BuddhistRoad
Dynamics in Buddhist Networks in Eastern Central Asia 6th–14th Centuries

**BuddhistRoad Paper 4.4**

# AVALOKITEŚVARA AND THE LONGING TO RETURN HOME: STEIN PAINTING 3 FROM DUNHUANG

IMRE GALAMBOS

**BUDDHISTROAD PAPER**
Peer reviewed
ISSN: 2628-2356
DOI: 10.46586/rub.br.232.204

You can find this publication also on the BuddhistRoad project homepage:
https://buddhistroad.ceres.rub.de/en/publications/

Please quote this paper as follows:
**Galambos, Imre, "Avalokiteśvara and the Longing to Return Home: Stein Painting 3 from Dunhuang," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 4.4 (2022).**

**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/en/

BuddhistRoad is a project of

CERES Centrum für Religionswissenschaftliche Studien
*Center for Religious Studies*

RUHR UNIVERSITÄT BOCHUM RUB

**SPONSORS:**

erc European Research Council
Established by the European Commission

This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 725519).

# AVALOKITEŚVARA AND THE LONGING TO RETURN HOME: STEIN PAINTING 3 FROM DUNHUANG*

IMRE GALAMBOS

*Abstract*

Stein painting 3 in the British Museum is a silk painting with a symmetrical composition of two Avalokiteśvara figures side by side. At 147.3×105.3 cm in size, this is one of the larger portable paintings from Dunhuang. At the top of the centre of the composition, between and above the heads of the two figures, is a yellow cartouche with a donor inscription. Although the inscription itself contains no date, it has been dated to the mid-9th century on the basis of a supposed reference to the Tibetan control of Dunhuang (787–848). This paper re-examines the inscription and argues that the part in question is unrelated to the Tibetan rule of the region and simply refers to a more generic situation of donors living away from their native land. By moving a detached piece of the silk to its original position, we can also possibly improve the reading of the inscription and, ultimately, its translation. A comparison with other similar inscriptions and colophons from Dunhuang demonstrates that the painting probably dates to the 920s, about seven decades later than previously assumed. In Dunhuang, this falls within the rule of the Guiyijun (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army), when the region was separate from both Tibet and the Chinese states.[1]

* I would like to thank Yu-ping Luk for her generous help while examining Stein painting 3 at the British Museum and for offering invaluable feedback on a draft version of this paper. I am also grateful to Ágnes Kelecsényi and Judit Bagi for kindly providing a high- quality scan of Stein's photograph kept in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Finally, I am grateful for comments and feedback I have received from colleagues, including Lilla Russell-Smith and Henrik H. Sørensen. Research for this paper was greatly facilitated by generous support from the Glorisun Foundation.

[1] For the history of Dunhuang under the rule of the Guiyijun, see Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, *Guiyijun shi yanjiu* 歸義軍史研究：唐宋時代敦煌歷史考索 [A Study of the History of the Guiyijun: Exploration of Dunhuang History during the Tang-Song Period] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996).

## 1. *Introduction*

Stein painting 3 was acquired by Marc Aurel Stein (1862–1943) during his second expedition to Chinese Central Asia (1906–1908). Stein acquired the object, along with the hundreds of other paintings and thousands of manuscripts, from Mogao Cave 17, a.k.a. the Library Cave (Chin. Cangjing dong 藏經洞) at the Mogao cave complex (Chin. Mogao ku 莫高窟) southeast of the city of Dunhuang (敦煌). The sealed off chamber had been discovered in the summer of 1900 by its self-appointed caretaker, a Daoist monk Stein called 'Abbot Wang', while clearing away the sand from the entrance to a larger cave.[2] The chamber contained tens of thousands of manuscripts in Chinese, Tibetan, and other languages, as well as Buddhist paintings and banners on silk, hemp or ramie, and paper, as well as textiles, prints, and other objects. Arriving at the site in the autumn of 1907, Stein was the first foreigner to examine the contents of the cave, and he was able to convince Abbot Wang to part with a sizeable quantity of manuscripts and paintings in exchange for a modest donation towards his fundraising campaign. Stein shipped the crates with the manuscripts and paintings to London, where they were deposited in the basement of the British Museum.[3] Part of the material was later shipped to Delhi, as the Indian Government has co-sponsored Stein's expeditions.[4]

[2] For the story of the discovery of the Library Cave, see Sam van Schaik and Imre Galambos, *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-century Buddhist Pilgrim* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 13–18 and Rong Xinjiang, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2013), 81–85.

[3] The painting's museum number is 1919,0101,0.3, revealing that it was formally accessioned into the museum's holdings in 1919. Stein's original number was Ch.xxxviii.005, which was the one used in earlier publications.

[4] Roderick Whitfield, *The Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982–1985), 13–15.

Figure 1. Two Avalokiteśvara figures side by side. Cave 17, Mogao Caves, Dunhuang, early 10th c. Stein painting 3, 147.3×105.3 cm, © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The painting depicts two standing Avalokiteśvara figures, facing each other in three-quarter view (fig. 1). On the front of their headdress is a small figure of Amitābha Buddha. Although the bodhisattva figures are symmetrical, they are not perfect mirror images but differ in a number of details, most noticeable of which is that they hold different objects in their hands. The figure on the left holds an orange flower, whereas the one on the right holds a flask and a willow branch. Other differences include the shape of their nose and ear, the colour of the outer circle of their halo, vestment, and the canopy above them. Clearly, the artist did not intend to produce identical figures, although it is also undeniable that they are extremely similar. In general, the painting betrays considerable skill and attention to details, and was without doubt executed by a highly skilled professional. As it can be seen from Stein's early photograph (fig. 2), the painting was originally framed using a band of ornamented silk textile, which must have been removed by modern conservators after its arrival in the British Museum.[5]

[5] Stein LHAS Photo 38/164; see John Falconer, Ágnes Kárteszi, Ágnes Kelecsényi, and Lilla Russell-Smith, *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences* (Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2007), 103. As far as it is possible to see from the old photograph, the ornamentation seems to have a pattern of triangular clouds and roundels with two cranes or other birds. I have not been able to find this particular piece of silk in the catalogue of Dunhuang textiles in British collections. See Feng Zhao, Helen Wang, Helen Persson and Frances Wood, *Textiles from Dunhuang in UK Collections* (Shanghai: Donghua daxue chubanshe, 2007).


Figure 2. Stein's original photograph of the painting. Stein LHAS Photo 38/164, Oriental Collection, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Another detail that speaks for its continued use is that it was conserved with patches of paper from older manuscript fragments. These fragments have been removed from the painting by modern conservators of the British Museum and are now catalogued separately under the British Library pressmark S. 8516.[6] The presence of these patches on the painting reveals that it had already undergone some repair prior to being deposited in the Library Cave at the beginning of the 11th century. The medieval conservation demonstrates, on the one hand, that the painting had suffered some damage in the course of being used and, on the other, that there was an effort to preserve it in a condition suitable for further use.

The upper part of the composition, between the heads of the two figures and slightly higher, is occupied by a donor inscription in a yellow cartouche. Like the painting, the inscription is symmetrical, and the vertical lines of its left and right halves read in opposite directions, each moving from a central axis towards the outside. Thus, the lines on the right start at the centre and read from left to right, opposite to the conventional direction of writing Chinese. By contrast, the lines on the left of the cartouche read from right to left, matching the way Chinese texts are normally written. In terms of their content, the inscriptions on the two sides are analogous, but not identical, just as it is the case with the two bodhisattva figures, which are very similar but differ in some details. In addition to having symmetrical left and right halves, the cartouche with the inscription further divides into a central part with a lighter yellow background and an outer part with a slightly darker background. On each side, the central part holds two lines of text written in larger characters and fainter ink, whereas the outer part has two (on the right) or three (on the left) lines in smaller characters and darker ink. Both sides of the central part are written in the same hand, which differs from the other hand that wrote both sides of the outer lines.

Stein described the painting in some detail on the pages of *Serindia*, the four-volume scientific report of his second expedition to Western China,

[6] See Rong Xinjiang 榮新江, *Yingguo tushuguan cang Dunhuang hanwen feifojiao wenxian canjuan mulu* 英國圖書館藏敦煌漢文非佛教文獻殘卷目錄: (S.6981–13624) [Catalogue of Non-Buddhist Fragments from Dunhuang in the British Library: S.6981–13624] (Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1994), 96–99; Xinjiang Rong, "The Historical Importance of the Chinese Fragments from Dunhuang in the British Library," *The British Library Journal* 24 (1998): 78–89.

published in 1921. He noted the excellent preservation of the painting and that the two standing figures of Avalokiteśvara approached life size. He also drew attention to the symmetrical composition of the figures and praised the high standard of execution, calling it "an example of the conventional 'Chinese Buddhist' art at its best". Although he discussed the iconography in detail, he merely mentioned the presence of the donor inscription, remarking that it was incomplete at the top.[7] Illustrating his description of the painting was a monochrome plate of the left half, showing the left side figure of Avalokiteśvara and the corresponding half of the inscription.[8]

In the same year, Stein also published a photographic album of paintings from the Library Cave under the title *The Thousand Buddhas*. This volume included a full-page colour reproduction of the entire painting and a discussion of its iconography.[9] With regards to the inscription, a translation of which was not yet available, Stein opined that it had the potential of helping to identify the particular kind of Avalokiteśvara in the painting.[10]

A translation was published a full decade later in Arthur Waley's (1889–1966) catalogue of the Stein paintings at the British Museum.[11] Waley transcribed and translated the legible part of the inscription. Unfortunately, he did not recognise that the two sides of the inscription ran in opposite direction, and thus read both sides from right to left, as Chinese texts are usually read.[12] Even though in his catalogue he often made a note of inscriptions reading from left to right, in this case he may

[7] Marc Aurel Stein, Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 1043.

[8] Ibid., vol. 4, pl. LXXXI.

[9] Marc Aurel Stein and Laurence Binyon, The Thousand Buddhas: Ancient Buddhist Paintings from the Cave-temples of Tun-Huang on the Western Frontier of China, vol. 1 (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1921), pl. XV.

[10] Ibid., 28.

[11] Arthur Waley, A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang by Sir Aurel Stein, K.C.I.E., Preserved in the Sub-department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, and in the Museum of Central Asian Antiquities, Delhi (London: Trustees of the British Museum and the Government of India, 1931), 6–7.

[12] This was also how Ma De (馬德) read the inscription more than half a century later; see Ma De, "Dunhuang juanhua tiji jilu 敦煌絹畫題記輯錄 [Colophons of Silk Paintings from Dunhuang]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 1 (1996): 137.

have been misled by its unexpected bidirectionality. As a result, he began his translation with the last line of the right-side inscription, which made it difficult to arrive at a coherent meaning, especially with several characters missing from the top of each line. Nevertheless, the transcription of individual lines was largely accurate and if we rearrange the lines, the translation is more or less functional.

After another half a century, Roderick Whitfield provided a new description of the painting in *The Art of Central Asia*, his monumental study of the Stein Collection at the British Museum. He pointed out the similarity of the iconography to that of Stein painting 8 (Ch.lvi.0016), which features a single figure of Avalokiteśvara. He also recognised that the inscription between the two figures consisted of two symmetrical halves, which read from the centre towards the outside. The inscription identified the individuals who commissioned the painting, as well as their motivation for doing so. Whitfield explained that the two halves constituted separate dedications for each of the two bodhisattva figures. Each dedication consisted of two lines of text with larger characters, presumably recording the principal wishes of the chief donors, followed by additional lines in smaller characters, which may have represented a subsequent extension of the original inscription.[13]

When transcribing the inscription,[14] Whitfield added in square brackets an assumed reference to Tibetans (Chin. *fan* 番), which technically was not visible in the painting. In this, he was following the opinion of Fujieda Akira, one of the major scholars of Dunhuang studies, who pointed out during a visit to the British Museum that the preceding character *luo* (落), literally meaning 'to fall', was likely followed by the character *fan* (番 or 蕃), i.e., 'Tibet, Tibetan', as it was also the case in some mural inscriptions inside the Mogao Caves. According to this line of reasoning, the painting was an offering by "the disciple of pure faith, Yiwen [*sic*], on his own behalf, having fallen [into the hands of the Tibetans], that he may return to his birthplace."[15] Therefore, the painting could be dated "with some certainty" to the Tibetan period of Dunhuang (781–848).[16] Whitfield

[13] Roderick Whitfield and Anne Farrer, *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route* (London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1990), 31.
[14] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia*, 321, pl. 24.
[15] 清信弟子溫義爲己身落[番得]歸鄉.
[16] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia*, 321, pl. 24.

therefore dated the painting to the mid-9th century, to the very end of the Tibetan period. Clearly, the date is an inference which relies on the assumption that the word *luo* (落), meaning 'to fall', would be followed by the character *fan* (番), referring to Tibet. This reading and dating has since been generally accepted,[17] and some publications even omit the square brackets enclosing the hypothetic character *fan* (番), as if they were present in the actual inscription.[18]

## 2. *Reconstructing the Inscription*

As part of his description of the painting, Whitfield observed that "a small piece from the top right half of the inscription has been mounted on the left".[19] This is a narrow piece of silk which is now located above the left half of the inscription, and the traces of characters on it make it abundantly clear that it is not in its correct position. None of the characters on it is complete, which is also why none is legible. If we look at the image of the painting in *Serindia*, which only shows its left half, we can see that this piece of silk is not there. Yet in the colour photograph of the entire painting in *The Thousand Buddhas* the piece is already on the left side. Although both books were published in 1921, for *Serindia* Stein must have used his own monochrome photographs, whereas the colour images in *The Thousand Buddhas* were probably taken anew at the British Museum. Stein's original photograph of this painting, preserved in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, unambiguously shows that the detached piece of silk was originally above the right half of the

[17] While accepting this dating, Michelle C. Wang discusses the painting together with Avalokiteśvara images from the subsequent Guiyijun (851–1036?, 歸義軍, Return-to-Allegiance Army) period. See Michelle C. Wang, *Maṇḍalas in the Making: The Visual Culture of Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018), 139–140. Laurence Sickman, without suggesting a specific date range, mentions this painting as being among "the latest" ones from Dunhuang. See Laurence Sickman, "An Early Chinese Wall-Painting Newly Discovered," *Artibus Asiae* 15.1/2 (1952): 144.

[18] E.g., Ma Wei 馬煒 and Meng Zhong 蒙中, *Xiyu huihua: Dunhuang Cangjingdong liushi haiwai de huihua zhenpin. 2 (Pusa)* 西域繪畫: 敦煌藏經洞流失海外的繪畫珍品. 2（菩薩）[Art of the Western Regions: Precious Silk Paintings from the Dunhuang Library Cave in Overseas Collections. 2. Bodhisattvas] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2010), 5–6.

[19] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia*, 321.

inscription.[20] Accordingly, this detached piece was mistakenly mounted above the left half of the inscription sometime before 1921 by modern conservators at the British Museum.[21]

Perhaps this was done as a temporary solution because the piece on the top noticeably does not join with the inscription below. High quality digital images of the painting show the slight difference in the tone of the yellow background of the cartouche between its centre and two sides, providing yet another indication that the slip is in the wrong place. Moving it above the right half of the inscription, we can see that the number of lines in the slip are a perfect match for those below, and so is the intensity of the ink. The characters also fit, proving that this is the correct place where this piece of silk originally belonged (fig. 3).

[20] Stein LHAS Photo 38/164.

[21] The mounting of the painting introduced yet another minor inaccuracy. Whitfield notes that the left figure has been mounted somewhat higher, spoiling the alignment of the two figures' hands, which would have been exactly opposite each other. This can be seen from the yellow flower and the two green leaves which appear in the left figure's hand but extend slightly into the right half of the painting.

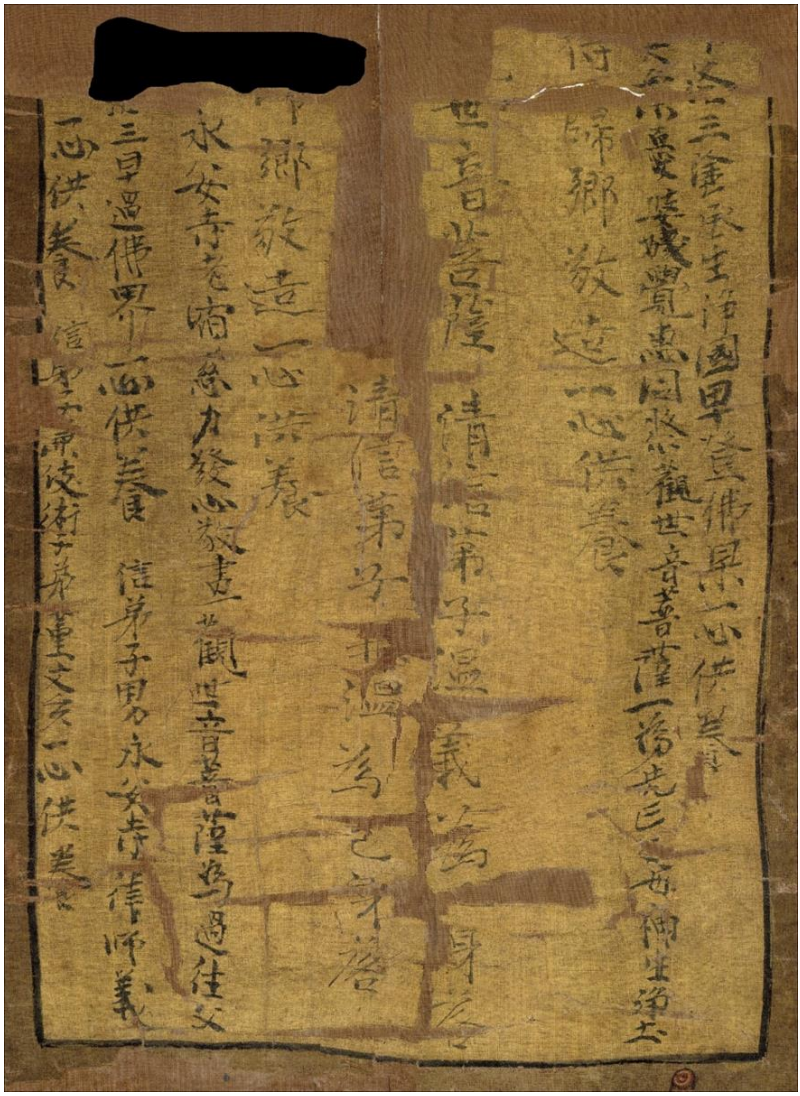

Figure 3. The reconstructed inscription with the detached piece of silk in the right place. Stein painting 3, © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Following the left-to-right direction of the inscription, we can see at the left edge of the re-attached slip of silk the end of the last stroke of the character *guan* (觀), which thus completes the name Guanshiyin (觀世音), the Chinese appellation of Avalokiteśvara. Although it was not difficult to guess the missing character, this confirms that the piece of silk is now in the right place. Moving on to the next line to the right, we can reconstruct the character *de* (得), literally meaning 'to be able to', in the expression 'to be able to return to their birthplace' (Chin. *de gui xiang* 得歸鄉). In the following line, we can now read 'Great Vehicle' (Chin. *dacheng* 大乘), modifying 'female disciple' (Chin. *youpoyi* 憂婆姨), which is a detail that was invisible before. The phrase 'Great Vehicle female disciple' (Chin. *dacheng youpoyi* 大乘憂婆姨) also occurs in a similar context in Stein painting 63, where it—placed inside a cartouche—identifies one of the female donors. Finally, in the last line we can now read the character *luo* (洛), evidently standing for *luo* (落), 'to fall', in the expression 'fall into the three evil destinies' (Chin. *luo san tu* 落三塗).[22] We can also see the end of a vertical line from the character above the character *luo* (落) and, in this context, the only possibility is that it belonged to the character *bu* (不), meaning 'no, not', which thus allows us to read the four characters as 'not fall into the three evil destinies' (Chin. *bu luo san tu* 不洛（落）三塗).[23] Although the reconstructed characters do not significantly alter the meaning of the inscriptions, they offer a

[22] The use of the the character *luo* (洛), 'Luoyang', in place of *luo* (落), 'to fall'), was not uncommon and there are examples in variations of the same phrase; e.g., the colophon to the *Shan'e yinguo jing* 善惡因果經 [Sūtra on Good and Evil Causes and Results] in manuscript S. 2077 writes "do not fall into the three evil destinies (Chin. *mo luo san tu* 莫洛（落）三塗)"; see Ikeda On 池田温, *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shūroku* 中國古代寫本識語集録 [Collection of Ancient Chinese Manuscript Colophons] (Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku bunka kenkyūjo, 1990), 474. This type of 'substitution' was not a new development, and there are examples from centuries earlier, such as the Sui Dynasty (581–618, 隨) stone inscription with the phrase "and fall into the three evil destinies (Chin. *er luo san tu* 而洛（落）三塗)" in Taniguchi Tetsuo 谷口鉄雄 and Soejima Mikio 副島三喜男, "Zuidai chōkoku meibun shūroku (jō) 隋代雕刻銘文集錄(上) [Collection of Engraved Inscriptions from the Sui Dynasty]," *Tetsugaku nenpō* 哲學年報 [Annual Journal of Philosophy] 17 (1955): 128.

[23] Other choices for a character before *luo san tu* (落三塗) would have been *mo* (莫), 'not, do not', *wu* (勿), 'do not' or *dui* (墮), 'to fall'. Neither of these characters has a vertical stroke at the centre of its bottom part.

chance to refine our reading and to confirm our understanding of its content.

The first line of the right-side inscription, in larger characters, names the donor as 'the disciple of pure faith Wenyi' (Chin. *qingxin dizi Wenyi* 清信弟子溫義). Although transcribing the Chinese characters of the inscription correctly, in his translation Whitfield accidentally reversed the two characters of the name, writing it as Yiwen.[24] He also reconstructed the partially damaged name of the donor in the first line of the left side inscription as [Yi]wen ([義]溫), thereby making the two names the same, which seemed to work well with the analogous content of the two inscriptions. The name on the left, however, is Wenyi, and it is different from the one on the right.

Enough of the first character of the name on the left remains to be able to reconstruct it as the character *zai* (再), literally meaning 'twice', written in a way commonly seen in Dunhuang.[25] It is also a character that frequently occurs in given names in Dunhuang, perhaps more often than in other regions.[26] Therefore, the name of the donor in the inscription on the left is Zaiwen (再溫), entirely different from Wenyi (溫義), the name of the donor in the inscription on the right.[27] This particular given name was not unique in Dunhuang, but is attested in combination with different surnames. Thus, there is a Mu Zaiwen (穆再温) in a lay society circular in manuscript P. 3145 (dated 988?) and a Guo Zaiwen (郭再溫) in another circular in manuscript S. 274 (dated 928?).[28] Significantly, Zaiwen was the

[24] Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia*, 321.

[25] For forms matching the one in the inscription, see Huang Zheng 黃征, *Dunhuang suzidian* 敦煌俗字典 [Dictionary of Popular Character Forms from Dunhuang] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005), 532.

[26] There were, for example two dozen different given names with this character in combination with the surname Zhang (張), including very common ones such as Zaiying (再盈), Zaiqing (再慶), Zaixing (再興), Zaichang (再昌), Zaicheng (再成), or Zaide (再德); see Dohi Dohi Yoshikazu 土肥義和, *Hasseiki makki - jūisseiki shoki Tonkō shizoku jinmei shūsei: Shizoku jinmeihen, Jinmeihen* 八世紀末期~十一世紀初期燉煌氏族人名集成：氏族人名篇, 人名篇 [Inventory of Personal Names from Dunhuang: Late Eighth through Early Tenth Centuries] (Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2015), 403–406.

[27] Dohi, *Hasseiki makki - jūisseiki shoki*, 903 also correctly reads the name as Zaiwen.

[28] Lay society circulars (Chin. *shesi zhuantie* 社司轉帖) were brief notices issued by the management of local welfare societies, typically calling the members together for a meeting or celebration. See Stephen F. Teiser, "Terms of Friendship: Bylaws for Associations of Buddhist Laywomen in Medieval China," in *'At the Shores of the Sky': Asian Studies for*

given name of the person better known by his style name, *zi* (字), as Zhai Fengda (883–966, 翟奉達), a local official and calendar maker who copied several manuscripts for the benefit of his late wife.[29] Naturally, without the surname we have no reason to think that this inscription was written specifically by Zhai Fengda, especially since the given name Zaiwen was by no means unique.

As the names of the primary donors Wenyi and Zaiwen appear on parallel sides of the same cartouche, it is probable that these two individuals were members of the same family, possibly brothers. The wish expressed in this pair of primary dedication is that, living in a region away from home, they wanted to return to their native village. Finding themselves in Dunhuang together suggests that they had travelled or moved there of their own volition, even if at that point they were hoping to leave and go back home.

The donor in the outer (i.e., smaller script) inscription on the right is the Great Vehicle female disciple Juehui (覺惠). Among the donors on the left side, we find the "junior technician Dong Wenyuan [(d.u., 董文員)]" (Chin. *jishu zidi Dong Wenyuan* 伎術子弟董文員),[30] presumably referencing someone studying at the Technician Academy (Chin. *jishuyuan* 伎術院) in Dunhuang.[31] The name Dong Wenyuan also occurs together with that of the Great Vehicle female disciple Juehui in the donor

*Albert Hoffstädt*, ed. Paul W. Kroll and Jonathan A. Silk (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 154–172 and Imre Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), 195–220.

[29] Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 101–121; see also Galambos, Dunhuang Manuscript Culture, 82–83.

[30] Some researchers read the name as Dong Wenhai (董文亥), as the cursive form of the character *yuan* (員) can closely resemble the character *hai* (亥); see, for example, Ma, "Dunhuang juanhua tiji jilu," 137 and Zhang Peijun 張培君, "Dunhuang cangjingdong chutu yihua zhong gongyangren tuxiang chutan 敦煌藏經洞出土遺畫中供養人圖像初探 [Preliminary Examination of Donor Figures in Portable Paintings from the Dunhuang Library Cave]," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 4 (2007): 94. Whitfield, *Art of Central Asia*, 321 transcribes the name correctly in Chinese but in the translation writes it as Dong Wenhai. The character *yuan* (員) commonly writes the last syllable of personal names in Dunhuang; see, for example, an inventory (dated 930) in manuscript P. 2049, which mentions a certain An Wenyuan (安文員).

[31] On the *jishuyuan*, see Qu Zhimin 屈直敏, "Dunhuang jishuyuan kaolüe 敦煌伎術院考略 [A Brief Examination of the Technician Academy in Dunhuang]," *Dunhuang xue jikan* [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 2 (2020): 67–80.

inscription of a portable Dunhuang painting in the collection of the National Museum of China (formerly Historical Museum of China).[32] The painting similarly features a double deity composition, displaying the standing figures of Avalokiteśvara and Vaiśravaṇa side by side. The lower register is occupied by the kneeling figures of a male and female donor on the two sides of a central donor inscription. A two-line inscription inside a cartouche next to the female figure on the left reads: "Offered with undivided heart by the compassionate mother, Sudden Enlightenment Great Vehicle female disciple Juehui" (Chin. *cimu xiuxing dunwu dacheng youpoyi Juehui yixin gongyang* 慈母修行頓悟大乘憂婆夷覺惠一心供養). Next to the figure of a monk on the right side, another two-line inscription in a cartouche reads: "Offered by the elder brother, Buddhist Vinaya Master Approaching the Platform and Commissioner of Palace Chapel, the monk Yiquan" (Chin. *xiong shimen lintan lüshi jian shinei daochang menseng biqiu Yiquan gongyang* 兄釋門臨壇律師兼使內道場門僧比丘議全供養). These two vertical lines read from left to right, in contrast to Juehui's dedication on the left and the larger central inscription between the two figures, both of which read in the opposite direction. The main donor inscription in the centre reads as follows:

> The pure faith Buddha's disciple Dong Wenyuan, first so that his deceased parents may be reborn in the Pure Land and may not fall into the three evil destinies; second so that his eldest brother the monk Yiyuan, who is affected by illness and has not been able to recover(?),[33] may get well by the power of the Buddha, asks for deliverance. He reverently painted, as an offering,

[32] See Zhang Zong 張總, "Yanluowang shouji jing zhuibu yankao 《閻羅王授記經》綴補研考 [Piecing Together the Scripture of the Prophecy Given by King Yama]," *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 5 (2001), 99. For a published image of the painting, see Ryo Chōsei [Lü Changsheng] 呂長生, *Sengoku Shin Kan Tō Sō Gen bokuseki* 戦國秦漢唐宋元墨跡 [Chinese Calligraphy from the Warring States, Qin, Han, Tang, Song, and Yuan Periods] (*Chūgoku rekishi hakibutsukan zō hōsho daikan* 中國歷史博物館藏法書大觀 [Masterpieces of Calligraphy from the Collection of the Historical Museum of China], vol. 12) (Kyoto: Yanagihara shoten, 1994), pl. 56.

[33] I am unsure about the meaning of *chou han* (抽撼), which is almost certainly a familiar word written in non-standard orthography. Zhang, "*Yanluo wang shouji jing* zhuibu yankao," 99 transcribes it as *chou gan han* (抽感撼), inadvertently writing the second character in two different ways. Ryo, *Sengoku Shin Kan Tō Sō Gen bokuseki*, 26 transcribes the last character as *jian* (槭), whereas Wang Huimin 王惠民, *Dunhuang fojiao yu shiku yingjian* 敦煌佛教與石窟營建 [Dunhuang Buddhism and the Construction of Cave Temples] (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2013), 86 as *jian* (減).

> the images of the Great Compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, Succorer from Trouble, as well as the Great Sage of the Northern Direction, the Heavenly King Vaiśravaṇa. Recorded on the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the *gengyin* year, by Dong.[34]

The situation that emerges from this inscription is that Dong Wenyuan was the son of the female disciple Juehui (who at this point had already passed away) and the younger brother of the monks Yiquan and Yiyuan. The image of two adjacent deities is conspicuously parallel to the two Avalokiteśvara figures in Stein painting 3, except that here they are in full frontal view and, being different deities, are less alike. Nonetheless, the involvement of both female disciple Juehui and the lay disciple Dong Wenyuan in both paintings makes it certain that they are the same individuals. Another notable parallel with Stein painting 3 is that the captions identifying the two donors read in opposite directions, moving from the centre to the outside.

Dong Wenyuan also appears in a copy of the *Shiwang jing* 十王經 [Scripture of the Ten Kings] in the collection of the Kuboso Memorial Museum of Arts, Izumi (Jap. Izumi shi Kubosō kinen bijutsukan 和泉市久保惣記念美術館). The colophon at the end of the scroll identifies the image of the kneeling donor with an incense burner as Dong Wenyuan, who finished copying the scripture and painting the image on the tenth day of the twelfth month of the *xinwei* (辛未) year, at the age of 68.[35] That

[34] 清信佛弟子董文員，先奉為先王父母神生净土，勿落三塗；次為長兄僧議淵，染患未蒙抽撾，憑佛加威，乞祇（祈）救拔；敬畫大慈大悲救苦觀世音菩薩，及北方大聖毗沙門天王供養。時庚寅年七月十五日題。董。

For the text of the inscription, see Zhang, "Yanluo wang shouji jing zhuibu yankao," and Ryo, *Sengoku Shin Kan Tō Sō Gen bokuseki*, 26. I am a little hesitant regarding the last character (i.e., *dong* 董), but in lieu of a better solution follow the transcription in Ryo, *Sengoku Shin Kan Tō Sō Gen bokuseki*, 26. In connection with this inscription, Chen Ming points out that it demonstrates that (1) familial ties remained significant even after someone became a monk; (2) in addition to directly offering medicine to ailing monks, secular family members also painted or sculpted images as offerings for their benefit of the ill; (3) Avalokiteśvara and Vaiśravaṇa were thought to possess healing powers; see Chen Ming 陳明, "Shizhe defu: Zhonggu shisu shehui dui fojiao sengtuan de yiyao gongyang 施者得福——中古世俗社會對佛教僧團的醫藥供養 [The Donor Gains Blessings: Medicinal Offerings of Medieval Secular Society for Buddhist Clergy]," *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究 [Studies in World Religions] 2 (2013): 48.

[35] I calculate the ages in this paper in *sui* (歲), which are always a year more than the same age according to the Western reckoning.

Dong Wenyuan performed both the copying and the painting himself fits well with him being named as a junior technician in Stein painting 3. For this reason, we are justified to translate the verb *hua* (畫) in Avalokiteśvara-Vaiśravaṇa painting as 'painted', rather than 'caused to be painted.'

In addition, the name Dong Wenyuan also appears in manuscript P. 2615, where he is identified as the person who copied a geomantic text. Unfortunately, the manuscript provides no additional details about him. Finally, a fragment removed by modern conservators from the back of Stein painting 3 includes the same name, demonstrating that the fragments used for conservation in the medieval period may not have always been entirely random but could have some sort of link with the people who commissioned the painting.[36]

In light of the above discussion, we can make some corrections and adjustments to the transcription and translation of the donor inscription in Stein painting 3. As there seems to be a clear distinction between the central dedications in large characters and the outer ones, it is probably useful to translate these separately. The four lines of the central part, with punctuation added, are as follows:

> [Right side]
>
> […] Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva […] The disciple of pure faith, Wenyi, having himself fallen [...], that he may return to his birthplace, made and dedicated with undivided heart.[37]
>
> [Left side]
>
> [Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva] […] The disciple of pure faith Zaiwen, having himself fallen [...], that he may return home, reverently made and dedicated with undivided heart.[38]

Then, moving towards the outside, we find the two dedications, possibly added at a later point, in smaller characters and darker ink. They read as follows:

[36] On these patches, see below.
[37] […]觀世音菩薩 […] 清信弟子溫義，爲己身落
□□得歸鄉，敬造一心供養。
[38] […] [觀世音菩薩] […] 清信弟子再溫，爲己身落
□□[得]歸鄉，敬造一心供養。

[Right side]

The Great Vehicle female disciple Juehui, also worshipped Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva; first, that her deceased father and mother may be reborn in the Pure Land, [and may not fall] into the three evil destinies, but be granted birth in the Pure Country, and soon ascend the Buddha's realm, dedicated with undivided heart.[39]

[Left side]

Cili, elder of the Yong'an Temple,[40] piously and reverently painted Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva, on behalf of his departed father [...] third, that he may soon ascend the Buddha's realm, dedicated with undivided heart. The disciple of faith and son Yi[...], Vinaya Master in the Yong'an Temple, dedicated with undivided heart. The disciple of faith and junior technician Dong Wenyuan dedicated with undivided heart.[41]

Dong Wenyuan, who we know was Juehui's son, appears in a parallel place but on the opposite side (i.e., left) of the inscription from his mother (i.e., right). Although it is tempting to identify the truncated name Yi[...] with Dong Wenyuan's younger brother Yiquan from the inscription in the Avalokiteśvara-Vaiśravaṇa painting, he is listed here as a son, which would not be in relation to Juehui on the right side. In either case, it is clear that this complex inscription involves members of the same family.

Discussing donor inscriptions from Dunhuang, Zhang Peijun proposes that the reason why the donor inscription listed several individuals was that their financial means were limited and they could only afford to commission a silk painting like this together. He also suggests that individuals with even lesser means would have commissioned paintings on paper.[42] There is, of course, some truth to this explanation, as large silk paintings would have been significantly more costly than paper-based ones. At the same time, I find it unlikely that the donors listed in the inscription of Stein painting 3 made commissioned the painting together

[39] 大乘憂（優）婆夷覺惠，同修觀世音菩薩，一為先亡父母神生净土，
不洛（落）三塗（途），承生净國，早登佛果（界），一心供養。

[40] On the Yong'an Temple in Dunhuang, see Sørensen, Henrik H., "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang: Mid-8th to Early 11th Centuries," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.2 (2021), 75–77.

[41] □□永安寺老宿慈力，發心敬畫觀世音菩薩，為過往父
□□三早過佛界，一心供養。 信弟子男永安寺律師義
□一心供養。 信弟子兼伎術子弟董文員，一心供養。

[42] Zhang, "Dunhuang cangjingdong chutu yihua," 94.

out of the desire to alleviate costs. Instead, a more realistic scenario is that they commissioned the painting jointly because they were part of the same family and chose to make an offering together, as a collective act of worship. They would have also participated together in the associated ritual. This type of joint production is also evidenced in Stein painting 65 showing the image of the Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara, below which the central donor inscription expressly states that the offering was made collectively as a family (Chin. *hejia* 合家) so that their deceased parents would be reborn in the Pure Land (Chin. *jingtu* 淨土) and not fall into the three evil destinies.[43] There are also some Dunhuang manuscripts in which the texts, typically short scriptures, were copied by several individuals, clearly not out of the desire to reduce costs but to ensure the religious efficacy of the manuscript through each individual's personal participation.[44]

### 3. *The Tibetan Connection*

As mentioned above, the dating of Stein painting 3 hinges on Fujieda's suggestion that the character *luo* (落), 'to fall' was typically followed by the word *fan* (番), meaning Tibet. If we go back to Arthur Waley's translation, he interpreted the word *luo* entirely differently, thinking that it referred to one of the Buddhist realms sinners would find themselves after their death. Accordingly, he translated the relevant part in both dedications as "[lest he should] fall...", expecting that it would be followed by words such as 'hell' or 'three evil destinies'.[45] The problem with this reading is that the word *wei* (為), 'for, because, on account of', at the beginning of the dedication explains the reason for the votive act, whereas the wishes are only articulated later. Thus, Fujieda was right in that this part of the dedication presents the unfortunate condition the offering of the painting is meant to alleviate. My own opinion, however, is that the expression "because he himself has fallen into" (Chin. *wei ji shen luo* 爲

[43] Ma, "Dunhuang juanhua tiji jilu," 141.
[44] On such multiple-text manuscripts, see Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture*, 23–85.
[45] Waley, A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang, 7.

己身落) is not necessarily followed by the word *fan* and it certainly does not have to be linked to the period of Tibetan control over Dunhuang.

Among the manuscript colophons that use the word *luo*, we can find phrases that are similar to the relevant part in Stein painting 3. One of these is the colophon at the end of the *Guanyin jing* 觀音經 [Avalokiteśvara Scripture] (i.e., the 25th chapter of the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* [Lotus Sūtra]) in manuscript S. 2992, which reads as follows:

> Copied on the twenty-third day of the fifth month of the *shen* year, to the order of the female disciple of pure faith He Sanniang (i.e., 'third girl') who, having fallen into a distant land, prays for peace and happiness.[46]

The phrase *yixiang* (異鄉), which I translate here as 'distant land', is quite generic and simply signifies a different location at some distance from her home. In his translation of the colophon, Lionel Giles renders it as "a strange land", but this has undetones of this land being unusual or odd.[47] He dates the *shen* year to 768, adding a question mark to indicate uncertainty. What is significant from our point of view is that the word *luo* is not followed by the word *fan*, just as 'another land' is not a reference to a specific political entity such as Tibet. The colophon was written by a woman who lived away from her original home. That she chose to copy the *Avalokiteśvara Scripture* as an offering towards the fulfilment her wish is probably because this scripture promises protection and help in all types of difficult situations, even if one finds oneself in a hostile land populated by demons.

A comparable colophon is found in manuscript S. 1963, likewise commissioned by a female lay disciple. This is a six metres long scroll in which the main text is *juan* (卷) 1 of the *Jinguangming jing* 金光明經 [Golden Light Sūtra], translated by Dharmakṣema (385–433, Chin. Tanwuchen 曇無讖). The red dots that punctuate the text indicate that the manuscript was not just copied, but also read and recited, probably as part of a ritual. The heavily indented colophon comes at the end, on a separate sheet of paper, and it provides the following justification for copying the *sūtra*:

---

[46] S. 2992: 清信弟子女人賀三娘，為落異鄉，願平安，申年五月廿三日寫。

[47] Lionel Giles, Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1957), 87.

> The female disciple of the Buddha of pure faith Lu Erniang [(盧二娘, i.e., 'second girl')], on behalf of her deceased ancestors of seven generations and her current relatives, and because she herself has fallen into the distant land of barbarians, reverently copied one scroll with the *Golden Light Sūtra*. She only prays that the two states may live in amity, that hostilities may cease, and that all drifting people may speedily reach their native villages.
>
> May Lu Erniang also share the benefits of this merit.[48]

The colophon is in the same hand as the main text and may have been written by a hired hand paid by the donor. The last eight characters were added in smaller script and fainter ink, perhaps by the donor herself. Interestingly, the name Lu Erniang was miswritten and then corrected, which is an unexpected mistake, considering that the name of the donor was arguably the most important information in the dedication, and that her wish was the very reason for the production of the manuscript. In any case, the mistake corroborates the conjecture that the colophon was written by a hired hand, rather than the donor herself. This is why Giles interpreted the phrase *jing xie* (敬寫) as "referently caused ... to be copied".[49] He also translated the phrase *yifan* (異番) as "the land of foreign barbarians," explaining that it referred to the Tibetans. Accordingly, he transcribed the character *fan* (番), 'barbarian', as (蕃), 'Tibet', adding the 'grass' signific on the top, even if this was not how it appeared in the manuscript.[50] He further explained that the "two states" (Chin. *liang guo* 兩國) referred to China and Tibet. Probably for similar reasons, Ikeda On dated manuscript S. 1963 (as well as S. 2992) to the first half of the 8th century, when Dunhuang was still under Tibetan rule.[51]

While the character *fan* (番), 'barbarian', could certainly be used in place of 蕃 ('Tibet'), there is no direct evidence that would tie Lu Erniang's prayer specifically to the Tibetan period in Dunhuang. Her

[48] S. 1963: 清信女佛弟子盧二娘，奉為七伐（代）仙（先）亡、見(現)存眷屬，為身陷在異番，敬寫金光明經一卷，唯願兩國通和，丘（兵）甲休息，應沒落之流，速達鄉井。□盧二娘同霑此福。

[49] Giles, Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum, 61.

[50] Ibid. Li Zhengyu also transcribes this character as *fan* (蕃,'Tibet'); see Li Zhengyu 李正宇, "Zailun wan Tang Wudai Beisong shiqi de Dunhuang fojiao 再論晚唐五代北宋時期的敦煌佛教 [Reconsidering Dunhuang Buddhism during the Tang, Five Dynasties, and Northern Song Periods]," *Nanjing Xiaozhuang xueyuan xuebao* 南京曉莊學院學報 [Journal of the Xiaozhuang Academy, Nanjing] 6 (2013): 99.

[51] Ikeda, Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shūroku, 377 and 379.

falling into the land of barbarians, even if we interpret this as a reference to the Tibetans, by no means means that the region of Dunhuang was under Tibetan control. In fact, the mention of hostilities and drifting people implies that this was a period of recent changes, which would fit better the early years of the Guiyijun period (i.e., post-851), after the end of the relative stability of the Tibetan rule.

With regards to the reason for choosing the *Golden Light Sūtra*, apart from it being among the most popular scriptures during the 9th-10th centuries, it also contains *gāthā*s that are directly relevant to the idea of being in a distant land without the support of one's kin:

> As there are sentient beings with no one to save and protect them,
> And are subjected to a multitude of hardship with nowhere to take refuge,
> May I in future times become for them
> A great saviour and protector and a place of refuge.[52]

Indeed, these very words occur on the scroll sponsored by Lu Erniang and are clearly pertinent to the idea of being stranded in a distant land away from one's original home. That the *sūtra* talks about refuge on a spiritual level poses no real contradiction because the donor, as a Buddhist devotee, would have simultaneously understood her life in the human world as a place of impermanence. Note that the colophons in these two manuscripts were written by women, who were understandably more prone to move away from their original families. This suggests a kind of sentiment that is entirely different from the patriotic mindset assumed when interpreting the colophons with reference to the Tibetan 'occupation'.

A relevant colophon appears in manuscript S. 4397, another copy of the *Avalokiteśvara Scripture*. This is a 125 cm long scroll which, due to damage, only contains the last part of the *sūtra*. The colophon dates to the fourth month of first year of the *guangming* (廣明) reign (880) and was written by Liang Ju (d. u., 梁矩), commander of the fifth frontier garrison of the Tianping Army (Chin. Tianping jun 天平軍) in Liangzhou (涼州). The colophon states that Liang Ju "made a vow and copied this *sūtra* on account of being on military service deep in *fan* land" (Chin. *yuan shen shu shen fan, fayuan xie ci jing* 緣身戍深蕃，發願寫此經). It is true that

[52] S. 1963: 若有眾生 無救護者 眾苦逼切 無所依止
我於當來 為是等輩 作大救護 及依止處

the word *fan* (蕃) used here could refer to Tibet but it could also be used for 'barbarians' in general, more commonly written with the character *fan* (番).[53] Giles translated the end of the dedication as "caused this *sūtra* to be copied in fulfilment of a vow made while on military service in the heart of Tibet."[54] Once again, this interpretation involves several assumptions that may be too specific for what the text actually intends to say. Giles thought that the colophon was copied after Liang Ju came back from a military mission to Tibet because he had made a vow while he was there. The reason for reading the colophon in this manner is the need to bridge the geographical distance between Liangzhou where Liang Ju copied the scripture and Tibet where he was on military service. Giles solves this by separating the two events, thinking that the *sūtra* was copied in Liangzhou but the vow to do so had been made earlier while still in Tibet. It is clear, however, that the colophon implies no separation between these two events. In fact, the vow and the *sūtra*-copying belonged together, forming part of the same votive act. For this reason, '*fan* land' probably refers not to Tibet but to Liangzhou or the area east of Kokonor not far from Liangzhou, where Tibetans were still present well into the 10th century.[55] This must have been the place where Liang Ju served when he decided to make a copy of the *sūtra*. Reading the colophon in this light takes the presumed antagonism with the Tibetans out of the equation.

## 4. *The Date*

Among the most noticeable characteristics of the inscription in Stein painting 3 is that it is divided into two halves, and the vertical lines of each half read in opposite direction, moving from the central axis towards the outside of the painting. In this manner, while the left half of the inscription

[53] Yet another character that could be used to write the same word was *fan* (藩), as in the *Tang Code* (Art. 36), which uses the expression *moluo waifan* (沒落外藩), translated by Wallace Johnson as "those who have been captives among the barbarians"; Wallace Johnson, *The T'ang Code: Volume I, General Principles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 198.

[54] Giles, Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum, 87.

[55] I am grateful to Carmen Meinert for pointing out to me that this area east of Lake Kokonor was a contested area between the Chinese and Tibetans up to the 10th century.

reads in the 'normal' way from right to left, the right half reads from left to right. This anomalous direction of writing Chinese occurs in a series of Dunhuang manuscripts and paintings from the Guiyijun period. It was especially common on donor inscriptions in portable paintings, the absolute majority of which were written in this manner. As I have shown elsewhere, this practice first began at the end of the 9th century and lasted at least until the end of the 10th century, possibly longer. The twenty-five unambiguously dated Dunhuang manuscripts with left-to-right inscriptions range from 892 to 991.[56] It is likely then, that Stein painting 3 is not a lone exception but was also produced within the same time frame.

Among the dozens of examples of texts and inscriptions written from left to right, there are a few that constitute pairs of identical or nearly identical texts arranged symmetrically, reading in an outward direction from an imaginary axis, much like the inscription in Stein painting 3. For example, the miscellaneous material on the verso of manuscript S. 214 includes two symmetric copies of an untitled heptasyllabic poem. Both are written in the same hand and for the most part replicate all the orthographic idiosyncrasies, exhibiting only inconsequential variation.[57] The same side of the same manuscript also has two copies of a society circular, written symmetrically, although with some space between them.[58] The colophon on the recto of this scroll dates to the *guiwei* (癸未) year (923?).[59] Another example is manuscript P. 2690, the recto of which includes two copies of the Buddhist poem *Shier shi* 十二時 [Twelve Hours], reading in opposite direction. Even though the two copies are not adjacent but have other texts between them, they read in opposite direction, away from each other. This manuscript dates to the *jiaxu* (甲戌) year (914/974).

Paintings from Dunhuang also contain several examples of two or more inscriptions running in opposite direction, although these arrangements are less regular than the symmetrical layout described above. For instance, Stein painting 14 (dated 910) with the central figure of Avalokiteśvara has

[56] Galambos, Dunhuang Manuscript Culture, 191–194.

[57] Replicated idiosyncrasies include writing *ceng* (曾) in place of *ceng* (層), *tou* (投) in place of *tou* (頭), *jian* (諫) in place of *jian* (澗). As for the discrepancy, the right-side copy of the poem writes *lingxing* (令姓) instead of the correct *lingsheng* (靈聖).

[58] Fig. 52 in Galambos, *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture*, 171.

[59] Ibid., 170–172.

two cartouched inscriptions on the right and another one on the left.[60] All three inscriptions read from the centre towards the outside, which means that the two on the right read from left to right, whereas the one on the left reads from right to left. Another example is the paper painting P. 4518 (27), which contains a Khotanese inscription at the bottom and two Chinese ones on the two sides of the image of Vaiśravaṇa. The two Chinese inscriptions are different in content but their lines run from the centre towards the outside of the painting. Because of the Khotanese inscription, this painting can be confidently dated to the 10th century.

With regards to Stein painting 3, the presence of an inscription which includes lines reading from left to right immediately casts doubt on dating the object to the first half of the 9th century, when the region was still under Tibetan rule. All dated examples of this otherwise decidedly uncommon practice come from the late ninth and especially the 10th century, which in Dunhuang corresponds to the Guiyijun period. It stands to reason then that this painting was probably also produced within that period. As we have seen, the main justification for dating the painting to the first half of the 9th century was the alleged claim of the donors to being stranded in Tibetan territory. This reference, however, was only assumed and, upon closer scrutiny, turns out to be untenable. Thus, while there is no evidence for dating the object to the Tibetan period, there is strong palaeographic support for dating it to the long 10th century.

As we have seen above, Dong Wenyuan participated in the production of several paintings and manuscripts. He was 68 years at the very end of the *xinwei* year (912/972),[61] when he produced the copy of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* with a picture of himself at the end. In the *gengyin* (庚寅) year (930/990), when he painted the Avalokiteśvara-Vaiśravaṇa painting for the benefit of his already deceased mother, he would have been either 19 years older or 41 years younger. The former scenario is improbable, as he would have been 87 and his mother must have died many years earlier. Instead, it is much more likely that he was mourning his mother at the age of 27, which also means that the *gengyin* year could

[60] On this painting, including its connection with the Jinshan Kingdom (910–914, Jinshan guo 金山國), see Yu-ping Luk, "A Silk Painting of Avalokiteśvara with Portraits of the Deceased from the Kingdom of Jinshan in Dunhuang (Stein Painting 14)," forthcoming 2022.

[61] The *xinwei* year was 911/971, but its end would have technically been in 912/972.

not refer to 990.[62] As the inscription of the undated Stein painting 3 mentions his mother as still being alive, it must have been written before 930, when he was even younger.

Finally, among the patches removed from the back of Stein painting 3 by modern conservators are fragments (S. 8516E) of a lay society circular penned by Dong Wenyuan in the capacity of the society's registrar (Chin. *lushi* 錄事). The circular is dated to the tenth day of the sixth month of the *bingchen* (丙辰) year (896/956).[63] Some of the other fragments of S. 8516 feature dates such as the second year of the Guangshun (廣順) reign (952) and the third year of Guangshun (953), which makes it probable that the *bingchen* year in the circular signifies 956.[64] Similarly, some of the fragments together constitute a letter by Cao Yuanzhong (r. 944–974, 曹元忠), the ruler of Guiyijun Dunhuang, to the Third Army.[65] A fragment that does not fit this window is S. 8516D, which includes the date *dingchou* (丁丑, 917/977). Nonetheless, the years 952 (Guangshun 2) and 953 (Guangshun 3) are too close to 956 (*bingchen*) to be a coincidence, which is why the *bingchen* year in the circular must be 956. Putting these dates together, this is the timeline that emerges with regards to Dong Wenyuan's activities:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (1) | Stein painting 3 | – | – | mother alive |
| (2) | Avalokiteśvara-Vaiśravaṇa painting | *gengyin* (930) | age 26 | mother deceased |
| (3) | Society circular | *bingchen* (957) | age 53 | |
| (4) | *Scripture of the Ten Kings* | *xinwei* (972) | age 68 | |

[62] The reason for this is that then the *xinwei* year would be 1031, after the sealing of the Dunhuang library cave (ca. 1006).

[63] Rong, "Yingguo tushuguan cang Dunhuang hanwen," 97 dates it to 896, whereas Hao Chunwen 郝春文, "Dunhuang xieben sheyi wenshu niandai huikao (yi) 敦煌寫本社邑文書年代匯考（一）[Dating of Dunhuang Manuscripts Related to Local Societies, 1]," *Shoudu shifan daxue xuebao* (*Shehui kexue ban*) 首都師範大學學報（社會科學版）[Journal of the Capital Normal University, Social Sciences] 4 (1993): 37 to 956. That this is not a copy made by students for the sake of exercise but an actual document that had been sent out by the society can be verified by the presence of dots next to the names.

[64] These two fragments are S. 8516B8 and S. 8516C4.

[65] S.8516C3+S.8516C4+S.8516C5. For an image of the reconstructed letter and a description of its content, see Susan Whitfield and Ursual Sims-Williams, *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith* (London: The British Library, 2004), 60.

This means that Dong Wenyuan was born in 904 and participated in the offering of Stein painting 3 sometime before 930.[66] In the donor inscription in that painting, he is identified as a "junior technician," which means that he must have been at least of teenage age when such specialisation would have become feasible. Considering that during the Tang Dynasty (618–907, 唐) the age requirement for studying in official schools or academies was 14–18,[67] we could date the painting to between ca. 918 and 922. Even if the age limit in Guiyijun Dunhuang was slightly different, it would not represent a drastic deviation from the date proposed here.

## 5. *Conclusions*

This paper re-examined the inscription of Stein painting 3, which has been dated to the end of the Tibetan period in the mid-9th century based on a presumed reference to the Tibetan presence in the Dunhuang region. This reference, however, was purely hypothetical and was not actually visible in the inscription. The analysis of colophons with a similar theme revealed that the phrase in question probably signified a more generic desire to return to one's native region, which must have been a common sentiment for many people inhabiting the oasis cities along the Silk Roads. In other words, there was no concrete evidence that would link the painting with the Tibetan period. Instead, we can date the painting to the long 10th century on the basis of the inscription being written in two directions, including its right side which read from left to right. This otherwise atypical manner of writing Chinese was common in Dunhuang paintings and all unambiguously dated examples come from the period 892–991. As one of the donors named Dong Wenyuan was involved in the production of another painting and several manuscripts, some of which were dated using cyclical dates, it was possible to calculate that Stein painting 3 was probably produced around 920–930. This places it firmly within the part of the Guiyijun period when the region was ruled by the Cao (曹) clan.

[66] Noting that the illustrated copies of the *Scripture of the Ten Kings* were popular during the Five Dynasties (906–978, 五代), Wang, *Dunhuang fojiao yu shiku yingjian*, 86 also came to a similar conclusion, namely, that the *gengyin* year denoted 930 and the *xinwei* year 971.

[67] *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New Book of the Tang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 1160; see also Qu, "Dunhuang jishuyuan kaolüe," 75.

Just as importantly, the painting and the inscription are also an example of how certain assumptions about the linguistic and social conditions during specific periods may lead us astray. In this particular case, one such assumption is that the core population of Dunhuang felt antagonistic towards the Tibetan rule in the first half of the 9th century. Part of the problem is, of course, that Dunhuang is often seen as a largely Chinese city which temporarily fell under Tibetan occupation. According to this scenario, the Chinese residents of the region would have remained hostile towards the occupying forces, until their eventual 'liberation' in the mid-9th century. This is a decidedly modern perspective ultimately based on 20th-century vicissitudes of China as a nation state, and it disregards the multi-cultural makeup of local society in Dunhuang during the 9th and 10th centuries. It imagines a strong contrast—and opposition—between 'Chinese' and 'Tibetans', and possibly other groups, at a place and time when such categories were not always clear-cut. Seeing the Tibetan presence in the Hexi Corridor as the major source of discomfort and antagonism for locals diverts the attention from more immediate concerns which occupied them in their daily lives.

I suspect that one of the reasons why the painting has formerly been dated to the Tibetan period was because the idea of 'distant land' or 'land of the barbarians' did not seem to apply to Dunhuang, which has been seen as part of the 'Chinese' cultural sphere. Yet we have to realise that settlers and visitors coming from farther east would have seen this region as a *fan* domain, and many of them longed to return to their native land. This also means that we should not imagine Dunhuang during the Guiyijun rule as a stronghold of Chinese civilisation and appreciate the complex makeup of local society.

## *Abbreviations*

| | |
|---|---|
| BM | British Museum in London |
| P. | Pelliot Collection of Chinese Dunhung Manuscripts preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris |
| S. | Stein Collection of Chinese Dunhuang Manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London |

## *Bibliography*

### *Resources*

Dohi Yoshikazu 土肥義和. *Hasseiki makki - jūisseiki shoki Tonkō shizoku jinmei shūsei: Shizoku jinmeihen, Jinmeihen* 八世紀末期~十一世紀初期燉煌氏族人名集成 ： 氏族人名篇， 人名篇 [Inventory of Personal Names from Dunhuang: Late Eighth through Early Tenth Centuries]. Tokyo: Kyūko shoin, 2015.

Falconer, John, Ágnes Kárteszi, Ágnes Kelecsényi, and Lilla Russell-Smith. *Supplement to the Catalogue of the Collections of Sir Aurel Stein in the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*. Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 2007.

Giles, Lionel. *Descriptive Catalogue of the Chinese Manuscripts from Tunhuang in the British Museum*. London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1957.

Huang Zheng 黃征. *Dunhuang suzidian* 敦煌俗字典 [Dictionary of Popular Character Forms from Dunhuang]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2005.

Ikeda On 池田温. *Chūgoku kodai shahon shikigo shūroku* 中國古代寫本識語集録 [Collection of Ancient Chinese Manuscript Colophons]. Tokyo: Tōkyō daigaku bunka kenkyūjo, 1990.

*Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 [New Book of the Tang]. Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, ed. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.

Waley, Arthur. *A Catalogue of Paintings Recovered from Tun-huang by Sir Aurel Stein, K.C.I.E., Preserved in the Sub-department of Oriental Prints and Drawings in the British Museum, and in the Museum of Central Asian Antiquities, Delhi*. London: Trustees of the British Museum and the Government of India, 1931.

### *Primary Sources*

*Guanyin jing* 觀音經 [Avalokiteśvara Scripture]. S. 2992, S. 4397.
*Jinguangming jing* 金光明經 [Golden Light Sūtra]. S. 1963.
P. 2049.
P. 2615.
P. 3145.
S. 214.
S. 274.

S. 8516.
*Shan'e yinguo jing* 善惡因果經 [Sūtra on Good and Evil Causes and Results]. S. 2077.
*Shier shi* 十二時 [Twelve Hours]. P. 2690.
*Shiwang jing* 十王經 [Scripture of the Ten Kings]. In the collection of the Kuboso Memorial Museum of Arts, Izumi (Jap. Izumi shi Kubosō kinen bijutsukan 和泉市久保惣記念美術館).

## *Secondary Sources*

Chen Ming 陳明. "Shizhe defu: Zhonggu shisu shehui dui fojiao sengtuan de yiyao gongyang 施者得福——中古世俗社會對佛教僧團的醫藥供養 [The Donor Gains Blessings: Medicinal Offerings of Medieval Secular Society for Buddhist Clergy]." *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究 [Studies in World Religions] 2 (2013): 37–48.
Galambos, Imre. *Dunhuang Manuscript Culture: End of the First Millennium*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020.
Hao Chunwen 郝春文. "Dunhuang xieben sheyi wenshu niandai huikao (yi) 敦煌寫本社邑文書年代匯考（一）[Dating of Dunhuang Manuscripts Related to Local Societies, 1]." *Shoudu shifan daxue xuebao* (*Shehui kexue ban*) 首都師範大學學報（社會科學版） [Journal of the Capital Normal University, Social Sciences] 4 (1993): 33–39.
Johnson, Wallace. *The T'ang Code: Volume I, General Principles*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
Li Zhengyu 李正宇. "Zailun wan Tang Wudai Beisong shiqi de Dunhuang fojiao 再論晚唐五代北宋時期的敦煌佛教 [Reconsidering Dunhuang Buddhism during the Tang, Five Dynasties, and Northern Song Periods]." *Nanjing Xiaozhuang xueyuan xuebao* 南京曉莊學院學報 [Journal of the Xiaozhuang Academy, Nanjing] 6 (2013): 95–102.
Luk, Yu-ping. "A Silk Painting of Avalokiteśvara with Portraits of the Deceased from the Jinshan Kingdom in Dunhuang (Stein Painting 14)." Forthcoming 2022.
Ma De 馬德. "Dunhuang juanhua tiji jilu 敦煌絹畫題記輯錄 [Colophons of Silk Paintings from Dunhuang]." *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 1 (1996): 136–147. (Originally published in *Wenwu* 文物 [Cultural Relics] 2 (1982).)
Ma Wei 馬煒 and Meng Zhong 蒙中. *Xiyu huihua: Dunhuang Cangjingdong liushi haiwai de huihua zhenpin. 2 (Pusa)* 西域繪畫：敦煌藏經洞流失海外的繪畫珍品. 2 （菩薩）[Art of the Western Regions: Precious Silk Paintings from the Dunhuang Library Cave in Overseas Collections. 2. Bodhisattvas]. Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 2010.
Qu Zhimin 屈直敏. "Dunhuang jishuyuan kaolüe 敦煌伎術院考略 [A Brief Examination of the Technician Academy in Dunhuang]." *Dunhuang xue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 [Journal of Dunhuang Studies] 2 (2020): 67–80.
Rong Xinjiang 榮新江. *Yingguo tushuguan cang Dunhuang hanwen feifojiao wenxian canjuan mulu* 英國圖書館藏敦煌漢文非佛教文獻殘卷目錄: (S.6981-13624) [Catalogue of Non-Buddhist Fragments from Dunhuang in the British Library: S.6981-13624]. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1994.

Rong Xinjiang 榮新江. *Guiyijun shi yanjiu: Tang Song shidai Dunhuang lishi kaosuo* 歸義軍史研究: 唐宋時代敦煌歷史考索 [Study of the History of the Guiyijun: Exploration of Dunhuang History during the Tang-Song Period]. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1996.

Rong, Xinjiang. "The Historical Importance of the Chinese Fragments from Dunhuang in the British Library." *The British Library Journal* 24 (1998): 78–89.

Rong, Xinjiang. *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*. Translated by Imre Galambos. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Ryo Chōsei [Lü Changsheng] 呂長生. "Sengoku Shin Kan Tō Sō Gen bokuseki 戦國秦漢唐宋元墨跡 [Chinese Calligraphy from the Warring States, Qin, Han, Tang, Song, and Yuan Periods]." In *Chūgoku rekishi hakibutsukan zō hōsho daikan* 中國歷史博物館藏法書大觀 [Masterpieces of Calligraphy from the Collection of the Historical Museum of China], vol. 12). Kyoto: Yanagihara shoten, 1994.

van Schaik, Sam and Imre Galambos. *Manuscripts and Travellers: The Sino-Tibetan Documents of a Tenth-century Buddhist Pilgrim*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012.

Sickman, Laurence. "An Early Chinese Wall-Painting Newly Discovered." *Artibus Asiae* 15.1/2 (1952): 137–144.

Sørensen, Henrik H., "The Buddhist Temples in Dunhuang: Mid-8th to Early 11th Centuries," *BuddhistRoad Paper* 5.2 (2021): 1–100.

Stein, Marc Aurel. *Serindia: Detailed Report of Explorations in Central Asia and Westernmost China*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921.

Stein, Marc Aurel and Laurence Binyon. *The Thousand Buddhas: Ancient Buddhist Paintings from the Cave-temples of Tun-Huang on the Western Frontier of China*. London: Bernard Quaritch, 1921.

Taniguchi Tetsuo 谷口鉄雄 and Soejima Mikio 副島三喜男. "Zuidai chōkoku meibun shūroku (jō) 隋代雕刻銘文集錄(上) [Collection of Engraved Inscriptions from the Sui Dynasty]." *Tetsugaku nenpō* 哲學年報 [Annual Journal of Philosophy] 17 (1955): 113–135.

Teiser, Stephen F. *The Scripture on the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994.

Teiser, Stephen F. "Terms of Friendship: Bylaws for Associations of Buddhist Laywomen in Medieval China." In *'At the Shores of the Sky': Asian Studies for Albert Hoffstädt*, edited by Paul W. Kroll and Jonathan A. Silk, 154–172. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2020.

Wang Huimin 王惠民. *Dunhuang fojiao yu shiku yingjian* 敦煌佛教與石窟營建 [Dunhuang Buddhism and the Construction of Cave Temples]. Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2013.

Wang, Michelle C. *Maṇḍalas in the Making: The Visual Culture of Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang*. Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2018.

Whitfield, Roderick. *The Art of Central Asia: The Stein Collection in the British Museum*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982–1985.

Whitfield, Roderick and Anne Farrer. *Caves of the Thousand Buddhas: Chinese Art from the Silk Route*. London: British Museum Publications Ltd., 1990.

Whitfield, Susan and Ursual Sims-Williams. *The Silk Road: Trade, Travel, War and Faith*. London: The British Library, 2004.

Zhang Peijun 張培君. "Dunhuang cangjingdong chutu yihua zhong gongyangren tuxiang chutan 敦煌藏經洞出土遺畫中供養人圖像初探 [Preliminary

Examination of Donor Figures in Portable Paintings from the Dunhuang Library Cave].” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 4 (2007): 91–97.

Zhang Zong 張總. “*Yanluowang shouji jing* zhuibu yankao 《閻羅王授記經》綴補研考 [Piecing Together the *Scripture of the Prophecy Given by King Yama*].” *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 5 (2001): 81–116.

Zhao, Feng, Helen Wang, Helen Persson, and Frances Wood. *Textiles from Dunhuang in UK Collections*. Shanghai: Donghua daxue chubanshe, 2007.