elders, its manner of conceptualisation and role in Buddhist practice is of quite another order. Here, and in the related material from Dunhuang, it is quite clear that Sinitic norms were the most common modus (it would be strange otherwise, as the population of Dunhuang during the medieval period, such as that addressed here, was dominated by Chinese).

scriptures at Dunhuang, is one appended to manuscript S. 4378.[36] The manuscript itself features two of the central Esoteric Buddhist spells in China, the *Dabei xin tuoluoni* 大悲心陀羅尼 [Heart Spell of the Great Compassion] (T. 1064.20)[37] and the *Foding zunsheng jiaju lingyan tuoluoni* 佛頂尊勝加句靈驗陀羅尼 [Bodoṣṇīṣa-Augmenting Phrases of the Spell of Numinous Response] (T. 974C.19).[38] The two spells are accompanied by lengthy liturgical texts, and as such highlight the great importance locally ascribed to both the *Nīlakaṇṭhaka* and the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyasūtra*. The text of the colophon reads:

> […] The merit [(Chin. *gongde* 功德)] of upholding [these spells]
> I revert to all that have sentience,
> so that I and all sentient beings,
> may attain to the Buddha's Way.
>
> The monk Huilan [(d.u., 惠鑾)], in response to an order, has respectfully undertaken to issue forth these writings, and although there are many clumsy mistakes, [he hopes] that they nevertheless will aid sentient beings in the future. He respectfully offers them up, humbly asking that they be received and upheld, so that all may share in the exceptional benefits.
>
> The time being the 8th day of the 12th month in the *jiwei* [(己未)] year [(899 or 959?)]. The *Heart Spell of the Great Compassion* and the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyadhāraṇī* were copied together in one roll in the scripture repository of the Dabei Temple in the Jiangling prefecture[39].[40]

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[36] Lengthy description in Giles, 130b (4444).

[37] This is the primary spell of the *Nīlakaṇṭhakadhāraṇīsūtra* as translated by Amoghavajra (T. 1064.20).

[38] Written by the Imperial Commissioner Wu Che (d. before 763, 武徹) during the Tang. A record of the spiritual results from practicing with the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana-uṣṇīṣavijāyadhāraṇīsūtra*. For additional data on this person, see *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 [Extensive Records from the Taiping Reign Period], ch. 150.

[39] In modern Hubei province.

[40] S. 4378V° (1): […] 持課諸功德普及諸有情我等與眾生皆共成佛道比丘惠鑾者今奉 命書出, 多有拙惡, 且副來情, 謹專奉上. 伏乞受持 同沾殊利. 時己未 **歲** 十二月八日在江陵府大悲寺經藏**內**寫大悲心陀羅尼, 尊勝陀羅尼同一卷了.

This is a *de facto* verse for transferring merit and as such is found attached, more or less verbatim, to ritual texts relating to the cult of the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara, including the *Dabei qiqing* 大悲啓請 [Inviting the Great Compassion], which was in common use in Dunhuang during the 9–10th centuries. Cf. E.g. T. 2843.85, 1296b. See also Zhang Zong 張總, "Dunhuang xieben *Qianshou jing* yu *Dabei qiqing* 敦煌寫本 千手經 與大悲啟請 [The Dunhuang Manuscripts [Featuring] the *Nīlakaṇṭhakasūtra* and the *Inviting*

This donor colophon clearly shows that the motive behind having the two spell texts copied was a singularly religious one, namely the wish that the person himself, together with all sentient beings, will attain Buddhahood. Its religious nature is further underscored by the admonition to show the proper decorum when using the spells in question. An identical colophon appended to another copy of the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyadhāraṇī*, but with a different date, is found in S. 2566.[41] It states that it was written on "the 17th day of the 1st month in the *jiwei* [(己未)] year," which refers to either 918 or 978. Moreover, it informs us that it was "copied in the inner Guanyin Cloister [(Chin. Guanyin yuan 觀音院)] of the Sanjie Temple [(三界寺)][42] in Shazhou."[43] This indicates that the text in question functioned as a sort of template or form for liturgical texts of this kind.

As we see above, there is a tendency in the sources for clerics to have more altruistic motives recorded in connection with their donations. Although this was generally the case, we also find many records of prayers that reflect motivations behind the donation that are not any different from those of the common lay people.

Clerics making donations on behalf of the Buddhist community are also found. One such case relates to a nameless monk or nun, who made a donation of a booklet featuring the *Vajracheddikā* and the *Foshuo yan luo wang shouji he si zhong ni xiu sheng qi zhai gongde wang sheng jingtu jing* 佛說閻羅王受記合匹衆逆脩生七齋功德往生淨土經 [Scripture Spoken by the Buddha on King Yama Receiving the Records on Joining the Documents of the Multitude of Refractions and Regulating the Living Through the Meritorious [Performance] of the Seven *Zhai*, whereby One May Go for Rebirth in the Pure Land] (ZZ 21.1); the *Shiwang jing* 十王經 [Scripture on the Ten Kings] is a variant title.[44] The booklet contains two dedications, one after each scripture (S. 5450). The first reads:

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the Great Compassion]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌学輯刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 4 (2015): 22–30.

[41] A description of this manuscript is found in Giles, 202b (6436).

[42] This is one of the few rare instances where details about the Sanjie Temple are given in the primary sources. The Guanyin Cloister is where the important local monk Daozhen resided during the mid-10th century. Cf. P. 2641.

[43] S. 2566: 時戊寅歲一月十七日, 在沙洲三界寺內觀[音]院寫.

[44] See Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings*, 24–27; and Wang-Toutain, *Le Bodhisattva Kṣitigarbha en Chine du Ve au XIIIe Siècle*, 214–229.

> Copied so that all enemies and debtors, and impurities that stain this monastery [(Chin. *jialan* 伽藍)],[45] as well as all the heavy sins [of *karma*], will surely be done away with.[46]

Here we see how concern over misfortune that either has occurred or that may befall the unnamed Buddhist institution in question, is the primary reason behind offering the books. The 'enemies and debtors' refers to people with whom one has karmic bonds in the past, and who, because of unresolved affairs, may come back to haunt one in some form. Such grievances 'from beyond the grave' is a common trope in Chinese cultural practice, and were a constant source of anxiety and fear among people at large. This is reiterated in the second dedication, which reads: "[May] all enemies and debtors [of the past] receive this merit."[47] In other words, by sharing part of one's merit with the dead, a person was believed to be able to obliterate karmic debt from the past.

A copy of the *Guanyin jing* 觀音經 [Avalokiteśvara Scripture][48] done at the scriptorium of the Liantai Temple (蓮臺寺) features a colophon in which it is stated that it was copied on behalf of the visiting Saṁgha Overseer Haisheng (d.u., 張海晟) of the Zhang clan by a resident monk named Lingjin (d.u., 靈進) in 912 (Beijing 海 61).

> On the 27th day of the 3rd month in the *renshen* year [(i.e. 912)], the traveller, with a disposition overflowing with compassion, respectfully [commissioned] the copying of the *Scripture of the Great and Holy Avalokiteśvara* in one roll. Firstly, on behalf of the deceased royal parents. Secondly, for the entire family, that it may eternally be graced by piety, good luck, and prosperity, I pray that the numinous spirits of the dead attain rebirth in the Pure Land, that all sentient beings [(Chin. *cang* [*zhong*?] *sheng* 蒼[眾?]生)] in the *dharma* realm, as well will be benefitted by [the merit of] this

[45] This could also be read as 'hermitage' or a small temple. This use of *jialan* in the Dunhuang material is usually a generic term, simply indicating a Buddhist establishment. For a more evolved discussion, see Henrik H, Sørensen, "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang: Mid 9th to Early 11th Centuries," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.2 (2020 forthcoming).

[46] ZZ 21.1: 寫一切怨家債主所有汚泥伽藍一切重罪悉得銷.

[47] The 'debtors' mentioned in the text refer to people with whom one or one's family has unresolved karmic issues. This could be concrete economic issues, such as an unpaid loan, or people, dead or alive, who for whatever reason bear grudges.

[48] This rather imprecise designation may cover different scriptures and could potentially refer to the *Pumen Chapter* (普門品) of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* [Lotus *sūtra*] or to an apocryphal scripture, such as the *Gaowang Guanyin jing* 高王觀音經 [Exhalted King Avalokiteśvara Scripture] (T. 2897.85).

> blessing. The devoted disciple Zhang Haisheng whole-heartedly makes this offering.
>
> The monk [in charge of] matters of faith at Liantai [Temple], the *śramāṇera* Lingjin, has written down this record of copying.[49]

In his dedication of merit, Haisheng reveals that he was actually a son of Zhang Yichao (r. 851–867, 張議潮), the founder of the Guiyijun regime. His dedication should, therefore, be seen in the context of his close affinity with the ruling family, which was in severe decline at the time of his writing.

There are also a number of dedications found in connection with Buddhist scriptures that do not carry any specific prayers or otherwise express a desire to have the merit of the good work extended to others. One such example is a small booklet containing three Buddhist scriptures, the *Vajracheddikā*, the *Mārīcīdevīsūtra* (already encountered once above), and the apocryphal *Foshuo zhaifa qingjing jing* 佛說齋法清淨經 [Scripture on the Fasting Methods of Purity] (T. 2900.85) commissioned by the cleric He Jiangtong (fl. second half of 10th c., 何江通) of the He clan (何氏) (S. 5646). Here the colophon simply states:

> The time being the 15th day in the 4th month of the 7th *jixu* year of the Qiande reign period [really the 2nd of Kaibao] in the Great Song Dynasty [(969)], the Mahāyāna adept, who studies the Chan records [(Chin. *chanlu* 禪錄)],[50] He Jiangtong, has reverently copied out three books of *sūtra*s, long and short, nine rolls [of paper] in all.[51] Having recited them throughout the night, he whole-heartedly presents them as an offering. Hence this record.[52]

This short colophon is an example of a dedication that does not specify or otherwise refer to the concept of merit. Therefore, it appears to be a case of a 'pure offering' in which no sign of religious barter is present. The

[49] Beijing 海 61: 壬申年三月廿七日, 行者傾心慈悲, 敬寫大聖觀音經一卷. 一, 為先王父母, 二, 為合家, 永聖吉昌, 願亡靈神生淨土, 法界蒼[眾?] 生同霑此福 清信弟子張海晟, 一心供養. 信事僧蓮台, 沙彌靈進書寫記.

[50] It is also possible to translate this part as 'recorder of Chan' or 'recorder of *dhyāna*', but I find such renderings less plausible in light of what we now know about the presence of Chan Buddhism and its related writings in Dunhuang during the 10th century.

[51] This seems to refer to the format in which the copies were made. Note that S. 5646, at least in the form we have it today, is a bound booklet measuring 14 × 11 cm.

[52] S. 5646: 于時大宋乾德七年己巳 歲 四月十五日, 大乘賢者兼當學禪錄何江通發心敬為大小經三筑子計九卷. 盡夜念誦一心供養. 故記之耳.

See also the version provided in Giles, 31a.

intense piety implicit in this offering is underscored by the mention of the condition under which the booklet was donated, namely, that Jiangtong spent all night reciting the three scriptures it contains. As such this brief yet elucidating piece of evidence shows the fervour and intense devotion that in some cases went into the production of such scriptures meant for donation.

Another example of a donation of the *Vajracheddikā*, which was also made without any prayers in mind, is found in yet another booklet similar to the two ones discussed above (S. 5669). In this case the pious Buddhist intent behind the donation is spelled out as follows:

> On the 3rd day of the 2nd month in the 3rd *pingyin* year of Tianyu [(i.e. 906)], an eighty-three [year old] person pricked the middle finger of his left hand to draw blood, which he mixed with fragrant ink, in order to copy out this *Vajrasūtra*,[53] so as to transmit it to persons of faith. All who are without [personal] wishes since their fundamental nature [(Chin. *benxing* 本性)] is truly vacuous, and have no desire for blessings. [54]

This is a singular example of a private donation, in which the copied text was not commissioned by the donor, but instead created by himself. Moreover, as an added caveat, he partly wrote the text with his own blood. As such this is a fine example of the practice of copying holy scriptures using one's own blood (Chin. *xieshu* 寫書), which is meant to underscore the serious nature of one's donation and the depth of faith behind the enterprise.[55] One may, of course, argue that although the donor foregoes the opportunity to ask for boons from the unseen powers, he nevertheless could not help mentioning that he does so. In other words, there is an implicit need for self-promotion behind the act. In contrast, a truly selfless act would leave no record.

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[53] I.e. the Vajracheddikā.

[54] S. 5669: 天祐三年丙寅, 二月, 三日八十三, 老人刺左手中指出血, 以香墨寫此金經流傳信心人, 一無所願本性實空, 無有願樂.

[55] Although reference to this practice can be found in other primary sources, it would appear that the *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 [*Brahmajāla* Scripture] was a major inspiration behind the spread of this practice in China during the Tang and after (T. 1484.24, 1009a). A number of cases from China's medieval period are discussed in James A. Benn, *Burning for the Buddha: Self-Immolation in Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 123, 139, 218, 228, etc. See also John Kieschnick, *The Eminent Monk: Buddhist Ideals in Chinese Medieval Hagiography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 40–41 and 49–50. For additional information, see FDC, vol. 3, 2551a.

5. *Other Forms of Donation and Patronage*

Not all donations carried specific requests, such as transference of merit or prayers for the well-being of self and others, but are in certain cases only given a terse record stating that the event has taken place. One such case involves Cao Zongshou (d. 1014, 曹宗壽), one of the last Guiyijun rulers, and his wife. The record dates from the 5th year of the Xianping (咸平) reign (1002) of the Northern Song (Dx 32A), the Song reign era as it was in use in Dunhuang as well. It reads:

> The primary donor, the ruler of Dunhuang Cao Zongshou, aided by his wife from the Fan clan [(氾氏)] in the Northern District [of Shazhou], together give rise to a mind of faith, order the artisans of the households of weavers to make book wrappers and increase [the production of] manuscript rollers, and had them entered into the scripture depository of the Bao'en Temple [(Chin. Bao'en si 報恩寺)].[56]

This short piece shows that it was customary for the rulers of the Dunhuang region to commission and donate materials to maintain the libraries in the local temples. Even though—as in this example—it could take the form of harnessing the local population for corvée. In other words, a donation by the rulers could mean an extra burden for the local population. This example shows that donations to Buddhist temples were not always accompanied by specific prayers or spiritual requests. Moreover, it also shows that by 1002 the Bao'en Temple was still functioning, which means that the Sanjie Temple was surely not the only active Buddhist institution in Dunhuang at this time.

Undoubtedly, one of the most comprehensive and fascinating cases of a commemorative text found in connection with donations to the Buddhist communities in Dunhuang is the colophon accompanying S. 86 (fig. 7). It records the events surrounding the death of a woman belonging to the Ma clan (馬氏), including different aspects of the customary memorial services held in connection with a person's death, such as recitations of Buddhist scriptures and the transference of merit.

[56] Dx 32A: 施主燉煌王朝宗壽与滲 (濟) 北郡夫人氾氏, 同發信心, 命當府匠人編戶造帙子及添寫卷軸, 入報恩寺經藏訖.

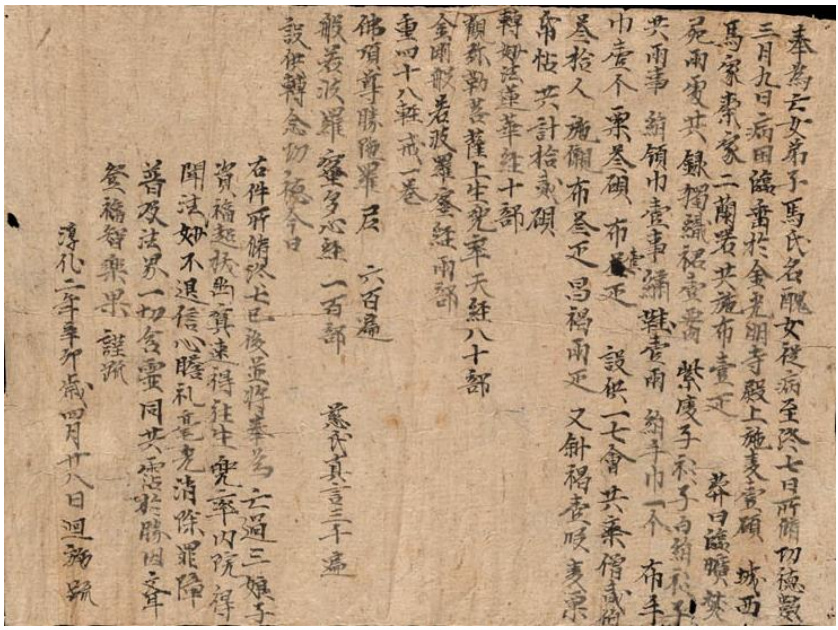

Figure 7. Colophone of S. 86. Dunhuang, 10th century. S. 86, BM.

The text reads:

> Respectfully numerous meritorious practices were cultivated on behalf of the deceased daughter, the Buddhist disciple of the Ma clan by the name Chounü [(d. 991, 馬醜女)], from the time she fell ill until the end, for seven days. On the 9th day of the 3rd month, the sickness became worse, and when her end drew near, a large measure of wheat was offered in the halls of the Jinguangming Temple. The Ma family, west of the prefectural seat, and the Sun family [both] donated one bolt of cloth to each of the two sanctuaries [(Chin. *lanruo* 蘭若)] [there].[57] On the day of cremation, the corpse was burnt in the cemetery [(Chin. *linkuang* 臨壙)]. Both places got in total one green jade armband [(?)], two purple damask shirts, two plain silk shirts, one silk collar, one pair of green shoes, one piece of silken hand cloth, one piece of cotton hand cloth, three bushels of unhusked millet, and one bolt of cotton

[57] One of these is evidently the Jinguangming Temple, and the other is perhaps the Sanjie Temple. Both were, in any case, located at the Mogao Caves, which is west of the county seat, as stated in the text.

cloth. When arranging for the first of the seven assemblies,[58] a total of two hundred and thirty participating monks [were invited for] the banquet. [To each] was offered three bolts of cloth for undergarments and two bolts of fine woolen cloth. Moreover, a piece of striped woolen cloth, barley, unhusked millet, and paper for books [(covers?)]. In a total ten bushels [of grain?]. The *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* was recited [(lit. 'turned,' Chin. *juanjing* 轉經)] ten times, the *Scripture on the Visualisation of the Bodhisattva Maitreya in Tuṣita Heaven* [Chin. *Guan Mile pusa shangsheng doushuai tian jing* 觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經] eighty times, the *Vajracheddikā* two times, the grave and light precepts forty-eight times, the *Uṣṇīṣavijāyadhāraṇī* six hundred times, the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* one hundred times,[59] and the *Mantra of Great Compassion* [Chin. *Cishi zhenyan* 慈氏真言, i.e. the *dhāraṇī of the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara*] three thousand times. The virtues of the displayed offerings and the recitations today mark the end of the cultivation of the seven [assemblies]. Afterwards, respects were made on behalf of the deceased Third Woman with assisting merit, so that they may escape […] [descend into?][60] the Netherworld, and quickly obtain rebirth in the inner sanctum of Tuṣita [Heaven], where they will be able to listen to the wondrous teaching and not regress in their faith. [Hence] one must respect the fine light of the rites, which eliminates and does away with the [karmic] screens of wrong-doing, and widely extends to all with vital spirits in the *dharma* realm, so that they together may share and be soaked in the victorious cause [occasioned by the performance of the rite]. This celebration marks the commencement of merit for arriving at the fruits of bliss. Beware of laxity!

The time being the 28th day of the 4th month in the 2nd *xinmao* year of the *chunhua* reign [(991)], when the transference of the offerings was made.[61]

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[58] This refers to the seven-seven rite (Chin. *qiqi zhai* 七七齋), one held on each of the seven days following the death of a person, until the passing of forty-nine days. See FDC, vol. 3, 2885c–2886c.

[59] This undoubtedly refers to the *Hṛdāyaprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (T. 251.8).

[60] One character illegible.

[61] S. 86: 奉為亡女弟子馬氏名醜女, 奉為亡女弟子馬氏名醜女, 從病至終, 七日所修功德數. 三月九日病困臨垂, 於金光明寺殿上施麥壹碩, 城西馬家索家二蘭若, 共施布壹疋. 葬日臨壙焚屍, 兩處共綠鐲織 (?) 壹薯, 紫綾子衫子, 白絹衫子共兩事, 絹領巾壹事, 綠鞋壹兩, 絹手巾壹個, 布手巾壹個, 粟參碩, 布壹疋. 設供一七會, 共齋僧貳佰參拾人. 施襯布參疋, 昌褐兩疋, 又斜褐壹段, 麥粟紙帖, 共計壹拾碩.轉妙法華經十部, 觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經八十部, 金剛般若波羅密經兩部, 重四十八輕戒一卷, 佛頂尊勝陀羅尼六百遍, 般若波羅密多經一百部, 慈氏真言三千遍, 設供轉念功德. 今日右件所修, 終七已後, 並將奉為亡過三娘子資福, 超□幽冥, 速得往生兜率 內 院, 得聞妙法. 不退信心.

This text is significant for providing a complete, or near complete, list of the goods offered by the Ma and Sun clans to the Buddhist communities of two local temples on the occasion of the death of a common relative, likely a Sun woman married into the Ma clan (or vice-versa). The fact that the offered goods included silk, cotton, wool, and other textiles, and that the amount of food stuffs were lavish, shows that the expenditure for holding such a seven-seven rite was both costly and elaborate. The invited monks and nuns recited a number of holy scriptures and chanted spells at these events as part of the garnering of merit to be transferred to the deceased. Although the event described in the document above represents a religious undertaking of families belonging to the upper strata of Dunhuang society, I expect that such rites were commonly performed by all, of course on different levels of the social scale and at different costs. Again, this case underscores the importance of donations in relation to funerary practices and the belief in the act of transferring the merit to the welfare of the dead. The case is also noteworthy for including injunctions against being lax in faith and careless in performing one's duty to the deceased. Finally, the document indicates that in this particular case, cremation was practiced, possibly before burial of the remains. It is unclear whether this was done because the deceased person was a devout Buddhist or simply because it was considered more practical.

6. *Cross-Cultural Collaboration in the Repair of Cave 444*

The last aspect of donation at Dunhuang of interest here, concerns extended giving in connection with the opening of new caves for worship and the repair of old caves. While repair of the Mogao Caves was likely an ongoing process since the excavation of the first caves during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–589, 南北朝), it is really the period of the Guiyijun reign which marks the zenith of both the creation of new caves and repair of pre-existing ones. That development hinges on a number of factors, including a more politically stable situation, an increase in wealth on a general level, expansion of trade, and Buddhist monastic communities that grew exponentially. As with the other

瞻禮毫光，消除罪障．普及法界，一切含靈，同共霑於勝 因，齊登福至樂果，謹疏.
淳化二年辛卯歲, 四月, 廿八日, 迴施疏.

examples discussed above in relation to donations of paintings and holy books, it is not the point here to make anything near a comprehensive record of the caves constructed and repaired during the Guiyijun, but simply to highlight a few of the more illustrative cases to underline what took place.

One important aspect of the excavation and repair of caves at Dunhuang and elsewhere in the region, such as at Yulin (榆林), which in many ways sets the situation apart from other places of Buddhist activity on the Silk Road, is that these pious works served as a focal point for intercultural and international collaboration between different peoples in Eastern Central Asia. While this fact has already been repeatedly noted in the past, few scholars have actually made an investigation of this rather significant factor the subject of extended study.[62]

There were enumerable redecorations and repairs carried out during the history of the Mogao Caves, especially during periods of prosperity. But for the purpose of this study, I selected only one example, namely that of Cave 444, not because it holds special significance or because its icons are especially beautiful, but because it serves as a good example of local elite patronage of Buddhist sanctuaries, collaboration across cultural boundaries in their repair and maintenance, and indicates who the artisans who made the repair were.

On the 1st year of the Taipingguo reign, the then Guiyijun ruler Cao Yangong (r. 974–976, 曹延恭) engaged in the repair of Cave 444 as a collaborative effort together with two visiting Khotanese princes (DMGT: 168). The cave itself was originally established during the mid-Tang. Inside there are clay statues and wall paintings, including one of Avalokiteśvara illustrating the *Pumen Chapter*. On the left and right walls are the Buddhas Prabhūtaratna and Śākyamuni, also serving as illustrations of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, i.e. the theme of the chapter on the *Miraculously Manifested stūpa*, an image of Śākyamuni discoursing on the *dharma* beneath a tree. On the upper decorated bands, images of the Thousand Buddhas are displayed. An image of Ekādaśamukhāvalokiteśvara is also on the southern wall. Above the

[62] See Lilla Russell-Smith, *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005). Even so, she is more focused on identifying Uyghur donors and their activities than on viewing their activities in light of intercultural collaboration.

entrance of the eastern wall of the cave, beside the paintings from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* are portraits of the Khotanese royal princes with inscriptions dating from the early Northern Song.
Since Cao Yangong was the primary force behind the repair of the cave, I address the inscription commemorating his efforts first. It reads:

> On the 7th *jiaxu* day of the New Moon of the 1st *wuchen* month in the 9th *bingzi* year of Kaibao [(976)], under the Great Song Dynasty, the Guiyijun Controller of Gua[zhou], Sha[zhou], Surveillance and Supervisory Commissioner of the Inner Palace, Commissioner in Charge of Duty Group of Villages, Lord Specially Advanced, Inspector and Grand Mentor, Concurrently Director of the Secretariat under the Jurisdiction of the Drum Tower, Founding Lord of the Realm, with merit-land grant of one thousand five hundred households to provide food, and [additional] land rights of three hundred households, Cao Yangong has set up this record for the world.[63]

There are no prayers nor talk of merit in connection with the repair-project. The record is a simple statement of the Guiyijun ruler's involvement with and completion of the repair of Cave 444. In actual fact it is a propaganda-like record underscoring Cao Yangong's prestige and power insofar as it lists his titles and the grants formally bestowed upon him by the Northern Song.

In contrast to the above record, the inscriptions made by (or on behalf of?) the Khotanese princes, who participated in the repair work of the cave, are rather terse and more straight-forward religious in their wording. The Khotanese donor inscriptions, one for each prince, are interesting for invoking the two Buddhas of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. They read:

> Namo Sakyamuni Buddha utters the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. Made as an offering by the Imperial Prince of Khotan Conglian [(從連)].[64]

The other reads:

> Namo Prabhūtaratna Buddha. On behalf of those who listen to the *dharma* and who, therefore, come to the *dharma* assembly, the Imperial Prince of Khotan Congyuan [(琮原)] has made this offering.[65]

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[63] DMGT: 168: 維大宋開寶九年, 歲 次丙子正月戊辰, 朔七日甲戌, 勅歸義軍節度瓜沙等州, 觀察處, 置管內管押番落等, 使特, 進檢校, 太傅, 兼中書, 令譙郡, 開國公食邑一千五百戶, 食實封三百戶, 曹延恭之世建紀.
[64] DMGT 168: 南無釋迦牟尼佛說妙法蓮華經. 大寶于闐國皇太子從連供養.
[65] DMGT, 168: 南無多寶佛為聽法故來法會. 大寶于闐國皇太子琮原供養.

In contrast to Cao Yangong's record, with its boastful and self-congratulating content, the two Khotanese dedications are mainly concerned with expressing religious sentiment. Obviously, the Cao record underscores who the important donor is; however, the difference between them is rather striking, especially so since the two Khotanese donors were royal princes.

There was an aftermath to the repair work on the cave a few years later:

> On the 3rd day of the 1st month in the 3rd *wuyin* year of the reign of Taipingguo [(i.e. 978)], [there was work done by] three venerable, cave painting monks [(Chin. *heshang kuhua* 和尚畫窟)], among whom Fan Dingquan [(fl. second half of 10th c., 氾定全)][66] was one.[67]

This short inscription was evidently a record left by those who carried out a second repair. It is an important piece of evidence as it refers to monk artisans carrying out repair (probably also actual painting) in the Mogao Caves during the Guiyijun period.[68]

And finally, the short inscription,

> On the 8th day of the 10th month in the *wuzi* [year][69] […][70] during the autumn, I came with reverence to burn incense.
> The Hermitage [Dwelling?] monk, Xianshi [(n.d., 賢師)] came here.[71]

Now this last inscription, which almost has a 'Kilroy was here' feel to it, is nevertheless an important piece of evidence, not so much for its information on Cave 444, but because it provides us with first hand

[66] Although the reading of this last part of the inscription is somewhat unclear, what is clear is that 'Dingquan' is a Buddhist name and 'Fan' the family name.

[67] DMGT, 169: 太平國三年戊寅**歲**正月初三日, 和尚畫窟三人壹氾定全.

[68] This piece of information, brief as it is, goes some way in explaining how the intricate iconography that we find in the caves could be rendered with such iconographical and compositional precision, tasks which would obviously require expert craftsmen with a high degree of knowledge in Buddhist imagery and scriptures, something that would naturally be within the province of Buddhist monks. For a discussion of artisan monks in Dunhuang, see Sarah E. Fraser, *Performing the Visual: Buddhist Wall Painting Practice in China and Central Asia, 618-960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 48–108.

[69] Most probably in 988, i.e. the 1st year in the reign of Duangong (端拱) during the Northern Song.

[70] One character missing.

[71] DMGT, 169: 戊子申十月八日□為天秋寅燒香來
蘭 [若?] 僧人
賢師
到此.

information that the Mogao Caves were indeed sites for worship and not mausolea to be left in the dark, as suggested by Robert Sharf in a recent article.[72]

Clearly, the pair of short inscriptions reveal that the tableaux from the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* was commissioned by the Khotanese princes, and that it was done at the same time as Cao Yangong repaired the cave. As such, these terse inscriptions reveal that repair of Cave 444 was a joint, intercultural effort that took place under the auspices of the Guiyijun government. Obviously, such a display of patronage of Buddhism must have been a strong common denominator, which bound together the rulers of both Dunhuang and Khotan.

7. *Conclusion*

As we have seen, motives for making donations varied quite a bit among practicing Buddhists in Dunhuang. Even so, it is clear that offerings in connection with mortuary practices and beliefs played a significant part in the production and distribution of Buddhist donations in the region. Since the donors' motives are important for understanding the nature of these offerings and the context in which this practice took place, donor dedications to commemorate their offerings constitute an important source. These dedicatory texts, often extensively presented on votive paintings and in large-scale cave-related projects, and less so in donated books where space is more restricted, underline the spiritual intentions of the donors, while at the same time signalling to the rest of society the piety and devotion behind the act. In this way, donations and the display of intent serve a dual purpose, namely to communicate to the powers of the spiritual world the whole-hearted prayer of the donor on the one hand, and an attempt at presenting him- or herself as a paragon of virtue on the other.

When the discussion falls on donor portraits in votive paintings, it is obvious that this type of logic is taken one step further. Not only do the

[72] Robert Sharf, "Art in the Dark: The Ritual Context of Buddhist Caves in Western China," accessed February 12, 2018. http://buddhiststudies.berkeley.edu/people/faculty/sharf/documents/Sharf%202013%20Art%20in%20the%20Dark.pdf. Currently, I am also preparing a paper in response to Robert Sharf, see, Henrik H. Sørensen, "'Light on Art in the Dark': On Buddhist Practice and Worship in the Mogao Caves," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.6 (2020 forthcoming).

donors present their formal prayers in writing, through the portraits they insert themselves (and their family members) directly into the holy icons, thereby becoming virtual images of devotion and piety.[73] In this sense, they appear as salient features in the religious paintings whenever they are displayed for worship and presented with offerings. The donation of votive paintings was probably never within the means of most common folks living in Dunhuang during the late medieval period. Nevertheless, we see many examples of these donated paintings, which do not represent an overly high artistic standard, something which could be an indication that lay Buddhists with middling incomes would sometimes be able to afford them as well.

In comparison to more costly donations, such as votive scroll paintings or decoration of repair of entire caves, the donation of Buddhist scriptures was more affordable for ordinary people. Hence this practice flourished in Shazhou, and by extension, in and around the Mogao Caves. The colophons with donor dedications encountered in connection with these donated books are rather terse and brief, in many cases consisting of little more than a line mentioning the date and nothing else. The examples of commissioned or self-created booklets reviewed here reveal that this type of copied scriptures was small, almost insignificantly so, and is unlikely to have been very costly. One may speculate that they could be ordered by visiting Buddhists from a shop, probably on site at the Mogao Caves, and that a brisk business concerning these books took place. In any case, the booklet format was widely used for copying short *sūtra*s or groups of *sūtra*s, just as we saw above. The examples given here also document that apocryphal Buddhist scriptures were evidently very popular as scriptures to be donated. Exactly why this was so is not clear, but it may have been because they often are relatively short and, therefore, inexpensive to have copied. Of the more formally authentic Buddhist scriptures that we often find copied for donation, we of course have the *Vajracheddikā*, which, in manuscript form and in print, was among the most widely copied Buddhist scriptures in Dunhuang, at least during the 9th–10th centuries.

[73] See also the case of Tangut donors in Carmen Meinert, "Creation of Tantric Sacred Spaces in Eastern Central Asia," in *Buddhism in Central Asia I: Patronage, Legitimation, Sacred Space, and Pilgrimage*, ed. Carmen Meinert and Henrik H. Sørensen (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 244–271.

Abbreviations

Beida	Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved in Beijing University (Beijing daxue 北京大學)
Beijing	Collection of Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the National Library in Beijing
DMGT	*Dunhuang Mogao ku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供养人题记 [Donor Inscriptions from the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang], comp. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986, 5 vols.
Dx	Dunhuang Manuscripts in the Petersburg Collection in The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg
FDC	*Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典 [Great Dictionary of Foguang], 8 vols, ed. Ciyi 慈怡 et. al. Gaoxiong: Foguangshan chubanshe, 1988.
Giles	Giles, Lionel. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum.* London: The British Museum, 1957.
OA	Oriental Arts Section of the British Museum in London
P.	Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque National in Paris
S.	Stein Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London
T.	Takakusu Junjirō 高順次郎 et. al., ed. *Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經 [Taishō *tripiṭaka*]. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935, 1–55, 85.
ZZ	*Dainihōn zōkuzōkyō* 大日本續藏經 [Extension to the *tripiṭaka* [Compiled] in Japan], 90 vols, ed. Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照 et. al. Tokyo: Kokusho Kangyōkai, 1980–1988.

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