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## ARTICLES

# Art, Ritual, and Patron: Examining an Unknown Buddhist Cave in Shanxi

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THE NORTHERN WEI 魏 (386–534) Buddhist caves in southeast Shanxi are of great significance for understanding the spread and influence of the Yungang 云岡 style in the central plains of China. These caves are also important visual evidence for examining local beliefs and image-making in Shanxi, which became a political, economic, and cultural center in northern China after Emperor Daowu 道武 (Tuoba Gui 拓拔珪, r. 371–409) moved the Northern Wei seat from Shengle 盛樂 (in present-day Hohhot) to Pingcheng 平城 (present-day Datong 大同) in the first year of Tianxing 天興 (398). Shanxi was also the political power base for the Northern Wei, Eastern Wei (534–550), and the Northern Qi (550–577). During the Northern Dynasties (386–581), Buddhism spread widely in Shanxi and developed rapidly with the support of the Tuoba emperors who were devout Buddhists. Consequently, Shanxi is full of Buddhist caves and monasteries, particularly in the southeast of the province, an important location which connected the two Buddhist centers, Pingcheng and Luoyang 洛陽, of the Northern Wei, and the two capitals, Ye 鄴 (present-day Linzhang 臨漳) and Taiyuan 太原, of the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi. With this significant location, Buddhism and Buddhist art flourished quickly, and many Buddhist caves and monasteries were commissioned for the attainment of merit, rebirth in the western paradise, and for Buddhist ritual practices such as meditation. Beside the most famous Yungang 雲岡 and Tianlongshan 天龍山 caves, there are many unknown smaller ones in Shanxi. Gaoping 高平 County, a part of this



area, has many hidden Buddhist caves and monasteries such as Yangtoushan 羊頭山, Shitanghui 石堂會, Gaomiaoshan 高廟山, and Fushan 釜山 caves, as well as the Dinglin 定林 and Kaihua 開化 monasteries, etc.<sup>1</sup>

Between 2004 and 2009, as part of my larger investigation of the Northern Dynasties Buddhist caves in north China, I examined some unknown caves in Shanxi and discovered that they contain valuable visual evidence for studying the development of the central plain caves and their relationship to the transfers of the capitals (Pingcheng, Luoyang, and Ye), as well as to the third-phase caves of Yungang (494–524) and early Longmen 龍門 caves, not to mention the value of the caves themselves for examination. All of these caves were executed during the late Northern Dynasties and they are small in scale, perfect for meditation and devotional ritual. It is significant to note that they are all situated within the triangle of the three capitals: Pingcheng, Luoyang, and Ye. Stylistically, the images demonstrate typical iconographic features of those of the late Northern Wei.

Among all the Shanxi caves I have investigated, the Fushan cave in Gaoping County particularly deserves academic research. It is rather small yet possesses exceptional diversified motifs, some of which are repeatedly represented. However, due to its remote location, which makes access difficult, this cave has not received the scholarly attention it deserves until now. This article therefore attempts to read the iconography, examining both what it represents and why, in certain cases, some subjects are visually illustrated more than once. Furthermore, this paper will closely examine the cave by taking into consideration the architectural structure, the iconographic composition, subject matter, and style. Since no written clues are available, I will use the methodology of iconographic and typological examination to propose a plausible date and to explore the issues of patronage, function, doctrines and visual images, as well as connections between the Yungang third-phase caves and the small ones in Shanxi.<sup>2</sup>

### *Reading the Iconography*

The Fushan cave is situated near the top of the yellowish sandstone Fushan Mountain in Fushan village, twenty-two kilometers northeast of the seat of Gaoping County in Shanxi Province (fig. 1). The cave, facing west, consists

<sup>1</sup> For the Gaomiaoshan and Yangtoushan caves, see Li 1999, pp. 60–73, and Li 2000, pp. 63–88. For the Shitanghui caves, see Li and Yi 2009, pp. 67–85.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Angela Howard who read and commented upon an earlier version of this paper.

of an anteroom and a main chamber. The main chamber is square in plan, while the anteroom is rectangular with shallow left and right walls (fig. 2).<sup>3</sup>

### Anteroom

The anteroom now has only three walls. It is likely that the front wall collapsed over time judging from the surface of the stone outside the cave. The center of the rear wall of the anteroom is the main chamber's entrance (plate 1), above which sixteen small Buddhas are observed (fig. 3). Each Buddha has an elongated face and shows a prominent *uṣṇīṣa*.

It should be mentioned that on either side of the entrance stand two secularized *dvārapālas* with large exaggerated eyes and prominent foreheads. Neither of them wears armor or holds a trident, as they usually do. Both figures appear very masculine with exaggerated muscles and broad shoulders.

The ceiling of the anteroom is ornamented with two finely sculpted lotus patterns in the middle and two floral designs of the same size beside them at both ends (fig. 4).

The overall plan of the left and right walls do not correspond with each other, except that they both have a meditating *bhikṣu* at the top. The right wall is occupied by three pointed niches arranged vertically (fig. 5), while the left wall, though narrow, presents a rich series of subjects, which seem to have been inspired by Buddhist doctrines and devotees' ritual practice (fig. 6). Beside the Buddha's drapery, two worshippers prostrating completely are observed, and below them are two kneeling worshippers; between them is an incense burner. Below them, two Buddhas, apparently representing Śākyamuni Buddha and Prabhūtaratna Buddha, are seen inside a shallow niche.

### Main Chamber

The main chamber is square in plan. The ceiling is coffered with a large lotus pattern in the center. All images are rendered on a low, narrow altar in front of each wall, except the front wall, forming an inverted "U" shape on the floor plan.

The main wall is completely occupied by a variety of diversified subjects (fig. 7). The primary images are the seated Buddha in the center and four standing attendants—two bodhisattvas flank the Buddha and two disciples

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the terms left and right side refer to the main Buddha's left and right, not the viewer's left and right.

beside them at the conjunction of the walls (fig. 8). Atop the bodhisattva's halo, to the right, a spirit king is carved in low relief, with his arms stretched out and squatting with legs apart, facing towards the Buddha. In all, six creatures of this kind, five seemingly ox-headed and one human-headed (right wall, east side) (figs. 7, 9, 10), are found in this cave. There are two on each wall except the front, flanking the upper part of the nimbus of the central Buddha.

To the left of the left-hand spirit king near the conjunction of the main and left walls, a standing Buddha is portrayed. He is carved in low relief with his left hand lowered, holding an alms bowl, and three children kneeling down in front of him (fig. 11). This, needless to say, illustrates the story of King Aśoka offering dust to the Buddha as we are told in the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經 (Sutra of the Wise and the Fool).<sup>4</sup>

Below the Aśoka story, two Buddhas seated side by side in a roofed niche and a prostrating worshipper with an incense burner are observed. It is interesting to note that the left Buddha's left hand is placed on his lap, while his right one holds the other Buddha's hands which in turn are joined together resting on the latter's legs (fig. 12).<sup>5</sup>

The two disciples standing at the conjunction of the walls look very slender with attenuated bodies, sloping shoulders, and Sinicized robes. Both heads are unfortunately damaged; but the round halos are still discernable. The bony appearance of the disciple on the left suggests that this figure was intended to represent Mahākāśyapa. If so, the one on the right can be identified as Ānanda. Both figures are standing on square pedestals.

It is worth mentioning that the arrangement of the imagery on the left side of the Buddha does not correspond to that of the right side which we have just explored. Between the disciple and the bodhisattva on the right of the Buddha no other images were rendered, unlike the arrangement on the left of the Buddha. This unbalanced arrangement leads us to believe that it is possible that the cave was not completed, for some unknown reason, and that the images on each wall were rendered at different times without an overall iconographic plan.

The left wall contains primarily one seated Buddha and two flanking bodhisattvas (plate 2 and fig. 9). It is worth noting that the rendition of the Buddha's drapery is rather unique and substantially differentiated from that

<sup>4</sup> Translated by Huijue 慧覺 (n.d.) et al. in 445 (T no. 202, 4: 368c).

<sup>5</sup> This posture is also observed in the Wangqing 王慶 cave images (Shanxi) and on the images discovered in Nannieshui 南涅水 County (Shanxi), now housed in the Nannieshui Museum. This representation seems to be a regional rendition of the two Buddhas seated side by side particular to Shanxi. It is not observed elsewhere.

of the Buddha on the main wall. It is reminiscent of those of the late Northern Wei in the Maijishan 麥積山 caves on the Silk Road. Is there a stylistic link between the Shanxi caves and the Maijishan caves?

On each side of the Buddha's nimbus, near the top point, the head of a monk and a spirit king are illustrated. To the left of the bodhisattva, that is, at the very end of the left wall, seven rows of "thousand Buddha" niches arranged vertically are carved, above which a curtained niche which looks like a suspended square box is seen (plate 3). Inside the box niche is a seated bodhisattva with legs crossed. Above this niche, seven monks' shaven heads are carved to fill the space.<sup>6</sup>

The right wall, like the main wall, is entirely occupied by a variety of motifs (fig. 10). The main images are a standing Buddha accompanied by two bodhisattvas (fig. 13), unlike the other two walls, which contain seated Buddhas.

Monks with shaved heads in bas-relief, meditating *bhikṣu*, spirit kings, and Prince Siddhārtha attended by his white horse at his feet are also represented. Here the prince is shown in seated posture under a tree with one leg pendant and one hand raised to his chin in pensive meditation. Evidently, this depicts the story of the separation of Prince Siddhārtha from his white horse Kaṅṭhaka as we read in the *Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經 (Sutra on the Causes and Effects in the Past and Present).<sup>7</sup>

Noteworthy is that the spirit king on the east side is not ox-headed like the other ones. Rather, he is a human-headed figure, as I mentioned earlier.

At the extreme end of the right wall, a suspended niche corresponding to the one on the left wall contains a seated figure with both legs crossed and hands joined together on the lap (fig. 14). The rendition of these two figures in the suspended niches is reminiscent of the images of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī represented in the Gaomiaoshan cave in Shanxi (fig. 15).<sup>8</sup> In both

<sup>6</sup> A group of monks with shaved heads is also illustrated in Lu 路 Cave in Longmen, but they are rarely found in any other caves in central plain China.

<sup>7</sup> T no. 189, 3: 633b. Translated by Guṇabhadra (394–468) during the reign of Emperor Wendi 文帝 (407–453; r. 424–453). The sutra recounts that when Prince Siddhārtha arrived at the tranquil forest, he told his attendant Chandaka to go back to the palace with his white horse Kaṅṭhaka. After hearing this, the white horse bent his legs licking the prince's feet and began to cry with tears falling down like rain.

<sup>8</sup> Gaomiaoshan cave (Shanxi Province) consists of one square cave with five images and six niches. Though a small cave, it has many inscriptions of *bhikṣus* and donors which provide important clues to the names of places and official or monastic ranks. Vimalakīrti holding a huge fan is rendered in the roofed niche and is surrounded by *bhikṣus* and donors. This cave also has two secularized *dvārapālas* at the entrance but they wear bodhisattva's celestial robes. The ceiling has eight *apsaras* (celestial maidens), well preserved.

caves, the images are draped in a unique upper garment like a cape and are surrounded by *bhikṣus* and donors. They are also seated in the same posture. This led me to believe that the figures in the suspended niches facing each other in the Fushan cave are also intended to represent Vimalakīrti (left) and Mañjuśrī (right). Although Vimalakīrti on the left does not have a *zhuwei* 塵尾 (fly whisk) in his hand, like the Gaomiaoshan one (fig. 16), it is represented in the exact same distinctive arrangement as that of Gaomiaoshan.

The front wall of the cave is fully covered with small thousand Buddha niches. A cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva whose feet are held by a *genie* sits in the center above the entrance gate (plate 4 and fig. 17).

The ceiling contains one very large and shallow coffer in the center, inside of which is a large lotus surrounded by four floral scrolls in each corner. The coffer is formed by a two-tiered square frame around which thousand Buddha niches are carved at the conjunction of the ceiling and the top of the four walls. In other words, the four walls of the cave are topped by the thousand Buddha niches.

### *Iconographic Analysis and Interpretations*

Fushan is a relatively small cave. However, the subject matter is of an exceptionally rich diversity.

As has been discussed, the main subjects are the Buddhas of the three times of past, present, and future, and the thousand Buddhas of a *kalpa*. Other motifs including the Sixteen Buddhas, the Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna Buddhas, the cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva, *dvārapālas*, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, spirit kings, the farewell of Prince Siddhārtha from his white horse Kaṅṭhaka, monks with shaven heads, prostrating devotees, and *dhyāna bhikṣu* (meditating ascetics) are also represented.

We also noticed that the meditation *bhikṣu* motif was rendered three times, which is remarkable in such a small cave.

The subject of the Buddhas of the three times is one of the most popular and frequently represented themes in Northern Dynasties Buddhist art. It was a particularly popular theme throughout the Yungang caves. The iconographic composition of the three Buddhas, however, often varies. Sometimes they represent Kāśyapa, Śākyamuni, and Maitreya; or Dīpaṅkara, Śākyamuni, and Maitreya; or Śākyamuni, Amitābha, and Maitreya. At the same time, in many cases, the three Buddhas do not represent any specific Buddha. Rather, they are the representations of the Buddhas of the ten quarters in the three *kalpas* of the past, present, and future in a broader sense. We find many such examples in the Maijishan and Binglingsi 炳靈寺 caves in Gansu, and

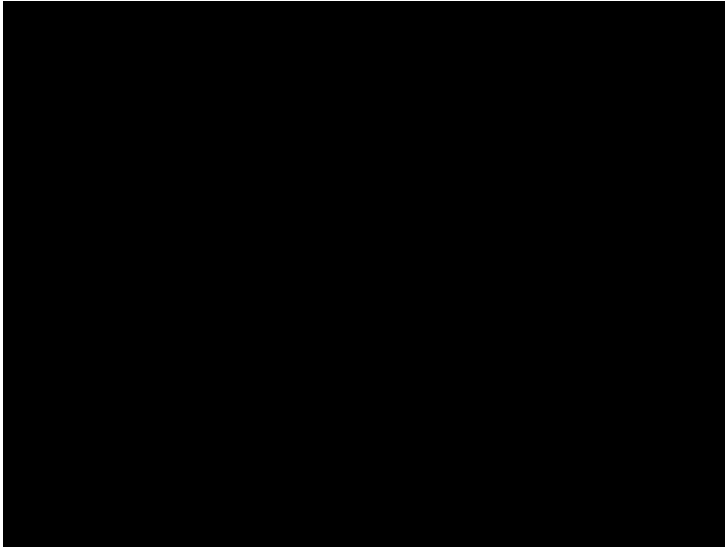


Figure 1. Fushan cave

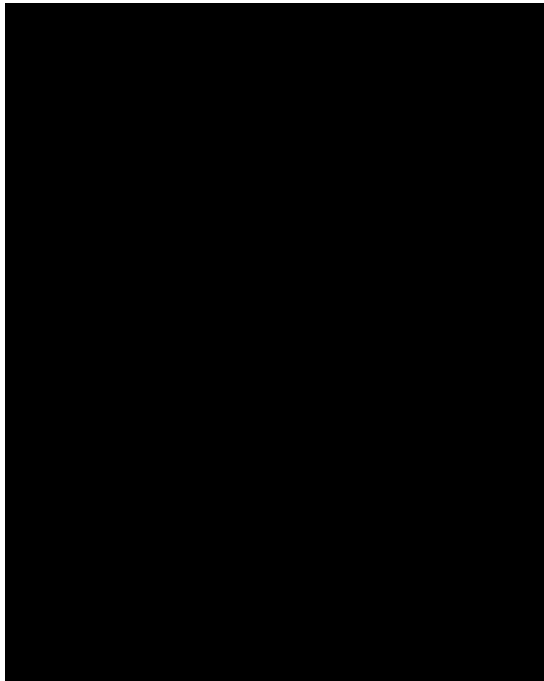


Figure 2. Drawing of cave plan



Figure 3. Drawing of rear wall



Figure 4. Ceiling of the anteroom





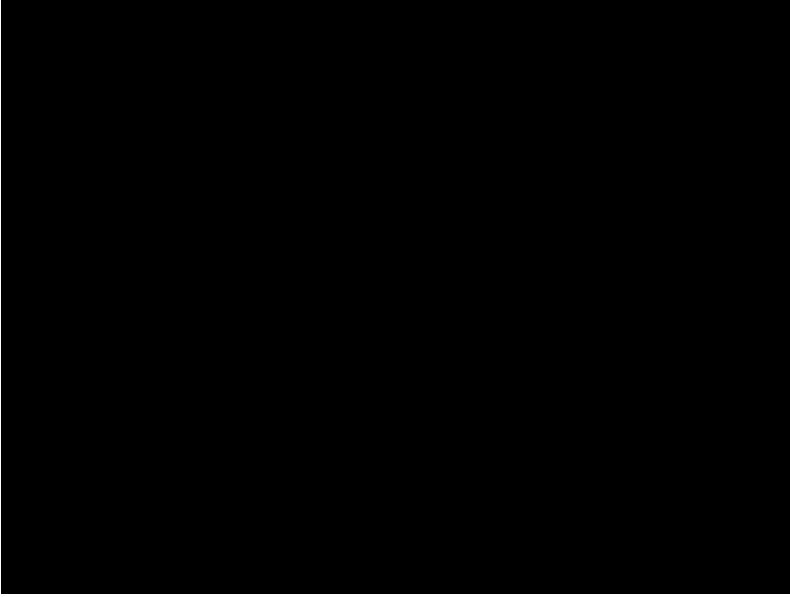


Plate 1. Cave entrance

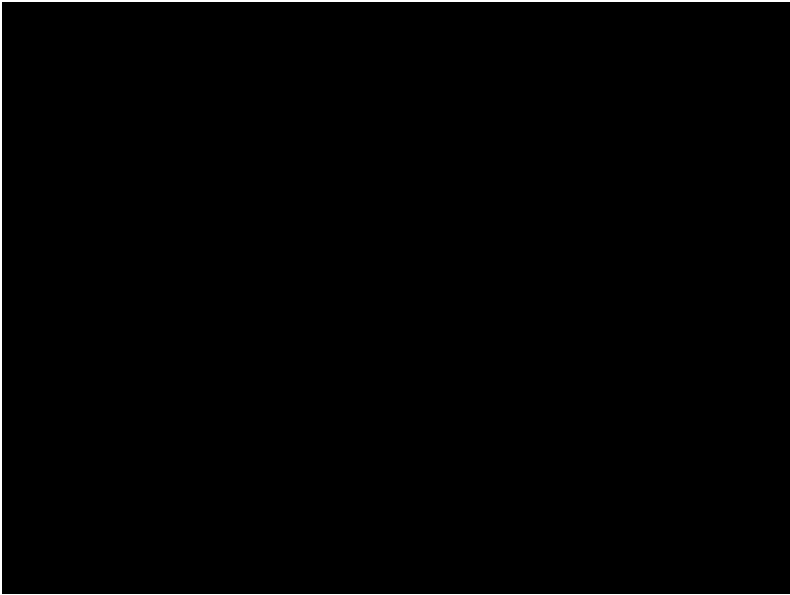


Plate 2. Left wall

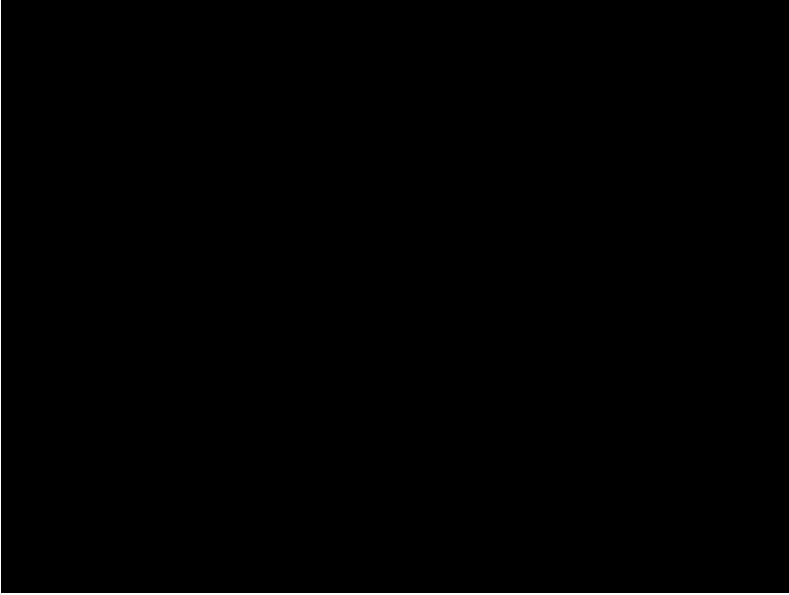


Plate 3. Curtained niche, left wall

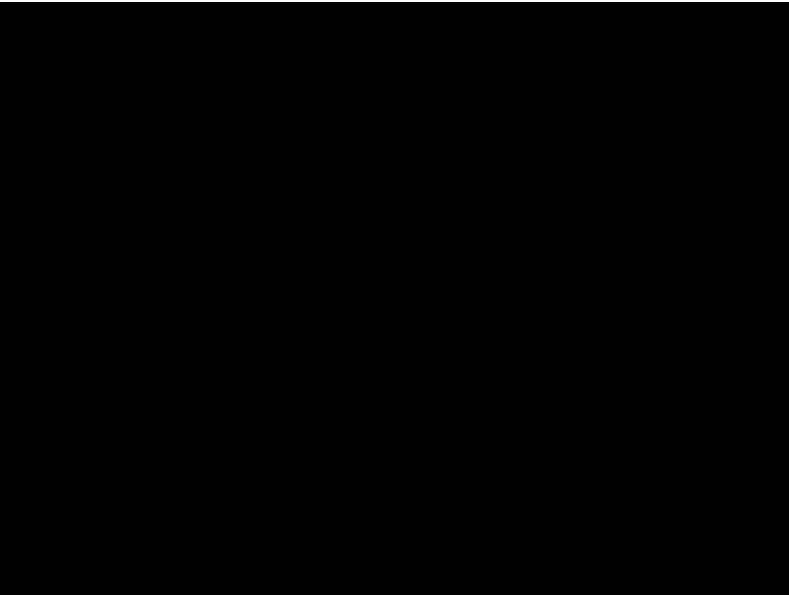


Plate 4. Front wall



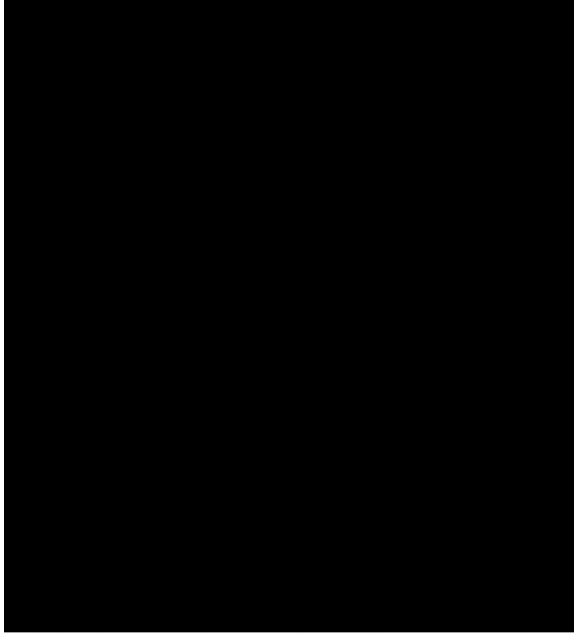


Figure 5. Right wall of the anteroom



Figure 6. Left wall of the anteroom

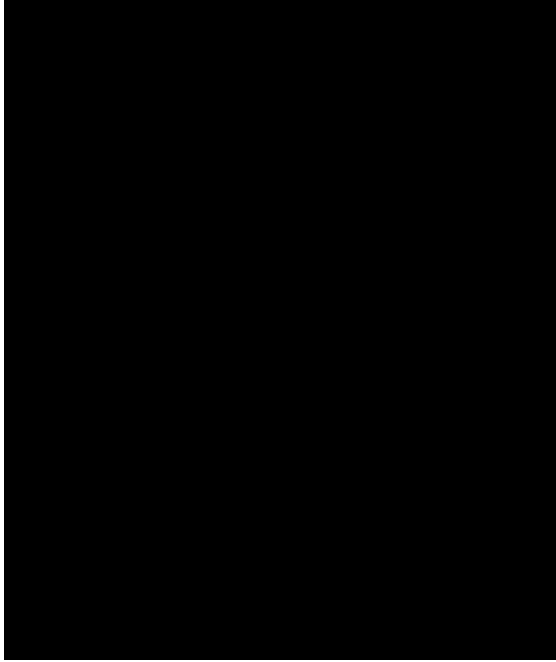


Figure 7. Drawing of main wall

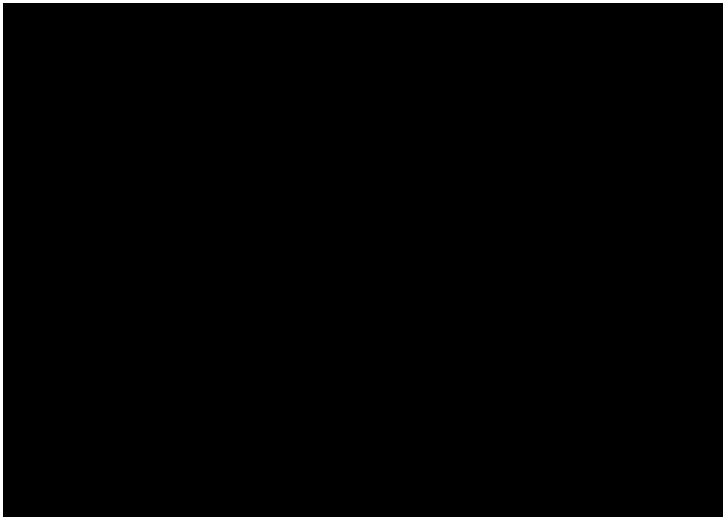


Figure 8. Main wall

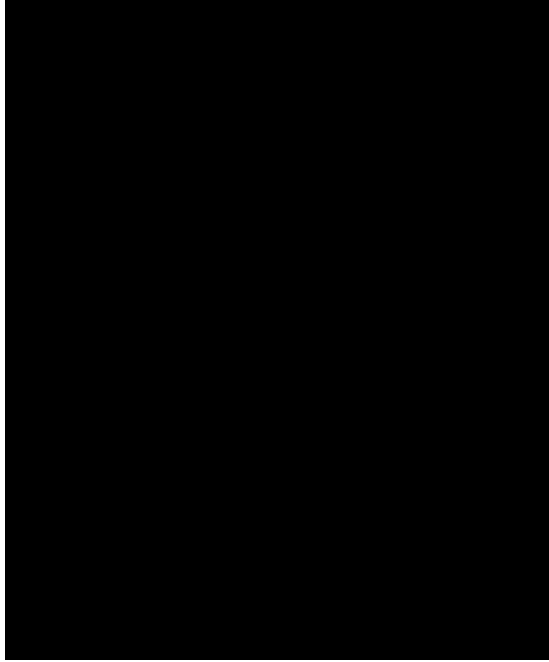


Figure 9. Drawing of left wall

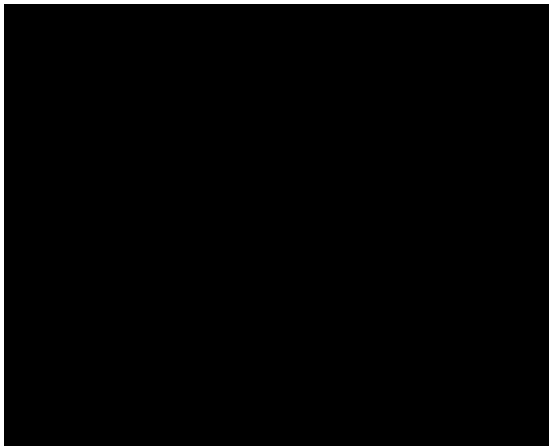


Figure 10. Drawing of right wall

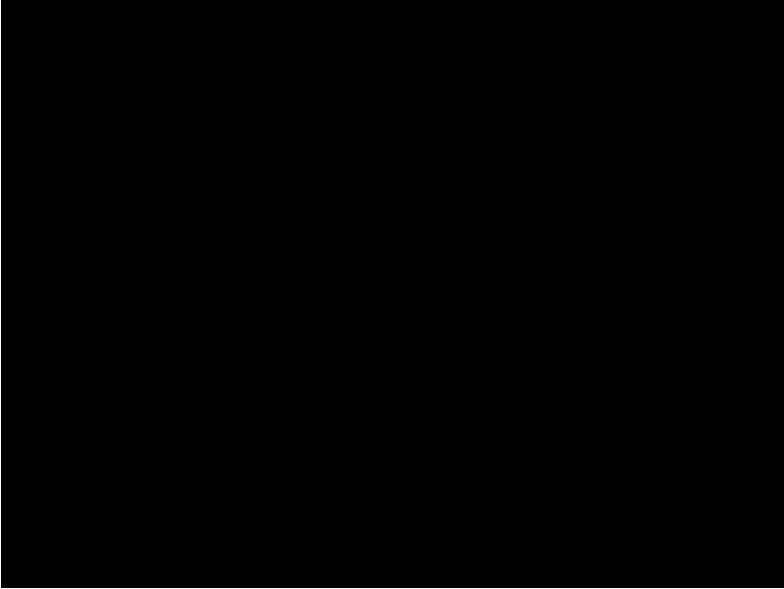


Figure 11. The story of King Aśoka offering dust, main wall

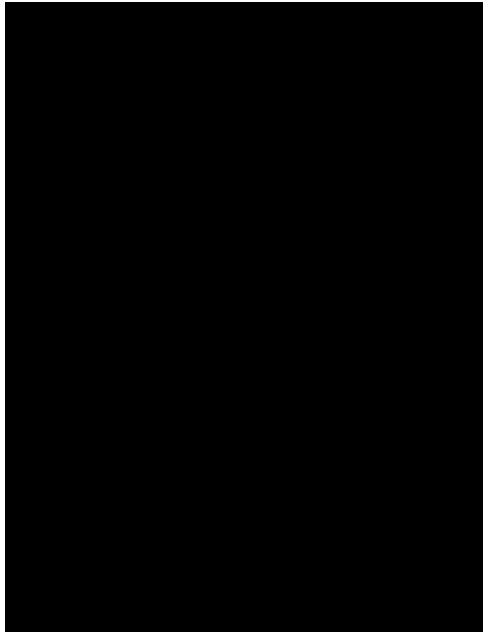


Figure 12. Two seated Buddhas in a roofed niche, main wall

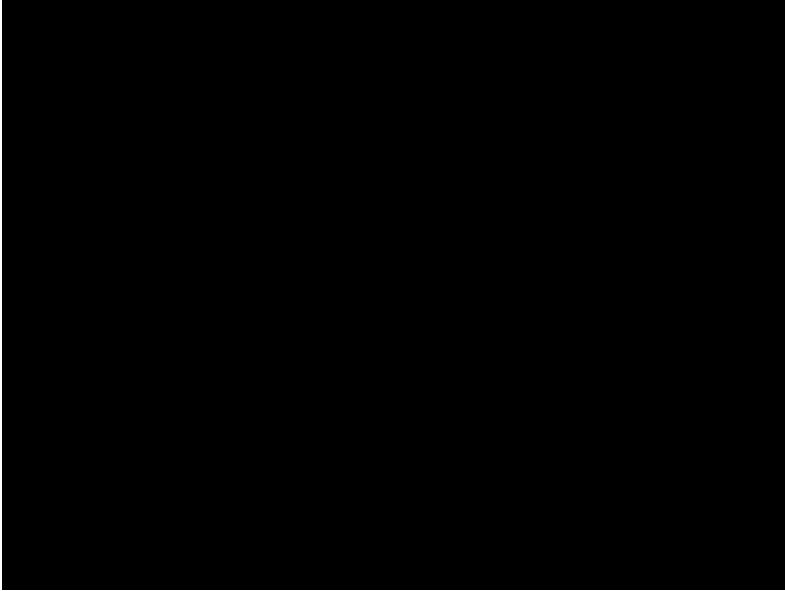


Figure 13. Right wall

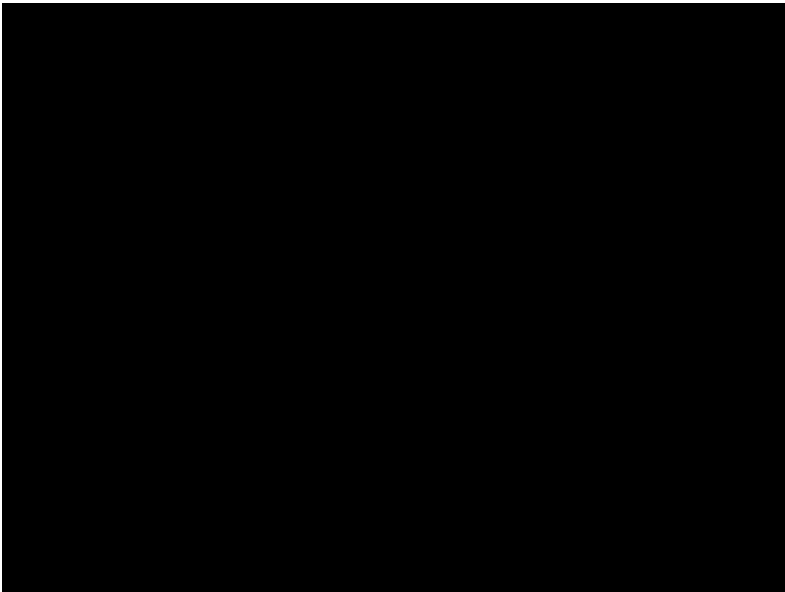


Figure 14. Curtained niche, right wall





Figure 15. Left wall, Gaomiaoshan cave, Shanxi

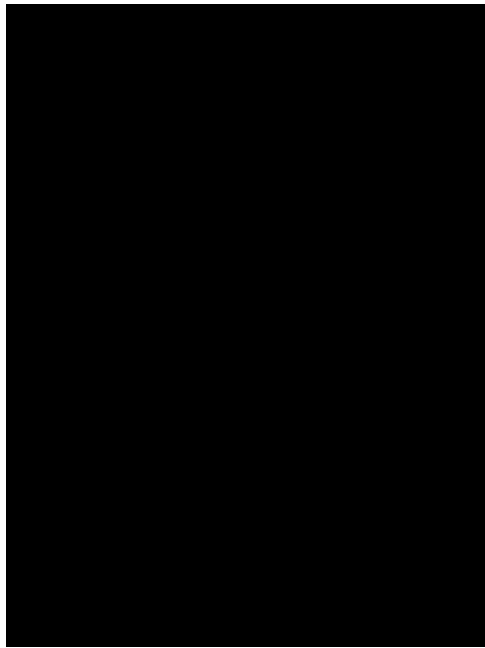


Figure 16. Vimalakīrti in a curtained niche, left wall, Gaomiaoshan cave, Shanxi

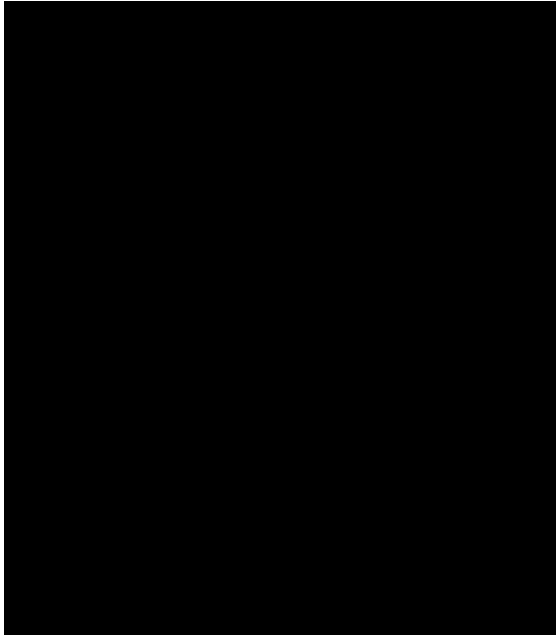


Figure 17. Drawing of front wall

the Yungang caves in Shanxi. The idea that the many Buddhas of the past, present, and future are dispersed in the ten quarters is a fundamental concept of Mahayana Buddhism which had a profound impact on Buddhist visual representations. Consequently the three Buddhas of the three times became a fundamental subject of Buddha art. The three Buddhas in Fushan, without any particular iconographic attributes, thus can be confidently identified as the Buddhas of the three *kalpas* imagery.

The subject of the three Buddhas is also a very popular motif throughout the *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (hereafter, *Lotus Sutra*), the most influential text in which the three Buddhas are often mentioned.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For example in the preface and in chapter 2, “Expedient Devices”: “Śāriputra, the Buddhas of the past by resort to incalculable and numberless devices and to various means, parables, and phrases proclaimed the dharmas to the beings. These dharmas were all directed toward the One Buddha Vehicle. These beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, all attain thoroughly to knowledge of all modes (*sarvākārajñatā*). Śāriputra, future Buddhas shall come into the world, and they, too, by resorting to incalculable and numberless devices

With the development of Mahayana Buddhism and the increasing number of translated sutras, the number of Buddhas multiplied quickly. It was no longer a one Buddha world and the historical Gautama Buddha was not the only object for reverence any more. Rather, there were three, seven, sixteen, thirty-five, fifty-three, a thousand and even up to three thousand or more Buddhas, among which the thousand Buddhas of a *kalpa* became a popular motif and a frequent scene in Northern Dynasties Buddhist art.<sup>10</sup> The identification of the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas however is often uncertain. They can be interpreted as the thousand Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa (the present eon) based on the *Xianjiejing* 賢劫經 (Bhadrakalpa Sutra)<sup>11</sup> or the Buddhas of past, present, and future and the manifestation of Śākyamuni Buddha dispersed in the ten directions based on the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>12</sup> They can also refer to the three thousand Buddhas of the three consecutive times as found in the text *Sanjie sanqian foming jing* 三劫三千佛名經 (Sutra of Three

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and to various means, parables, and phrases, shall proclaim the dharmas to the beings. These dharmas shall all be directed toward the One Buddha Vehicle. These beings, hearing the Dharma from the Buddhas, shall all attain thoroughly the knowledge of all modes. Śāriputra, the Buddhas, the World-Honored Ones, in the incalculable hundreds of thousands of myriads of millions of Buddha-lands in the ten directions of the present time have many beings whom they benefit and put at their ease. These Buddhas also, by resort to incalculable and numberless devices and to various means, parables, and phrases, proclaim the dharmas to the beings. These dharmas are all directed toward the One Buddha Vehicle.” Translation by Hurvitz (1976), pp. 30–31.

Concerning the three Buddha motif, see He 1992, pp. 1–18; He 1993, pp. 1–10; also see Liu 1958, pp. 91–101.

<sup>10</sup> The earliest extant illustrations of the thousand Buddhas of a *kalpa* with an explicit date (420), to the best of my knowledge, is represented on the east wall of Cave 169 in the Bingling 炳靈 cave, Gansu, but in terms of frequency, the Mogao 莫高 caves, Dunhuang, possess the greatest number of the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas.

<sup>11</sup> T no. 425, 14: 1b.

<sup>12</sup> The iconography and the inscriptions in Mogao Cave 254 indicate that the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas are connected with many sutras such as *Guoqu zhuangyan jie qianfo ming jing* 過去莊嚴劫千佛名經 (Sutra on the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Past Majestic Kalpa), T no. 446, 14: 365a; *Xianzai xianjie qianfo ming jing* 現在賢劫千佛名經 (Sutra on the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa), T no. 447, 14: 376a; *Weilai xingsu jie qianfo ming jing* 未來星宿劫千佛名經 (Sutra on the Names of the Thousand Buddhas of the Future Constellation Kalpa), T no. 448, 14: 388b; *Foshuo guan yaowang yaoshang erpusa jing* 佛說觀藥王藥上二菩薩經 (Sutra on Contemplation of the Two Bodhisattvas Bhaiṣajyarāja and Bhaiṣajyasamudgata), T no. 1161, 20: 664c; *Foshuo jue ding pini jing* 佛說決定毗尼經 (*Upaliparipṛccha*), T no. 325, 12: 37b, to mention only a few. Therefore this subject matter is not merely a product of the *Lotus Sutra* although the latter is perhaps the most influential text.

Thousand Names of Buddhas of the Three *Kalpas*).<sup>13</sup> Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio identified the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas around the niches of Śākyamuni Buddha and Prabhūtaratna Buddha as the manifestation of Śākyamuni Buddha dispersed in the ten directions, and as the thousand Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa when around a single Buddha niche.<sup>14</sup> However, the thousand *kalpa* Buddhas carved in the Fushan cave, judging from the arrangement of thousand Buddhas with the future Buddha in the center, and the future Buddha directly facing the Śākyamuni Buddha are most likely intended to represent the thousand Buddhas of the three *kalpa* periods.

The subject matter of the sixteen Buddhas, although not as popular as the three Buddhas and the thousand Buddhas, is also frequently illustrated in Northern Dynasties Buddhist art, and is often associated with the sixteen *śrāmaneras* from the *Lotus Sutra*.<sup>15</sup> We are told in this text that sixteen princes left their household and became *śrāmaneras*. They later attained *anuttarāsamyakṣambodhi* (full Enlightenment), became Buddhas and preached in the lands of the ten directions.<sup>16</sup> It is possible that the sixteen Buddhas in Fushan are intended to illustrate the sixteen *śrāmaneras* based on the *Lotus Sutra*.

<sup>13</sup> This is an alternative title for the texts T nos. 446, 447, 448, taken together as one work.

<sup>14</sup> Mizuno and Nagahiro 1953, p. 75.

<sup>15</sup> *Śrāmaneras* are novices (male or female) who have made vows to observe the ten precepts. To the best of my knowledge, the earliest representation of the sixteen Buddha motif is illustrated in Yanshi Shuiquan 堰師水泉 cave in Henan Province. They are also represented in the South Xiangtangshan 響堂山 Cave 2, Hebei Province and the Baifoshan 白佛山 caves, Shandong Province; as well as on the base of the Eastern Wei Mahābhijñānābhībhū Buddha image from Zhengding 正定 County, Hebei; on the stele dated to the second year of Wuping 武平 (571) now housed in the Shanxi Museum; and on the Ju Shiguang 巨始光 stele from the Western Wei, etc. In the inscription by Hong Bao 洪寶 (n.d.) dated to the second year of Tianping 天平 (535), some of the names of the sixteen Buddhas are mentioned. See Taian Shi Wenwu Kaogu Yanjiushi 1989, pp. 231–33; Zhang 1998, p. 28; Mizuno and Hibino 1956, plates 26.27 and 29; Zhao and Chen 1995, pp. 87–88; Zhou 1985, pp. 90–94; and Ōmura 1915, pp. 252–53.

<sup>16</sup> They are the Buddhas of Akṣobhya and Sumeru dwelling in the Land of Joy in the east; Lion Sound and Lion Sign Buddhas in the southeast; Space-dweller and Ever Extinguished in the south; Sovereign Sign and Brahmā Sign Buddhas in the southwest; Amitāyus and Savior of All Worlds from Pain and Woe Buddhas in the west; Supernatural Penetration of the Fragrance of Tamālapattra and Candana, and Sumeru Sign Buddhas in the northwest; Cloud Self-Master and King of the Cloud Self-Masters in the north; and He who Demolishes the Fears of All the Worlds Buddha in northeast and Śākyamuni Buddha as the last one. Some of these names are carved on the walls of the caves or steles mentioned above. See also the translation of the “Parable of the Conjured City” in Hurvitz 1976, pp. 146–47.

It is worth mentioning that the visual representations of the three, sixteen, and thousand *kalpa* Buddhas present in Fushan are also the main subjects throughout the *Lotus Sutra*. Furthermore, the subject of Śākyamuni Buddha and Prabhūtaratna Buddha represented at Fushan is the visual symbol of the *Lotus Sutra*. Reading these four motifs as an integral whole, it is evident that all these subjects are based on the *Lotus Sutra*, which was an important doctrinal source during the Northern Dynasties. This, in the meanwhile, also further proves our previous arguments that the three and thousand *kalpa* Buddhas in Fushan are meant to represent the many Buddhas of the three *kalpas* of the past, present, and future, which are popular subjects in the *Lotus Sutra*. We have abundant evidence to show that the subject matter of Northern Dynasties Buddhist art is closely linked with the *Lotus Sutra*, as we gauge from reading the inscriptions in the Guyang 古陽 cave, Longmen.<sup>17</sup> Like the caves in Longmen, the Fushan one is also inspired by this scripture, perhaps the most influential Buddhist text of the Northern Dynasties.

A further witness to the argument that the visual representations of Fushan are closely connected with Buddhist doctrines is that the *Lotus Sutra* is not the only textual source; the famous *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 (hereafter, *Vimalakīrti Sutra*)<sup>18</sup> was also an inspiration, as it is seen in the representations of the legendary debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī in the suspended niches. The *Lotus Sutra* and the *Vimalakīrti Sutra* were the essential textual sources for the creation of Buddhist art during the Northern Dynasties. Vimalakīrti, a Buddhist with the qualities of a Confucian *junzi* 君子, was used to attract the more orthodox and cultivated Chinese, as pointed out by J. Leroy Davidson.<sup>19</sup>

Noteworthy is the subject of the spirit king, which is a common scene in Six Dynasties visual arts. They are often carved in Buddhist caves (Longmen, Gongxian 鞏縣, Xiangtangshan, Xumishan 須彌山, and Anyang 安陽, etc.), tombs, and on Buddhist steles, and they are normally rendered in the lower level near the base.<sup>20</sup> The six spirit kings in the Fushan cave, however, are

<sup>17</sup> Many inscriptions in the Guyang cave clearly indicate that they are inspired by the *Lotus Sutra*. For instance, the inscriptions of Yang Xiaofei 楊小妃 (n.d.) executed in the third year of Zhengshi 正始 (506) and those of Hui Rong 慧榮 (n.d.) in the second year of Zhengguang 正光 (521), see Mizuno and Nagahiro 1980, pp. 367, 371.

<sup>18</sup> T no. 475, 14: 537a–57b.

<sup>19</sup> Davidson 1954, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> For the subject matter of spirit kings, see Bunker 1964, pp. 26–37; Bush 1974, pp. 25–53; Chang 1994, pp. 1127–41; Jin 1995, pp. 55–62; Zhao 1995, pp. 63–71; and Li 2010, pp. 66–76.

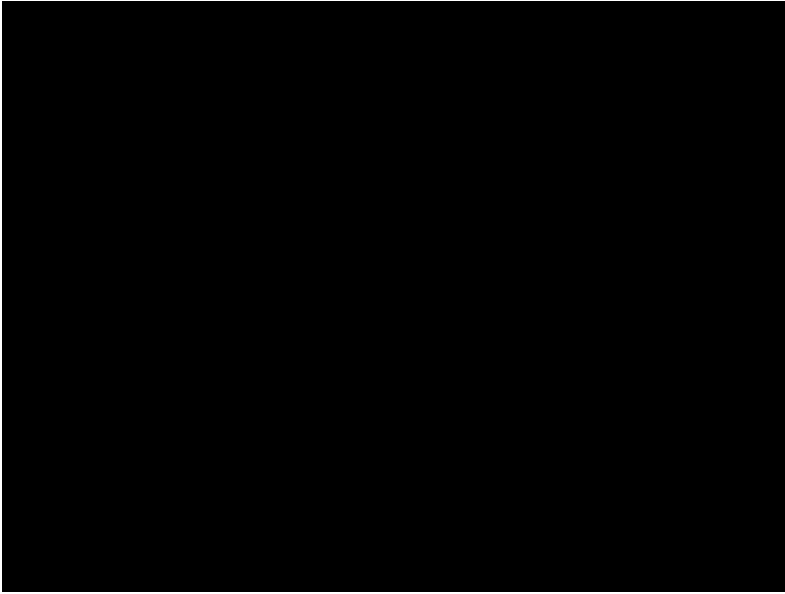


Figure 18. Ceiling of Cave 12, Yungang

rendered in the upper area, which is rarely seen in other caves. We usually find Dharma-protectors represented in the upper space, as we observe them in Cave 12 in Yungang on the ceiling of the main room, watching over from high above (fig. 18). Is it possible that the six spirit kings here were meant to represent Dharma-protectors as well, judging from their high position and the fact that they all face the Buddha with their arms out-stretched, ready to fight? Protection of the Dharma is a very popular motif in Yungang and is repeatedly represented in numerous caves there.

Stylistically, the imagery of the Fushan cave demonstrates a completely Sinicized visual form. The bodies are slender, the faces elongated, the necks emphatically long, and the shoulders gently sloping. The Buddhas wear Chinese style robes with flattened step-like folds in the covered mode, and the bodhisattvas, with exceptionally attenuated bodies, have their celestial robes hanging down low and criss-crossing in front through a large ring. These are typical iconographic features of late Northern Wei style as displayed in the images of the Yungang third-phase caves, as well as in the late Northern Wei Longmen and Gongxian caves. Fushan is not the only cave in Shanxi that exhibits the attenuated Chinese style. Most of the caves

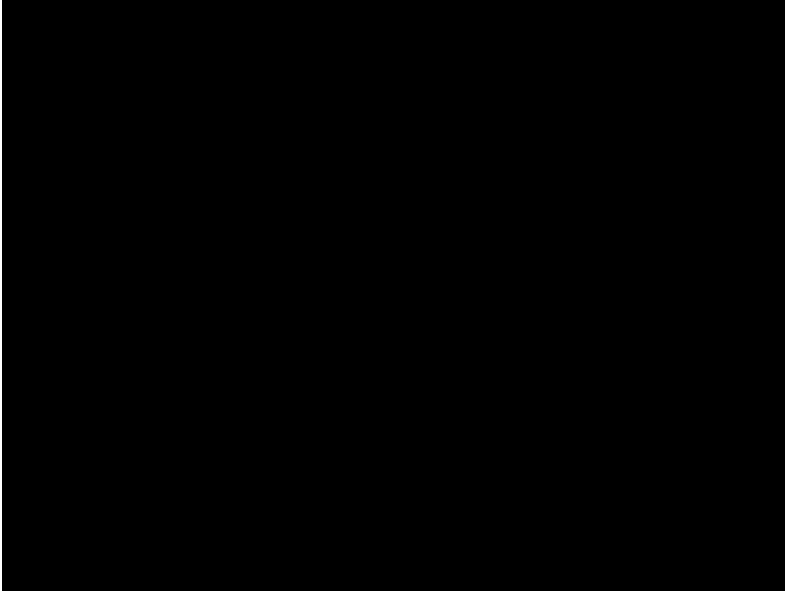


Figure 19. Right wall, Heshun cave-temple, Shanxi

I examined there share the same stylistic features. For example, the images in Heshun 和順 cave (fig. 19) appear rather slim and even more attenuated than those in Yungang third-phase caves, during which time Sinicization reached its mature stage and the Yungang style became a major iconographic inspiration. The Yungang model became quite influential during the sixth century, and particularly on those caves built after the capital was moved to Luoyang from Pingcheng, that is, the caves in southeastern Shanxi which are around the two capitals of the Northern Dynasties, Luoyang and Ye. With the transfers of the capitals, the Buddhist centers moved as well. Many small caves consequently were constructed around these capitals and new Buddhist centers. Fushan was one of the caves which was built on the route from Pingcheng to Luoyang.

The Yungang influence is not only reflected in style. It is shown in architectural layout and iconographic composition, as well. The Fushan cave is square in plan and small in scale, which is a typical characteristic of the architecture of the third-phase caves of Yungang and early Longmen caves. The iconographic composition of five images on the main wall at Fushan is not found in the Gongxian or Longmen caves, but it is common in the Yungang third-phase caves.

Overall, Fushan artists followed the traditions of these major Buddhist centers and caves, and yet responded to their influence with local artistic creation. The cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva is placed right above the entrance on the front wall, facing the three Buddhas of the three *kalpa* times, a rare occurrence in central plain China. The only other known example is in the Shishishan 石室山 (Stone Chamber Hill) caves, fifteen kilometers north of Gaoping County where the current cave is also situated. According to the investigations in the 1950s, the future Buddha in Shishishan Cave 1 was placed above the entrance as well, in the same representation.<sup>21</sup> This placement may represent a regional feature, as it is not found in Yungang or Longmen. The secularized *dvārapālas* might be a regional invention as well since we rarely find *dvārapālas* with secularized garments.

I argued earlier that the subjects of the Fushan cave are mainly inspired by Buddhist doctrines, and that words are connected with images. I also questioned how these motifs were chosen and why. When we ponder these questions, we cannot help but notice that the seated *dhyāna bhikṣus* under a tree are depicted three times in such a small cave, and that prostrating figures with incense burners, which indicate that the devotees are preparing for meditation, are represented twice. Furthermore, we rarely find images of both monks with shaven heads and *dhyāna bhikṣus* represented in the same cave. It is evident that meditation was an essential aspect of Buddhist ritual activity and it was emphasized in Buddhist practice. Many Buddhist sanctuaries were constructed as *changuan ku* 禪觀窟 for meditation and visualization.<sup>22</sup> It is entirely possible that meditation and visualization were the primary functions of the Fushan cave. However, this does not necessarily rule out the other functions of the religious space. Buddhist sanctuaries were often multi-valued.

Northern Wei Buddhism evolved from Later Qin 秦 (384–417) and Northern Liang 涼 (397–439) Buddhism, both of which laid emphasis on meditation practice, an important characteristic of this period.<sup>23</sup> We know that the Northern Wei Emperors Jingmu 景穆 (Tuoba Huang 拓拔晃, 428–451)

<sup>21</sup> Zhu 1957, pp. 78–79. There are six caves in total, among which Cave 3 has an inscription reading “*Dongwei Wuding yuannian*” 東魏武定元年 (the first year of Wuding in Eastern Wei, i.e., 543). These caves according to the local research institute were regrettably ruined during the 1950s.

<sup>22</sup> For meditation and visualization functions of Buddhist sanctuaries, see Liu 1996, pp. 331–48; Ning 2000, pp. 489–29; He 1982, pp. 122–43; Ding 1989, p. 31; Howard 1996, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Tang 1997, p. 354.



and Wencheng 文成 (Tuoba Jun 拓拔濬, 440–465, r. 452–465) often supported *dhyāna* monks in order to attain merit. *Dhyāna* concentration at that time was a very popular Buddhist practice and *dhyāna* monks played a significant role in the restoration of Buddhism after the first persecution of it (446–452) and the ensuing execution of Buddhist caves and monasteries. It is not impossible that the execution of the Fushan cave is associated with Buddhist monks who very likely sponsored the cave. It was not unusual for a *dhyāna* monk to sponsor a Buddhist rock-cut cave. Many such examples exist: the monk Yuezun 樂樽 (n.d.) at Mogao caves, Xuangao 玄高 (402–444) at Maijishan caves, Tanyao 曇曜 (n.d.) at Yungang caves, Daoping 道憑 (488–559) at Daliusheng 大留聖 caves, and Sengchou 僧稠 (480–560) at Xiaonanhai 小南海 caves. All these examples show that the execution of Buddhist caves was closely associated with Buddhist monks, who either sponsored the cave or suggested their execution to the court, as Tanyao encouraged Emperor Wencheng to have Yungang caves carved.<sup>24</sup> With the transfers of the capitals and Buddhist centers during the late Northern Dynasties, many Buddhist monks consequently moved around as well, and it is not hard to imagine that wherever they moved, they supported Buddhism, and helped build Buddhist caves and Buddhist centers. This may well be the reason that Buddhist caves in Shanxi were mainly situated near the three capitals (Pingcheng, Luoyang, and Ye) or within the triangle they formed. That is to say, the execution of the Buddhist caves in southeastern Shanxi was closely associated with the transfers of the capitals and Buddhist centers, and with Buddhist monks.

The imagery at Fushan demonstrates stylistic features distinct to this period. The images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas show an elegant and slender style, which is the prominent feature of late Northern Wei images. The Buddhas are clad in *baoyi bodai* 褒衣博帶 (loose robe and wide girdle), and the scarves of the bodhisattvas are tied together through a large ring in the front, which are very similar to those in Yungang, Longmen, and Gongxian caves. In terms of the subject matter, the composition of two seated Buddhas with one standing Buddha is seen in the Yungang third-phase caves, as well as in the late Northern Wei Yuanzishan 圓子山 cave in Yushe 榆社 County, Shanxi.<sup>25</sup> Further, the subjects of the legendary

<sup>24</sup> Wei 1974, p. 3036.

<sup>25</sup> The cave is situated fifteen kilometers northwest of Yushe County, Shanxi. The site consists of one cave and six niches. Inscriptions in the cave suggest that the cave was executed before 528. See Li 1997, pp. 69–79. I visited the Yushe caves in 2003 but the images had been unfortunately stolen leaving only fresh traces of chiseling.

debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, and the cross-ankled Maitreya Bodhisattva represented in Fushan are also popular motifs in the late Northern Wei caves in Longmen and Gongxian, as well as in the Yungang third-phase caves. We mentioned earlier that the Fushan cave is square in plan, which is a popular architectural characteristic of the third-phase cave in Yungang. This seems to be a minor point, but it proves that the Fushan cave was executed after the Yungang third phase.

All of these provide useful clues in dating the Fushan cave. Additional evidence helpful in dating the cave is the design on the ceiling with a large lotus in the center and floral patterns at the corners. It is similar to that of Gongxian Cave 5, which was dated between 528 and 538.<sup>26</sup>

Judging from the stylistic features, the subject matter, and the architectural layout we have just analyzed, it is believed that the Fushan cave was executed after the Yungang third-phase caves but no later than the end of the Northern Wei dynasty (534), prior to the split into Western and Eastern Wei. In other words, it was constructed in the last decade of the Northern Wei and inspired by the Yungang third-phase, Longmen and Gongxian caves, but fully developed into a more Sinicized artistic form with attenuated images. Fushan, and many other caves in southeastern Shanxi, were executed after the capital was moved to Luoyang and were heavily influenced by the Yungang and Longmen models in many aspects. Even though we do not know whether or not the Yungang or Longmen artists actually went to southeastern Shanxi, the iconographic association between these small caves in Shanxi, and the Yungang third-phase and early Longmen caves is evident. Yungang was certainly an influential Buddhist center in art and religion in the sixth century, and different regions responded to the widespread Yungang model in light of local Buddhist development.

#### ABBREVIATION

- T        *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai. 1924–34.

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<sup>26</sup> Chen 1989, p. 199.

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