

IMAGES OF MONKS WITH THE *UṢṢĪṢĀ* – from the Kucha and Turfan Regions

According to the scriptures, Śākyamuni is supposed to have been born with thirty-two *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* (characteristics/body-marks of the Great Person) and eighty *anuvyañjana* (minor marks). The *uṣṣīṣa*, “the protrusion on top of the head,” is one of the thirty-two *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas*. In standard Buddhist iconography, the *uṣṣīṣa* is almost an exclusive attribute of the Buddha image. However, some monk images are clearly shown with the cranial protuberance. They are mainly found in Buddhist caves and temple sites in the Kucha and Turfan regions in Central Asia and a few are found in the Ajaṅṭā caves in India. These images have long been overlooked until recently when Monika Zin conducted research on this unusual iconography. Based on an extensive study of Ajaṅṭā paintings and a survey of the rest of the Buddhist world, she proposes that the *uṣṣīṣa* on monk figures was meant to indicate either that they were members of the Śākya clan (Ānanda and Nanda) or that they were future Buddhas.¹⁾ However, in Kucha paintings, monk figures with the *uṣṣīṣa* are not restricted to these two categories. They include Śākyamuni’s principle disciples who are outside of Śākya clan. Yet, the question of why this iconography only appears in limited areas and is absent in the Theravada/Pāli tradition in South India and Southeast Asia and in the Mahāyāna tradition in East Asia is still unanswered.

This paper attempts to search for the possible connection among the regions where this iconography appears and how it may relate to the Sarvāstivāda, the Hīnayāna school which is believed to have dominated Kucha and also existed at the sites of Turfan and Ajaṅṭā. The purpose of the paper is to study the

¹⁾ Monika Zin (2003: 107–130).

significance of endowing the *uṣṇīṣa* on the non-Buddha figures in Buddhist theory and practice. Since the Kucha caves yield the most intensive depictions of such images and the images at Turfan bear inscriptions that are crucial for interpreting the meaning of the iconography, I will focus on the images from these two areas, which have not been previously examined at length.

IMAGES

KUCHA REGION: KIZIL CAVES

The ancient state of Kucha was located on the Northern part of the trade route in Central Asia, which is now part of present-day China. A number of Buddhist cave sites have been found in Kucha including the renowned Kizil. It is one of the earliest and also the largest Buddhist cave sites in Central Asia.²⁾ Images of monks with the *uṣṇīṣa* can frequently be found in the central-pillar type of caves at Kucha and appear in virtually all the themes of the iconographic program of the caves (Ill. 1): the Buddha's assemblies on the side walls of the main hall, the depictions of *avadānas* on the vaulted ceiling, the *parinirvāṇa* and related episodes in the back chamber, the First Council in the left corridor, and among the devotee and monk figures on the side wall of the central pillar. A monk bearing an *uṣṇīṣa* can either be the key figure of the narrative or just appear as a member of the audience. As the discussion below will show, they are either Śākyamuni in his past incarnation or one of the Buddha's principle disciples, but they are not necessarily from the Śākya clan. Only a limited number of these depictions at this cave site have been identified while most of them still remain undetermined. The following represent examples of each theme.

GROUP I. BUDDHA'S TEACHING ASSEMBLIES

Monks with *uṣṇīṣas* can frequently be found in paintings of the Buddha's preaching assemblies. Among these monks, Purna Maitrāyaniputra has been identified,³⁾ and can be seen in Kizil Cave 14 (Ill.2a) and 181 (Ill.2b).

According to the *Buddha Pūrvacaryā Saṃgraha Sūtra* (*Fo benxing ji jing*),⁴⁾ Purna Maitrāyaniputra was born in a Brahman family of the imperial priest-

²⁾ Since only Kizil caves are relatively well published, examples in this paper are mainly from Kizil.

³⁾ This subject in Cave 181 is identified in Duan Wenjie (1995: 30, 32, ill. 66).

⁴⁾ *Taishō*3: 190. 824a-825a. The *Buddha Pūrvacaryā Saṃgraha Sūtra* is the most developed form of the biography of the Buddha, and commonly attributed to the Dharmaguptaka school. Nakamura Hajime (1999: 132).

hood, the same day that Śākyamuni was born. The night when Śākyamuni renounces worldly life, Purna Maitrāyaniputra also secretly leaves his family to begin his ascetic life in the Snow Mountains. Through his practice, he reaches the Four Dhyāna Heavens⁵⁾ and obtains the Five Supernatural Powers. After Śākyamuni has achieved enlightenment, Purna Maitrāyaniputra comes to follow the Buddha. Just as depicted in the paintings, when the two meet, Purna Maitrāyaniputra prostrates himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha. He holds the Buddha's feet with both hands and kisses the teacher's feet. Then, Purna Maitrāyaniputra kneels down on one knee and praises the Buddha. In the paintings of Cave 14 and 181, Purna Maitrāyaniputra is shown twice: first prostrating and then kneeling by the Buddha. Purna Maitrāyaniputra is one of the ten chief disciples of Śākyamuni. He appears as one of the interlocutors in the *Śūrangama-sūtra*. According to the same *sūtra*, Purna Maitrāyaniputra is said to be born with the *mahāpuruṣa* marks, which explains why he is depicted with the *uṣṇīṣa* in the Kizil paintings.⁶⁾

Other unidentified monk figures possessing the *uṣṇīṣa* also seem to be close disciples of the Buddha. For example, in Kizil Cave 227, one such figure attends the Buddha of the main niche (Ill.2c). In Cave 123 (Ill. 2d), a similar figure stands to the Buddha's immediate top left. The close position of these figures to the Buddha speaks of their importance. These figures clearly represent the monks, not the Buddhas. Unlike the Buddha images in Kizil paintings that are shown with a high, round protuberance, the *uṣṇīṣas* on the monk figures are small and low. In addition, the Buddha figure's hairline is round and smooth; while the hairlines on the images on the monks with the *uṣṇīṣas* recess in sharp zigzag angles. Further, in contrast to Śākyamuni, these monk figures usually do not have halos around them.

GROUP II. THE AVADĀNAS

Among the *avadānas* on the ceiling, two scenes with images of monks possessing the *uṣṇīṣa* have been identified: the "poor woman offering a lamp" and "Buddha Fuṣya painting a self-portrait."⁷⁾ However, the *uṣṇīṣa* on the attendants in these paintings has not been recognised and reminds unexplained.

⁵⁾ The eighteen Brahmālokas are divided into four levels and are reached through the four stages of *dhyāna* (meditation) practice.

⁶⁾ *Taishō* 3: 190.824a-825a.

⁷⁾ Ma Shichang (1996: 174–22).

According to the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*Xianyu jing*), a poor woman, Nanda, gives everything that she has possessed in order to buy oil to offer an oil-lamp to the Buddha. Her lamp shines throughout the night when all the other lamps die out. Even Maudgalyāyana, one of Śākyamuni's top disciples, who is on duty the next day, is not able to extinguish the light.⁸⁾ The depiction of this story in Kizil Cave 196 (Ill. 3a) shows an image of a monk with an *uṣṇīṣa* besides Nanda. Scholars have been using the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* to identify the story.⁹⁾ Based on this text, the monk figure in the painting could be Maudgalyāyana. This story is also seen in the Sanskrit *Divyāvadāna*¹⁰⁾ and *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya*¹¹⁾, in which the woman then makes a vow in front of the Buddha, "May I become a Buddha just like you in the future." Afterwards, the Buddha predicts her enlightenment.

The scene of Buddha Fuṣya painting a self-portrait appears in Kizil Cave 34 (Ill. 3b) and 38 (Ill. 3c). This event also is explained in the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*. At the time of Buddha Fuṣya in the remote past, the presiding ruler, King Boseqi (Vāsuki?), wanted to make images of the Buddha for his people to venerate. All the court painters fail to capture the auspicious marks of the Buddha. Finally, Fuṣya picks up the bush and paints a self-portrait for the court painters. When Śākyamuni at a future time relates the story of Fuṣya as an *avadāna*, he explains that King Boseqi was himself in one of his previous lives. The merit accrued by Boseqi for making images of the Buddha, ensured that he would always be reborn as a king with the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* and eventually became a Buddha.¹²⁾ The Kizil paintings show the Buddha seated painting on a piece of cloth held by a monk with a low *uṣṇīṣa*. This monk is presumably King Boseqi who commissioned the painting. Interestingly, even though he is a king here, he is shown as a Buddha-to-be, already possessing the body marks like the Buddha.

⁸⁾ *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*, *Taishō* 4:202.370c-371c. Its Tibetan version also exists: *Mdsans buun shes bya baḥimdo*. Tohoku Cat. No.341. The Sanskrit original is lost. According to Nakamura Hajime, the Sanskrit title may be *Dama-mūka-midāna-sūtra*. Nakamura Hajime (1999: 140).

⁹⁾ Xinjiang Uighur zizhiqu wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al. (1997: 221, fig. 102). For identification of the theme in general, see Ma Shichang (1996: 174–226, fig. 27); and Emmanulle Lesbre (2001: 305–354). This subject is also depicted in the Kizil Caves 38, 188, 193, and 244, in which, however, only the woman is shown.

¹⁰⁾ E.B. Cowell (1886: 80–90).

¹¹⁾ N. Dutt (1947: vol.3,i, 123.15–159.16).

¹²⁾ *Taishō* 4:202.368c-369a.

GROUP III. THE *PARINIRVĀṆA* AND RELATED SCENES

In the *parinirvāṇa* and related scenes located in the back corridors of the caves, every so often, images of monks with *uṣṇīṣas* are portrayed among the mourning crowds. In Kizil Cave 38 (Ill. 4a), a monk with an *uṣṇīṣa* kneels down holding the feet of the Buddha.¹³ In Cave 224, a similar figure stands with Kāśyapa in the cremation scene (Ill. 4b). In the *parinirvāṇa* scene of Cave 161, three monks are endowed with the *uṣṇīṣa* (Ill. 4c). One stands near the Buddha's head, and the other two near the feet. In Cave 171 (Ill. 4d), a monk with an *uṣṇīṣa* stands under a tree, frowning, seemingly contemplating the Buddha's final passing. Similar images appear in Caves 7, 163, and 205 (cremation) as well. Since Ānanda plays an important role in the various textual accounts of the Buddha's last days, it is possible that one of these figures is meant to represent him.

GROUP IV. THE FIRST COUNCIL

In a number of caves at Kizil, the First Council is depicted in the left corridor. The First Council was held shortly after Śākyamuni's *nirvāṇa* in order to settle debates over doctrine. Ānanda is said to have recited the *sūtras*,¹⁴ and Upāli, another disciple of the Buddha, recited the *vinayas*.¹⁵ The central youthful-looking monk in the Council scene in Kizil Cave 178 and 224 (Ill. 5) bears the *uṣṇīṣa*. In Buddhist art Ānanda is typically shown as a young monk. Also given the importance of Ānanda to this event, the central monk is most likely depicting him.

GROUP V. MONKS AND DEVOTEES

One of the motifs on the side wall of the central pillars in a number of caves shows rows of monks and lay devotees. At least two images of monks with *uṣṇīṣas* can be found in this subject. In Kizil Cave 175, a row of eight standing monks and a row of gods were depicted on the upper and lower part of the right side wall of the central pillar respectively (Ill. 6b). The second monk in the line possesses an *uṣṇīṣa* (Ill. 6a). Since the monks are lined up with and are even higher than the gods, they are likely to have very high status, possibly the most important disciples of Śākyamuni. The third monk, old and wearing a patch-

¹³ The position at the feet of the Buddha in the *parinirvāṇa* scene is usually reserved for Kāśyapa. However Kāśyapa is shown as an elder wearing patch-robe at Kizil. Therefore, this figure (in Cave 38) is unlikely to be Kāśyapa. For the iconography of Kāśyapa in *parinirvāṇa* depictions, see: Jorinde Ebert (1985: 77–87).

¹⁴ *Lidai sanbao ji* (歷代三寶記), *Taishō* 49: 2034.95b.

¹⁵ Louis L. La Vallée Poussin (1925 : 30).

robe, seems to be Kāśyapa. The second monk is then probably also a disciple of the Buddha of no less importance. The status of the row of monk figures appeared on the side wall of the central pillar can be supported by another example in Kizil 7 (“Cave of the Frescoed Floor”). In this case, the monk images were originally inscribed in Brāhmī in the strip over their heads.¹⁶ In Cave 205 (Ill. 6c), a cave patronised by the royal family, a monk with an *uṣṇīṣa* is shown leading the prince’s family. The prince and his wife are depicted with halos, which indicate that they are otherworldly figures. Hence, the guiding monk is probably also a figure in the celestial realm and not a local priest from Kizil.¹⁷

The image of a monk with a protuberance on his head is a quite common iconographic feature at Kizil. It seems germane to certain subjects and certain figures. Images of monks with *uṣṇīṣas* are clearly distinguishable from the Buddha figures and other ordinary monks in terms of the shape of the *uṣṇīṣa* and the hairline. Regarding the date of the Kizil caves, German scholars dated them to the sixth to seventh centuries and their opinion has been largely followed in the field.¹⁸ Based on a more comprehensive typological analysis of the structure of the caves and the decorations with reference to carbon fourteen testing, Su Bai establishes a new chronology and dates the caves to the fourth through the seventh centuries.¹⁹ This early date has become very influential.

TURFAN: BEZEKLIK AND SENGIN

In Central Asia, the convention of depicting the *uṣṇīṣa* on certain monk-like figures extends into the Turfan region, and is seen mainly at the Bezeklik cave site and Sengin temple site. The Bezeklik Cave was active from the ninth through the twelfth centuries during the Gaochang period (848–1283) and was under imperial patronage.²⁰ Sengin is located twenty miles north of the capital,

¹⁶ Albert Grünwedel, (1912: 48ff.); Albert von Le Coq, (1923–1933: VI, pl. 9); The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1982: 94, fig. 30).

¹⁷ In the past, the subject of the monk figures on the side wall of the central pillar of Caves 175 and 205 has been identified as donors. For example, Jia Yingyi (1993: 131, fig. 183). It is doubtful that a Kizil monk would have a protrusion on top of his head or dare to endow himself with an *uṣṇīṣa*.

¹⁸ Albert von Le Coq (1923–1933: III: 21–23, VII: 27–29). For the problems of this dating and a review of the study of the chronology of Kizil caves, see: A. Howard (1991: 68–83).

¹⁹ Su Bai (1989: 10–23). For a review of the problems of this dating, see: Emmanuelle Lesbre (2001: 346–348).

²⁰ For the chronology of the site, see: Jia Yingyi (1989); for the C14 testing of the Bezeklik caves, see: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiushuo shiyanshi (1991: 1039–1045).

Gaochang. A royal temple is built at the site.²¹ As will be discussed below, in this area, images of monk figures bearing *uṣṇīṣas* usually represent Buddhas-to-be. They appear primarily in two subjects, the *praṇidhāna* (“vow”) paintings, and the *parinirvāṇa* scenes.

The *praṇidhāna* paintings record Śākyamuni’s long journey of making offerings to the Buddhas of the past and receiving their prediction of enlightenment. Typical *praṇidhāna* paintings appear on the side walls of more than fourteen caves at Bezeklik.²² Some of these *praṇidhāna* paintings are inscribed with Brāhmī, which quotes from a *vinaya* of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhaiṣajyavastu*. These inscriptions help identify the subject of the painting. Fifteen themes, each recording one particular previous life of Śākyamuni, have been identified.²³ Images of a monk with the *uṣṇīṣa* only appear in one scene of these stories.²⁴ It is the time when Śākyamuni was born as a Brahmācārin named Uttara. Having heard the preaching by Buddha Kāśyapa, he renounces his worldly life to seek enlightenment.²⁵ Shown in Cave 20 (Ill. 7a) and Cave 31 (Ill. 7b), dressed in monastic robes, Uttara kneels beside the Buddha Kāśyapa on the right side. A protuberance appears on Uttara’s head and, in Cave 31, his hairline recedes in zigzag shape.

In addition to the typical *praṇidhāna* paintings, my research shows that there is another simplified form of these paintings. They appear on the ceilings in Bezeklik Caves 16 and 17 and Sengin Temple I. A series of forty-eight similar representations are depicted on the vault in Bezeklik Cave 16 (Ill. 8a, 8b) and the main hall of Temple I at Sengin (Ill. 8c). The composition is centred on a seated Buddha, who is commonly accompanied by only four other figures: a monk with an *uṣṇīṣa*, Vajrapāṇi, a celestial being, and a devotee. The monk bearing the *uṣṇīṣa* generally sits next to the Buddha’s shoulder, holding a fan and water jar in his hands. One section (Ill. 8b) survives in good condition and bears a clear inscription: during the *kalpa* (aeon) of Buddha Śikhin, those

²¹ In the early twentieth century Albert von Le Coq found inscribed wooden pillars on which royal families were listed as donors. F.W.K. Müller (1915: 18); Meng Fanren (1995: 9).

²² The typical *praṇidhi* paintings are depicted in Bezeklik Caves 15, 18, 20, 22, 24, 31, 33, 37, 38, 42, 47, 48, 50 and 55 (or Cave 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 24, 25, 29, 36, 37, and 39 in Grünwedel’s numbering).

²³ Shinkan Hirano (1961: 27–44); Meng Fanren (1981: 43–61).

²⁴ The painting with the monk with the *uṣṇīṣa* was named Scene Ten in Cave 20 and Scene Four in Cave 15.

²⁵ “昔為梵志名最勝，於兩足尊迦葉佛；由聞喜護所說語，乃得出家修淨意。” *Taishō* 24:1448.75b.

who donated jewels for the Buddha's garden received the prophecy that they would attain enlightenment.²⁶⁾ Buddha Śikhin also appears on the ceiling in Bezeklik Cave 17 (Ill. 8d). A monk figure with an *uṣṇīṣa* sits to the Buddha's right. Unfortunately, this painting is too damaged to identify the attributes of the monk and read fully the Chinese inscription. Both Cave 16 and Cave 17 have been dated to the tenth-eleventh centuries, the third phase of the site.²⁷⁾

The *parinirvāṇa* scenes are depicted on the back walls at Bezeklik, such as in Cave 33 (Ill. 9a) and 31 (Ill. 9b).²⁸⁾ The figures with the *uṣṇīṣas* in these two paintings are almost identical: They stand in the same position holding a long-necked water vase and a fan above their heads. In both the *prañidhāna* painting on the ceiling and in the *parinirvāṇa* scene, the monk who possesses the *uṣṇīṣa* carries a vase, the typical attribute of the future Buddha in Gandhara and Central Asia. It is likely that these images are intended to represent Buddhas-to-be.

The images of monks with *uṣṇīṣas* discussed above represent only a small number of those depicted at the sites in Kucha and Turfan. These images indicate the popularity of the motif and call attention to the significance of the subject of showing monks with *uṣṇīṣas*.²⁹⁾ In summary, among those that can be identified, the figures at Kucha are mostly the Buddha's chief disciples and occasionally the Buddha-to-be. While at Turfan, they usually represent the Buddha-to-be. However, the question remains, why do these individuals appear with the *uṣṇīṣa*? In addition, why does only one episode of the fifteen *prañidhāna* paintings show this iconography? My research suggests that the reasons for this type of depiction can be found in the doctrinal meaning of the *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa*.

²⁶⁾ Rajeshwari Ghose (1998: 263).

²⁷⁾ Jia Yingyi (1989) (no page number in the book.)

²⁸⁾ Cave 31 is Cave 19 in Grünwedel's numbering system.

²⁹⁾ In addition, by recognizing the characteristics of the iconography of the monks with *uṣṇīṣas*, we can identify more of such depiction, even in sculptures, such as a head of a monk excavated from a temple site at Yanqi (Ill. 10). See: Huang Wenbi (1983: 39). Same as in the paintings, the *uṣṇīṣa* on this sculpture is raised smooth and low, and the hairline recedes in notable angles. Another almost identical example is found in the ruins of Temple N at Tumshuq, now in the Musée Guimet; Jacques Giès (1995: 119, fig. 69). Tumshuq is at the west end and Yanqi is at the east end of the Northern Route. The Northern Route is known dominated by a Hinayāna school: Sarvāstivāda. It seems that the iconography of non-Buddha figures bearing the *uṣṇīṣa* present along the Northern Route.

UṢṆĪṢA: THE MEANING IN DOCTRINE AND PAINTINGS

There are two aspects of the notion of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. First, the *lakṣaṇa* are caused by good deeds, especially worshipping the Buddhas in one's previous incarnations. The second aspect is that they are a sign of the promise of the future Buddhahood.

In the Brahmanic tradition, whoever is born with the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* marks will become either a *cakravartin* (wheel-turning king) or a Buddha. Over a hundred *sūtras* have listed the thirty-two *lakṣaṇas* and about half of them further explain the causes of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* marks.³⁰ These textual sources basically all agree that each of the thirty-two auspicious body marks are the result of a particular type of good deed performed in a previous life. Most of the good deeds are performed within the context of lay practice. For example the Pāli text the *Dīgha Nikāya*, records that the *uṣṇīṣa* is achieved by making donations, supporting parents, and friends and by making offerings to Buddhists and Brahmins.³¹ In the *Lalitavistara*, a Sarvāstivādin biography of the Buddha, the *uṣṇīṣa* is caused by staying away from wrong speech; always praising *śrāvakas*, *pratyekas*, Bodhisattvas, Tathāgatas and all other Dharma masters; holding on to the Buddha's teachings, reciting and copying the *sūtras*, explaining them to other people; and practicing according to the Dharma.³²

The identity of the figures with *uṣṇīṣas* can be divided into two groups: Śākyamuni's disciples and Buddhas-to-be, both of which can be analyzed according to the two aspects of the notion of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* discussed above.

ŚĀKYAMUNI'S DISCIPLES:

When non-Buddha figures with the *uṣṇīṣa* are shown accompanying Śākyamuni, they are most likely to be his chief disciples except in the *avadana* depictions on the ceiling.³³ Some of these figures have been identified, such as Purna Maitrāyaniputra at Kizil.

³⁰ Yukihiko Okada (1989: 303–307); (1991: 12–16).

³¹ *Lakkhaṇasuttanta*. Trans. T.W. Rhys Davids (1967: 145–17). Similar passage is also seen in the *Youyoyi jingxing famen jing* (優婆夷淨行法門經), “身口意業布施持戒。月修六齋。供養父母沙門婆羅門親友眷屬者舊宿德。復有善行不可稱計。以此行故。積聚無量常受天樂。乃至一生補處。下生人間得二大人相。一者頂有肉髻。二者頭髮紺青。” *Taishō* 14:579.958bc.

³² “於長夜遠離一切語過。恒常讚歎聲聞辟支菩薩如來及諸法師。受持讀誦書寫經典。為人解說如法修行故。名肉髻無能見頂。” *Taishō* 3:187. 610b.

³³ Usually the figures that accompany Śākyamuni teaching form his assembly. However, in

In the *Buddha pūrvacaryā saṃgraha sūtra*, Purna Maitrāyaniputra is said to have seen all the past Buddhas and established good karma by making offerings to them, which clarifies why he is born with the thirty-two marks.³⁴⁾ Besides Maitrāyaniputra, a variety of texts identify other Buddha's disciples that also possess the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*, including Nanda,³⁵⁾ Aniruddha,³⁶⁾ and Kātyāyana.³⁷⁾ They all possess the *lakṣaṇa* by virtue of the good deeds they performed in their previous lives. The attendants of the Buddha in the Kizil paintings could therefore be depictions of Nanda, Aniruddha, and/or Kātyāyana. Regardless of their identity, the reasons for the monks acquiring the marks are related to their good deeds. The idea of merit-making leading to a future enlightenment is enhanced in the depictions of the next category, the Buddha-to-be.

THE BUDDHA-TO-BE:

At Kizil, a monk-like figure with the *uṣṇīṣa* appears as the Buddha-to-be in the *avadāna* stories depicted on the ceiling. In the story of Boseqi and the Buddha Fuṣya, the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* in particular claimed that it is from the merit of making images of Buddha *Fuṣya (Chinese: Fusha) that King Boseqi will be reborn with the thirty-two marks and eighty minor marks and will eventually become a Buddha.³⁸⁾ In the story of the oil-lamp offering, the *Divyāvadāna* is more likely to have been circulated at Kucha, not the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*.³⁹⁾ According to the *Divyāvadāna*, the monk-like figure in the painting would then probably represent the poor woman as a future Buddha since that was the vow she had made and that was also what the Buddha had predicted her to become. This accomplishment would be made possible all by the virtue of her merit that was gained from the offer of the lamp oil.

the Kizil *avadānas* depiction on the ceilings the figures are characters in stories. They are from the distant past and not the audience in the same time frame with the Buddha.

³⁴⁾ “往昔已曾見諸佛來。彼諸佛邊。種諸善根。” *Taishō* 3:190.824a

³⁵⁾ For the literary review on the appearance of Nanda, see: Monika Zin (2003: 113–114); and *Correspondence*, *Taishō* 45:1856.127b.

³⁶⁾ *Correspondence*, *Taishō* 45:1856.127b.

³⁷⁾ *Buddha Pūrvacaryā Saṃgraha Sūtra*, *Taishō* 3:190.825a.

³⁸⁾ “緣是功德，……所受生處，端正殊妙，三十二相，八十種好；緣是功德，自致成佛。” *Taishō* 4:202.369a.

³⁹⁾ The *Divyāvadāna* belongs to the Sarvāstivāda, a school that dominated at Kucha and the Northern Route for most of its Buddhist history.

Most of the identified monk images with the *uṣṇīṣa* representing the Buddha-to-be are from the Turfan area. Making offerings to the Buddhas, gaining merit, and receiving the prediction of Buddhahood are all essential to the theme of the vow paintings. Such actions also constitute part of the Bodhisattva's path and are accepted in Mahāyāna beliefs. The inscription on the "vow" paintings at Bezeklik came out of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhaiṣajyavastu*. This *vinaya* and some other texts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda school claim that it takes three-*asaṅkhyā*⁴⁰⁾ to gain enough merit for acquiring the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*.⁴¹⁾ The direct relationship between making offerings to the past Buddhas for three *asaṅkhyas* and the *lakṣaṇa* is also recorded in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (*Da zhi du lun*) attributed to Nāgārjuna:⁴²⁾

...If (he can make offering to the past Buddhas) for three *asaṅkhyas*, [then] at that time, the Bodhisattva [refers to Śākyamuni] will gain the karmic causation of the thirty-two marks.

In the story of Uttara and the Buddha Kāśyapa at Bezeklik, the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Bhaiṣajyavastu* text explains that Kāśyapa is the last Buddha of the third *asaṅkhyā* and that this episode marks the end of Śākyamuni's three-*asaṅkhyā*-long effort.⁴³⁾ The inscription of this scene on the painting bears an additional line clearly declaring, "The third *asaṅkhyā* is at an end." Therefore, only in the depiction of this episode, Uttara appears with the *lakṣaṇa*.

The inscriptions on the ceiling *prañidhāna* paintings from Bezeklik Cave 16 have the same theme: that making offerings to Buddha Śikhin will gain one a promise of future Buddhahood. Presumably, the more than forty similar *prañidhāna* paintings on the ceiling vault are of the same theme but make offerings to different Buddhas of the past.

⁴⁰⁾ An *asaṅkhyā/asaṅkheyya* (Pali *asaṅkeyya*), 'an incalculable,' is used both for one of the four periods making up a *kalpa*, and a large number of *kalpas*. The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (III.93d–94a) explains that it takes a bodhisattva three *asaṅkheyyas* to become a perfect Buddha, and that each of these consists of one thousand million million *kalpas*.

⁴¹⁾ The *Abhidharma mahāvibhāṣā [sātra]*, *Taishō* 27:1545.891b–892c, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, *Taishō* 29:1558.29a, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, *Taishō* 29:1559.249bc, and the *Abhidharma Nyāyānusārśāstra*, *Taishō* 29:1562.591a.

⁴²⁾ "...若過三阿僧祇劫。是時菩薩種三十二相業因緣" *Taishō* 25:1509.87a.

⁴³⁾ *Taishō* 24:1448.74c–75a.

MAHĀPURUṢA LAKṢAṆA: THE HISTORY AND THE ASSOCIATION
WITH SARVĀSTIVĀDA

Although the images of non-Buddha figures bearing the *uṣṇīṣas* find support in Buddhist doctrines, such depictions are absent or rare in East Asia, which predominately follows Mahāyāna, and South India and Southeast Asia, where, mostly, the Theravada tradition is followed.⁴⁴⁾ So what could possibly be the common link in the Buddhist practice among these limited regions, especially between Kizil and Bezeklik, where this iconography frequently appears? And, is there any additional significance of possessing the *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇa* to the Buddhist followers of these areas that is missing in the Mahāyāna and Theravada traditions?

THE RELATION BETWEEN BUDDHIST SITES
IN KUCHA AND TURFAN AND SARVĀSTIVĀDA

In terms of Buddhist practice, scholars have generally accepted that Buddhist sites along the northern route of the Silk Road, especially Kucha, belong to the Sarvāstivādin sect.⁴⁵⁾ The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang observed that the Sarvāstivādin school was the dominant school at Kucha in the seventh century.⁴⁶⁾ Various Sarvāstivādin texts excavated in Central Asia also prove that this particular Hīnayāna school was active in this region.⁴⁷⁾ A major corpse of these manuscripts was, actually, yielded from a Kizil cave, the “Red Dome Cave” (Cave 66 and 67).⁴⁸⁾ Although, the Dharmaguptaka school and Mahāyāna Buddhism were also present at Kucha (the former was more active in the early phase and the later mainly in the late period after the eighth century), these different traditions in Buddhism used different scripts. Dharmaguptakas used Kharoṣṭhī script with the Gāndhārī language, Sarvāstivādins used various types of Brāhmī with the Sanskrit and Tocharian language, and Mahāyānists used Chinese. Different types of scripts are all found at Buddhist sites and with different type of caves or different subjects of the paintings. The inscriptions inscribed in the central-pillar caves with the iconographic plan in which images of the monks with *uṣṇīṣas* occur are in the Brāhmī script, the same to the

⁴⁴⁾ Monika Zin (2003: 107–130).

⁴⁵⁾ The original non-Kāśmīr Sarvāstivādins renamed themselves as Mūlasarvāstivāda and became popular after the seventh century. The two terms will not be distinguished in this paper.

⁴⁶⁾ *Datang xiyu ji*. Xuanzang (1968: 18).

⁴⁷⁾ Lore Sander (1991: 133–150); Charles Willemen (1998: 126), ft. 464.

⁴⁸⁾ Albert von Le Coq (1928: 25, 126); Ernst Waldschmidt (1925: 108–9); Dieter Schlingloff (1964: 10–12).

Sarvāstivādin manuscripts excavated from the Red Dome Cave at Kizil. Therefore, the central-pillar caves with the aforementioned iconographic program at Kucha are probably associated with the Sarvāstivādin communities, even if some small communities of other Buddhist traditions, e.g. Dharmaguptaka and Mahāyāna, may also be present at Kucha.⁴⁹⁾

Regarding the *prañidhāna* paintings in Turfan, as mentioned above, they are inscribed with a Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* text. Mūlasarvāstivāda is a Hīnayāna school, and is generally considered to be a sub-sect of the Sarvāstivāda school or an old branch of the Sthaviravādin. The Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda are closely intertwined on doctrinal matters. The relationship of the two and whether or not they are in fact the same school are hotly debated among scholars, which I shall not discuss further here. As observed by Bart Dessein, the name Mūlasarvāstivāda actually did not appear anywhere before the seventh century. Even in the first half of the seventh century, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (600–664), in the record of his travels in India, only mentioned Sarvāstivāda, not Mūlasarvāstivāda. It was fifty years later when Yijing (635–713), who also traveled in India, mentioned Mūlasarvāstivāda for the first time.⁵⁰⁾ It is remarkable that Mūlasarvāstivāda only appears to be a *vinaya* school.⁵¹⁾ The Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinayas* differ from those of the Sarvāstivāda mainly at the inclusion of the *jātaka* and *avadāna*.⁵²⁾ Although the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinayapiṭaka* is old, the legends in them are elaborate and might have been inserted later.⁵³⁾ No extant manuscripts of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinayas* can be dated before the seventh century. Those in the Chinese and Tibetan canon were all translated in eighth and ninth centuries. Many manuscripts of the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinayas* in Sanskrit were found at Gilgit and they cannot be dated earlier than the seventh century. It is possible that the section relating to *prañidhāna* paintings was inserted into Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinayas* at a later time after the text was first compiled, something shared in common between the fifth-eighth centuries Sarvāstivāda school in Kucha and the Mūlasarvāstivādin *vinaya* texts in the versions can be dated to the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.

⁴⁹⁾ Some scholars speculate that small Dharmaguptaka communities on the Northern Silk Route followed the general trend of Sanskritisation and acceptance of Brāhmī as the sacred script under the influence of the Sarvāstivādins. Oskar von Hinüber (1983: 27–34).

⁵⁰⁾ Charles Willemen (1998: 85).

⁵¹⁾ Charles Willemen (1998: 125).

⁵²⁾ Erich Frauwallner (1956: 25–26); Charles Willemen (1998: 88–89).

⁵³⁾ Erich Frauwallner (1956: 25–26); Satoshi Hiraoka (1998: 419–434).

The composition and format of these Turfan *prañidhāna* paintings resemble the Buddha's assemblies depicted at Kizil. Scholars have therefore suggested that Kizil might have influenced Bezeklik.⁵⁴⁾ Both the ceiling *prañidhāna* paintings and the *parinirvāṇa* scenes at Bezeklik are new themes that appeared during the third phase (middle tenth–middle eleventh centuries). This was the period when the Gaochang Kingdom was most prosperous and occupied the Kucha region. In addition, the layout of the forty-eight *prañidhāna* paintings on the ceiling visually resembles the *avadānas* at Kucha. Depicting the *parinirvāṇa* at the back of the cave is also a convention in Kucha. Therefore, the appearance of the two themes at Bezeklik has also been speculated as an influence from Kucha.⁵⁵⁾ The forms of Buddhism practiced at Bezeklik display influences that come from both east and west. It is possible that ideas and texts associated with the Sarvāstivādin school, as well as iconographies related to the Kucha cave paintings reached here as well.

SARVĀSTIVĀDIN AND THE MAHĀPURUṢA LAKṢAṆA

The Sarvāstivādins played an important role in the development of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* concept. They further created new theories on the Buddha's auspicious body marks. As I will discuss below, their keen interest in the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is also evident in their meditation practice and literature.

The concept of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* was rooted in the Brāhmanical tradition and later adopted into Buddhism.⁵⁶⁾ The *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* are listed in early Pāli scriptures and most works of Northern Buddhism. These appear most prominently in the narrative of the life of the Buddha. In the *Dīghanikāya*,⁵⁷⁾ *Majjhimanikāya*,⁵⁸⁾ and *Mahāvastu*,⁵⁹⁾ the word “*uṣṇīṣa*” originally refers to the “turban like head” and was not understood as a protuberance of the skull or flesh as in the later Buddhist texts.⁶⁰⁾ In Buddhist art, the protrusion on the top of the head on early Buddha images merely resembles a natural bump of hair.⁶¹⁾

⁵⁴⁾ Meng Fanren (1981: 59–60); Denise P. Leidy (2001: 201–223).

⁵⁵⁾ Jia Yingyi (1989).

⁵⁶⁾ A.K. Coomaraswamy (1928: 815–840).

⁵⁷⁾ *Mahāpadāna Suttanta*. Trans. T.W. Rhys Davids (1967: II, 19; III, 1, 145; IV, 137–139.)

⁵⁸⁾ *Majjhimanikāya, Brahmāya Sutta II*. Trans. Robert Chalmers (1927: 72–73).

⁵⁹⁾ *The Mahāvastu II*. Trans. J.J. Jones (1952: 26).

⁶⁰⁾ A.K. Coomaraswamy (1928: 815–840); J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw (1949: 163, 165); Y. Krishan (1966: 275–289).

⁶¹⁾ E.G. Krishna pointed out the Gandhāran Buddha image's *Uṣṇīṣa* looks just a hair bun, Y. Krishan (1966: 275–289).

In his study of the evolution of the theory on the Buddha's bodies, Guang Xing points out that the Sarvāstivādins synthesised the attributes and qualities of the Buddha as described in the early *sūtras*.⁶²⁾ The Sarvāstivādins brought about a tri-fold system to define the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*, and further developed new schemes explaining how the thirty-two marks take shape.

Even though all Buddhist schools accept the idea of the Buddha possessing the thirty-two marks, it is in the *Abhidharma* texts of the Sarvāstivādin school that we find the most sophisticated analysis of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. Each *lakṣaṇa* is said to have three aspects: *lakṣaṇa*-body (*xiangti*), *lakṣaṇa*-*karma* (*xiangye*), and *lakṣaṇa*-fruit (*xiangguo*). For example, the *uṣṇīṣa*, as recorded in the *Daśābhūmikavibhāṣā sūtra*, is the bodily protuberance on top of the head that represents the *lakṣaṇa*-body of the *uṣṇīṣa*. Donating a garden, fruit, bridge, trees, ponds, wells, food, flowers, incense jewels or houses denotes the *lakṣaṇa*-*karma*. In addition, building a *stūpa*, and being able to offer more in collected donation also fall under this category. Finally, being honorable and free signifies the *lakṣaṇa*-fruit. The *lakṣaṇa*-*karma* is the cause of the *lakṣaṇa*-body while the *lakṣaṇa*-fruit is the result.⁶³⁾

According to the Sarvāstivādin text, the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāśāstra*,⁶⁴⁾ the group also was very concerned over how to obtain the thirty-two body marks. They developed complicated theories that added to earlier beliefs in which the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* were only obtainable through accumulating merits in past lives. For the Sarvāstivādins, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* became acquirable by one's will or thought. The body marks are initiated either by "one thought" or "thirty-two thoughts" in accordance with the different opinions among the Sarvāstivādins. According one opinion, "the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is initiated by one thought and is later consummated by multi-thoughts." According to one opinion, "the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is initiated by one thought and is later consummated by multi-thoughts" while a different point of view suggests that "the thirty-two thoughts lead to the thirty-two marks [respectively]; while each mark has to be completed by various *karmas*."⁶⁵⁾ The full discussion of these theories was not available in Chinese until the seventh century when Xuanzang translated the *sūtra Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā* for the third time in

⁶²⁾ Guang Xing (2002: 30–50).

⁶³⁾ *Taishō* 26:1521. 64c–65c.

⁶⁴⁾ *Taishō* 27:1545.887c–888a.

⁶⁵⁾ “以一思牽引，後以多思圓滿。” “三十二思引三十二大丈夫相，一一復以多業圓滿。” *Taishō* 27:1545.887c.

much greater length. However, Nāgārjuna mentioned these ideas in the *Mahā-prajñāpāramitodeśa*, which was brought to China in the early fifth century. “The thirty-two thoughts generate the thirty-two *lakṣaṇas*; each thought generates each *lakṣaṇa*.”⁶⁶ It must have been confusing to the Chinese Buddhist community at that time. In Huiyuan’s letters to Kumārajīva, one of the questions asks about the “thirty-two thoughts.” Kumārajīva, thereupon, elucidated that this theory was created by Kātyāyana and his followers, not the Buddha.⁶⁷ Kātyāyana was a Sarvāstivādin theorist.⁶⁸

In addition to the metaphysical approach, the concept of the Buddha’s body marks also became significant in the meditation practice of Sarvāstivādins. In addition to the biographies of the Buddha, the meditation manuals on how to visualise the Buddha are another place that provide rich descriptions of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. According to Yamata Meiji’s study, the idea of the Buddha’s thirty-two body marks did not become important until the early Mahāyāna movement and image-making first began, which are shown in the development of the Buddhist meditation practice of *buddhānusmṛti*.⁶⁹ *Buddhānusmṛti*, which means “calling the Buddha to mind” and has been a form of Buddhist practice since the earliest times. However, in Pāli texts the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* only refers to reciting the formula of the “ten epithets” (*adhivacana*) of the Buddha. Moreover, it is only one of a sequence of *anusmṛtis* (“calling to mind”), including the *anusmṛti* of the Dharma (Law), the *saṃgha* (community), and the *devata* (divinities).⁷⁰ A new form of *buddhānusmṛti* practice involving visualisation of the physical body of the Buddha through the thirty-two *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* came to be popular at least by the second century CE.⁷¹ By this time, *buddhānusmṛti* had become an independent and essential form of Buddhist meditation. Seeing the Buddha with one’s very eyes is equivalent to hearing the Dharma preached by the Buddhas and understanding the nature of Buddha. It can eliminate one’s bad karma, and eventually lead one to awakening.⁷² Practitioners were encouraged to be use images as aids for visualisation and even as objects for contemplation.

⁶⁶ “三十二思種三十二相，一一思種一一相。” *Taishō* 25:1509.87b.

⁶⁷ *Taishō* 45:1856.127b.

⁶⁸ Lai Penjeu (2002: 17–18).

⁶⁹ Yamada, Meiji (1967: 27–48).

⁷⁰ Paul M. Harrison (1992: 215–238).

⁷¹ The existence of this type of *buddhānusmṛti* is attested in *sūtras* such as the *Pratyutpanna Samādhi Sūtra* (T417, Vol. 15), which was translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema in 179 CE.

⁷² Paul M. Harrison (1992: 220–225).

This new form of *buddhānusmṛti* involving envisioning the Buddha's body is strongly associated with Mahāyāna practice.⁷³⁾ The best-known example of *buddhānusmṛti* is the visualisation of Amitābha. However, as demonstrated in Hīnayāna texts such as the *Ekottarāgama* and the *Mahāvastu*, *buddhānusmṛti* in some of the late Hīnayāna schools also involved envisioning the Buddha's body.⁷⁴⁾ Most importantly, it is one part of a series of meditation exercises preserved in a meditation manual found at Kizil in the third German "Turfan" expedition.⁷⁵⁾ The manuscript was written in Central Asian Brāhmī on birch barks. The *buddhānusmṛti* is listed on top of a group of five *anusmṛti* contemplations. Both the "ten epithets" and the Buddha's body are included in the practice. In the extant fragments of the text, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* occurs a number of times. To envision the Buddha, the practitioner visualises the *lakṣaṇa* come forth from the pores of the Buddhas in three places.⁷⁶⁾ In three separate instances in this manuscript, the practitioner is even instructed to envision the Buddha's *lakṣaṇas* appearing on his own body.⁷⁷⁾

In addition to Sarvāstivādin's theoretical study and their meditations, their literature also provides more details regarding the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*, such as who obtained these body marks. The following are two examples comparing different texts when they describe the same episode associated with the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*.

From the *Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinayaśūdradavastu*, a *vinaya* text of the *Mūlasarvāstivādin* school, and the *Mahāparinirvāṇa sūtra* in the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese versions there is an interesting vignette. It states that on his deathbed, right before he entered his *nirvāṇa*, Śākyamuni took off his garment, revealing his body marks to his disciples and asked them to look carefully.⁷⁸⁾ However this version does not appear in the Pāli edition of the *Dīghanikāya*.⁷⁹⁾ Apparently, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* was not significant enough to the Buddhists of the Pāli canon and they did not see it as the Buddha's last teaching.

⁷³⁾ Paul M. Harrison (1978: 35–57).

⁷⁴⁾ *Ekottarāgama III*, (*Taishō* 2:125.557ab); *The Mahāvastu*. Trans J.J. Jones (1949: 426).

⁷⁵⁾ D. Schlingloff (1956: 127); D. Schlingloff (1964: 146–155).

⁷⁶⁾ D. Schlingloff (1964: 101/133R2, 109 /136R1, and 120 /140V6).

⁷⁷⁾ D. Schlingloff (1964: 92 /130 R6), 142/150R3, and 172/163V2).

⁷⁸⁾ "遂去上衣現其身相。告諸苾芻汝等今者可觀佛身。汝等今者可觀佛身。何以故。如來應正等覺。難可逢遇如烏曇跋羅華。" *Taishō* 24: 1451.399a.

⁷⁹⁾ E. Waldschmidt (ed.) (1951: 358–359, 360–361, 410–411). For the literary review of the description of this detail in the *Mahā parinirvāṇasūtra* see: G. Roth (1987: 291–312).

According to Zin's study, it is also the Sarvāstivādin texts that say more about the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* on Nanda and Devadatta than the Pāli texts.⁸⁰ For example, in one episode, the Pāli text the *Suttavibhaṅga* (V.92.1) says that Nanda resembled Śākyamuni so much that other monks often mistook him for the Buddha. A fragment of the *Vinayabibhaṅga*, a *vinaya* of the Sarvāstivādin school, found in the Kizil region and written in the local language, further adds that Nanda had no less than thirty body marks on his body.⁸¹

THE MAHĀPURUṢA LAKṢAṆA IN MAHĀYĀNA

The above demonstrates how the notion of *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* became more significant in the Sarvāstivādin school than in the Pāli tradition. Later on in the Mahāyāna context, new philosophies were developed regarding the Buddha's bodies and Buddhist meditation practices changed; therefore, the significance of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* appears to have faded away.

I. MAHĀPURUṢA LAKṢAṆA IN MAHĀYĀNA THEORY

Guang Xing proposes that it is the Sarvāstivādins who first stabilised a twofold body theory of the Buddha.⁸² In any case, both the Sarvāstivādin texts and the early Mahāyāna *sūtras*⁸³ advocate that the Buddha has two bodies, the *dharmakāya* (Dharma-body) and the *rūpakāya* (Physical-body). The *rūpa-kāya* is the Buddha as a human being with physical form. The *dharmakāya* is the Buddha as seen through the Buddha's Dharma nature. The Dharma refers to the Buddhist teachings. It is the absolute "essence" and the eternal "law" of everything. The *dharmakāya* cannot be seen by the naked eye. Most of the *sūtras* mentioned in this paper use the two-body system. In this system, the Buddha's *lakṣaṇas* are on his form body.

However, in general, Mahāyāna holds to the *trikāya* (three-body) system. In short, *dharmakāya* becomes the essential core, Śākyamuni who once lived in this world is merely a manifestation of the *dharmakāya* called the *nirmāṇakāya*. The additional body is the *sāṃbhogakāya* (reward-body) and it is not in the *saṃsāra* (transmigration) world. It is only visible in certain stages of meditation or dreams, such as the Buddha Amitābha who appears in the *sāṃbhogakāya* form. In the *trikāya* system, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is attributed to the

⁸⁰ Monika Zin (2003: 113, 114).

⁸¹ Rudolf Hoernle (1916: 367–369); Monika Zin (2003: ft. 14).

⁸² Xing Guang (2002: 30).

⁸³ Gadjin Nagao (1973: 25–53).

sāmbhogakāya.⁸⁴⁾ Therefore, under this categorisation the Buddha's body marks become totally invisible to humans.

In addition, the concept of the *wujiandingxiang*, or the “invisible – *uṣṇīṣa*” (*anavalokitamūrdhatā*) makes the issue of the *uṣṇīṣa* even more intricate. The doctrine of the invisible – *uṣṇīṣa* holds that regardless of the conventions of Buddha image-making, living beings are unable to see the *uṣṇīṣa* of the Buddha.⁸⁵⁾ In the legend of the Mahābodi image (one of the first Buddha images), there was an old lady who was the only one who had seen the Buddha in person and was still alive at the time. She came to examine the resemblance of the sculpture and one of her criticisms was addressed to the *uṣṇīṣa*. “The *uṣṇīṣa* (of the Buddha) was not visible, (but) it is visible (on the image).”⁸⁶⁾ In this story, a lay devotee recognised something that did not belong to the living Buddha which humans are able to see. If the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is supposed to be on the *sāmbhogakāya* and the *uṣṇīṣa* becomes invisible, then an ordinary human would not be seen bearing an *uṣṇīṣa* on top of the head.

I further suggest that the lack of interest in the *uṣṇīṣa* among Mahāyānists is also associated with their belief in *śūnyatā*, which emphasises voidness as the ultimate truth. The Buddha's form body or the *lakṣaṇa* on the form body is not what Mahāyānists pursue. According to Mahāyānist doctrine, if all phenomena is essentially empty, possessing a protrusion would not be very meaningful. Consequently, it is not surprising that the iconography of monks with the *uṣṇīṣas* did not gain much popularity in areas dominated by Mahāyānist thought and therefore became almost absent in East Asia.

II. MAHĀPURUṢA LAKṢAṆA IN MAHĀYĀNA BUDDHĀNUSMṚTI MEDITATION

Visualisation practices, as represented in the visualisation on Amitābha Buddha, underwent fundamental changes in fully developed Mahāyāna meditation. The differences between how to meditate on Amitābha, as taught in *The Sūtra on Contemplation of Amitāyus*, and how to meditate on Śākyamuni, as revealed

⁸⁴⁾ Gadjin Nagao (1973: 34).

⁸⁵⁾ There is no consensus in the Buddhist texts in expounding the relationship between the *uṣṇīṣa* and the invisible-*uṣṇīṣa*. These two are identical in the *Yogacārabhūmi-śāstra*, *Taishō* 30:1582.568a. See also: the *Pusa di chi jing* (菩薩地持經) “此肉髻相，無見頂相，即是一相。” *Taishō* 30:1581.955b-956a. The invisible – *uṣṇīṣa* is included within the eighty minor marks in some texts such as the *Mahāprajñāpāmitā sūtra*, *Taishō* 6:220.968c18–19. And, in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*, it is treated as independent of either the major or minor marks; see: Gadjin Nagao (1987: 336). For a study on the invisible – *uṣṇīṣa*, see: Hubert Durt (1929: 443–450); For a brief discussion see: T. Griffith Foulk (1993–1994: 149–219).

⁸⁶⁾ Patna George Roerich (trans.) (1959: 69–70).

in the Sarvāstivādin text, may shed light on the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* issue under discussion.

In the aforementioned Kizil manuscript, the practitioner envisions his own body radiating with the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* just like a Buddha (“āśrayo lakṣaṇa-nuvyañjanāvīrājita utpadyate”).⁸⁷⁾ Among the three perfections of the Buddha (the Body, Speech and Mind), the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* signify the perfection of the Buddha’s body. These body marks go beyond anthropomorphic limits. They mark the special quality of the Buddha. The meditation of visualising the Buddha’s body and evoking one’s own body to possess the same qualities symbolises a path of achieving salvation by self-effort just like what Śākyamuni did, a method generally attributed to Hīnayāna path—one aims at attaining a perfect body like that of the Buddha, and ultimately the Buddhahood through one’s own effort.

In Buddhist art, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇas* and in particular the *uṣṇīṣa*, became a symbol that emphasised the Buddhahood of Śākyamuni, which is considered the highest attainment of all beings.⁸⁸⁾ By possessing *uṣṇīṣas*, these figures of monks in the paintings under discussion exemplify a certain ideal for the Hīnayānists. As the Buddha’s disciples, they are shown following the Buddha, listening to his preaching, performing miracles (e.g. flying in the sky), and leading the Buddhist community after the Buddha’s *nirvāṇa*. As the Buddha-to-be, they are shown as already having reached a certain stage of attainment with the promise of enlightenment.

On the contrary, the most important difference in the typical Mahāyāna *buddhānusmṛti* practice is to place oneself in the Buddha’s Pure Land. Salvation in Mahāyāna Buddhism can be achieved through rebirth in one of the Buddha lands. Consequently, the focus of meditation in Mahāyāna practice was shifted from envisioning the Buddha’s intricate body to the rich details of the Buddha’s land. In his commentary when comparing the difference between the visualisation of Śākyamuni and Maitreya, the Korean monk Wōnhyo pointed out that the key point of the Maitreya visualisation *sūtra* was not Maitreya, but the visualization of the practitioner amidst all the splendors of Tusita Heaven. The goal of this meditation was to place oneself in the Heaven.⁸⁹⁾ This is even more true in the visualisation of Amitābha/Amitāyus in the *Sūtra on Visualizing Amitāyus*. Among the Sixteen-Visions in the meditation exercises on Amitābha

⁸⁷⁾ D. Schlingloff (1964: 92, 123, 172, lines:130R6, 144R1 and 163V2).

⁸⁸⁾ S. Kramrisch (1936: 79–83).

⁸⁹⁾ Alan Sponberg (1988: 94–109).

only Vision Nine is about visualising Amitābha's body. However, it provides no actual details of his body. In Mahāyāna Buddhist art, interest was consequently switched to depicting the grand paradises of various Buddhas/Bodhisattvas and Bodhisattvas occupying the place immediately besides the Buddha. However, the importance of possessing the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* was not completely forgotten. The essential relationship between the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* and Buddhahood left a subtle trace in Mahāyāna practice. One of Amitāyus' vows is that he will not obtain his own enlightenment until all human beings and gods in his future land have attained the thirty-two marks of a *mahāpuruṣa*.⁹⁰ The first of the twelve vows of Bhaisajyaguru, the medicine Buddha, aims at possessing the thirty-two *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* and the eighty *anuvyañjana* and in addition he hopes that all sentient beings are able to possess the same marks.⁹¹ However, the details discussed above are very minor and they are not the main content of the Mahāyāna *buddhānusmṛti* practice.

Even though the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is a very old notion accepted by all Buddhist sectarian groups, it did not come to be important until the phase of the late Hīnayāna and early Mahāyāna. Above all, the Sarvāstivādins of the Hīnayāna showed the most interest in the Buddha's body. They systemised the quality of the Buddha's body, formulised the two-fold *kāya* theory and included envisioning the Buddha's body into their *buddhānusmṛti* meditation. The issue of the Buddha's body is associated with the questions of what makes the Buddha a Buddha and how one should practice. Both the Buddha's *kāya* theory and the *buddhānusmṛti* practice were further developed in Mahāyāna. The focus of Mahāyāna was shifted to realise the empty nature of all phenomena. The interest of possessing the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* on one's own body was replaced by the desire to be reborn in the Buddha's Pure Land. The art of the Sarvāstivādins and the Mahāyāna also show a visible difference regarding the depiction of *uṣṇīṣas* on non-Buddha figures. In the Sarvāstivādin related sites images of monks bearing *uṣṇīṣas* are abundantly present. In contrast, such an iconographic convention is conspicuously missing from the sites of the Pālī and Mahāyāna traditions.

⁹⁰ “設我得佛，國中人天，不悉成滿三十二大人相者，不取正覺” *Sukhāvativyūha sūtra* (*Fo shuo Wuliangshou jing* 佛說無量壽經) *Taishō* 12:360.268b.

⁹¹ *The Consecration Sūtra* (*Fu shuo guanding jing* 佛說灌頂經) *Taishō* 21:1331.532c; “第一大願，願我來世得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提時，自身光明熾然，照曜無量無數無邊世界，以三十二大丈夫相八十隨好莊嚴其身，令一切有情如我無異” *Bhaisajyaguru vaidūryaprabhāsapūrvapraṇidhānaviśeṣa-vistara* (*Yaoshi liuliguang tulai benyuan gongde jing* 藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經) *Taishō* 14: 450.405a.

III. IN TANTRAYĀNA

If the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is subject to karmic retribution, then it is simply not obtainable through meditation in this lifetime.⁹² Nevertheless, this did not stop later Tantric masters from raising new theories and methods to accomplish the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. To complete the history of the notion of the Buddha's body mark, I will end with the Tantric method shown in Dipaṃkarabhadra's *Guhyasamājamāṇḍalavidhi*. Quoted by Tsong-kha-pa in his *Sñags rim chen mo*, "the [sixteen] vowels are the source of the *Lakṣaṇas*; the [thirty-four] consonants radiate the *anuvyañjanas*."⁹³ Each of the sixteen vowels is divided into two parts: *prajña* (wisdom) and *upāya* (means). This makes thirty-two, which is the number of the Buddha's *Lakṣaṇa*. In a typical Tantric manner, the concept of the Buddha's body marks becomes more complex. The vowels and consonants, *prajña* and *upāya*, and more symbolisms are involved.

OTHER REGIONS WITH SIMILAR ICONOGRAPHY

Within India and nearby regions, the cave site at Ajaṇṭā, Maharashtra, in particular, has yielded copious images of monks with the *uṣṇīṣa*. In addition, the Gandhāra region, in present day Pakistan, is an area where examples of this iconography are occasionally found. Figures possessing the *uṣṇīṣa* at these sites bear the same iconographic features as Śākyamuni, but are usually represented smaller in size. This contrasts with the monk images found in the Kucha and Turfan areas, where they appear with a zigzag hairline. Zin, in her study on Ajaṇṭā paintings identifies the monks Ānanda and Nanda based on the narratives of the "taming the wild elephant," and the "conversion of Nanda." These narratives are found mainly in the wall paintings in Ajaṇṭā Cave 16 and 17. Since Ānanda is Śākyamuni's cousin and Nanda is his half-brother, Zin deduces that the *uṣṇīṣa* is to be understood as indicating membership of the Śākya clan.⁹⁴

The paintings at Ajaṇṭā are considered to be a product of the Vakataka dynasty and a group of later so-called "intrusive" donors. They are generally dated to the late fifth century.⁹⁵ In the inscriptions, the intrusive donors identified themselves as Śākyabhikṣus or Śākya-upāsakas.⁹⁶ "Śākya" stands for the

⁹² Huiyuan, once, raised this puzzle in his letter to Kumārajīva. *Taishō* 42:1856.127a.

⁹³ *Guhyasamājamāṇḍalavidhi* (Tōh. 1865). By Dīpapaṇḍarabhadra (1957: 259).

⁹⁴ Monika Zin (2003: 115).

⁹⁵ Walter Spink (1992: 67–94).

⁹⁶ Richard Scott Cohen (1995: 192).

clan of Śākya-muni; the term “Bhikṣus” means monks; while “upāsakas” refers to lay devotees. Therefore, the term “Śākya-bhikṣus” and “Śākya-upāsakas” indicate that the monks and laity that belonged to the Śākya clan. The adoption of the epithet “Śākya” and the emergence of Śākya-bhikṣus as a distinct group seemed to come out of a trend aimed at emphasising the importance of the Śākya family.⁹⁷⁾ From this perspective, Zin’s conclusion might be true at Ajaṅṭā. However, as discussed in this paper, people outside the Śākya clan also possess the *lakṣaṇa*. Moreover, even for members from the Śākya family, there is a karmic reason for why they can possess the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*.

Actually, Ajaṅṭā shows a strong relationship with Sarvāstivāda school. In his dissertation, Richard Cohen discussed the donor-ship and the *yānic* nature at the Ajaṅṭā site. He points out that there was a close association of the Śākya-bhikṣus with the Mūlasarvāstivādin school, and the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* played an important role in reconstruction of Buddhism at the site. The narrative paintings of Ajaṅṭā Cave 16 and 17, where the iconography of the monks with the *uṣṇīṣas* is depicted, in particular, indicates a direct connection with the Mūlasarvāstivāda *nikāya*.⁹⁸⁾

The title Śākya-bhikṣus is rare in Buddhist literary sources. Yet, four out of five dedications dated to the intrusive period at Ajaṅṭā employ this term.⁹⁹⁾ A sudden explosion of monks calling themselves Śākya-bhikṣus in central and southern India can be tied to the movement of Buddhist monks of Śākya origin from the subcontinent’s western and northern borders – in the regions of Sarvāstivāda stronghold.¹⁰⁰⁾

The Sarvāstivāda school developed and gained popularity in Kāśmīr and spread to Gandhāra during the Kuśāna period.¹⁰¹⁾ However, in Gandhāra, it was one among a number of Buddhist schools. For instance, just two of the potshards Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions found in Gandhāra (first century) were dedicated to Sarvāstivādin teachers, in contrast to nine dedicated to Dharmaguptakin and one to Mahīśāsakin.¹⁰²⁾ According to Xuanzang, Sarvāstivāda was still only one of the five sects in Gandhāra in the early seventh century.¹⁰³⁾ This might explain,

⁹⁷⁾ Richard Scott Cohen (1995: 221–245); H. Sarkar (1966: 107).

⁹⁸⁾ Richard Scott Cohen (1995: 192, 202, 316).

⁹⁹⁾ Richard Scott Cohen (1995: 192)

¹⁰⁰⁾ Richard Scott Cohen (1995: 221–245).

¹⁰¹⁾ For the history and doctrine of the school, see: Charles Willemsen (1998).

¹⁰²⁾ Richard Salomon (1999: 176).

¹⁰³⁾ The other four schools are the Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, Kāśyāpiya, and Mahāsāṃghika.

at least partially, why images of monk with the *uṣṇīṣa* do occasionally occur in Gandhāra. Sites or regions where the iconography of monks bearing the *uṣṇīṣas* is found seem to be related to the practice of the Sarvāstivādins

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The question of how to view the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* touches upon the idea of how to perceive the concept of “Buddha” and the Buddha-body. This concept has been a fundamental discourse among Buddhist followers and has undergone various developments from school to school. For a time, the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* seemed to have been especially important to the Sarvāstivādins. Among the thirty-two *lakṣaṇas*, the understanding of the *uṣṇīṣa* in particular, went through a long history of twists and turns among various schools. It transformed from a turbaned head, to a cranial or fleshy bump, and subsequently to the idea of “invisible” protuberance. As discussed in this paper, the *uṣṇīṣa* appeared on many images of monks and became a unique iconography at some Buddhist sites, such as Kizil, Bezeklik and Ajaṇṭā. These locations arose as more or less Sarvāstivādin or Mularsarvāstivādin related sites. And Sarvāstivādin texts show more interests in Buddha’s body marks.

The understanding of the depictions of monks with a cranial protuberance supplement our knowledge of the Buddhist practice at these sites, the development of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* concept, and the history of the *buddhānusmṛti* meditation. In the past, the study of Buddhist art at Kizil, Bezeklik or Ajaṇṭā focused primarily on the Buddha images or the narratives and therefore failed to notice this iconography until recently. The study of this iconography reveals a picture of how the Hīnayānists were arduously striving on a self-powered path (instead of the other-powered liberation in Mahāyāna) to obtain the qualities like that of the Buddha. In the study of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*, some scholars have tended to attribute the full development of the notion of the Buddha’s body marks to the early Mahāyāna movement.¹⁰⁴ This study shows that the Sarvāstivādin school played an important role in the conceptualisation of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. Scholarship on the *buddhānusmṛti* meditation has hitherto focused mainly on the Mahāyāna phase. By searching and revealing the potential relationship between the *lakṣaṇa* and the Sarvāstivādin’s meditation practice, this study highlights the significance of an alternative facet of the *buddhānusmṛti* practice within the Hīnayāna tradition.

¹⁰⁴ For example: Yukihiro Okada (1989: 15); Meiji Yamada (1967: 27–48).

Sarvāstivāda was one of the major schools in Buddhism and was influential in large areas of northwest India and parts of Central Asia. There are probably more images of this iconography than what has been identified to date. As a convention of Buddhist image making, it is possible that this iconography also reached East Asia as rare instances in Mahāyāna territory. Further investigation will perhaps allow recognition of more images showing this iconography.

CHINESE CHARACTERS IN THE TEXT:

Boseqi 波塞奇
Da zhi du lun 大智度論
Fo benxing ji jing 佛本行集經
 Fusha 弗沙
 Gaochang 高昌
 Huiyuan 慧遠
nianfo 念佛
wujiandingxiang 無見頂相
Xian yu jing 賢愚經
xianguo 相果
xiangti 相體
xiangye 相業
 Xuanzang 玄奘

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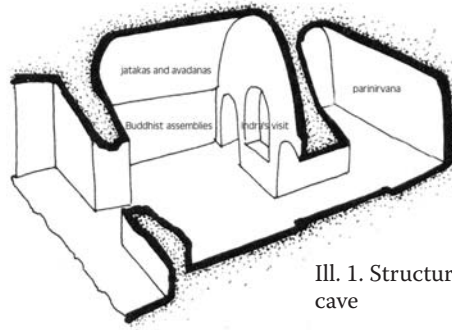
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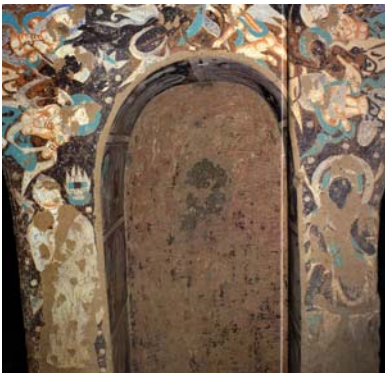
Ill. 1. Structure of Kizil central pillar cave



Ill. 2a. *Purna Maitrāyaniputra*, ca. 6th century. Kizil Cave 14. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku I*, fig. 45



Ill. 2b. *Purna Maitrāyaniputra*, ca. 6/7th centuries. Kizil Cave 181. Fresco. From *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji: Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua quanji III· Kizil*, fig. 66



Ill. 2c. *The main niche on the central pillar*, ca. 7th century. Kizil Cave 227. Fresco. From *The Murals from Xinjiang – The Thousand-Buddha Cave at Kizil* (Beijing: Zhongguo Waiwen Chubanshe, 1981), fig. 191



Ill. 2d. *The attendants*, ca. 7th century. Kizil Cave 123. Fresco, From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku II* (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1996), fig. 157



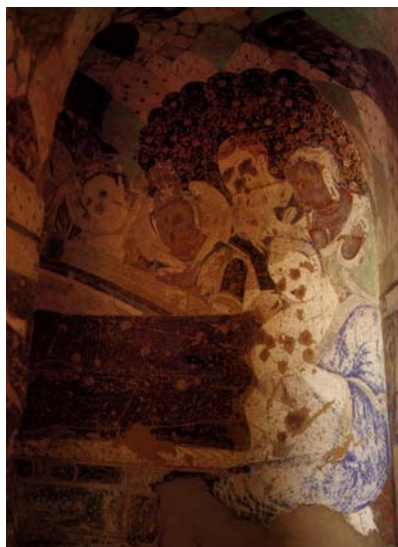
Ill. 3a. *The poor woman offering a lamp*, ca. 6th century. Kizil Cave 196. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku III*, fig.102



Ill. 3b. *Fuṣya painting the Buddha image*, ca. 5th century. Kizil Cave 34. Fresco. From *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji: Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua quanji II*. Kizil, fig. 21



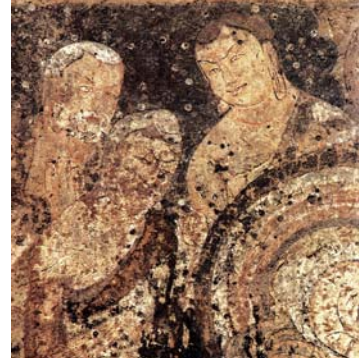
Ill. 3c. *Fuṣya painting the Buddha image*, ca. 4th/5th centuries. Kizil Cave 38. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku III* fig. 121.



Ill. 4a. *Mourning figures*, ca. 4th/5th centuries. Kizil Cave 38. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku I* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), fig. 145



Ill. 4b. *Cremation*, ca. 7th century. Kizil Cave 224. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku III* (Beijing: Wenwu Chubanshe, 1997), fig. 224



Ill. 4c. *The overview and detail of parinirvāna*, ca. 5th century. Kizil Cave 161. Fresco. From *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji: Zhongguo Xingjiang bihua quanji II· Kizil*, fig. 43, 45



Ill. 4d. *A standing monk with ushṇīṣa*, ca. 5th century. Kizil Cave 172. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku III*, fig. 12.



Ill. 5. *The First Council*, ca. 7th century. Kizil Cave 224. Fresco. From *Zhongguo shiku – Kizil shiku III*, fig. 226



Ill. 6a. *Monks*, ca. 6th century. Kizil Cave 175. Drawing of fresco. From Jia Yingyi, *Xinjiang bihua xianmiao jingpin* (Urumuqi: Xinjiang meishu sheying chubanshe, 1993), fig.183, p. 131



Ill. 6b. *Monks and Gods*, ca. 7th century. Kizil Cave 175. Fresco. From *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji: Zhongguo Xingjiang bihua quanji II*. Kizil, pl. 144



Ill. 6c. *Donors and monks*. ca. 7th century. Kizil Cave 205. Fresco. From *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji: Zhongguo Xingjiang bihua quanji II*. Kizil, pl. 82



Ill. 7a. *Uttara and the Buddha Kāśyapa*, ca. end 9th–mid 10th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 20. Drawing of fresco. From Meng Fanren ed., *Gaochang bihua jiyi* (Urumuqi: Xinjiang Renmin Chubanshe, 1995), fig. 151, p. 131



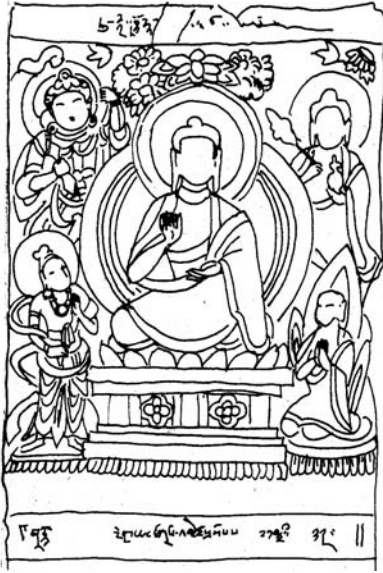
Ill. 7b. *Uttara and the Buddha Kāśyapa*, ca. mid 10th–mid 11th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 31. Drawing of fresco. From Meng Fanren ed., *Gaochang bihua jiyi*, fig. 205, p. 175



Ill. 8a. Overview of the ceiling paintings, ca. mid 10th–mid 11th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 16. Fresco. From *Zhongguo bigua quanji--Xinjiang VI--Turfan*, fig. 73



Ill. 8b. *Prophecy of Buddha Śikhin*, ca. mid 10th–mid 11th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 16. Fresco. From Rajeshwari Ghose, *In the Footsteps of the Buddha* (Hong Kong: U Museum And Art Gallery, The U of Hong Kong, 1998), fig. 71, p. 264



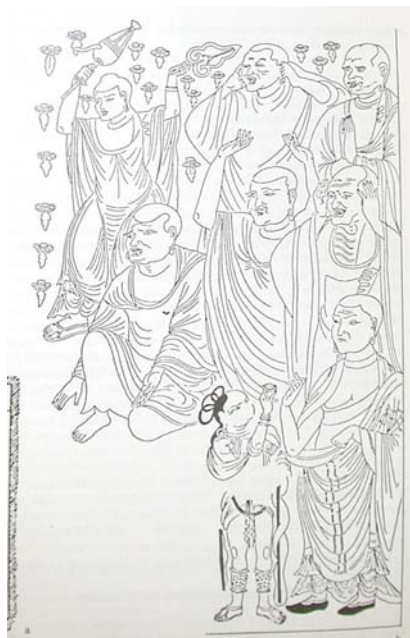
Ill. 8c. *Preaching Buddha*, ca. 9th–11th centuries. Genjin Temple I. Drawing of fresco. From *Gaochang bihua jiyi*, fig. 249, p. 209



Ill. 8d. *Prophecy of Buddha Śikhin*, ca. mid 10th–mid 11th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 17. Fresco. From *Xinjiang shiku – Turfan Bezeklik shiku*, fig. 28



Ill. 9a. *Disciples in parinirvāṇa*, ca. mid 10th–mid 11th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 33. Fresco. From *Xinjiang shiku* – *Turfan Bezeklik shiku*, fig. 84



Ill. 9b. *Disciples in parinirvāṇa*, ca. mid 10th–mid 11th centuries. Bezeklik Cave 31. Drawing of fresco. From Jorinde Ebert, *Parinirvāṇa*, fig. 37



Ill. 10. *Head of a monk*, ca. 7th century. Mingwugou site at Yanqi. Clay. From Huang Wenbi, *Xinjiang kaogu fajue baogao* (1957–1958), plate xx, no. 6