

DEVOTION TO TĀRĀ IN TANGUT BUDDHISM
—BASED ON AN ART EXPLORATION OF TĀRĀ MURALS IN
DUNHUANG CAVES

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Religious Studies at

University of the West

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Religious Studies

By

Xiaoyang Zhang

May 2021

Approval Page for Graduate

Approved and recommended for acceptance as a dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies.

Xiaoyang Zhang
Candidate

May 4, 2021

Devotion to Tārā in Tangut Buddhism

—Based on An Art Exploration of Tārā Murals in Dunhuang Caves

APPROVED:

Darui Long
Chair

May 10, 2021

Shi Zhiru
Committee Member

May 6, 2021

Miroj Shakya
Committee Member

May 10, 2021

**I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted
as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,
and that it is entirely my own work.**

© 2021

Xiaoyang Zhang

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Abstract

Devotion to Tārā in Tangut Buddhism

—Based on An Art Exploration of Tārā Murals in Dunhuang Caves

By

Xiaoyang Zhang

This dissertation aims to reveal Tangut Buddhists' devotion to Tārā through a detailed art analysis of Tārā murals in Tangut caves from the Dunhuang area, together with religious and historical discussions on Tangut Buddhism and the Tangut caves in Dunhuang.

Dunhuang was a sacred site for Tangut Buddhists and Tangut-occupied Dunhuang for nearly one and a half centuries. Over eighty caves were created and reconstructed by Tanguts in the Dunhuang area. The three Tārā murals are painted in cave no. 5 and cave no. 2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves and cave no. 4 at Yulin Caves. The dissertation primarily discusses the significance of the role of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism based on the contents of the three Tārā murals, with supplemental information from the portraits of their patrons and history. Through detailed art analysis of the three Tārā murals, this dissertation also summarizes attributes of Tangut Tantric art to add depth to the understanding of Tangut Tantric art and its history.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
List of Figures	v
Chapter 1. Introduction	1
1.1 Project Description	1
1.2 Significance of the Study	5
1.3 Research Questions	6
1.4 Literature Review	6
1.5 Methodology	21
1.6 Scope of the Study	24
Chapter 2. Historical Background	26
2.1 History of Tangut	26
2.2 Tangut Buddhism	32
2.3 The Development of Dunhuang Caves during the Tangut Reign	48
Chapter 3. Tangut Buddhist Art	61
3.1 Introduction of Tangut Buddhist Art	61
3.2 Architecture: Temples, Stupas, and Caves	62
3.3 Statues	69
3.4 Paintings	72
3.5 <i>Kesi</i> Painting	95
Chapter 4. Tārā Mural in Cave No. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves	99
4.1 Art Analysis of the Tārā Mural	101

4.2 Cave No. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves	113
4.3 Discussion	127
Chapter 5. Tārā Mural in Cave No.2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves	132
5.1 Art Analysis of the Tārā Mural	133
5.2 Cave No.2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.....	144
5.3 Discussion	158
Chapter 6. Tārā Mural in Cave No.4 at Yulin Caves	161
6.1 Art Analysis of the Tārā Mural	162
6.2 Cave No. 4 at the Yulin Caves	168
6.3 Discussion	176
Chapter 7. Conclusion.....	180
7.1 The Three Tārā Murals.....	180
7.2 Tangut Tantric Buddhist Art	184
7.3 Tārā in Tangut Tantric Buddhism	187
7.4 Limitations	188
7.5 Expected Contribution.....	189
7.6 Suggestion for Future Studies	190
Bibliography.....	191

List of Figures

1	Green Tārā Mural in Cave no. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.....	2
1a	Green Tārā Mural in Cave no. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves (details)..	101
2	Green Tārā Mural in Cave no. 2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.....	3
2a.	Green Tārā Mural in Cave no. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves (details)..	133
3	Green Tārā Mural in Cave no. 4 at Yulin Caves	4
3a	Green Tārā Mural in Cave no. 4 at Yulin Caves (details).....	162
4	Green Tārā <i>Kesi</i> Painting of Xixia	96
4a	Green Tārā <i>Kesi</i> Painting of Xixia (details).....	104
5.	Green Tārā Painting of Central Tibet (third quarter of the thirteenth century)...	103
6	Green Tārā Painting of Central Tibet (second half of the eleventh century)	107
7	Green Tārā Painting of Vikramashila Monastery, Bihar, India (ca. 1145)	109
8	Sketch of Two Offering Attends	137

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Project Description

This dissertation aims to reveal Tangut Buddhists' devotion to Tārā through a detailed art analysis of Tārā murals in Tangut caves from the Dunhuang area, together with religious and historical discussions on Tangut Buddhism and the Tangut caves in Dunhuang.

Dunhuang was a sacred site for Tangut Buddhists. According to colophons from the Tangut books from Mogao caves, Dunhuang was the "Sacred Mountain of Shazhou" (Shazhou Shenshan, 沙洲神山). More than eighty caves were created and reconstructed by the Tangut in the Dunhuang area. Many highly skilled Tangut Buddhist artworks have been discovered in Dunhuang caves. The three Tārā murals to be discussed are found in cave no. 5 (see figure 1) and cave no. 2 (see figure 2) at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, and in cave no. 4 at Yulin Caves (see figure 3). They are the only cave murals that illustrate Tārā as a principal deity in the Dunhuang area and they were created during the Tangut reign in Dunhuang. Informed by studies on the patron portraits inside the caves, the dissertation reveals the importance of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism. Meanwhile, the discussion also presents Tangut artists' unique approach to creating images for veneration, which is closely related to the formation and development of Tangut Buddhist art and Tangut Buddhism in general. Therefore, this dissertation also aims to provide evidence and information to add depth to the understanding of Tangut Tantric Buddhist art.



Figure 1. Green Tārā mural of Tangut, in cave no. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, China.¹

¹ Zhang Baoxi 張寶璽 ed., *Guazhou dongqianfodong Xixia shiku yishu* 瓜州東千佛洞西夏石窟藝術, 203.



Figure 2. Green Tārā mural of Tangut, in cave no. 2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, China.²

² Zhang Baoxi 張寶璽 ed., *Guazhou dongqianfodong Xixia shiku yishu* 瓜州東千佛洞西夏石窟藝術, 113.



Figure 3. Green Tārā mural of Tangut, in cave no. 4 at Yulin Caves, China.³

³ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Zhongguo shiku: Anxi yulinku* 中國石窟：安西榆林窟, 186.

1.2 Significance of the Study

In Tantric Buddhism, Tārā is a female Buddha. She has been a significant figure in Tibetan Buddhism since the middle of the eleventh century. When Tangut Buddhism shifted its center to Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism in the eleventh century, Tārā also became one of the most worshipped deities among Tangut Buddhists. Therefore, when Dunhuang was ruled by the Tangut Empire, Tārā was illustrated as a principal deity in Dunhuang caves.

Tārā was most often portrayed as one of the Bodhisattvas in the *maṇḍala* of eight Bodhisattvas in Dunhuang caves prior to the Tangut occupation of the area. Her first appearance as a principal deity in Dunhuang caves occurred during the Tangut reign. Her significance in Tangut Vajrayana Buddhism is also indicated by the number of *kesi* thangkas of Tārā discovered in Khara Khoto. Tangut Buddhist art, due to the cultural engagement of Tangut Buddhism, also reflects the influences of many of those other cultures the Tangut encountered. In the close analysis of these Tārā murals, the foreign-art-inspired features are also discussed to provide evidence to complete the understanding Tangut Vajrayana Buddhism.

In addition, the dissertation combines the art analysis with a focus on historical elements and religious information originating from both Dunhuang and Khara Khoto to provide further evidence for the Tangut people's devotion to Tārā in the Dunhuang area.

At present, research on Tangut Buddhist art is mainly based on the art relics that have been preserved in the Dunhuang caves and the former capital of the Tangut Empire—Khara Khoto. The mural paintings from the Dunhuang area that were produced in the first half of the Tangut period (1038-1158 CE) have been emphasized in Chinese

scholarly publications since the 1990s. However, the focal point of the historical studies on Dunhuang art that are published in English is usually the highly praised Chinese Tang art. As previously mentioned, Tangut Buddhism and its art practices represent the uniqueness of Tangut culture, which is a balanced combination of influences from the various neighboring cultures. Thus, to expand the understanding of Tangut Buddhism and its art practices, it is important to study Tangut Buddhist art in the Tantric tradition that was received from Tibetan, Mongol, and Indian Buddhist masters and artists.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on an analysis of Tangut murals of Tārā in Dunhuang caves, this dissertation aims to answer the proposed research questions:

1. How do the given cave murals illustrate and reflect the significance of Tārā among Tangut Buddhists?
2. How does the art presentation of the Tārā murals resonate with the essential characteristics of Tangut Vajrayana Buddhism?
3. What aspects of Tangut Vajrayana Buddhism can be revealed from the Tārā murals?

1.4 Literature Review

This literature review mainly focuses on the previous studies of Tārā murals in Tangut caves and Tangut Tantric art in the Dunhuang caves. Since the identification work of the Tangut caves in Dunhuang has a long and complicated history, and because one of the caves that this dissertation will study was not previously identified to be a Tangut

cave, this literature review covers the history of the identification work on the Tangut caves in Dunhuang as well. Meanwhile, other related topics—the history of Tangut Buddhism and the art of the cave murals in Dunhuang—are also included in this section.

Research on Tangut Buddhist art is mainly centered on the art relics that have been preserved in the Dunhuang caves and in the former capital of the Tangut Empire—Khara Khoto. The mural paintings from the Dunhuang area that were produced in the first half of Tangut history (1038-1158 CE) have been frequent subjects of Chinese scholarly publications since the 1990s. Comparably, publications in the West have not substantially addressed Tangut Buddhist art in the Dunhuang caves. The focal point of the historical studies on Dunhuang art that are published in English is the highly praised Chinese Tang art. Therefore, in the literature review, both Chinese and English publications are considered for the discussions on Tangut Buddhist art.

1.4.1 Tārā Murals in Tangut Caves in Dunhuang

Most Chinese publications⁴ on Tangut mural paintings in the Dunhuang caves place a focus on those that were produced in the first half of the Tangut period (1038-1159 CE), which show a strong influence of Chinese Tang art. However, there are only a limited number of studies⁵ on Tangut Tantric art that were produced in the second half of

⁴ Zhao Xiaoxing 趙曉星, “Xixia shiqi de Dunhuang wutaishan tu” 西夏時期的敦煌五台山圖, 228-234; Sha Wutian 沙武田, and Li Guo 李國, “Dunhuang mogaoku di 3 ku wei Xixia dongku kao” 敦煌莫高窟第3窟為西夏洞窟考, 1-11. Shi Jinbo 史金波, “Xixia huangshi” 西夏皇室, 165-71; Wang Yanyun 王艷雲, “Hexi shiku Xixia bihua zhong de mile jingbian” 河西石窟西夏壁畫中的彌勒經變, 133-139; Lee, Yumin 李玉珉, “Dunhuang yaoshi jingbian yanjiu” 敦煌藥師經變研究, 1-39; Rössch, “Retracing the Origin of the Water-Moon Guanyin Iconography,” 19-54.

⁵ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, “Yulinku di 3 ku bukongjuansuo” 榆林窟第3窟不空羂索, 111-19; Linrothe, “Ushnishavijaya,” 1-24; Shi Wei 史偉, “Xixia hexi” 西夏河西, 100-105.

the Tangut period in the Dunhuang caves. Among them, Shi⁶ addresses the art of Tārā. In this study, Shi finds that many Tibetan visual elements are present in the Tangut murals of Tārā. For instance, unlike in the Chinese Tang's style of illustration, Green Tārā in both Tibetan and Tangut paintings is only decorated with jewels and garlands on the naked upper body, with a short skirt covering the lower part of the body.

Although the origin of the worship of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism was left unidentified, Shi believes that it is likely that Tangut Buddhists received the transmission from Tibetans, based on historical records of cultural interaction between Tibetans and Tanguts. By referring to the Tangut documents, Shi ascertains that highly regarded Tibetan monks were invited to the Tangut Empire to teach, and great historical Tibetan teachers' names frequently appeared in scriptures of Tangut translation. Shi considers the close political relationship and frequent religious communication between Tibet and Tangut from the eleventh century to the thirteenth century as the supporting evidence for his claim about the origin of the Tārā practice in Tangut. Tibetan art is the only source that is mentioned in Shi's study as the inspiration of Tangut Tantric art.

From my visit to the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, I could find evidence that Tārā murals in cave no. 2 and cave no. 5 indeed manifest influences of Tibetan Tantric art. However, there are also visual elements borrowed from Indian Gupta art in the two large cave murals of Tārā. According to Tibetan sources, many important Indian monks, including the renowned Sakya master Drakpa Gyeltsen, traveled to Tibet through Tangut in the late eleventh century.⁷ Meanwhile, the Mongols depended on Tangut to sustain a

⁶ Shi Wei 史偉, "Xixia hexi" 西夏河西, 102-103.

⁷ Davidson, *Tibetan Renaissance*, 257-260.

peaceful relationship with Tibet during the two centuries. As stated in Tibetan historical records, there was frequent religious and cultural communication between the Mongols and Tanguts before the death of Genghis Khan (1162-1227 CE).⁸ Therefore, other possible art and religious influences in Tangut Tantric art that were overlooked in Shi's work will be examined in this dissertation, based on the examination of the murals of Tārā in the Yulin and Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.

In addition, this dissertation will also discuss the unique Buddhist practice and culture in the Tangut Empire in the second half of its history, based on the art analysis of Tārā and Tangut Buddhist culture as manifested in the composition of Tārā murals. It will also discuss the relevant historical facts regarding the religious communication between the Tangut Empire and its neighbors.

1.4.2 Tangut Tantric Art in Dunhuang

According to the studies of the Dunhuang caves, the main theme of Tangut art is Buddhism. It is characterized by depictions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, illustrations of sutra stories, esoteric *maṇḍalas*, portraits of donors, as well as traditional decorative patterns. The most updated chronological grouping method is suggested by Sha.⁹ He divides the history of Tangut art into three periods based on the time of caves created in the Dunhuang area: early period (1002-1085 CE), middle period (1086-1192 CE), and later period (1193-1227 CE). In each period, Tangut art had its own style with different degrees of influence from the various neighboring cultures.

⁸ Berger et al., *Latter Days of the Law*, 102-107.

⁹ Sha Wutian 沙武田, “Dunhuang Xixia shiku fenqi” 敦煌西夏石窟分期, 23-34.

In general, scholars agree that when Tantric Buddhism became the state religion in the Tangut Empire in the middle of the twelfth century, Buddhist art also shifted its emphasis from illustrations of Mahayana sutras to portraits of Tantric deities. Important Tantric deities, such as Vairocana, Avalokiteśvara, and Tārā were most often depicted. Zhao,¹⁰ Linrothe,¹¹ and other scholars¹² suggest that Tangut art reflects a harmonious and skilled integration of Tibetan, Indian, and Chinese elements during this period. Yet, it has its own stylistic and thematic features, which can be summarized as follows.

The Unique Composition of Maṇḍala

By studying Yulin Cave no. 3, a cave that was active in the later time of Tangut occupation in Dunhuang, Linrothe¹³ finds a unique approach to the composition of *maṇḍala* in Tangut Buddhist art. In this *maṇḍala* painting of Amoghapāśa, the main deity and her throne are depicted inside a semi-section view of a standing stūpa. Such type of composition has only been found in the art tradition preserved in the Ajanta caves in India. This is because early Buddhism in India had its tradition of worshipping stūpas—instead of a direct depiction of the Buddha—prior the Gupta period (320 to 550 CE). Later, during the post-Gupta blooming of Indian art, images of the Buddha started to appear as fitted inside a standing semi-section stūpa. Other than the Ajanta caves in India, Buddhist sculptures of similar composition are seldom observed.

¹⁰ Zhao Shengliang 趙聲良, *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianshi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史, 221-225.

¹¹ Linrothe, "Peripheral Visions," 239–43.

¹² Dunnell, "Esoteric Buddhism Under the Xixia," 465-66; Mookerji, *The Gupta Empire*, 142-144; Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage in Dunhuang*, 91–98.

¹³ Linrothe, "Ushnishavijaya," 1-2.

In addition, Linrothe¹⁴ describes the uncommon alignment of groups of guardian goddesses in Tangut Buddhist Tantric art. In the design of Tantric *maṇḍalas*, Tibetan artists typically placed the four guardians respectively in the four directions, with their heads pointing to the gate of the mansion. However, in Tangut *maṇḍala* paintings, the four wrathful guardian goddesses are standing vertically as the main deity. They are grouped into pairs and occupy arched niches on both sides of the stūpa, rigidly aligned to each other. This rigid alignment is rare in Tibetan and Indian Tantric art, but it is a typical practice in Tangut Buddhist art.

In the same study, Linrothe reveals another unique feature of the Tangut composition of *maṇḍala*: the standing stūpa and goddesses are arranged in a square, symbolizing the celestial mansion from an aerial view. Although the celestial mansion in Tibetan Tantric art is also illustrated as a symbolic square, it does not include the stūpa inside it. Such *maṇḍala* compositions of a diagram surrounding a semi-section standing stūpa can be rarely found outside of Tangut caves.

In contrast, through studying *maṇḍala* paintings in the same cave, Jia¹⁵ focuses on the similarities of Tangut art practice in Tibetan and Indian art. For instance, the four guardians are decorated with jewels, beads, and dressed in only short lower garments, which is typical apparel for wrathful deities. This style originated in Indian art of the Pāla period (eighth-twelfth century CE) and was later widely employed in Tibetan art.

Infusion of Various Art Traditions

¹⁴ Linrothe, “Ushnishavijaya,” 8-9.

¹⁵ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, “Yulinku di 3 ku bukongjuansuo” 榆林窟第3窟不空羂索, 68-71.

In general, studies¹⁶ claim that Tangut art practice is greatly influenced by a diverse group of art traditions: Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, Uyghur, and Mongol. Tangut artists integrated these foreign art features and techniques into their works. Therefore, Buddhist murals by Tangut artists in Dunhuang present a balanced infusion of various art traditions. For instance, Linrothe (1996)¹⁷ describes the maṇḍala of Ushnīshavijayā in cave no. 3 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves and points out that the wrathful guardians are illustrated in a Tibetan esoteric style and the Bodhisattvas and the celestial beings on the clouds are represented similarly to Chinese *apsara*, which were widely depicted in Chinese Tang art. The main deity is dressed only in a lower garment and is graced with prominent crowns, large round earrings, various bracelets, and sets of necklaces. These adornments were originally commonly seen in Indian Pāla art and later in Tibetan art.

Dancing Bodhisattva in Indian Style

While the Chinese, Tibetan, and Uyghur influences seem to be direct and reasonable based on the frequent interaction with these neighbors, Indian art can be just as influential and important to Tangut mural art, according to recent publications¹⁸ on the cave no. 3 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.

¹⁶ Lojda, Klimburg-Salter, and Strinu, “Transfer of Buddhism,” 121–46; Berger et al., *Latter Days of the Law*, 101–102; Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, “Dunhuang yaoshi jingbian yanjiu” 敦煌藥師經變研究, 24; Zhao Xiaoxing 趙曉星, “Xixia shiqi de Dunhuang wutaishan tu” 西夏時期的敦煌五台山圖, 233–34.

¹⁷ Linrothe, “Ushnīshavijaya,” 1–24.

¹⁸ Sha Wutian 沙武田, and Li Guo 李國, “Dunhuang mogaoku di 3 ku wei Xixia dongku kao” 敦煌莫高窟3窟为西夏洞窟考, 4–8; Zhao Shengliang 趙聲良, *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianshi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史, 221–225.

In this cave, figures that are depicted purely in the Indian style are found. There is an offering Bodhisattva on the northern wall. She is in a slender female form in a dancing posture with narrow shoulders, full breasts, and a trim waist. She is adorned with a crown of flowers. Her right arm lifts to reach a tree branch and her left arm smoothly stretches downward with the palm facing up. Her body twists as she is dancing, and her legs are crossed. Her upper body is only decorated by necklaces and a snake; the lower body garment is a short “miniskirt” in white with a green ribbon. Such appareling and posing of a Bodhisattva are directly learned from Indian Pāla art, which had been almost forbidden in female depictions in Chinese Song art and hardly existed in Tibetan art during the twelfth century.

1.4.3 Tangut Cave Identification in the Dunhuang Area

For decades, archeologists and historians have been learning about the history of Dunhuang through historical documents that were discovered in the library cave at the Mogao site. However, the library cave was closed off at the beginning of the eleventh century, when the Tangut took over the rulership of Dunhuang. In general, scholars agree that Dunhuang became part of the Tangut Empire in 1036 CE and remained as such until Tangut was annihilated by the Mongols in 1227 CE. Therefore, any documents about Tangut's occupation and the creation of the Tangut caves in Dunhuang were not likely to be found in the library cave. The identification work of the Tangut caves mainly relies on art historians' assumptions based on artistic evidence in the cave murals themselves. Scholars have engaged with much effort in the identification work since the first half of

the twentieth century. Yet new discoveries always override the previous conclusions, and the debate continues up to the present.

Through a three-month field reconnaissance in 1964, Shi¹⁹ and his Dunhuang Tangut caves research team claimed over eighty caves to be Tangut caves. In 1982, Dunhuang yanjiu yuan 敦煌研究院 (Dunhuang Research Academy) published the *Dunhuang mogaoku neirong zonglu* 敦煌莫高窟內容總錄 (*Complete Records of Dunhuang Mogao Cave Interior*)²⁰ and argued for the existence of eighty-two Tangut caves in the Dunhuang area. Among them were sixty-six caves that were established by the Tanguts and sixteen caves that were rebuilt by the Tanguts during the time of occupation. Based on this, Tangut caves make up one-sixth of the total number of Dunhuang caves. Yet, as Wang²¹ points out, these caves are only at the Mogao site and the Yulin site. In the same year, Liu (1982)²² argues that there are seventy-seven caves at the Mogao site and eleven caves at the Yulin site that belonged to the Tangut Empire. Liu also divides them into three groups based on the time they were established, as suggested by colophons and artistic features. Liu also identifies twenty-three caves from the group of Tangut caves and re-classifies them as Uyghur caves in his 1987 publication.

In 1998, based on new discoveries at the Eastern and Western Thousand Buddha sites, in addition to progressive studies on Tangut art in Dunhuang murals made during the previous ten years, Liu once again updates his identification of Tangut caves by

¹⁹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, “Xixia huangshi” 西夏皇室, 165–71.

²⁰ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Dunhuang mogaoku neirong zonglu* 敦煌莫高窟內容總錄, 3.

²¹ Wang Huimin 王惠民, “Dunhuang Xixia dongku fenqi” 敦煌西夏洞窟分期, 59–65.

²² Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, “Guasha Xixia Shiku Gailun” 瓜沙西夏石窟概論, 174–175.

classifying cave no. 2 and no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves site as later Tangut period.²³ Meanwhile, Sha²⁴ applies his analysis of features and characteristics of Tangut art to the identification of debatable Tangut caves. Sha says that it is safe to believe that among these caves, eleven from the Yulin site²⁵ and four from the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves site²⁶ were created by Tanguts. Later, Zhang²⁷ finds a group of photos taken in the 1920s that display four caves constructed and painted during the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534 CE). Due to an earthquake that took place between the 1920s and 1930s, those Northern Wei caves on the very top level of the cliff were destroyed and never discovered by modern researchers. Based on art analysis, Zhang also states that cave no. 6 is also a Tangut cave, rather than a later Yuan cave, along with caves nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7. In addition, through analyzing donors' portraits, Zhang²⁸ reveals the identities of different groups of donors in cave no. 5 and confirms the time of the creation of the cave to be during the late Tangut occupation in Guazhou.

Meanwhile, Chang conducts her dissertation²⁹ on identifying each of the deities in all the murals in cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, and traces the sources and models of these Tangut murals. However, due to the severe damage of the murals of these caves, many identifying features of the deities are no longer visible. Chang

²³ Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, "Dunhuang Xixia dongku fenqi zaiyi" 敦煌西夏洞窟分期再議, 1–4.

²⁴ Sha, Wutian 沙武田, "Dunhuang Xixia shiku fenqi" 敦煌西夏石窟分期, 23–34.

²⁵ Caves no. 10, no. 21, no. 22, no. 26, no. 13, no. 17, no. 14, no. 15, no. 29, no. 2, and no. 3.

²⁶ Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves: no. 2, no. 4, no. 5, no. 7.

²⁷ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, "Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang" 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 71–81.

²⁸ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku" 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 49–59.

²⁹ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, "Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu" 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究.

identified each figure based on insufficient evidence and some of her identification work has been proven inaccurate in subsequent studies.³⁰ Therefore, in Chapter 4, when discussing the composition of cave no. 5, Chang's research will not be a fundamental reference.

1.4.4 Tangut Buddhism

Early Period (1003 CE-1159 CE)

Prior to the establishment of the Tangut Empire, Buddhism had already been embraced by Tanguts. Shi (1988)³¹ claims that the rapid development of Buddhism in Tangut was a result of the imperial court's promotion and support of the religion. The first Emperor of Tangut, Emperor Jingzong (1003-1048 CE), popularized Buddhism by using his political power. Though the Tangut Empire was embraced by northwestern kingdoms and tribes where Buddhism was already well established and developed—such as Tibet and Mongol—Emperor Jingzong of Tangut (r. 1032-1048) nevertheless made a request of Buddhist teachings from the farther neighbor—Song China (960-1279 CE)—in 1031 CE and 1035 CE. In investigating the reason behind the request, Sen³² follows Frederick Mote,³³ who claimed that Emperor Jingzong of Tangut respected Chinese culture as the highest established civilization. In addition, Shi (1988)³⁴ explains two additional motives behind the request: first, that Emperor Jingzong saw an urgent need

³⁰ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang” 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 71-81; Jia Weiwei 賈維維, “Xixia shiku zaoxiang” 西夏石窟造像, 20-36.

³¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 23-27.

³² Sen, *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade*, 164.

³³ Mote, *Imperial China*, 161-164.

³⁴ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 25-31.

for religious relief for his fellow Tanguts after decades of war, and second, the emperor wanted to establish future political interaction with Song China. Shi finds that the most frequently portrayed figure in the Dunhuang caves in the early period of Tangut was Medicine Buddha, who is generally praised and worshipped for healing and protection from diseases and harmful spirits. Xie³⁵ supports the claim that seeking religious relief for healing and protection was the essential motive for the request of the Buddhist teachings from Song China. He explains that among the silk paintings discovered in Khara Khoto, one of the more frequent renderings of Śākyamuni Buddha is with subduing mudra, which suggests that one of the main purposes of Buddhism for Tanguts was to pacify evil spirits and harmful beings.

As a result, the Tangut court initiated and maintained the Buddhism-related communication with Song by requesting the Chinese Buddhist canon six times. Many Chinese Buddhist monks were invited to Tangut to preach. Chinese Buddhism heavily influenced Tangut Buddhism during this time, and this is also reflected in Tangut art in its early period.³⁶

Scholars³⁷ agree that early Tangut art largely consists of imitation of Chinese art from the Later Tang and Song dynasties. However, Tangut artists were not as skilled as Chinese artists during that time. The features of early Tangut art include a more simplified landscape for the background of the Buddhas, fewer details in the illustrations

³⁵ Xie Jisheng 謝繼勝, *Heishuicheng chutu Xixia tangka yanjiu* 黑水城出土西夏唐卡研究, 35-73.

³⁶ Solonin, "Hongzhou Buddhism in Xixia," 57-58.

³⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 168-170; Chen Yuning 陳育寧, and Tang Xiaofang 湯曉芳, "Xixia yishu yanjiu ji tezheng renshi" 西夏藝術研究及特徵認識, 53-58; Zhao Shengliang 趙聲良, *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianshi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史, 222-23. Sha Wutian 沙武田, "Dunhuang Xixia shiku fenqi" 敦煌西夏石窟分期, 23-34.

of sutra stories, as well as more rigid alignment of accompanying Bodhisattvas and goddess. These features allowed studies in the present day to differentiate early Tangut art from Song Chinese art.

Later Period (1159-1227 CE)

Tantric Buddhism became mainstream in Tangut Buddhism in the second half of its history. Beginning in the twelfth century, transmissions and teachings of Tantric Buddhism entered the Tangut Empire. While Chinese studies mainly focus on the influences of Tibetan Buddhism, Dunnell (1996)³⁸ asserts that Tibetan monks, Mongol monks, as well as Indian and Central Asian monks who were on their way to Song China through Hexi Corridor, all played important roles in the spread of Tantric Buddhism in Tangut.

Based on Tibetan historical records, the first patriarch of Karma Kagyu lineage, Dusum Khyenpa, was highly respected by Emperor Renzong (1124-1193 CE) of Tangut and his disciple Geshe Sowa was sent as a representative to Tangut to preach. Meanwhile, monk Jueben, a disciple of the fifth patriarch of Sakya lineage—Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsen (1147–1216 CE)—was also invited to preach and was honored as the preceptor of all Tangut Buddhists by the twelfth century. From these significant historical events, scholars³⁹ have reason to believe that in the middle of the twelfth century, Tangut Buddhism's focus shifted from Chinese Buddhism to Tantric Buddhism. Furthermore,

³⁸ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*,” 27-28.

³⁹ Kessler, *Song Blue and White Porcelain*, 368; Meinert, *Transfer of Buddhism*, 76-77; Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 3; Berger et al., *Latter Days of the Law*, 99-100; Dunnell, *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras*, 465-466.

based on the cave studies in Dunhuang, Duan⁴⁰ determined the specific year of 1159 CE as the moment when Tantric Buddhism was officially introduced to Tangut from Tibet and then later became dominant.

Tangut Tantric Buddhism was established and developed with teaching sources from various cultures. However, previous studies⁴¹ argue that the influence of Tibetan Buddhism was incomparably significant. By studying the *Tiansheng gaijiu Xxinding lüding* 天盛改舊新定律定 (*New Law and Rules of Tiansheng Era*) published in the Renxiao Tiansheng era (1149-1169 CE), Shi (2007) finds that the official head of the Tangut monastics was required to be skilled in reciting more than ten sutras and mantras, most of which were Tibetan texts. Moreover, this person had to be examined by a scholar who was skilled in Tibetan. Moreover, Shi also locates archeological evidence of a manuscript that was written in Tangut with Tibetan phonetic notations. Chinese Buddhist texts with commentary in Tibetan were also found in Khara Khoto.

Cave Murals in Dunhuang

The art of Dunhuang was created by enormous human effort and has been preserved in the rock-cut caves for centuries. After Aurel Stein (1862-1943) and Paul Pelliot (1878-1945) discovered the site with the finest art and introduced that to the Western world at the beginning of the twentieth century, Dunhuang art received much attention from the West. In the academy, studies on the history of Dunhuang was primarily based on the documents and artworks that were taken back to Europe by Stein

⁴⁰ Duan, *Dunhuang Art*, 164.

⁴¹ Li, “The Influence of Tibetan Buddhism on Xi Xia,” 159-172.

and Pelliot. Nevertheless, there was relatively little interest in Dunhuang art and history in China at that time. The Dunhuang art was publicized in China in the 1940s when Wu Zuoren 吳作人 (1908-1997) and Zhang Daqian 張大千 (1899-1983) arrived in Dunhuang and started their own projects aimed at protecting the cave murals.⁴²

Today, Dunhuang cave murals receive immeasurable praise and appreciation worldwide. Numerous art and historical studies on the Dunhuang caves have been conducted all over the world. Dunhuang art experienced its greatest flourishing during the Sui (581-618 CE) and Tang (618-907 CE) dynasties. It is generally accepted that the greatest Chinese art of Dunhuang was produced during the Sui and Tang dynasties.⁴³ Consequently, the Sui-Tang caves and murals comprise the largest portion of the Dunhuang art studies.⁴⁴

Dunhuang cave murals depict mainly Buddhist themes. Scholars present analyses on these illustrations of the Jataka tales, the life of the Buddha, Buddha preaching the Dharma, Bodhisattvas, and the content of the sutras.⁴⁵

Furthermore, some scholars also clarify and analyze the historical background and the Buddhist culture expressed in the murals, using as supporting evidence the donor images, decorative patterns, and colophons.⁴⁶ For instance, Ning (2003) analyzes the

⁴² Duan, *Dunhuang Art*, 52-53.

⁴³ Fraser, *Performing the Visual*, 109-110.

⁴⁴ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 35-36.

⁴⁵ Bell, *Didactic Narration*, 112-116; Karetzky, *Early Buddhist Narrative Art*, 75-77; Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, "Dunhuang yaoshi jingbian yanjiu" 敦煌藥師經變研究, 1-40; Yü, *Kuan-Yin*, 223-63; Rössch, "Retracing the Origin of the Water-Moon Guanyin Iconography," 19-54; Hung, "What Is Bianxiang?," 111-92; Hung, "Reborn in Paradise," 52-60.

⁴⁶ Duan, Wenjie. "Cultural Exchange Between China and West" 402-403; Ning, "Gender Politics in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Art," 28-39; Ning, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China*, 148-149; Ma

images of Vairocana Buddha in the Dunhuang caves and Longmen grottoes that were built during and after Empress Wu Zetian (624-705 CE)'s time and finds the integration of feminine features in the depictions of Vairocana Buddha. Hence, Ning (2003) claims that the empowered feminine depiction of Vairocana Buddha likely had its nascence in the blooming female power in the Tang court during that time. Through a re-examination of a set of murals and corresponding documents that were sponsored by the Zhai family in the Early Tang period (629-645 CE), Ning (2004) presents the important historical and social values of this elite Dunhuang family. He further discovers the Zhai family's political preference and pursuit in their choices of translated scriptural texts for art illustration, as well as the arrangement of the assembly of donors.

Thus, the importance of studying the Dunhuang cave murals has been upheld by scholars for nearly a century. It is worthwhile not only for the world to appreciate the unique presentation and the great achievement of Dunhuang art, but also to comprehend the hidden history of the highly active Dunhuang area and the Silk Road.

1.5 Methodology

This dissertation aims to provide a thorough understanding of Tārā in the Tangut Buddhist culture by relying on the analysis of cave images of Tārā in the Yulin and Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves. Therefore, the fieldwork is necessary so that I can observe the images in the context of the caves and the geographic conditions of northwestern China. Meanwhile, a comprehensive understanding of Tangut history and

Shichang, "Buddhist Cave-temples and the Cao Family," 316; Wong, "A Reassessment of the Representation of Mt. Wutai," 27–30.

Buddhism based on historical and religious texts and evidence are laid out as the foundation of the main argument and discussion. For instance, the historical background of the given caves is primarily understood through the analysis of the patrons' illustrations and inscriptions inside the caves.

The dissertation is conducted in three progressive stages: 1) field study on the murals of Tārā in the Dunhuang caves and caves in Khara Khoto; 2) image analysis and discussion on the murals of Tārā; 3) reflective discussion on the history and culture of Tangut Tantric Buddhism as well as Tangut Buddhism in Dunhuang. Each process is specified as below.

1.5.1 Field Study

Murals and paintings on silk and paper are the subject of the study of Tangut art. Cave murals and many paintings on silk were discovered in the Dunhuang caves and the capital of the Tangut Empire, Khara Khoto. This dissertation also employs analysis and discussion of the murals and paintings discovered in both Dunhuang and Khara Khoto with an emphasis on the murals of Tārā in the Dunhuang caves. The murals and paintings discovered in Khara Khoto are primarily used for comparison and discussion.

The preliminary visit to the Dunhuang caves was made in the summer of 2016 when basic notes of these murals were taken. During the first visit, popular caves at the Mogao site were visited. Several caves at the Yulin and Eastern Thousand Buddha sites that were exclusively open for scholars and archeologists related to Dunhuang Research Academy were also visited, including many Tangut caves. However, due to the harsh living conditions, such as the desert weather, and the extremely large number of visitors

in Dunhuang during the summer, I was not given permission for a longer stay in these caves. Therefore, another visit during winter was needed for my purpose of research.

Based on observations from the preliminary visit and data research through *Dunhuang Research Academy Journal*, it was determined that caves that contained the representation of Tārā as the main deity and were built during the Tangut period were cave no. 2 and cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, and cave no. 4 at the Yulin Caves. These caves would be the focus of investigation for the second visit.

The second visit to the Dunhuang caves took place during the winter of 2017 to avoid the peak season of traveling in Dunhuang. On this visit, a detailed examination of the murals and the given caves was made, with a focus on the artistic elements and composition of the murals as well as the caves themselves. Due to the limitations on photographing inside the caves, only detailed notes and sketches were taken for my further analysis and discussion. Archived photocopies of the murals inside the given caves were requested officially from the Dunhuang Research Academy and are included in this project as reference.

Once the first draft of the description and investigation on the Dunhuang murals was completed, another visit to these Dunhuang caves was needed to confirm the validity of the description and investigation work. Meanwhile, a visit to Khara Khoto for Tārā paintings was needed for comparison with the murals of Tārā in the Dunhuang caves. These two places could be visited in one trip, and this was carried out at the beginning of 2019.

1.5.2 Art Analysis and Discussion

First, the given Tārā murals are closely examined with respect to composition, art styles, religious elements, and coloring techniques. Due to lacking the textual records of the transmission of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism, I also discuss the models of the Tangut Tārā murals in order to trace the origins of transmission. I reference the silk paintings of Tārā found in Khara Khoto and Tārā paintings of Indian, Tibetan, and Nepalese traditions and compare these to related religious texts. Afterwards, murals of the caves in which the Tangut Tārā murals exist, as well as the art arrangement of the caves, are introduced and discussed to provide more art, religious, and historical information for the discussion in the next step. Particularly, the analysis of the patrons' portraits provides valuable information for the historical and religious discussion of the caves.

1.5.3 Historical Reflective Discussion

By providing historical evidence—existing Tangut historical studies and patrons' colophons inside the caves—the dissertation further discusses the religious and cultural significance of Tārā among Tangut Buddhists. It also examines how the art presentation of Tārā in these Tangut murals reflects the essential characteristics of Tangut Vajrayana Buddhism.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This dissertation aims to provide detailed analysis and comparison of the visual representations of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism, to offer an understanding of Tangut Tantric Buddhism through the lens of art. As Yü⁴⁷ indicates in her book, to comprehensively

⁴⁷ Yü, *Kuan-Yin*, 22-23.

study Chinese religions, the effective approach is to combine the analysis of the historical texts with visual images. Therefore, Tārā's important role in the history of Tangut Buddhism needs to be revealed in order to complete the understanding of Tangut Buddhism through a comprehensive study based on fieldwork, texts, and history.

Chapter 2. Historical Background

2.1 History of Tangut

The Tanguts (西夏, Western Xia or Xi Xia) are generally regarded as a group of people belonging to the tribe known as Dangxiang Qiang (黨項羌) in Chinese historical studies. Tibetans and Mongols referred to them as Miñak. Tanguts migrated from the northeastern Tibet during the expansion of Tibet. They later founded the Great Tangut Empire of White and High (白高大夏國, also known as the Tangut Empire) that remained in existence for nearly two centuries.

2.1.1 Prior to the Establishment of the Tangut Empire

Before the establishment of the Tangut Empire (Xi Xia Empire), a tribe known as Tangut or Dangxiang Qiang, had been residing in the Ordos and Hexi Corridors,⁴⁸ surrounded by China Tang, Tibet, Mongol, and Uyghur. Before the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), the Tangut tribe mainly stayed in the area that is now in the Southeast of Qinghai Province, China. During the early Tang period (618-712 CE), while the Tangut tribe expanded its territory, it also confronted military forces and political pressure from Tibet. Therefore, the Tangut had to request permission from the Chinese Tang court to migrate further into China, moving closer to the central plains. During the middle Tang period (766-835 CE), the Tangut relocated to a new area that is now east of Gansu Province, Ningxia Province, and north of Shaanxi Province of China. Until the An

⁴⁸ Present-day: Ningxia Province, Shaanxi Province, Gansu Province, and Inner Mongolia.

Lushan rebellion (755-763 CE), Tangut became the dominant power in that area.⁴⁹ During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–979 CE), the Tangut tribe politically relied on each of the five dynasties respectively and built up its military power during battles with other neighboring tribes and states. At the beginning of the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE), the leader of the Tangut tribe became an official under the Song court. However, the Tangut leader Li Jiqian (李继迁, 963-1004 CE) rebelled against the control of the Song court and attempted to claim independence on behalf of Tangut. Meanwhile, Li Jiqian forged a connection with Liao (907-1125 CE) and the Liao court recognized him as the “Prince of Xia” (夏国王 Xixia Wang). After the fifteen-year seesaw battle back and forth with Song China, he eventually forced the Song court to retitle him as the *Dingnan Jiedushi* (定難節度使) and became the General with control over the five states centered in Xiazhou (夏州).⁵⁰ Later, he conquered Lingzhou (靈州)⁵¹ and built the Xiping Mansion (西平府 xiping fu), which became the political center of the Tangut tribe.

After Li Jiqian passed away, his son Li Deming (李德明 981-1032 CE) succeeded to the throne. Generally, Li Deming maintained a friendly relationship with the Song court. In return, the Song court gave a large amount of silver, silk, and tea as a gift to the Tangut. In 1028, Li Deming sent his son, Li Yuanhao (1003-1048 CE), to conquer Ganzhou (甘州).⁵² Not long after the conquest of Ganzhou, Guazhou (瓜洲)⁵³ and

⁴⁹ Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*, 171-72.

⁵⁰ Present-day: Jingbian County (靖邊縣), Shaanxi Province.

⁵¹ Present-day: Lingwu County (靈武縣), Ningxia Province.

⁵² Present-day: Zhangye (張掖), Gansu Province.

⁵³ Present-day: Anxi (安西), Gansu Province.

Shazhou (沙州)⁵⁴ also surrendered to the Tangut. In 1032, Li Yuanhao conquered Liangzhou (涼州).⁵⁵ From that point on, the Tangut controlled the entire Hexi Corridor, which in turn became the foundation for the rise of the Tangut Empire. In the same year, Li Jiqian passed away and the Song court enfeoffed Li Yuanhao as the “Prince of Xiping” (西平王).⁵⁶

During the reign of Li Yuanhao, the Tangut military force grew in strength and Li Yuanhao’s political power was significantly enhanced. The Tangut’s territory was once again expanded by using military force against the Song, Tibet, and Uyghur. By then, the Tangut territory covered present-day Ningxia Province, most of Gansu, the North of Shaanxi, the West of Inner Mongolia, and the East of Qinghai, which left the Tangut state in a powerful position such that it that could act as a counterweight to Song China and Liao Khitan. Internally, Li Yuanhao implemented a series of policies to develop an independent cultural and political system within the state as foundation for the establishment of the Tangut Empire.⁵⁷

2.1.2 The Tangut Empire

Six years later, in 1038, Li Yuanhao founded the Great Tangut Empire of White and High (白高大夏國). Initially, the Song court refused to recognize Tangut as an independent state. Wars were frequently initiated by Song China, with the aim of

⁵⁴ Present-day: Dunhuang (敦煌), Gansu Province.

⁵⁵ Present-day: Wuwei (武威), Gansu Province.

⁵⁶ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 46-47.

⁵⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, “Xixia xue gaishuo” 西夏学概说, 167-68.

invading the Tangut Empire. After many failures in attempted invasion, Song China began seeking a resolution for peace. Nevertheless, after battling in wars for many years, the Tanguts were overwhelmed by the Chinese military's invasion, and were exhausted, physically and financially. Although they had been able to conquer states in the previous years, maintaining a peaceful state at the frontier turned out to also be challenging for the Tangut. Therefore, they compromised and reached an agreement: Tangut would declare itself a vassal to the Song court and Song would accept the independence of Tangut.⁵⁸

After Yuanhao died in 1048 CE, his son Li Liangzuo (李諒祚, 1047-1067 CE) succeeded to the throne while he was an infant. In fact, however, Liangzuo's mother, dowager Mozang Shi (摩藏氏), and his uncle, Mozang Epang (沒藏訛龐), were in control of the court. During this time, Tangut and Song occasionally enjoyed periods of peace, but the wars had not completely ceased. When Li Liangzuo was fourteen years old, he took over the reins of the government by murdering his uncle. However, Liangzuo died only a few years later at age twenty, and his son Li Bingchang (李秉常, 1061-1086 CE) thus succeeded to the throne. Again, it was Bingchang's mother, dowager Liang shi (梁氏), and his maternal uncle, Liang Yimai (梁乙埋), who ruled the court until Bingchang reached the age of sixteen. When Li Bingchang took over the rule of the court, he made a stand for peace with Song, going against his mother's will. Bingchang was thus imprisoned at Xingqing fu (興慶府). At this moment, Song took advantage of the politically vulnerable situation of the Tangut court and sent five armies to invade Tangut, which ended with the defeat of Song.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 5-7.

⁵⁹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia shehui* 西夏社會, 59-65.

After Bingchang died, his son Li Qianshun (李乾順, 1084-1339 CE) succeeded to the throne when he was three years old. Once again, it is the mother and uncle who serve as heads of the court instead. When Qianshun came into power, he decided to revive good relations with Liao. After Jin's rebellion against Liao (Jurchen, 1115-1234), the Tangut turned to Jin and took advantage of the opportunity to expand its territory. While Qianshun was engaged in the development of Tangut culture, national studies, and laws, his mother and her associates attempted to equalize their power in the court with the emperor. The conflict between the two sides of the Tangut royal family thus continued to heat up. All the while, commercial communication with Song China during Qianshun's reign did become more frequent and beneficial. Relations with Tibet also improved during his reign.

When Qianshun's son Li Renxiao (李仁孝, 1124-1193 CE) succeeded to the throne, the previous defector, the Khitan, rebelled against the Tangut court, which brought more bloody wars to the empire. Adding to the strain for the Tangut people, severe famine and devastating earthquakes occurred in the year 1143, which resulted in harsher living conditions and led to Duo E's (哆訛) grand-scale uprising. The uprising was eventually quashed through battles. However, Ren Dejing (任德敬) gradually gained military strength and political power in the battles with Duo E, and so he attempted to divide the Tangut and claimed himself as the lord of his own kingdom. Eventually, with the support from Jin, Renxiao murdered Ren Dejing and his partners and suppressed the separation of the empire. Afterward, Renxiao focused on developing agriculture and animal husbandry, national studies, and imperial examination, providing a foundation for the Tangut culture and legal system. It is also worth noting that he undertook the printing

of Buddhist texts. It was at this time that the Tangut Empire came into a period of great prosperity.⁶⁰

It is after Renxiao's death that Tangut moves into its late period. At this time, both internal and external issues became more and more severe. The Mongols grew in strength and constantly attacked the Tangut. In the last thirty years of the Tangut Empire, the emperor's power was no longer stable, largely in part to the five consecutive successions to the throne as well as the constant wars to defend the Mongols' attack. In 1227, the Mongols conquered the capital, Khara Koto, along with Guazhou, Ganzhou, and Lingzhou. Eventually, the Mongols vanquished the Tangut Empire.⁶¹

The Tangut Empire existed for one hundred and ninety years in history, ruled by ten emperors. Relying on its military power, the Tangut Empire was able to balance itself between Song China, Liao, and Jin. At present, it is regarded as a historically and culturally important dynasty in the history of China. After the conquest of the Mongols, the remaining Tanguts either went to Tibet and China for refuge or stayed in the former Tangut territory and blended into their new cultures.

The history of Tangut, including the time when Tangut was merely an informal group of tribes, was fraught with wars, civil strife, and natural disasters. From the tenth century onward, the Tangut army was constantly defending against Song invasion. Later, in 1002, with support and help from Liao, Tangut expanded its territory through wars against Song. The wars between Song and Tangut were constant and intensive, especially after the official establishment of the Tangut Empire in 1038. The bloody wars exhausted

⁶⁰ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia xue gaishuo" 西夏学概说, 168.

⁶¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia xue gaishuo" 西夏学概说, 168.

both Song's and Tangut's military forces and caused distress for many citizens.

Unfortunately, even after entering the peaceful period with Song in 1044, Tangut citizens then experienced devastating civil wars and natural disasters that were financially and physically destructive to the Tangut civilization. At the same time, the destructive effects also led to a rapid decline in Dunhuang's economic and cultural development. Dunhuang gradually lost its importance on the Silk Road and its position as being the commercial and cultural center for Tanguts, Chinese, Tibetans, and Central Asians.⁶²

2.2 Tangut Buddhism

2.2.1 The Formation of Tangut Buddhism

The Tangut Empire was known to be a Buddhist state where Buddhist teachings were central to the core values of the Tangut culture, and Buddhist monastics and teachers received much respect and veneration from the royal court and citizens. In her book, *The Great State of White and High: Buddhism and State Formation in Eleventh-Century Xia*, Dunnell points out that Tangut Buddhism was closely related to the establishment of the Tangut Empire in its early history. Similar to other Asian states and countries, the development of Buddhism in Tangut was strongly promoted and supported by the ruling class for many reasons. One of the most critical reasons was the hope that it would enhance the court's political power over the state or country. Tangut was no exception. Even so, Buddhism was favored by the Tangut people before the time of the Tangut Empire. Buddhism took root in Tangut for historical and practical reasons.

⁶² Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 76-77.

As discussed earlier, Tangut as a tribe migrated from the northeast of Tibet into the region later known as the Tangut Empire. This region, before the Tanguts moved in, was ruled by Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Guiyi Circuit (歸義軍 *guiyi jun*) and it had been a Buddhist region since the time of the Northern dynasties for seven centuries. It was a crucial area for Buddhist transmission between the West⁶³ and Central China. Therefore, when the Tanguts moved into this region, they accepted this advanced belief system and gradually abandoned their tribal religion.⁶⁴

Meanwhile, neighbors of the Tangut also had a great influence on the formation of Tangut Buddhism. Since the Tang dynasty, the Chinese court had been communicating with the Tangut tribe through Buddhism. The Tangut received Buddhist canons and monastic teachings primarily from Chinese Mahayana Buddhism because the Tangut Empire relied generally on the Chinese court's support. In the second half of its history, due to the shift of diplomatic policies, Tangut Buddhism was significantly influenced by the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, which eventually became the dominant tradition in Tangut Buddhism.⁶⁵

Recent research⁶⁶ suggests that the study on Tangut Buddhism should be discussed in a broader perspective based on Tangut's relations with its neighboring states, instead of focusing exclusively on China and Tibet. That is to say, the context should be expanded to include other neighbors in this region, most importantly, Khitan Liao and

⁶³ "The West" refers to India and Central Asia.

⁶⁴ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 23.

⁶⁵ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 26-27.

⁶⁶ Solonin, "Khitan Connection of Tangut Buddhism," 371-395; Solonin, "The Glimpses of Tangut Buddhism," 66-127; Solonin, "Buddhist Connections between the Liao and Xixia," 171-219; Huang, S., "Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces," 129-82.

Jurchen. Solonin⁶⁷ also suggests that the study of Tangut Buddhism should not be limited by the concept of schools and lineages that is traditionally used in Buddhist studies. Neighboring Liao has been a subject of recent study and is considered to have greatly contributed to the formation of Tangut Buddhism. In Solonin's research, he discovers that the Huayan school in Tangut Buddhism was not initially transmitted from the Chinese Huayan school. In fact, it was originally from the tradition of *yuanjiao* (圓教, "all-rounded perfect teaching") in Liao Buddhism. Due to religious persecution in India, Central Asia, and Mongolia by Muslims, Buddhist monks and teachers from these regions also contributed to the spread of Buddhism in Tangut.

Another essential historical reason for the spread of Buddhism in Tangut was that both Tangut citizens and emperors needed Buddhism. Tangut citizens had suffered many hardships due to political chaos and constant warfare for centuries, particularly during the period of migration. Even after the founding of the Tangut Empire, the internal and external military and political crises did not cease. Tangut citizens suffered from unbearable taxes and were forced to participate in the constant wars. Therefore, the hopeless Tanguts found Buddhist concepts such as "impermanence," "perfection of endurance," "liberation," and "rebirth in the Pure Land of Amitābha," to be a remedy for their depression and spiritual support for confronting the difficult realities of their lives.⁶⁸ For instance, the *Infinite Light Sutra* (*Longer Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra*, 無量壽經), contains a description of how painful and stressful a human life is in this secular world. Living without enough necessities in a world without clear laws and morals was the reality of the

⁶⁷ Solonin, "Buddhist Connections between the Liao and Xixia," 217-219.

⁶⁸ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 158-159.

life situation for many Tanguts. Meanwhile, the sutra illustrates how comfortable and peaceful life is in the Pure Land: there is no war, no fighting, no poverty, no suffering. Instead, there are fragrant flowers, beautiful music, jeweled trees, refreshing breezes, and all life's requisites that instantaneously appear when desired. Therefore, the Tanguts' hardships made the presentation of the Pure Land, as rendered by the Amitābha Pure Land school, all the more appealing. It was considered the most developed sect in Tangut Mahayana Buddhism.⁶⁹ In the meantime, Tangut emperors also sought a more strategic spiritual means to pacify their people in times of hardship under their oppression. They chose Buddhist concepts to convince Tangut citizenry to accept unbearable taxes and endure constant chaos so they could further develop their power and expand their territory.⁷⁰

Moreover, the Tangut rulers found that the Buddhist pantheon provided an ideal model for society's class system. In the Buddhist pantheon, Śākyamuni Buddha is the head of all local deities and instructs their activities. This suited the political pursuits of the new Tangut emperor, Yuanhao. Before the founding of the Tangut Empire, the Tangut tribe consisted of many clans. Inspired by the ownership of the Chinese court and other northern states, heads of the major clans of Tangut gradually extended their political power onto other clans. Eventually, an emperor of all Tangut clans emerged. This new political power structure made use of this "ideal-world" example in order to subjugate the sub-clans. In this way, Buddhism entered the reign of Yuanhao.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Sun Changsheng 孫昌盛, "Lüelun Xixia de Jingtu Xinyang" 略論西夏的淨土信仰, 27–30.

⁷⁰ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 29–30.

⁷¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 30.

Requests for the Chinese Buddhist Canon

Yuanhao's court initiated communication with Song via Buddhism by requesting the Chinese Buddhist canon and inviting Chinese Buddhist monks to teach in Tangut. The court requested the Buddhist canon in exchange for horses from the Song a total of six times, and most frequently during the first forty years of its history. In 1031, Li Deming, as the leader of the Tangut tribe, officially initiated the request of the Chinese Buddhist canon from the Song court in exchange for seventy horses. His son Yuanhao renewed the unfulfilled request of Chinese Buddhist canon to Song in 1035—this time for fifty horses—which was finally fulfilled by the Song court.⁷²

In the year 1047, Yuanhao founded a large temple, namely Gaotai Temple (高台寺), to store the Buddhist canon that was granted by the Song court. He also invited Uyghur monks to expound the Buddhist sutras and translate scriptures inside the temple.⁷³

Later, in 1055, when Empress Mozang ruled the court on behalf of her son Liangzuo, and Emperor Song Renzong (宋仁宗, 1010-1063) received tribute from Tangut, the Tangut court received a Chinese Buddhist canon as a way of returning gratitude. Empress Mozang sponsored the building of the large Chengtian Temple (承天寺) and it was opened in the tenth month of the same year. According to the colophon, this temple was built with the wishes of longevity for Liangzuo and for the Li family's ever-lasting ownership of Tangut. The purpose of the temple was to store the Chinese

⁷² Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 60-63.

⁷³ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 44-45.

Buddhist canon gifted by Song. Empress Mozang also invited Uyghur monks to preach there.⁷⁴

In 1058, at the age of 16, Liangzuo, who favored the Chinese Han Ritual (漢禮 *hanli*), requested another set of the Chinese Buddhist canon from the Song court in exchange for seventy horses. In 1062, emperor Liangzuo renewed his request for the Chinese Buddhist canon in exchange for horses for the second time. Yet, unlike previous requests that were fulfilled within one year, this request was fulfilled by the Song court after four years.⁷⁵

In the 1060s, Empress Liang and her uncle dominated the Tangut court and wars on the boundary of Song and Tangut occurred frequently. The Tangut hoped to use Buddhism to restore communication with Song. In 1073, the Tangut court requested the Chinese Buddhist canon from the Song court for the sixth and final time. Unlike the previous occasions, as soon as the printing was completed, the Song representatives brought the complete Chinese Buddhist canon to Tangut.⁷⁶

Translation of Buddhist Texts

Upon the establishment of the Tangut Empire, Tangut emperor Yuanhao ordered the court to create the Tangut language for the translation of Buddhist scriptures. In 1038, he initiated the project of translating Buddhist sutras of the Chinese Buddhist canon into the language of Tangut. A special committee was formed for the translation of sutras.

⁷⁴ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 50-52.

⁷⁵ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 61-63.

⁷⁶ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 60-61.

Yuanhao took personal control over the committee's activities, and Uyghur monks were consulted who previously had some experience in translating Buddhist texts from Chinese into their language.⁷⁷

From that point on, the Tangut imperial court sponsored Buddhist text translation throughout its history. The early process of Buddhist textual translation in Tangut mainly involved translating Chinese Buddhist texts in the *Tripitaka*. From the discoveries in the Khara Koto ruins, Chinese Mahayana sutras were translated early on and were included in the imperial collection of Chinese Mahayana scripture.⁷⁸ Among these were the *Lotus Sutra* (妙法蓮華經), especially the chapter of *The Great Perfection Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra* (普賢行願品), *Vimalakīrti Sutra* (維摩詰經), the *Sutra on the Bodhisattva Maitreya's Previous Life in Tusita Heaven* (觀彌勒菩薩上生兜率天經), the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛般若波羅蜜多經), and *The Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* (佛說聖佛母勝般若波羅蜜多經). By 1090, the Tangut court completed translating 3,579 scrolls of Buddhist texts into Tangut in the span of fifty-three years.⁷⁹

In the middle of the twelfth century, the emphasis of Buddhist translation ordered by the Tangut court shifted from Chinese to Tibetan texts, once the Tangut and Tibet could maintain a peaceful boundary. Both Indian and Tibetan monks were invited to contribute to the translation process by explaining texts on Tantric practice.⁸⁰ In particular, doctrines pertaining to the Kagyu lineage and Sakya lineage of Tibetan

⁷⁷ Dunnell, "Translating History," 41–44.

⁷⁸ Solonin, "Xixia fojiao zhi 'xitongxing' chutan" 西夏佛教之「系統性」初探, 29–31.

⁷⁹ Solonin, "Xixia fojiao zhi 'xitongxing' chutan" 西夏佛教之「系統性」初探, 29–31.

⁸⁰ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 64–65.

Buddhism were favored in the Tangut Buddhist canon. The strong influence of the Kagyu lineage in Tangut Buddhism at the beginning of the twelfth century is proven by the large number of Buddhist texts that have been discovered in Khara Koto in the present day. Tantric texts of the Tibetan Kagyu lineage that were translated into Tangut and highly regarded in Tangut Buddhism mainly included teachings and instructions on *Mahāmudra*, *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Vajrayoginī*, and *Vajravarahī*. Also, Tangut translations of the essential teaching of the Tibetan Sakya lineage—*Lamdre*—as well as the important teaching from the Nyingma lineage—*Dzogchen*—were also found among the ruins of Khara Koto. Meanwhile, exoteric teachings that were translated from Tibetan Buddhism mainly included teachings from the ancient Tibetan Kadampa lineage.⁸¹

When the Tangut Empire began to decline at the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Tangut court founded a new translation center to re-translate and edit Buddhist scriptures, especially the *Sutra of Supreme Golden Light*, with the hope of receiving Buddhas' protection for the state.⁸²

Compilation of Tangut Buddhist Canon

Printing sutras and other Buddhist texts—i.e. prayers and vows—had been carried out both by the imperial court and by Tangut citizens throughout Tangut history. The most productive period of translating and printing Buddhist scriptures in Tangut was during the reign of Renzong (夏仁宗, r. 1139-1193). Starting in 1146, Renzong's court

⁸¹ Van Schaik, "Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia," 75-80.

⁸² Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, "Xixia 'Jingguangming zuishengwang jing' xinyang yanjiu" 西夏《金光明最勝王經》信仰研究, 55.

printed and distributed sutras that mainly include: the *Lotus Sutra* (妙法蓮華經), the *Universal Gate Chapter on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva* (觀世音菩薩普門品) from the Lotus Sutra, *Flower Adornment Sutra* (華嚴經), the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛經), *Sheng dasheng shengyi pusa jing* (聖大乘勝意菩薩經), *Foshuo sheng dasheng san guiyi jing* (佛說聖大乘三皈依經), *Foshuo dawei de jinlun foding zhisheng rulai xiaochu yiqie zainan tuoluoni jing* (佛說大威德金輪佛頂熾盛光如來消除一切災難陀羅尼經), and *Liuzi damingwang gongde lue* (六字大明王功德略). In 1189, Renzong's empress, Empress Luo, printed and distributed the *Lotus Sutra*'s chapter—*The Great Perfection Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra* (普賢行願品) and the *Diamond Sutra* (金剛經). In the ninth month of the same year, a grand distribution of Buddhist scriptures was held by the court and 200,000 scriptures were distributed at the event. Two years after Renzong passed away, Dowager Luo printed and distributed 30,000 copies of *Sutra on Transforming the Female Form* (佛說轉女身經 *Foshuo zhuan nüshen jing*) in both Chinese and Tibetan languages. In the following year, Dowager Luo vowed to continuously print and distribute scriptures from both Tibetan Buddhist canon and Chinese Buddhist canon in the next three years. In her vows, she especially emphasized printing certain sutras in a specific number, including *The Great Perfection Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra*, *Sutra on Transforming the Female Form*, and *Humane King State-Protection Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* (仁王護國般若波羅蜜經 *Renwang huguo*

bore boluomi jing).⁸³ Records indicate Dowager Luo's preference to *Sutra on Transforming the Female Form*, and her devotion to this sutra increased after Renzong passed away.

Tangut citizens also participated in the practice of printing and distributing Buddhist scriptures. As records indicate, *Sheng liuzi zengshou daming tuoluoni jing* (聖六字增壽大明陀羅尼經), *Mizhou yuanyin wangsheng ji* (密咒圓因往生集), *Buddha Pronounces the Mahāyāna Sūtra of the Holy Infinite-Life Resolute Radiance King Tathāgata Dhāraṇī* (佛說大乘聖無量壽決定光明王如來陀羅尼經) were printed and distributed by the Tanguts from 1200 to 1210.⁸⁴

The Tangut Buddhist canon (or Hexi canon) included 3,579 scrolls of texts, but this was merely half of the number of texts that were produced at the same time in Central China. The root canon that the Tangut canon is built upon is mostly commonly believed to be the Kaibao canon (開寶藏 *kaibao zang*), since it was the only available Chinese Buddhist canon in Song China during the time when the Tangut made six requests of Buddhist canon. It was not the Tangut court's intention to produce its own Buddhist canon to be a complete or standard Sinicized Buddhist canon, but rather, the Tangut Buddhist canon was compiled to meet the needs of the Tangut Buddhists at the time. The compilation of the Tangut Buddhist canon used both the Chinese Buddhist canon and the Qitan canon (契丹藏) as reference.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, the canon was not

⁸³ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de fojiao xinyang he fengsu" 西夏的佛教信仰和風俗, 15.

⁸⁴ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de fojiao xinyang he fengsu" 西夏的佛教信仰和風俗, 8-10.

⁸⁵ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de fojiao xinyang he fengsu" 西夏的佛教信仰和風俗, 8-10.

printed due to the lack of sponsorship from the Mongols in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It was eventually produced as the Hexi canon in Hangzhou in the fourteenth century during the Yuan dynasty.⁸⁶

Rituals

Once the Tangut imperial court demonstrated its preference for Buddhism as the state religion, Buddhism rapidly spread and flourished. For instance, the first Emperor Yuanhao set the first day of the first month of each season to be a holy day. On this day, all Tanguts were ordered to venerate Buddhas. Other important annual Buddhist rituals, like the Ullambanathe Ritual,⁸⁷ were performed through reciting sutras and making offerings, notably, the lamp offering.⁸⁸ Besides the major rituals with extensive offerings that were performed under the order and support of the court, other rituals and religious activities were also practiced in Tangut. However, the records show that the variety and number of rituals and religious activities in the early time of the Tangut Empire were not as abundant as when Vajrayana Buddhism became dominant in Tangut.

Ritual was a critical element in Buddhist practice in the second half of Tangut history as well, especially during the reign of Emperor Renzong in the twelfth century. Renzong and Empress Luo brought about a significant intensification of religious practice in the court. The variety of religious activities extended from printing Buddhist sutras and performing sutra recitation rituals to offering rituals, conducting repentance

⁸⁶ Orzech, Sørensen, and Payne, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 475-476.

⁸⁷ According to the Buddhist tradition, the Ullambanathe ritual is performed on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Rituals are performed for filial piety and offering to the ghosts.

⁸⁸ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia Fojiao Xintan" 西夏佛教新探, 72.

rituals, distributing food to the poor and prisoners, releasing prisoners, liberating animals, and also building temples and stupas. Each ritual was performed by some 3,000 to 7,000 monastics. In 1209, the court of Tangut Emperor Xiangzong (夏襄宗 1170-1211) conducted a particularly extensive ritual that was performed by 67,000 monastics. This occurred possibly because of the invasion of Mongols.⁸⁹

After Renzong passed away, Empress Luo became Dowager Luo, and engaged even more effort in promoting and practicing Buddhism. By way of illustration, for the three years after Renzong's death, she vowed to invite 3,000 Chinese, Tibetan, and Western⁹⁰ monastics to preach in Tangut, paint and distribute sacred images to purify negative karma, sponsor repentance rituals, set prisoners free, and liberate animals.

Large-scale rituals were also performed under the request and sponsorship of high-ranking court officials. For instance, in 1167, 太師上公總領軍 (General of Army) had been seriously sick for a long time and could no longer be cured by medicine. For this reason, he sponsored a vast printing of the *Diamond Sutra* and hosted extensive rituals to distribute the sutras.⁹¹

In general, rituals in Tangut Buddhism combined both Mahayana practices and Tantric methods, such as repentance. Imperial rituals were especially extensive and costly in Tangut, and this eventually became a burden for Tangut citizens later on. Rituals that were sponsored by the imperial family and the court were presided over by State Preceptors (國師 *guoshi*), and officials' rituals were conducted by Dharma preceptors (法

⁸⁹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia fojiao xintan" 西夏佛教新探, 73.

⁹⁰ "Western" here refers to Central Asia and India.

⁹¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia fojiao xintan" 西夏佛教新探, 73.

師 *fashi*) and Chan masters (禪師 *chanshi*). However, Imperial Preceptors (帝師 *dishi*), the highest-ranking preceptors in Tangut, were not recorded as having presided over any ritual in Tangut.⁹² Additionally, according to Tiansheng Laws (天盛律令 *Tiansheng lüling*), when high-ranking officials passed away, the court appointed monastics for a forty-nine-day ritual according to the official's rank.

2.2.2 *Mahayana Buddhism in Tangut*

During the frequent religious communication with China Song in requesting Chinese Buddhist canons, four schools of Chinese Buddhism were transmitted to Tangut: the Pure Land school, Huayan school, Chan school, and Tian Tai school. Mahayana Buddhist schools with influences from China, Liao, Uyghur, and Jurchen became popular in the Tangut court and among the citizenry.

Tanguts' devotion to the Pure Land school was reflected in the paintings and prayers that were included in personal-sponsored sutra copies. Paintings, from cave murals to *kesi*—delicate silk paintings—depicted Amitabha coming to people at the time of death to liberate them from this life suffering so that they could be reborn in the Pure Land. According to the prayers included in the sutra copies found in Khara Koto, practitioners from other traditions besides Pure Land Buddhists, as well as non-Buddhist officials, also dedicated their merits of printing sutras for themselves so that they could be reborn in the Pure Land. Whether the Tangut were Buddhist—monastic or lay—or

⁹² Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia fojiao xintan" 西夏佛教新探, 74.

not, the Pure Land was their common goal for the afterlife. The devotion to the Pure Land was widely spread and deeply rooted in Tangut.⁹³

Although there are many Pure Lands in the Mahayana Buddhist cosmology, Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land was clearly dominant in the Tangut Pure Land Buddhism, especially given the number of Amitabha paintings discovered in Khara Koto. Maitreya Bodhisattva's Tusita Heaven (Pure Land) was considered another important faith in the Pure Land school.⁹⁴ The devotion to Amitabha Buddha was initially brought from Chinese Buddhism. However, the Tangut demonstrated their devotion to Amitabha Buddha until the time when Tibetan Buddhism became the dominant form in Tangut.⁹⁵ As previously discussed, the cruel reality of Tangut citizens' lives and their wishes to be free from the physical and mental suffering attracted them to the blissful, suffering-free afterlife in the Pure Land of Amitabha. The fundamental need to be reborn in the Tusita Heaven was similar. According to the *Sutra on the Bodhisattva Maitreya's Previous Life in Tusita Heaven*, practitioners who practiced accordingly and collected enough merit could be reborn in the Tusita Heaven, a heaven of pure bliss that was without defilement. Therefore, the misery of reality and the natural desire of being free from suffering led the Tangut to their devotion to the Pure Land school.

The Huayan school also flourished in Tangut Buddhism. One of the more common Tangut Buddhist texts was the foundational text of the Huayan school: the *Āvatamsaka-sūtra* (Chi: 華嚴經 *Huayan jing*; Eng: *Flower Adornment Sutra*). Although

⁹³ Li Yumin 李玉珉, "Heishuicheng chutu Xixia mituo hua chutan" 黑水城出土西夏彌陀畫初探, 7-10.

⁹⁴ Sun Changsheng 孫昌盛, "Lüelun Xixia de jingtu xinyang" 略論西夏的淨土信仰, 27-30.

⁹⁵ Shi Wei 史偉, "Heishuicheng tangka zhong de jingtu xinyang" 黑水城唐卡中的淨土信仰, 134-39.

the Huayan school is commonly known in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism, it was also an important sect in Liao Buddhism, and it was from Liao Buddhism that Tangut originally received the teachings.⁹⁶ However, Chinese Buddhism also had a great influence in the development of the Tangut Huayan sect. By way of illustration, Tangut monastics translated the sutra and commentaries from Chinese into Tangut, and these texts were printed and distributed widely in both Chinese and Tangut.⁹⁷

Inspired by the concept of “all-rounded perfect teaching” learned from Liao Buddhism, Tangut Buddhists integrated their Huayan practice with concepts and methods from other schools and traditions as well. For instance, Tangut monk Yixing Huijue (一行慧覺, ?-1312) compiled the *Huayan Repentance Ritual* (華嚴海印懺儀 *Huayan haiyin chanyi*), which was widely practiced in Tangut and later transmitted into Central China during the Yuan dynasty, and it is still practiced today in Chinese Buddhism. Through conducting thorough textual comparison studies, Solonin finds that this repentance ritual incorporates both Chinese Mahayana methods and Tibetan Tantric practices based on the vows of Samantabhadra presented in *Flower Adornment Sutra*.⁹⁸ While individual repentance rituals were composed for each major Chinese Mahayana Sutra by Chinese Masters, Tangut monk Yixing Huijue provided the repentance ritual of the *Flower Adornment Sutra*.

The Chan school was generally dominated by the Huayan school in Tangut Buddhism. Thus, one of the most practices in Tangut Chan school was Huayan-Chan (華

⁹⁶ Solonin, “Buddhist Connections,” 179-181.

⁹⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 156-157.

⁹⁸ Solonin, “Huayan Repentance,” 4-5.

嚴禪), which was inspired by the ideal approach of “all-rounded perfect teaching” and combined the essence of Chan practice and Huayan practice. This unique approach of Chan contemplation was based on the commentaries by Qingliang Chengguan (清涼澄觀, 737–838) and Guifeng Zongmi (圭峰宗密, 780–841). It turns essential Huayan concepts, i.e. the “true mind” (真心 *zhenxin*) and “mind” is “nature” (心即性 *xin ji xing*), into the practice of Chan, to proceed from understanding to enlightenment. This practice was later discovered only as it was preserved in Tangut Buddhism.⁹⁹

Another major Mahayana school in Tangut Buddhism was the Tian Tai School based on the *Lotus Sutra*. The *Lotus Sutra* and its related commentaries were translated into Tangut in the early period and became widely disseminated in Tangut. In 1146, when block printing first began in Tangut, the first printed scripture was the *Lotus Sutra*. Throughout the history of Tangut Buddhism, the *Universal Gate Chapter on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva* from the *Lotus Sutra* had been one of the most favored sutras for printing. Meanwhile, Guanyin had been extensively depicted in the Tangut caves in Dunhuang and one of the best Guanyin murals in the Dunhuang area was produced during Tangut reign. The practice of painting Guanyin continued throughout the Tangut era. The reason for the continuous devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* and Guanyin can be found in the prayers and colophons along with printed copies: they were valued for their of fundamental healing properties.¹⁰⁰

In the *Universal Gate Chapter on Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) is described as closely connected to this suffering world and as having

⁹⁹ Solonin, “Chan Contemplation,” 213–215.

¹⁰⁰ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 156-157.

dedicated all his endeavors to saving people from all sorts of disasters and distress. While Guanyin is portrayed as a savior as well as a protector, he is also a healer who soothes pains for those who call on his name. Therefore, for the Tangut, the devotion to the *Lotus Sutra* and Guanyin fulfilled the fundamental needs for healing and protection.

The discovery of the sutra manuscripts in Khara Koto reflected the link between the Tanguts' mental and physical stress due to life's hardships and the function of Buddhism as a remedy for their stress. The Tangut, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhists, royal families or citizens, participated in Buddhist activities, such as sutra printing, to receive comfort and relief from the supreme or divine force.

2.2.3 Vajrayana Buddhism in Tangut

Besides the four main schools of Mahayana Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism also flourished in Tangut. In Khara Koto, many Tibetan-Buddhist-related texts, paintings, and architectural ruins have been discovered relatively recently. These serve as the foundational subjects for studies currently underway to understand the history of Tibetan Buddhism in the Tangut Empire.

Vajrayana Buddhism became mainstream in Tangut Buddhism in the second half of its history, and this is reflected in the Dunhuang cave murals created during the later Tangut period (1159-1227). At the beginning of the twelfth century, Vajrayana Buddhism began to spread in the Tangut Empire primarily through Tibetan monks. Although Esoteric Buddhism continued its influences on Chinese Buddhism in the Song dynasty, the Tangut received Tantric teachings and transmission directly from Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism or Tibetan Tantric Buddhism. The spread of Tibetan Buddhism started in the

western region of Tangut and eventually reached the east, the capital: Khara Koto.¹⁰¹ By the middle of the twelfth century, Tangut Buddhism's focus had shifted from Chinese Buddhism to Vajrayana Buddhism.¹⁰² On the basis of cave studies in Dunhuang, Duan gives a specific year—1159—as the moment when Tantric Buddhism officially became dominant in Tangut.¹⁰³

The connection between Tibetan Buddhism and Tangut Buddhism can be traced back to their historical origins. Both Tibetans and Tanguts originally descended from the same root tribe: Qiang (羌). Due to the similarity in language and culture, and the proximity of location, their frequent communication, especially in the religious aspect, began as early as the seventh century.¹⁰⁴ However, the relationship between Tibet and Tangut had often been complicated and unstable, especially in the early time of the Tangut Empire. During the reign of Emperor Xia Huizong (夏惠宗, 1061-1086), through a marriage of convenience, the Tangut and Tibet began to make peace over their shared boundary, and the economic and cultural communication between the two states became frequent and prosperous. Historical records also indicate that many Tibetans migrated into Tangut, which substantially influenced the Tangut culture.¹⁰⁵

According to the Tibetan historical records, Buddhist communication between Tibet and Tangut flourished particularly during the Renxiao Tiansheng era (1149-1169). Many highly regarded Tibetan monks were invited to teach the Dharma in Tangut, and

¹⁰¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de zangchuan fojiao" 西夏的藏傳佛教, 35-37.

¹⁰² Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 75-76.

¹⁰³ Duan, *Dunhuang Art*, 164.

¹⁰⁴ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de zangchuan fojiao" 西夏的藏傳佛教, 34-35.

¹⁰⁵ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de zangchuan fojiao" 西夏的藏傳佛教, 34-35.

some were even venerated as State Preceptors of Tangut. For example, the first patriarch of Karma Kagyu lineage, Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193), was highly respected by Tangut Emperor Renzong. Dusum Khyenpa's disciple Geshe Sowa was also sent to Tangut as a representative of Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁰⁶ Geshe Sowa was venerated as Guru by Emperor Renzong and gave Renzong teachings on both Mahayana sutras and Tantric *Sādhana*. Geshe Sowa also organized the translation of Buddhist sutras under the patronage of Renzong. Another influential Tibetan monk in Tangut was Jueben. He was a disciple of the third patriarch of Sakya lineage, Jetsun Dragpa Gyaltsen (1147–1216). He was invited to preach in Tangut during the Tangut Emperor Hengzong's reign (1193-1206) and was honored as the State Preceptor in Tangut.¹⁰⁷

The importance of Tibetan Buddhism in Tangut can also be reflected in the religious laws of Tangut. For instance, in *New Law and Rules of Tiansheng Era* (天盛改舊新定律定 *Tiansheng gaijiu xinding lüling*), published in the Renxiao Tiansheng era (1149-1169 CE), the official head of the Tangut monastics was required to memorize more than ten sutras and mantras that would be decided by the court. More than half of those scriptures were in Tibetan, for instance, Mañjuśrī-Nāma-Saṃgīti (Tib: *'jam dpal mtshan brjod*) and *Sutra of the Dharani of Pure Unsullied Light* (無垢淨光大陀羅尼經 *Wugou jingguang da tuoluoni jing*).¹⁰⁸ In addition, this person was required to be examined by a scholar who was skilled in Tibetan.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Berger et al., *Latter Days of the Law*, 102.

¹⁰⁷ Sun Changsheng 孫昌盛, "Shilun zai Xixia" 試論在西夏, 36–37.

¹⁰⁸ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de zangchuan fojiao" 西夏的藏傳佛教, 42.

¹⁰⁹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 38.

Based on the large number of Tantric texts discovered in Khara Koto and murals preserved in Dunhuang caves, the main Tantric practices that were practiced in Tangut were *Cakrasaṃvara*, *Mahāmudra*, *Lamdre*, and Six Yogas of *Nāropa*. The Tantric texts translated from Tibetan into Tangut were mainly pithy instructions on the essence of actual practice—i.e., visualization, channels and chakras, yoga—rather than philosophical doctrines. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Tangut Vajrayana Buddhists preferred the actual practice to philosophy studies.¹¹⁰ Discoveries in Khara Koto also shows a combination of the use of Tangut and Tibetan languages in Tantric transmission in Tangut Buddhism. Besides texts printed in both Tibetan and Tangut, there was another form of the manuscript that was written in Tangut characters with Tibetan phonetic notations.¹¹¹

While the main influence is generally attributed to Tibetan monastics and teachers, Mongol, Indian, Nepalese and Central Asian monks also contributed to the spread of Tantric Buddhism in Tangut on their way to Song China through Hexi Corridor. However, the influence of Tibetan Buddhism was unmatched.¹¹² Therefore, Tibetan Buddhist masters and monastics enjoyed a high level of respect in Tangut society. By way of illustration, in the prayer that Empress Luo wrote in her distribution of *The Great Perfection Aspiration Prayer of Samantabhadra*, it lists Tibetan monks before Tangut and Chinese monks, which indicates both the high status and the large number of

¹¹⁰ Sun Changsheng 孫昌盛, “Shilun zai Xixia” 試論在西夏, 38-39.

¹¹¹ Dunnell, “Translating History,” 70.

¹¹² Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 44-46; Sun Changsheng 孫昌盛, “Shilun zai Xixia” 試論在西夏, 42-43; Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia shehui* 西夏社會, 50-57.

Tibetan monks in Tangut. In contrast, lay Tibetans did not obtain a higher status than either Chinese or Tanguts in the Tangut court and society.¹¹³

2.2.4 *Tārā in Vajrayana Buddhism*

In Vajrayana Buddhism, Tārā (Tib: *Dōlma*) is the savior, the victress, and the emanation of all Buddhas' enlightened activity. She guides her disciples to liberation from the suffering of lower realms, obstacles, sickness, disasters, and most importantly, the cyclic worldly existence, to reach the ultimate enlightenment. She is the "Mother of All Buddhas" and is believed to answer all sentient beings' prayers swiftly. According to the text, *Praise to Twenty-One Tārā*, there are twenty-one manifestations of Tārā to provide relief and protection for sentient beings in various hardships and to guide practitioners to accomplish their spiritual goals. And she bestows victory over fear, danger, and afflicted emotions. For instance, Black Tārā helps subdue and dispel external obstacles and demons, while White Tārā brings peace, health, and longevity to practitioners. Hence, Tārā is one of the most venerated goddesses in the Himalayan Buddhist pantheon.¹¹⁴

The origins of Tārā are told in many different stories. For instance, one story tells that she is manifested from a ray of blue light from Amitabha's left eye. Another story describes that when Avalokiteśvara cried out in great compassion towards all suffering beings, a tear from his right eye became Green Tārā and a tear from his left eye became White Tārā. They both vowed to assist Avalokiteśvara in the commitment of saving all

¹¹³ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de zangchuan fojiao" 西夏的藏傳佛教, 38-39.

¹¹⁴ Myers-El, *Unknown Lore*, 221-222; Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 310; Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism*, 225-226.

sentient beings from suffering.¹¹⁵ Another well-known account of Tārā's origin is from *Tāranātha*, which portrays Tārā as a princess in the distant past. Her name was Jñanachandrā, meaning "wisdom of moon." After many lifetimes of earnest practice, she attained a level of enlightenment. Many elders and monks came to congratulate her and prayed for her to be born in a male form in order to become fully enlightened. The princess argued that a male form was unnecessary to attain full enlightenment. Simultaneously, she vowed to attain the Buddhahood in this female form. Therefore, when she became fully enlightened, she was bestowed with the title "Mother of All Buddhas" by the tathāgatas in the ten directions.¹¹⁶

The earliest evidence that shows the devotion to Tārā can be traced back to the seventh century in India. However, Tārā was initially portrayed as attending Avalokiteśvara by his side in Nālandā and Ellora Caves, India.¹¹⁷ In early Vajrayana Buddhist texts, i.e. *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* and *Mahāvairocana-sūtra*, Tārā is also illustrated as an attendant of Avalokiteśvara, holding a blue *utpala* flower in her left hand and the perfect-giving mudra in her right hand, sitting next to Avalokiteśvara.¹¹⁸ Yet, the detailed description of her iconography is generally believed to be given by the Indian *mahāsiddha* Nagarjuna (eighth-ninth century).¹¹⁹ Until the tantra text *Tārāmūlakalpa* emerged and was spread in Indian Buddhism, Tārā started to be referred to as the *Aṣṭamahābhaya Tārā*, literally meaning "Eight Great Fear Tārā," which revealed her

¹¹⁵ Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 307.

¹¹⁶ Beyer, *Cult of Tārā*, 11-14.

¹¹⁷ Malandra, *Unfolding A Maṇḍala*, 93-94; Javid, Jāvīd, and Javeed, *World Heritage*, 145-148.

¹¹⁸ Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 314-315.

¹¹⁹ Berger et al., *Latter Days of the Law*, 248.

great endeavor in liberating her disciples from the eight great fears—lions, elephants, snakes, fire, thieves, drowning, prison, and evil spirits.¹²⁰ In the eleventh century, Tārā became one of the most popular deities in North India and a large number of images and statues of her likeness were produced in North India during that time.

In the eleventh century, due to Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (982–1054)’s great devotion to Tārā, the tantra practice of Tārā based on *Arya Tārā Astambhaya Trata Nama Sadhana* (*Sadhana of Arya Tārā, Called Protection from Eight Perils*), was translated from Sanskrit to Tibetan by Atiśa, and was officially transmitted to Tibet.¹²¹ However, the devotion to Tārā was established among Tibetan citizens long before Atiśa’s arrival. For instance, back in the seventh century, the Tibetan King Songtsän Gampo (569-649)’s two wives--the Chinese princess Wencheng and the Nepalese princess Tritsun—were seen as the emanation of White Tārā and Green Tārā respectively.

2.2.5 Tārā in Tangut Buddhism

Tārā was also deeply beloved by Tangut Buddhists for her motherly love and kindness and for granting protection to people in danger. Due to the rise of Tārā rituals in Tangut Buddhism between eleventh to twelfth century, images of Tārā were produced based on models of Tibetan Tārā thangkas in Tangut. A large number of Tārā images on delicate *kesi* (silk tapestry) and book covers have been recently discovered in Khara Koto,¹²² as have three large Tārā-themed murals produced in Dunhuang during the time of Tangut occupation.

¹²⁰ Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*, 309-311.

¹²¹ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 54.

¹²² Watt, Wardwell, and Rossabi, *When Silk Was Gold*, 92-93.

Murals of Tārā first appeared in Dunhuang at the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth century. Tārā was initially depicted as an accompanying deity in Dunhuang caves, from the late eighth century to the early ninth century. Until the middle of the eleventh century when Dunhuang was occupied by the Tangut Empire, Tārā subsequently became a principal figure of mural paintings in the Dunhuang caves.¹²³ She is often illustrated as a green goddess, sitting on a lotus, with her left leg in the lotus posture and her right leg extending out. Her left hand holds a giving-teaching mudra with an *utpala* flower at her heart, while her right hand is in the mudra of perfect generosity, resting on her thigh. In some cases, both hands are holding stems of *utpala* flowers. Primarily, Tibetan Tantric artists illustrated Green Tārā accompanied by eight Tārās in different colors in accordance with the root text, *Arya Tārā Astabhaya*, which is mainly known as Tārā Who Saves Living Beings From Eight Dangers.”

2.3 The Development of Dunhuang Caves during the Tangut Reign

2.3.1 Tangut's Conquest

The Tangut Empire occupied Dunhuang for over one hundred and fifty years. The year of the conquest of Dunhuang by Tangut is commonly believed to be 1036, which has been argued in the study of Dunhuang history in recent decades. By referring to the Song's records and through the sealing of the library cave (Cave 17 at Mogao Grottoes), modern historical studies argue that only Guazhou was under Tangut control in the early eleventh century and the date of the conquest of Dunhuang by Tangut should be dated

¹²³ Berger et al, *Latter Days of the Law*, 101-102.

backward to 1072.¹²⁴ However, Rong Xingjiang disagrees with the date of sealing the library cave that was given by previous scholars and argues the date of the sealing of cave 17 to be 1002, which moves the date of Tangut's conquest back to the early eleventh century.¹²⁵ Additionally, based on Uyghur documents and records, the conquest of Dunhuang by Tangut was dated back to the late tenth century and the early eleventh century.¹²⁶ By examining the Tangut murals in the Dunhuang area, Tangut art styles and elements emerged and were commonly applied in Dunhuang cave art even before the eleventh century. Though some of them are argued to be influenced by Tangut art, many of them are products Tangut art.¹²⁷ Therefore, based on previous studies of Dunhuang history, the conquest of Dunhuang by Tangut is in the early eleventh century.

However, after Dunhuang was controlled by Tangut, Dunhuang's cultural and economic importance on the Silk Road started to decline. Due to the constant wars between Tangut and Song, Dunhuang residents were recruited to the military and many of them died in the wars.¹²⁸ Consequently, the population of Dunhuang swiftly declined and Dunhuang citizens no longer lived in peace in their home villages. Moreover, Southern Song relocated its capital to Hangzhou (nowadays in Zhejiang Province), which greatly encouraged business between China and the West through the Maritime Silk Road.¹²⁹ Both the significant decline of the Silk Road through Dunhuang and the

¹²⁴ Sun Xiushen 孫修身, "Xixia zhanju Shazhou shijian zhi wojian" 西夏佔據沙洲時間之我見, 40–41; Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, "Zailun Xixia ju Guasha de shijian jiqi xiangguan wenti" 再論西夏據瓜沙的時間及其相關問題, 73–74.

¹²⁵ Rong Xingjiang 榮興江, "Dunhuang cangjingdong" 敦煌藏經洞, 23–48.

¹²⁶ Hamilton, "Dating of the Old Turkish Manuscripts," 135–45.

¹²⁷ Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage in Dunhuang*, 74.

¹²⁸ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 76.

¹²⁹ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 76–77.

relocation of Southern Song's capital contributed to the recession of Dunhuang. Tangut lost its control of Dunhuang when they were conquered by the Mongols.

2.3.2 Dunhuang's Significance in Tangut Buddhism

While Tangut ruled the Dunhuang area, even despite the wars and political shifts, Buddhist shrine caves were created and painted. Caves that were constructed and painted during this period are mostly located in the Yulin site and the Eastern Thousand Buddha site. Since the middle of the twelfth century, the main Tantric deities—Vairocana Buddha, thousand-arm and eleven-face Avalokiteśvara, the Three Deities of Longevity, and Tāra—began to appear in the Tangut caves of Dunhuang. As one of the most frequently depicted figures, Tārā can be found in different Tangut caves across these sites.

The most appreciated Tangut mural paintings are found in the Dunhuang caves; for instance, the most renowned mural of Water-Moon Guanyin is found in cave no. 2 at the Yulin Caves that were painted during Tangut's reign. Dunhuang was viewed by the Tangut as a sacred place. According to the colophons at the Mogao caves that were created during the Tangut reign, Dunhuang was referred to as the “Holy Palace” (Shenggong, 聖宮). It is also introduced in Tangut books as the “Sacred Mountain of Shazhou” (Shazhou Shenshan, 沙洲神山). Given the significant art and religious regard that the Tangut held for Dunhuang, this dissertation focuses on the murals in the Dunhuang caves as a means to understanding the cultural and religious interpretations of Buddhism by the Tangut.

2.3.3 Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves

The Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, also known as Receiving Temple,¹³⁰ are rock-cut caves themed of Buddhist art situated in Guazhou County, Gansu Province, China. Twenty-three caves were found and have been preserved at this site until today. Among the caves, most of them are single rooms. Some are in the shape of a square with a pillar in the center, while some are constructed with a truncated pyramidal ceiling. Nine caves contain murals and statues: five on the west cliff and four on the east cliff, and four of them are well preserved: caves Nos. 2, 5, 6, and 7.¹³¹ The contents of the cave paintings can be categorized into five: scripture paintings, tantra murals, portraits of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, decorative patterns, and portraits of donors. Among all the murals, Amitabha's Pure Land, Medicine Buddha's Pure Land, and presentations of Manjushri, Samantabhadra, and Avalokiteśvara are frequently found in these caves. Meanwhile, Tantric art is also commonly seen at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, including Tantric maṇḍalas from the Tibetan tradition, as well as portraits of eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara, red Manjushri, and other Tantric deities. Statues that are preserved inside the caves till today are mainly from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911).¹³²

An early study¹³³ claims that the establishment of the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves are likely dated to the late Tangut period based on their analysis of the structures and art presentations of the caves. However, in 2016, Liu¹³⁴ finds its establishment time to

¹³⁰ Chinese: 接引寺 Jieyin si.

¹³¹ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, "Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang" 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 71.

¹³² Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, "Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang" 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 74.

¹³³ Zhang Baoxi 張寶璽, "Dongqianfodong Xixia shiku yishu" 東千佛洞西夏石窟藝術, 81-94.

¹³⁴ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, "Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang" 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 75-77.

be closer to the Northern Dynasties period (386-581) based on photos taken at the Eastern Thousand Buddha site in the 1920s. These photos show that a severe collapse of the cliffs during the 1920s destroyed the caves from Northern Dynasties on the west cliff and only the Tangut caves on the lower levels survived, which resulted in the misidentification of the actual establishment time of the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves. Also, the rebuilding and repainting work during the Qing dynasty covered many important art features from the Northern Dynasties. By examining the details of the traces from the Northern Dynasties, Liu reaffirms the establishment of the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves to be dated to the Northern Dynasties period.

When the Tangut occupied the Dunhuang area, it was difficult to create new caves at the Mogao Grottoes because numerous caves had already been built and painted there during previous dynasties. The Tangut thus repainted many of the caves at the Mogao site, as many as seventy-seven. In the meantime, the Tangut also explored the Yulin Caves—where cave art had just begun—and the Eastern Thousand Buddha site to build new caves. Therefore, the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves site provides important evidence to the understanding of the cave art of Tangut.

2.3.4 Yulin Caves

The Yulin Caves, also known as Gorge of Thousand Buddhas,¹³⁵ is located over one hundred kilometers away from the Mogao Grottoes. This site was named after the river that streams through the valley, the Yulin River. In the spring and summer, rose willows along the two sides of the valley turn this place into a green oasis in the middle

¹³⁵ Chinese: 萬佛峽 Wanfoxia.

of the desert.¹³⁶ Currently, forty-one caves still exist at the Yulin site, with murals covering over 4,200 square meters, from the Northern Wei dynasty (386–398) to the Yuan dynasty: three from the Tang dynasty, eight from the Five Dynasties, thirteen from the Song, four from the Tangut period, four from the Yuan, and nine from the Qing.¹³⁷

The caves at the Yulin site generally inherited the aesthetic and architectural concepts from the Mogao Grottoes. Additionally, the artistic quality of some the Yulin Cave murals, especially from the Tang dynasty to the Yuan, can be compared with the best murals at the Mogao site.¹³⁸ However, many exquisite Tang murals were painted over in later dynasties, mainly during the Song and the Five Dynasties periods. Only a few Tang caves from the period when the area was under the control of Tibetans¹³⁹ survived. These Yulin site caves are important evidence of Dunhuang art during the Tang dynasty. One of the most famous is cave no. 25.¹⁴⁰

At the Yulin site, Tangut artists presented their highest techniques and compositions in mural painting, by learning and combining elements from Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, and Uyghur art. The paintings are mainly Buddhist in theme, and primarily involved portraits of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, manifestations of *Jatakas*, illustrations of *maṇḍalas* and Tantric deities, as well as portraits of donors and local political figures.

¹³⁶ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Zhongguo shiku: Anxi yulinku* 中國石窟: 安西榆林窟, 161.

¹³⁷ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 476.

¹³⁸ Rong, *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*, 476.

¹³⁹ The Tibetan dominated Guazhou briefly from 776-848.

¹⁴⁰ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Zhongguo shiku: Anxi yulinku* 中國石窟: 安西榆林窟, 162.

Chapter 3. Tangut Buddhist Art

3.1 Introduction of Tangut Buddhist Art

Similar to other aspects of Tangut culture, Tangut art incorporated the essence of art from its neighboring cultures, yet maintained its own identity, balanced between these traditions: Song China, Tibet, India, Nepal, Uyghur, and Central Asia.¹⁴¹ Given the remains that are now found in the Hexi Corridor area, Tangut Buddhist art is understood as principally comprising paintings and statues, as well as architecture, including illustrations, temples, and stupas. However, many temples and stupas from the Tangut period have been destroyed or did not survive in the harsh conditions of the desert. Therefore, paintings and cave murals have become the foundation of the study of Tangut Buddhist art in modern research.

The development of Tangut Buddhist art is closely related to the history of Tangut Buddhism. Generally, it is believed that the inception of Buddhism among the Tangut came before the official establishment of the Tangut Empire. According to Shi's study,¹⁴² the history of Tangut Buddhist art can be divided into three periods: early period (1002-1086), middle period (1086-1192), and later period (1192-1227). In the early period, when Tangut Buddhism was substantially influenced by Chinese Buddhism, Tangut Buddhist art mainly learned from Chinese Song art and featured themes and stories of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. By way of illustration, most of the early Tangut Buddhist

¹⁴¹ Ruth W. Dunnell, "Esoteric Buddhism," 465–68; Gao Chunming 高春明, ed., *Xixia Yishu Yanjiu* 西夏藝術研究, 3–4; Huang, "Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces," 130–132; Zhao Shengliang 趙聲良, *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianzhi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史, 221.

¹⁴² Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 168.

paintings were themes of Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land and Medicine Buddha's Pure Land, according to the descriptions in the related sutras, as well as Avalokiteśvara and Samantabhadra.¹⁴³ However, in terms of art skills and techniques, Tangut artists were not comparable to the Chinese artists, which allows us to differentiate the Tangut Buddhist paintings from Chinese paintings.

Later, when Tibetan and Mongol cultures grew into prominence in Tangut, Tangut Buddhism shifted its focus from Chinese Mahayana Buddhism to Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism. Tibetan and Mongol lamas, masters, and teachers were invited to Tangut to teach in the court as well as in Tangut monasteries. In the meantime, Tibetan, Mongol, and Indian Buddhist art were also introduced to Tangut and became favored by the court as well as by the citizenry.

3.2 Architecture: Temples, Stupas, and Caves

Temples and stupas are the essential elements in Tangut Buddhist architecture. As with Chinese Buddhist architecture, Tangut temples were not complete without stupas. Unfortunately, Tangut temples and stupas rarely survived to the present day, and thus, the study of Tangut stupas heavily relies on written records and mural illustrations.

Primarily four types of stupas were favored by the Tangut culture: Song pavilion style, Tang multi-eaves style (both solid and hollow), Tibetan style, and a combination of the pavilion style and the multi-eaves style. The shape of the stupas varies from four-sided, eight-sided, to six-sided and round. And the stupa was not always found by itself. Stupa clusters were also found in Khara Khoto. They were often arranged as paralleled or

¹⁴³ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 269.

scattered.¹⁴⁴ Tangut stupas also served various functions. Many stupas contained sacred articles, such as scriptures, sacred images, and Dharma materials. These stupas were respected as objects of worship and veneration. Some stupas were built to store eminent monks' relics, ashes, and remains. The relic and stupa worship by Tangut Buddhists had also been confirmed by Chinese records regarding the burial of the Buddha's relics, which indicated that a head bone and a finger of the Buddha's relics were offered to the Tangut court by an Indian monk.¹⁴⁵ Some stupas stored both sacred objects and monks' relics and remains, which likely contributed to the relic cult in Tangut.¹⁴⁶

The earliest Tangut stupa was built prior to the formal establishment of the Tangut Empire by the first emperor Yuanhao, yet details regarding the location of the stupa and its presentation are lost in the record. Meanwhile, in the records of the Liangzhou mausoleum (涼州碑 Liangzhoubei, also known as Xixia mausoleum), the Gantong Stupa (感通塔 gantong ta) is specifically described: The stupa is constructed with four sides and seven heaps, decorated by seven kinds of pearls and jewels, as well as vivid murals. The stupa is glorified and shining with golden light.¹⁴⁷ Besides the magnificent Gantong stupa, the record also illustrates grand Buddhist rituals that were organized by the Tangut emperor Qianshun and his mother, empress dowager Liang, after the completion of the stupa. This reflects the importance of Buddhism in the Tangut culture.

¹⁴⁴ Li Yinxia 李銀霞, "Xixia fota de tedian" 西夏佛塔的特點, 55–56.

¹⁴⁵ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 36–37.

¹⁴⁶ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 91–92.

¹⁴⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 248.

Another example is the Great Buddha Temple (大佛寺 *dafo si*) in Ganzhou (present day: Zhangye, Gansu Province), which is also known as Reclining Buddha Temple (臥佛寺 *wofu si*). It is recognized as hosting the largest clay reclining Buddha statue in China, and served as the temple of the Tangut royal family. The construction began around 1098 CE and the main structure was completed in 1103 CE. The building of this temple was initiated by the State Buddhist Master of Tangut, Sineng Weimie (思能嵬暉), who discovered a stock of treasured objects underneath the ground where the temple is now, including either one or several reclining Buddha statues covered by a pile of green glaze.¹⁴⁸ Based on later documents, Monk Weimie presumably discovered four Buddha statues at the site. He offered three to the Emperor Qianshun to receive the royal family's support in building the temple, and he placed the last one inside the Reclining Buddha statue in the temple.¹⁴⁹ To celebrate this auspicious discovery, Master Sineng Weimie decided to build a temple and presided over the construction of the temple, which aligns with the tradition of discovering *terma* in Tibetan Buddhism. The significance of discovering sacred objects is especially stressed in Tibetan Buddhism. In this tradition, it is believed that ancient masters, most likely Padmasambhava, buried exclusive teachings and sacred objects—known as *terma*—underground for those who practice rightly, so that they might find this particular text and teach it at the right time.

¹⁴⁸ The actual number of the discovered Buddha statues is not specified in its original document *Chici baojuesi beiji* 敕賜寶覺寺碑記. However, in the *Chongxiu wofodian beiji* 重修臥佛殿碑記, the number of the discovered Buddha statues is said to number one.

¹⁴⁹ Zhao Yonghong 趙永紅, *Hexi zoulang zangwenhua shiyao* 河西走廊藏文化史要, Section 3 of Chapter 5.

Places where *termas* are discovered are treated as sacred sites of worship and prayer for generations.

The existing structures from the Tangut period are the Hall of Great Buddha, the Hall of Scriptures, and the Tu Stupa (土塔 *tu ta*). The Hall of Great Buddha is a wooden Chinese prototype 48 meters long and 24 meters wide, with a Song-styled double-eave gable-hip roof. The grand reclining Buddha statue lies inside the hall. The clay statue is molded and painted following the Song prototype as well. Inside, the statue is supported by a wooden framework inside that holds the weight and shape of the statue, which is typical in Chinese art, especially in the Dunhuang area. The space inside the wooden framework is filled with scripture, sacred objects, and jewels, similar to the Tibetan tradition.¹⁵⁰ The construction of the statue itself illustrates the particular skillful implementation in blending Chinese and Tibetan art and techniques in Tangut culture.

The stupa, however, is built according to the Tibetan stupa prototype “*chöten*” (Tib. *mchod rten*). According to *The Travels of Marco Polo*, the stupa is believed to have been part of the original complex during the Tangut reign,¹⁵¹ and it was mended during the Ming dynasty.¹⁵² The stupa is a large white structure, over 33 meters in height, standing behind the Hall of Great Buddha. Its foundation is a stepped square base with four facets. On top of the foundation, there is a base (須彌座 *xumizuo*) of two layers. A similar small stupa is placed on each corner of each layer of *xumizuo*, which is not commonly observed in the Tibetan-styled stupas. Including the main stupa, there are nine

¹⁵⁰ Zhao Yonghong 趙永紅, *Hexi zoulang zangwenhua shiyao* 河西走廊藏文化史要, Section 3 of Chapter 5.

¹⁵¹ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 356.

¹⁵² Gao Chunming 高春明, *Xixia yishu yanjiu* 西夏藝術研究, 159.

stupas in total. On top of the *xumizuo*, there is situated the body of the stupa shaped in an inverted-bowl prototype (覆钵式) that is typical of other Tibetan-styled stupas. Before reaching the top spire, there is another layer of *xumizuo* with four sides. On the east side, five niches are carved, and each contains a Buddha statue. Currently, the one in the center is a copper-made Buddha statue and the other four are made of clay. The spire is in the shape of stacked rings and is decorated with a canopy. The combination of the Chinese-styled temple and the Tibetan-styled stupa is a common application in Tangut Buddhist architecture.

The approach of incorporating Chinese and Himalayan architectural practices is also applied in the construction of Tangut caves. During the Tangut period, due to the decline of Dunhuang noble families, many Tangut caves were sponsored by multiple groups of donors, and artists were sponsored to repaint caves that were constructed during previous dynasties.¹⁵³ In all, more than one hundred Tangut caves survived through history, mostly in the Dunhuang area and the north of Gansu Province. Primarily, the Tangut caves flourished at the site of Yulin Caves in Guazhou (east of Dunhuang), in addition to the famous Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang.¹⁵⁴ Tangut caves at the Mogao site were mostly repaintings of the caves from previous dynasties, and only a few were created by the Tangut. Therefore, the characteristics of the Tangut cave structure remain unclear, but certain patterns are observed in Yulin Caves and Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ Sha Wutian 沙武田, “Dunhuang Xixia shiku yingjianshi goujian” 敦煌西夏石窟營建史構建, 3–12.

¹⁵⁴ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 61.

¹⁵⁵ Ning Qiang 寧強, *Dunhuang shiku yanjiu* 敦煌石窟研究, 236.

Tangut caves were primarily used for religious practices: veneration, repentance, and visualization.¹⁵⁶ While caves that were created during the previous times in Dunhuang were mainly for veneration, worshipping, and merit-making, Tangut caves, especially the ones created in the second half of its history, were intended for assisting practitioners' visualization in meditation. With the growth of Tibetan Buddhism's influences on Tangut Buddhism, Vajrayana iconographies were illustrated in many of the late Tangut caves, and the practice of visualization was especially highlighted. Therefore, many Tangut caves from the later period were created to provide a secret space for visualization. For example, in the cave no. 19 at the Yulin site, the Chinese colophon records the creation of “secret hall” (秘密堂), which refers to the Tantric caves during the Tangut period.¹⁵⁷

The functions of the Tangut caves determined the structures of the caves. Primarily, Tangut caves followed two types of structure: *caitya* caves with a circular pathway around the pillar and square-shaped caves with a truncated pyramidal ceiling.¹⁵⁸

Caitya caves originated in the Gupta period (third century CE to 543 CE) of Indian Buddhist art. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas started being represented in a frame of semi-section of a standing stupa. This architectural approach stemmed from the construction of *caitya* halls in the Indian Ajanta Caves¹⁵⁹ as well as from the paintings of twelfth-century Indian Pāla art.¹⁶⁰ Illuminating the layout of *caitya* halls and caves in

¹⁵⁶ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 361.

¹⁵⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, “Xixia de zangchuan fojiao” 西夏的藏傳佛教, 38.

¹⁵⁸ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang” 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 71.

¹⁵⁹ Spink, *Ajanta*, 33-35.

¹⁶⁰ Kossak, “Pāla Painting,” 9.

paintings was a common practice in Himalayan art,¹⁶¹ but not frequently found in Tibetan or Chinese Buddhist art, with the exception of Dunhuang art.¹⁶² *Caitya* caves started to appear in Dunhuang caves during the Sui dynasty and flourished in the Song and Tangut time.¹⁶³ However, the particular type of *caitya* caves, frequently seen in Tangut spaces, was popular in the Kucha caves of Central Asia from the fourth century to the eighth century. It was based on the Indian *caitya* cave structure with modifications of Kucha cave art elements.¹⁶⁴ The circle procession path was created for Buddhists to venerate the central Buddha or Bodhisattva by circumambulating the center pillar.

Tangut *caitya* caves are mainly found in the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves: no. 2, no. 4, no. 5, and no. 7, and they are different from the *caitya* caves at the Mogao site. In the Mogao *caitya* caves from previous dynasties, the central pillar is principally square shaped with four sides, decorated with paintings and statues. Tangut *caitya* caves at the Eastern Thousand Buddha site contain pillars that are wide enough, like thick walls, to divide the cave into two separate halls: front hall and back pathway. On each side of the wall-like pillar, an aisle connects the front hall to the back pathway. Therefore, practitioners could still circumambulate inside the cave.

The square shape with a truncated pyramidal ceiling, however, is more often found in Tangut caves at the Mogao site, such as nos. 37, 324, 327, 330, 354 and 356.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Tartakov, “Art and Identity,” 409–16.

¹⁶² Linrothe, “Ushnishavijaya,” 4–5.

¹⁶³ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang” 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 76.

¹⁶⁴ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, “Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu” 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究, 50.

¹⁶⁵ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 361.

In these caves, ceilings are wide at the bottom and narrow at the top, with four sides of the walls gradually extending up and meeting at the top. It shows a pyramid covering and protecting the cave. The top of the ceiling represents the highest power and position, overseeing the entire cave.¹⁶⁶ Especially in Tangut caves, the ceilings are structured with layers of caissons and decorated by paintings of a dragon in a circle or two phoenixes in a circle.¹⁶⁷ On the main (east) wall of the cave, statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are placed.

3.3 Statues

Statues are another essential component of Buddhist art. Tangut Buddhist statues are also characterized by the harmonious combination of Chinese art and Tibetan art elements. While many Tangut statues are found in Dunhuang caves, others were discovered in tombs and abandoned temples in Gansu Province, Khara Koto, and Inner Mongolia.¹⁶⁸ In the Dunhuang area, due to the remaking of caves at Mogao, many statues were merely repaired and repainted with the original statues from the previous times. These statues at Mogao Grottoes cannot be representative of Tangut statues.

Meanwhile, statues that were initially created by Tangut artists are mainly seen in Khara Khoto, Ganzhou, and Inner Mongolia nowadays.¹⁶⁹ They are more appropriately considered as part of the discussion of Tangut sculpture. Similar to Tangut Buddhist temples and stupas, Tangut statues also exemplify the Tangut artists' prominent skill in

¹⁶⁶ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia huangshi" 西夏皇室, 165–72.

¹⁶⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Buddhism and Confucianism," 151–52.

¹⁶⁸ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 362–363.

¹⁶⁹ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 362–364.

incorporating Chinese and Tibetan art. The main themes of Tangut statues principally follow Northern Song themes: Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as well as offering goddesses and patrons.

In the Mogao cave no. 491, there are two small statues that are mostly believed to be offering goddesses. However, Ning argues that their facial expressions lack the transcendental appeal, and these two statues are more likely human beings who are making offerings.¹⁷⁰ These two statues illuminate the fashion styles as well as the physical characteristics of the Tangut ethnic group, such as the round face, snub nose, and wide forehead.

In the ruins of Green City (綠城 Lücheng), 50 kilometers from Dalaikubu Town (達來庫布鎮) in Inner Mongolia Province, two color-painted Bodhisattva statues from the Tangut period are found and praised for their artistic merit. One of them is 64 centimeters high and the other is 58 centimeters high. Both Bodhisattvas sit with their left legs crossed and right legs bent. The upper bodies are only slightly covered by colored garments and their necks are decorated by jewelry ornaments. They wear colored loose pants with a short outer skirt and additional ribbons decorate the waists. They both have round faces with a smiling, compassionate expression. Their decorations are colorful and delicate, and the carving is highly skilled.¹⁷¹

While many Tangut statues strictly follow the measurements and proportions described in the scriptures, some statues, however, are not limited to the descriptions in

¹⁷⁰ Ning Qiang 寧強, *Dunhuang shiku yanjiu* 敦煌石窟研究, 236.

¹⁷¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, and Weng Shanzhen 翁善珍, “Ejinaqi Lücheng xinjian Xixia wenwu kao” 額濟納旗綠城新見西夏文物考, 72–80.

the texts. Among the Khara Khoto collection, statues of Bodhisattvas, Dharma protectors, Vajrayana deities such as Tārā and *Uṣṇīṣavijayā*, as well as eminent monks and donors are frequently embodied. A number of them, especially the ones of eminent monks and donors, are found to be flexible based on real-life appearances and facial expressions. Yet, one particular Buddha statue received much attention for its unique look in the Khara Khoto collection. This Buddha statue has two heads, four arms, but one torso. The statue skillfully illustrates the Buddha's compassionate, peaceful, and transcendental expressions. While Cui¹⁷² links this statue to the legendary story recorded in Master Xuanzang's *Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*,¹⁷³ Sørensen sees this piece to be a depiction of Vairocana, as an example of the Chinese-style esoteric art of Tangut.¹⁷⁴ As presented in other forms of Tangut art, the harmonious blending of Chinese and Tibetan conventions is emphasized in Tangut statues as well, especially the Tantric deities. This unique art practice later contributed to the spread of Mongol Buddhism in China during the Yuan dynasty.¹⁷⁵

Therefore, the themes of Tangut Buddhist statues are not limited to the content of scriptures. Instead, Tangut artists were flexible in adapting to the trends of Buddhism and in developing stories and legends through their creativity. Meanwhile, with the influence of Chinese and Tibetan cultures, they harmoniously blend both Chinese and Tibetan art

¹⁷² Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 366.

¹⁷³ The story tells that two Buddhists were only able to afford to make one Buddha statue. Out of compassion, the Buddha manifested and rendered the one-headed statue into one with two heads, to fulfill the two Buddhists' wishes.

¹⁷⁴ Sørensen, "Esoteric Buddhist Art in China," 510-512.

¹⁷⁵ Xie Jisheng 謝繼勝, "Hangzhou feilaifeng" 杭州飛來峰, 41-49; Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Buddhism and Confucianism," 140.

into their presentation of statues. Moreover, they emphasized the illustration of the transcendental expression of the ultimate beings and the devout appearance of the mundane Buddhists, and also demonstrated their painting skills and techniques. In the making of the statues, they explored the spiritual practice through their art skills and creative visualization.

3.4 Paintings

Tangut Buddhist paintings are the main component of Tangut art. Besides the famous cave murals discovered in Dunhuang, Tangut paintings were also produced on fabrics (*thangka*), fine silk (*kesi*), paper (scrolls), woodblocks (woodcut), and in the shrines of Buddhist temples (murals) in Khara Khoto and surrounding areas. Among them, cave murals, *thangka*, and *kesi* are the most often discussed because they were produced in such high volume, and for their artistic merits: they have become the focus of the discussion on Tangut Buddhist art. In Khara Khoto, the most commonly found paintings are *thangkas* and large-size scrolls, for they provided a flexible space to illustrate entire scenes of the Buddha's preaching and they can be rolled and safely stored.¹⁷⁶ Woodcut paintings were primarily used as frontispieces and inserted illustrations of printed sutras.¹⁷⁷ Tangut sutras were printed in various languages: Chinese, Tangut, as well as Tibetan. In the collection of Tangut sutras, Tibetan-inspired paintings can be found in scriptures in Tibetan and Tangut, as well as in sutras in

¹⁷⁶ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia de zangchuan fojiao" 西夏的藏傳佛教, 38.

¹⁷⁷ Huang, "Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces," 131-32.

Chinese.¹⁷⁸ It is unfortunate that Tangut Buddhist temples barely survived through history and the murals inside temples are rarely found.

The development of Tangut Buddhism is closely related to the history of Tangut culture. During the early period of Tangut (1002-1086 CE), due to the court's diplomatic relation with the Song court and their admiration for Chinese culture, Tangut Buddhism was primarily inspired by Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. Therefore, Tangut Mahayana art also presented the Chinese themes in Dunhuang, mainly including portraits of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, illustrations of sutra stories, paintings of patrons, and decorative patterns. Among them, the most commonly discovered are illustrations of sutras and portraits of Buddha and Bodhisattva. The sutras that were illustrated by the Tangut generally represented themes such as Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha, Pure Land of Maitreya Buddha, Pure Land of Medicine Buddha, frescoes of Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, the *Lotus Sutra*, and *Nirvana Sutra*. Pure Land themes were undoubtedly one of the most favored during the Tangut period. Frescoes of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra were most often represented as a pair in Tangut caves in Dunhuang. Due to the court's admiration for Mañjuśrī in Mount Wutai (五台山 wutai shan) themes, more twenty Dunhuang caves out of the seventy in total contain the Mañjuśrī portrait set in the grand view of Mount Wutai.¹⁷⁹ In addition to adopting the themes of Chinese Buddhism, Tangut artists also learned the skills and techniques of Chinese art.

Later, during the reign of Renzong (r.1139-1193), with the diminishing of Song power in East Asia, the focus of Tangut diplomatic relations shifted to Tibet. Also due to

¹⁷⁸ Xie Jisheng 謝繼勝, "Tubo Xixia lishi" 吐蕃西夏曆史, 35-44.

¹⁷⁹ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 388.

Renzong's actions with regard to Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrayana Buddhism officially became the state religion and Vajrayana Buddhist art began to flourish in Tangut.¹⁸⁰ In Tangut culture, painting *thangkas* was regarded as another approach to making merit—besides printing scriptures. Therefore, the production of Buddhist *thangkas* was frequently sponsored by the court as well as by citizens.¹⁸¹ Tangut *thangkas* have been discovered in great number in Khara Khoto and Hexi corridor. The themes of Tangut *thangkas* are generally in line with the content of Tantric scriptures that were popular among Tangut Buddhists, including Medicine Buddha, Akṣobhya, thousand-arm Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Green Tārā, Uṣṇīṣavijayā, Vajrayoginī, Chakrasambhava, the *maṇḍala*, Acala, Amitabha Buddha, and Vairocana. These *thangkas* were usually painted in bright colors, creating a strong contrasting effect. During the later period of Tangut, artists continued to adapt features from Himalayan art conventions and Chinese art into their works, and in so doing, these artists became exceedingly skilled in maintaining the balance between incorporating foreign art elements and maintaining a unique identity.

3.4.1 Mahayana Paintings

Tangut Mahayana Buddhist art was primarily inspired by the Chinese Mahayana art of the Song dynasty and Guiyi period in Dunhuang (851-1036 CE). These Tangut Buddhist paintings were humble imitations of the Chinese Buddhist art of the Tang and Song dynasties. Early Tangut artists were not able to completely master the skills and

¹⁸⁰ Linrothe, “Peripheral Visions,” 235–62; Sørensen, “Esoteric Buddhist Art,” 540-541.

¹⁸¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, “Xixia de zangchuan fojiao” 西夏的藏傳佛教, 45-46.

techniques of Chinese art, and this allows scholars nowadays to differentiate Chinese Song art and early Tangut art.¹⁸²

For example, Chinese Song artists often pursued a dignified landscape as the manifestation of Buddha's Pure Land to highlight the spiritual significance of the Buddha and the serenity of the ultimate spiritual realm in Buddhism. Architectural elements were especially emphasized in the Chinese paintings of Buddha's Pure Land. However, the Tangut illustration of the Pure Land from the early time is a much simplified version of these Chinese Song paintings of Pure Land with regard to composition and the depiction of details.¹⁸³ Additionally, in the depiction of the main subjects, early Tangut paintings often lacked the variety of postures and vivid facial expressions.¹⁸⁴

Early Tangut artists also favored the theme of a thousand Buddhas and offering Bodhisattvas. The thousand-Buddha murals from the Song project a multi-layered landscape and illustrate celestial beings with different facial expressions and bodily postures, vividly flowing around the main subjects. In contrast, the early Tangut version of thousand-Buddha murals arranges a large number of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in rigid alignment. And they are each painted in exactly the same color, size, posture, and facial expression, lacking vitality. The technique of color gradation is not used and subjects appear to be two dimensional.

In the later period of the Tangut empire, even while Vajrayana Buddhist art flourished, Mahayana Buddhist art meanwhile also continued developing in Dunhuang.

¹⁸² Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, "Lüelun Xixia bihua yishu" 略論西夏壁畫藝術, 9–19.

¹⁸³ Wang Yanyun 王艷雲, "Hexi shiku Xixia bihua zhong de niepan jingbian" 河西石窟西夏壁畫中的涅槃經變, 59–61.

¹⁸⁴ Zhao Shengliang 趙聲良, *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianshi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史, 222–223.

Tangut Mahayana Buddhist art reached its peak during this time. Among the paintings of Pure Land favored by the Tangut, the Pure Land of Medicine Buddha is the most common subject, along with illustrations of Śākyamuni Buddha preaching and Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land.

Unlike the early period paintings, late Tangut paintings present precise and vivid illustrations of Buddha and Bodhisattvas situated in magnificent landscape backgrounds.¹⁸⁵ Additionally, with fluid outlines and elegant coloring, late Tangut Mahayana paintings give prominence to the tranquil and harmonious expressions when portraying Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The two well-known Guanyin portraits in cave no. 2 at Yulin Caves are good examples of the late Tangut Mahayana art. The two murals of water-moon Guanyin correspond with each other in a sense of artistic merits. Their composition and art techniques are almost the same with some differences in detail.

The two portraits of water-moon Guanyin are located on the two sides of the northern wall inside the cave, with the front door in between. Water-moon Guanyin is one of the thirty-three manifestations of Guanyin in the Chinese convention, a tradition in Buddhist art that started in the Tang dynasty.¹⁸⁶ Specifically, in Chinese Buddhism, the composition of fluid water and glowing moon conceptualizes the transcendental nature of sages, which became one of the more favored settings in which to situate Guanyin. While inheriting the theme of water-moon Guanyin from Chinese Buddhism, late Tangut paintings also illuminate the ambiance of serenity. For instance, in the two given murals, the two most important elements—Guanyin and the moon—are situated on the two sides

¹⁸⁵ Mao Fang 卯芳, "Dongqianfodong di'erku bihua yishu yanjiu" 東千佛洞第二窟壁畫藝術研究, 132-133.

¹⁸⁶ Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記, 81.

of the diagonal line to enlarge the visual space and to contrast the sophisticated depiction of details. Peaceful and compassionate Guanyin, sitting in a large translucent aura, watches the glowing moon, while the fluid water quietly flows near him. With a large space intentionally left black between Guanyin and the moon, the serene and peaceful ambiance gives prominence to the spiritual state of realizing the nature of emptiness.

Elements and features from many other art conventions, such as Indian, Uyghur, Jin, and Liao art, are also infused in the Tangut Mahayana Buddhist art.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, the Tangut art also retains its own unique identity.

In the water-moon Guanyin on the southern wall, for example, Guanyin's face and some parts of the body have been gilded with gold. Although it is moderately faded due to air slaking, with the dim light in the cave, water-moon Guanyin still appears gently glowing, as in the light of a full moon. In Dunhuang caves, the technique of gilding can be traced back to the Tang and Sui dynasties, when gold powder was occasionally applied to create the golden-hue body of the Great man as described in scriptures. Or, in other cases, gilding was used on the crown ornaments of Bodhisattvas. However, it wasn't until the Tangut reign that gilding became popular in Dunhuang. Gold powder was often used, not only in the depiction of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, their garments and ornaments, but also in the decorative patterns, dragons and phoenixes, and large

¹⁸⁷ Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, "Lüelun Xixia bihua yishu" 略論西夏壁畫藝術, 100-105; Linrothe, "Peripheral Visions," 255-56; Li Yumin 李玉珉, "Heishuicheng chutu Xixia mituo hua chutan" 黑水城出土西夏彌陀畫初探, 29; Chen Aifeng 陳愛峰, and Yang Fuxue 楊富學, "Xixia Yindu fojiao guanxi kao" 西夏印度佛教關係考, 104-105; Solonin, "Buddhist Connections," 171-74; Huang, "Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces," 131-32.

flowers. Applying gold to create a glowing effect of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas was commonly used by Tangut artists in Dunhuang.¹⁸⁸

Exclusively, Tangut artists in its later period often used turquoise green not only as the theme color of an entire mural but also as the principal color of its central subjects at the same time. The Tanguts' love for green seems undeniable.¹⁸⁹ Moreover, cold colors, such as sky blue and lapis blue, were especially used in combination with turquoise green in Tangut caves, which creates a serious religious atmosphere.¹⁹⁰ This bold approach creates a soothing and tranquil ambiance and also emphasizes the harmonious nature of the transcendental state. Meanwhile, to contrast the soft and gentle green, lapis blue is used to provide fluid outlines and vermilion red is applied as highlight to build a three-dimensional effect within the mural. In the given mural, turquoise green is the theme color: it is used in the background mountains and trees, the flowing stream, as well as in the illustration of Guanyin and his large aura. The stillness of the objects on the banks is contrasted by the fluidity of the stream that gently flows near Guanyin, while the color of green holds them all together as a complete presentation of Guanyin's spiritual realm.

Guanyin's two arms are long and slender, and his shoulders are sloped and soft, while his torso seems relatively muscular. His upper body is naked and decorated by garments and ornaments, and the lower body is covered by garments of silk. This Tangut

¹⁸⁸ Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, "Lüelun Xixia bihua yishu" 略論西夏壁畫藝術, 100-105.

¹⁸⁹ Zhou Weina 周維娜, "Xixia wanqi shiku bihua fengge tanxi" 西夏晚期石窟壁畫風格探析, 95-96; Chen Yuning 陳育寧, and Tang Xiaofang 湯曉芳, "Shanzuigou Xixia bihua tanxi" 山嘴溝西夏壁畫探析, 14-20.

¹⁹⁰ Mao Fang 卯芳, "Dongqianfodong di'erku bihua yishu yanjiu" 東千佛洞第二窟壁畫藝術研究, 54-56; Zhou Weina 周維娜, "Xixia wanqi shiku bihua fengge tanxi" 西夏晚期石窟壁畫風格探析, 95-96.

illustration of Guanyin can be related to the art concept that emerged during the Indian Pāla period (eighth-twelfth century). Since the eighth century, Indian art began to develop its approach in depicting the gods and sages. Indian artists substituted the Gandharan features with Indians' physical characteristics in the depiction of transcendental beings and embedded their own understanding of transcendence in their works. Since this evolution of religious imagery, gods have been portrayed as slender and gentle in Indian art. Particularly, their shoulders are no longer wide and solid, but sloped and soft. The Tangut ethnic characteristics are fairly reflected in this depiction, such as Guanyin's prolonged torso, plump cheeks, and slim eyes.

Meanwhile, portraits of donors are also inspired by the Tangut ethnic group's physical appearance, especially during the late period of Tangut reign. In cave no. 29 at the Yulin site, more than twenty Tangut donors are portrayed in the cave mural with their names and titles listed, including Tangut officials, attendants, monks and the state master of Tangut, 信畢智海 *Xinbi zhihai*.¹⁹¹ Main donors stand in front, wearing official caps with ribbons. Their robes are loose and long, with crew neck collars and narrow sleeves. They wear belt circles around the waist and black leather boots. They have round faces with plump cheeks. Their eyes are long and narrow, and noses are tall. Their lips are narrow but thick, with the two edges pointing upwards. These facial features can also be observed in the illustration of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. The attendants are depicted as smaller and younger. Their heads are almost bald with only some bands in front. Some wear long robes and some wear short robes with colorful tight trousers. These paintings

¹⁹¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 149.

of donors provide visual evidence of the Tangut ethnic group's facial and physical characteristics and costumes.

3.4.2 Vajrayana Paintings

According to the historical sources, the Tangut people went through constant hardships of migration, famine, drought, and wars until its administration finally settled in Khara Khoto. Through the experience of balancing their existence with that of their neighbors, Tangut Buddhists were rather open to practices from different traditions of their neighboring tribes, especially during the later period. Limitations of lineage and tradition hardly stopped them from learning the practices for salvation. In the same way, Tangut artists skillfully blended art conventions from neighboring cultures—especially Himalayan art and Tibetan art—into their own creation of art.

To lay a comprehensive foundation for the examination of the art styles and techniques of the given Tangut murals, the following section introduces and discusses Tangut Tantric art and influences of other art conventions on art of Tangut.

3.4.2.1 Tangut Vajrayana Art Inspired by Himalayan and Tibetan Art

When discussing Tangut Vajrayana Buddhist art, there are generally two main views with respect to the external influences from both Tibet and India: 1) it was heavily

influenced by Tibetan Buddhist art,¹⁹² and 2) it was mainly inspired by the Indian or Nepalese (Himalayan) art.¹⁹³

Those who hold the first view believe Tangut Tantric Buddhist art to be part of, or a product of, Tibetan Buddhist art due to the history of the transmission of Buddhism into Tangut. The strong connection between the remaining artworks in the Kadampa temples in Central Tibet and Tangut Buddhist art is suggested, based on studies on artistic presentation in *kesi thangkas* found in Khara Koto.¹⁹⁴ After the early Central Tibetan style largely integrated with Indian Pāla art techniques and skills and when Tangut had a close relationship with Tibet, this artistic approach was also brought to Tangut. Exemplars may be seen in the Tangut capital, Khara Koto, as well as in the religious and artistic center, Dunhuang.¹⁹⁵

At the same time, Tangut Vajrayana art also exhibits a close connection with Himalayan art due to the direct Buddhist communication between Tangut and India, by means of traveling monks, during the eleventh to the twelfth century.

Central Tibetan Art

Early Central Tibetan art conventions emerged in Central Tibet during the tenth to the eleventh century with the substantial influence from Indian Pāla art. During the

¹⁹² Xiong Wenbing 熊文彬, “Cong banhua kan Xixia fojiao yishu dui yuandai neidi zangchuan fojiao yishu de yingxiang” 從版畫看西夏佛教藝術對元代內地藏傳佛教藝術的影響, 70–75; Xiong Wenbing 熊文彬, “Cong banhua kan Xixia fojiao yishu dui yuandai neidi zangchuan fojiao yishu de yingxiang (xu)” 從版畫看西夏佛教藝術對元代內地藏傳佛教藝術的影響 (續), 92–93.

¹⁹³ Xie Jisheng 謝繼勝, *Xixia zangchuan huihua* 西夏藏傳繪畫, 48; Vitali, *Early Temples*, 54–55; Chen Aifeng 陳愛峰, and Yang Fuxue 楊富學, “Xixia Yindu fojiao guanxi kao” 西夏印度佛教關係考, 104–8; Khokhlov, “The Xi Xia Legacy.”

¹⁹⁴ Watt, Wardwell, and Rossabi, *When Silk Was Gold*, 91–94.

¹⁹⁵ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 114–116; Van Schaik, “Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia,” 76–78.

eleventh and twelfth centuries, India was constantly facing the aggression of Islam. A large number of Indian monks, including Atiśa Dīpaṃkara Śrījñāna (982 – 1054 CE), fled to Tibet. Many manuscripts, scroll paintings, and sculptures were taken into Tibet from India, which also marks an important moment in history—the integration of Indian Buddhism into Tibetan Buddhism.¹⁹⁶

At that time, Tibet began to reconnect to Buddhism. However, Dharma texts and scriptures were incomplete. Therefore, many Tibetan monks went to India to learn Buddhist teachings and request scriptures. The frequent exchange of Buddhist teachings and practices between these Indian and Tibetan Buddhist monks during that time led to the formation of what is recognized as early Central Tibetan art.¹⁹⁷ In Chinese publications, this art style is also referred as “Pāla-Tibetan” art to indicate the great influence from the Indian Pāla art. Modern publications—for example, by Linrothe et al.¹⁹⁸ and Devers et al.¹⁹⁹—referred to this art convention as "Central Tibet-derived art" or "early Central Tibetan art." I choose to follow their use of "early Central Tibetan art" to differentiate the Indian Pāla art style that is to be discussed in the later section.

During the 11th and 12th centuries, many Buddhist temples in Tibet had a close relationship with India, especially the Pāla Empire in East India. The Buddhist culture and art of the Pāla Empire were continuously introduced into Tibet through the trade channel of Nepal, which developed into the main source of inspiration for Buddhist art in the Central Region of Tibet. These particular art conventions were mainly practiced in

¹⁹⁶ Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Pal and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Art of Tibet*, 114-116.

¹⁹⁸ Linrothe and Kerin, “Discovery through Deconsecration,” 52–63.

¹⁹⁹ Devers, Bruneau, and Vernier, “An Archeological Account,” 100–140.

Kadam monasteries in Central Tibet between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.²⁰⁰

Yet, Xie argues that the idea of adapting Pāla art features into Tibetan *thangkas* was possibly inspired by Tangut art.²⁰¹

Indian Pāla Art

The Indian Pāla style was practiced in East India (now the states of Bihar and West Bengal) during the reign of the Pāla Empire (eighth–twelfth century). The school of Pāla art was founded during the reigns of Dharmapala and Devapala. During these two reigns, lay artists were encouraged to practice religious art, as were monastics.²⁰²

Pāla art was a new chapter in the history of Indian art. Early Pāla art mainly focused on Buddhist topics and subjects. Indian artists no longer followed the convention of Gandhara art in depicting their gods and transcendental beings. Instead, they begin to express their own racial attributes in the depiction of the deities. More human physical characteristics manifested in images of deities, such as the gender differences between male and female. In particular, female deities were decorated with a significant amount of jewelry and ornaments. Due to the influences of the flourishing Hindu art, illustrations of consorts of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas began to appear during this time.²⁰³ Another important feature of Pāla art is that Pāla artists focused on manifesting the transcendent state of enlightened beings according to the artists' understanding. Therefore, Pāla era

²⁰⁰ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 114-116.

²⁰¹ Xie Jisheng 謝繼勝, "Tubo Xixia lishi" 吐蕃西夏曆史, 35-44.

²⁰² Wangu, *Images of Indian Goddesses*, 89.

²⁰³ Wangu, *Images of Indian Goddesses*, 89-90.

Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' facial and physical countenance were vividly rendered as expressing their ultimate spiritual states.

In India, during the tenth and eleventh century, much of Eastern India was controlled by the Pāla Empire. Many of the elites of the Pāla Empire generously sponsored and supported the Buddhist monasteries in Eastern India. As a result, the Pāla Buddhist art was well developed and widely spread.²⁰⁴

Nepalese Newar Art

Nepalese Buddhism was also influential in the development of Tangut Buddhism and art. Nepalese Buddhists received manuscripts and artworks from many great Indian teachers. During the eleventh to thirteenth century, Buddhist paintings in Nepal contained mainly themes of Buddhist Tantra based on Indian models, which indicates the transmission of Indian Buddhism and the importance of Vajrayana Buddhism in Nepal. Many Nepalese Buddhist Tantric art objects were created by Newar artists.²⁰⁵ While Nepalese merchants traveled between Nepal and Tibet, many Newar Buddhist paintings and sculptures were transmitted into Tibetan monasteries and some even reached the capital of Tangut, Khara Khoto.²⁰⁶

Although Newar artists much learned from Indian Tantric art, they also implemented features and characteristics of Nepalese art in their Tantric paintings. For instance, Buddhist female deities in Nepalese paintings are illustrated with slightly less

²⁰⁴ Pal and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Art of Tibet*, 114-116.

²⁰⁵ Pal, *The Arts of Nepal II*, 10.

²⁰⁶ Pal, *The Arts of Nepal II*, 149-150.

pronounced feminine attributes than in Indian paintings. Many of these paintings' details and compositions will be individually discussed in the analyses the Tārā murals.

Inspired by Tibetan Art and Indian Pāla Art

At the Yulin Caves, many Tangut caves are themed of Vajrayana Buddhism. These provide appropriate examples to discuss the influences of Tibetan art and Pāla art in Tangut Tantric paintings. One of the many features learned from Indian art is the situating of a principal deity inside a stupa. Early Buddhism in India had its practice of worshipping stupas instead of a depiction of the Buddha. In the post-Gupta time, sculptures emerged of the Buddha standing inside a semi-section-view stupa, as in the Ajanta Caves. This was an noteworthy example of the new northwest Indian trend of using Buddha images to adorn stupas.²⁰⁷ Aside from this example in Indian art, this approach of depicting Buddha on the dome of a semi-section stupa is mostly found in the Tangut art since the time of Renzong's reign.²⁰⁸

In the cave no. 4 of Yulin Caves, Green Tārā is sitting inside a semi-section stupa with six accompanying Tārās, each of them also sitting inside a semi-section stupa. And in cave no. 3 at the Yulin site, Uṣṇīṣavijayā is portrayed standing inside a semi-section stupa. Unlike the Indian depiction of Buddha inside a stupa, this illustration of Uṣṇīṣavijayā inside a stupa is situated upon a stepped throne and framed inside a *maṇḍala* with two accompanying Bodhisattvas, four heavenly guardians, two goddesses with nectar, and Śakra (Chi: 帝釋天 *dishitian*). There are four doors, one on each side of

²⁰⁷ Spink, *Ajanta*, 43-44.

²⁰⁸ Linrothe, "Xia Renzong," 91-121; Linrothe, "Ushnishavijaya," 3.

the mansion, and each door is guarded by a wrathful protector. Outside the *maṇḍala*, there are four tips of *vajra* in each direction, representing that the entire *maṇḍala* is supported by a crossed *vajra*. This arrangement also appears in *thangkas* and woodcut paintings discovered in Khara Khoto, but is only rarely found outside of Tangut, for Indian and Tibetan Tantric *maṇḍalas* do not include the stupa.²⁰⁹

Both Pāla art and Tibetan art shaped Tangut Tantric art mainly with regard to the depiction of Tantric deities. As an illustration, in the same Uṣṇīṣavijayā mural of at Yulin Caves, the upper bodies of the principal deity and two accompanying Bodhisattvas are naked and decorated with jewels. They are wearing only short lower garments, which is typical in Indian Pāla Art, as it derives from the Indian costumes during the Pāla period. Offering Bodhisattvas in the same cave are also strong examples of Pāla art. To illustrate, on the northern wall, there is a painting of an offering Bodhisattva in a slender female form, with narrow shoulders, full breasts and trim waist. Her head is adorned with a crown of flowers. Her right arm lifts to reach a tree branch and her left arm gently stretches downward with the palm facing up. Her body twists as she is dancing, and her legs are crossed standing. Her upper body is naked, yet adorned by a necklace and a snake. She wears a very short white lower garment like a “miniskirt,” decorated with green ribbons. The illustration of this Bodhisattva is in line with deity iconography in Pāla art, and is primarily derived from the folk costumes in India, which, in turn, was later adopted by Tibetan artists.

²⁰⁹ Linrothe, “Xia Renzong,” 99-100; Jia Weiwei 賈維維, “Yulinku disanku dingjizunsheng fomumantuluo yanjiu” 榆林窟第三窟頂髻尊勝佛母曼荼羅研究, 68-69.

In the meantime, Indian Pāla art also initiated new approaches in the composition of Tantric paintings, which were later adopted by both Tibetan and Tangut artists. In a Tantric painting, the principal deity takes up most of the space in the center. On top of the principal deity and the two sides, space is divided into many square blocks. In the blocks of the top bar, when the principal deity is a Buddha or Bodhisattva, there is usually a portrayal of Buddhas of the five directions; when the main figure is a Yidam deity (Tantric manifestation of enlightened beings), the top blocks are filled with the lineage preceptors or other manifestations of this Yidam deity. In the blocks of the two sides, the eight Bodhisattvas are often painted. Under the principal deity, preceptors and donors are usually portrayed. This type of composition can be frequently found in Tangut murals in the Dunhuang area: for instance, the *maṇḍala* of *garbhakośa-dhātu* (Tib. *spyod-pahi rgyud*) and the *maṇḍala* of Avalokiteśvara in cave no. 3 at Yulin, as well as the Tārā mural in cave no. 4 at Yulin.

Infused with Chinese Art

However, Chinese art was not completely abandoned in the formation of Tangut Tantric art. Chinese syncretic features were also embedded in the Tangut Tantric art, due to the long-standing influence of Chinese Mahayana Buddhist art.²¹⁰ In practice, Tangut artists situated Himalayan-style subjects and Chinese-style subjects together in one Tantric painting.

²¹⁰ Sørensen, *Esoteric Buddhism*, 498–511; Huang, “Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces,” 133; Ying Weifeng 英衛峰, “Shilun 11-13 shiji weizang fojiao yishu zhong de youguan boluo yishu fengge” 試論 11~13 世紀衛藏佛教藝術中的有關波羅藝術風格, 38-39.

The Uṣṇīṣavijayā mural mentioned above is one example. Interestingly, I find that, by viewing the entire composition of the *maṇḍala* from the center point and gradually extending to the outer rim in circle layers, deities within the same circle are painted in the same art convention, and each circle layer demonstrates a different art convention from the previous one. By way of illustration, the principal deity Uṣṇīṣavijayā is at the center point of the *maṇḍala*, portrayed in the prototype from the Himalayan and Tibetan art conventions. Around her, an inner circle layer of deities is illustrated, including two accompanying Bodhisattvas—Avalokiteśvara (white) and Vajrapāṇi (blue) standing right next to her, and two goddesses floating right on top of her, pouring nectar on her. Within this circle, the deities, as previously discussed, are primarily painted in the combined Himalayan and Tibetan art conventions. Outside this layer, four heavenly guardians are painted on each corner of the *maṇḍala*, and a heavenly god, possibly Śakra, stands in front of the stepped throne, holding an umbrella. These five heavenly beings constitute another circle layer around the principal deity. Different from the inner layer, heavenly beings of this circle are dressed in Chinese-style robes and illustrated as in Chinese paintings. Outside this layer, four wrathful deities are arranged respectively at each door of the *maṇḍala*, which is the outer circle layer of subjects. In contrast to the heavenly beings of the previous layer, the wrathful deities of this layer are of the Tibetan prototype. In this fashion, various art conventions harmoniously blend, and the change of styles is processed in an orderly and smooth manner within a single mural.

Other Attributes of Tangut Tantric Art

While blending a variety of art conventions into its works, Tangut Buddhist art successfully maintained its characteristics in the art expression of Buddhism.²¹¹ Besides the depiction of donors that were based on Tangut's own racial attributes as previously discussed, the presentation of Tanguts' life was also embedded in their Buddhist art.

Since the eleventh century, the Tangut became skilled in agricultural production, and their commercial activities yielded great prosperity. These achievements are largely found in the Tangut paintings discovered in Khara Khoto, Hexi corridor, and Dunhuang. One of the well-known examples is the illustration of the thousand-arm Avalokiteśvara in cave no. 3 at the Yulin site. This illustration of Avalokiteśvara has 51 faces and 166 hands, including 42 main arms and hands that are holding Buddhist symbolic weapons and mudras that are commonly seen in other portraits of thousand-arm Avalokiteśvara.²¹² The remaining one-hundred-plus hands, however, hold many secular tools and implements that were essential in Tanguts life, including agricultural and production tools,²¹³ industrial implements, and music instruments. Among them, musical instruments are the most frequently depicted, such as 箏 zheng, 琵琶 pipa, 笙 sheng, 鈸 ba, and 方響 fangxiang. In addition to the hand objects of Avalokiteśvara, life scenes are also depicted around the main deity in this mural. These scenes include Tangut activities in agriculture,

²¹¹ Wang Yanyun 王艷雲, “Xixia Heishuicheng yu Anxi shiku bihua jian de ruogan lianxi” 西夏黑水城與安西石窟壁畫間的若干聯繫, 105–7; Gu Ying 顧穎, “Xixia zangchuan fengge huihua yu Xizang fohua de yitong bijiao” 西夏藏傳風格繪畫與西藏佛畫的異同比較, 94.

²¹² Guo Jing 郭靜, “Yulinku disanku wushiyimian qianshou guanyin jingbian zhong de Xixia wuzhi wenhua yingxiang” 榆林窟第3窟五十一面千手觀音經變中的西夏物質文化影像, 79–87.

²¹³ Includes spade, hoe, harrow, saw, ax, scissors, hand pot, carpenter's square, ink maker, bucket, and the like.

trade, industry, assorted traditional performing arts (百戲 *baixi*), and music performance. At the same time, delicate Chinese-prototype pagodas are also represented in the top area of this mural. The entire mural vividly reflects the advanced development of Tangut agriculture, economics, arts, and architecture during the later period.

Inserting scenes of secular life into religious art reveals the emphasis of the practical and practicable nature of Tangut Buddhism. As touched upon earlier, after endless hardships, the Tangut finally settled in the Hexi corridor and began to develop their economy and culture. Throughout the entire process, Buddhism had always been the center of Tangut spirituality and its practice and had been closely related to Tangut citizens' daily lives. No matter whether Tangut Buddhism was more influenced by Chinese Mahayana Buddhism or Tibetan Tantric Buddhism, Tangut Buddhists always focused on the practical aspect. The lineage and sectarian concerns were not essential. Tantric Buddhism swiftly spread in Tangut for its practical and practicable characteristics. Tantric rituals were favored by the Tangut to achieve spiritual or secular goals. Therefore, as presented in this Avalokiteśvara mural, the Tangut connected their prosperous life and productivity to the Bodhisattva who vowed to save all living beings from suffering in this secular world. However, Tantric paintings, for example in Tibetan art, were required to exactly follow the root texts. The depiction of productive tools as hand objects of a Tantric deity and illustration of secular life was not common in Tantric art in other conventions. The special Tangut way of illustration proves that Tangut spiritual practice and secular life were inseparable.

Another essential feature of the Tangut Tantric murals is the ceiling paintings. In the later period of Tangut, cave paintings were regarded as the depiction of the Buddhist

cosmos. A cave was painted and decorated as a “secret hall”—or *maṇḍala*—to assist practitioners in visualizing the entire universe as described in the Buddhist cosmology. Therefore, the ceiling became part of the universe and its paintings and decorations became systematic in Tangut caves. Therefore, Tantric-themed *maṇḍalas* were primarily painted on the ceilings of late Tangut caves in Dunhuang as a way of demonstrating the Buddhist cosmology in the Tantric view. For example, the ceiling of cave no. 3 at Yulin Caves has a commonly painted Tantric *maṇḍala* of five Tathāgatas. Following the Tantric scriptures, the *maṇḍala* is comprised of various layers of geometrics. The outer layer is a circle, representing the cemetery ground and holding all the elements inside together. Within the circle, there is a square with four decorating tips of the vajra, representing the *vajra* mansion that is supported by a double-crossed vajra. Decorative patterns are painted to fill the space between the cemetery ground circle and the *vajra* mansion. Four doors are on the four sides of the *vajra* mansion, guarded by four wrathful protectors. Within the *vajra* mansion, on each of the four corners, a Bodhisattva is depicted as sitting in a meditative posture with the right leg stretching out. The four Bodhisattvas correspond with the five Tathāgatas in the inner layer. The five Tathāgatas of the five directions are Vairocana (center), Akshobhya (east), Ratnasambhava (south), Amitābha (west), and Amoghasiddhi (north). Treasure vases are painted as decoration between Tathāgatas. Although the colors of the deities inside the *maṇḍala* principally follow the Tantric scriptures, the green color is especially favored in this *maṇḍala* painting. The *maṇḍala* painting is commonly seen on the ceilings of Tangut Tantric caves in Dunhuang, and another example is cave no. 10 at the same site. In this ceiling *maṇḍala*, due to the shape of the ceiling, decorative paintings take up much greater space.

The turquoise green is almost unavoidable in every decorative layer, which gives a gentle and peaceful effect to the entire *maṇḍala*.

The Tangut also showed their strong preference for colors in their Tantric paintings. As previously mentioned in the section on Tangut Mahayana Buddhist Art, Tangut especially favored turquoise-green color in paintings.²¹⁴ Although this green color was not made of real turquoise minerals—due to the high value of natural turquoise stones—the purpose of imitating its color was related to the meaning of the stone.

Turquoise was first discovered outside the city of Nishapur in eastern Iran and it was regarded as the stone of victory, adorning the conquerors, and was especially important in Islamic cultures since ancient times. The color of turquoise naturally changes from sky blue to bluish green after being mined. The stone was thought to be closely related to the sky and the celestial realm because of its natural blue color. It was believed to be an amulet that provided protection from harm and would grant the power for conquering enemies.²¹⁵ The stone and its meaning and related legends spread across India, Central Asia, and the Near East along the Silk Road. Turquoise became the sacred stone in both imperial and religious contexts in these areas.²¹⁶ Dunhuang, as the most popular destination on the Silk Road, had been influenced by the spread of turquoise and its culture since the Guiyi period.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Tangut Empire was also influenced

²¹⁴ This green pigment is named turquoise green but does not necessarily mean the actual turquoise stone powder. In “Dongqinfodong bihua yanliao secailü jì bihua binghai zhili yanjiu” 東千佛洞壁畫顏料色彩規律及壁畫病害治理研究 by 郭宏 Guo Hong and 段修業 Duan Xiuye, through scientific examinations, the green color in Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves is mainly made of lead chloride, and the green color in Yulin Caves is primarily made of oxygen-bearing copper.

²¹⁵ Khazeni, *Sky Blue Stone*, 36-37.

²¹⁶ Khazeni, *Sky Blue Stone*, 27.

²¹⁷ Cui Hongfen 崔紅芬, *Xixia hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究, 402.

by the culture of turquoise and commonly used turquoise for amulets and decorations in the depictions of Buddhist deities.²¹⁸ In addition, similar to the turquoise culture in its original areas, the turquoise color was also used in the political court of Tangut for use in the decoration and the protection for the Tangut rulers' throne.²¹⁹

Hence, the imitated turquoise green color was frequently used in decorations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas for its sacred meanings. And artists generously used the bluish green to color large space in paintings, such as the ground, water, and mountains, to manifest the celestial and transcendent state of the realm of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This bluish green color is so often seen in Tangut murals that Tangut paintings are also known as the "green murals."

Gold is another color that was frequently seen in Tangut paintings. The convention of using gold powder in paintings started in the Sui and Tang dynasties and became popular in Song. Tanguts used it in both Mahayana Buddhist paintings and Tantric paintings. In the Tangut culture, the use of gold for decoration was specified for certain noble classes and loyal families. Detailed requirements for using gold for decoration was even identified in the *Laws of Tiansheng Era of Tangut*. Therefore, as a means to honor the highest class in both spiritual and secular realms, gold was frequently utilized in Tangut paintings for decorating Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Tantric deities, as well as dragons and phoenixes that represented emperors and empresses.

²¹⁸ Khazeni, *Sky Blue Stone*, 25-26.

²¹⁹ Dunnell, *The Great State of White and High*, 76.

Inspired by Jin, Liao, and Uyghur Art

In addition to the political and religious communication that Tangut had with Song, Tibet, and India, Tangut also had constant interactions with Jurchen Jin, Khitan Liao, and Uyghur.²²⁰ As touched upon earlier, the Tangut especially focused on the practice aspect of Buddhism, rather than the “tradition” or “lineage,” which allowed the essences of other traditions to blend into Tangut Buddhism. Similarly, in the art field, artistic elements and concepts from Jin, Liao, and Uyghur art conventions were also incorporated into Tangut paintings.²²¹ Costumes and physical attributes of these ethnic groups can also be seen in the depictions of donors and offering attendants in the Tangut murals.²²²

One of the most discussed Uyghur-featured portraits is the donor painting in cave no. 409 at the Mogao Caves. In this mural, the main donor is depicted with a rounded face, plump cheeks, and long, narrow eyes. His entire face is painted in pinkish beige with a red gradient over the forehead, chin, and cheeks. The donor wears a peach-shaped high crown over his head and a long dark robe decorated with the circled-dragon pattern. His two hands are holding an incense burner in front of his chest. This donor portrait is different from previous portraits, as well as Tangut portraits generally, yet quite similar to

²²⁰ For Xixia's Buddhist connection with Liao, see: Solonin, “Buddhist Connections between the Liao and Xixia: Preliminary Considerations”; Solonin, “Khitan Connection of Tangut Buddhism.” For Xixia's Buddhist connection with Jin, see: Liu Jianli 劉建麗, “Lüelun Xixia yu Jinchao de guanxi” 略論西夏與金朝的關係, 79. For Xixia's Buddhist connection with Uyghur, see: Yang Fuxue 楊富學, “Lun Huihu wenhua dui Xixia de yingxiang” 論回鶻文化對西夏的影響 in *Songshi Yanjiu Luncong* 宋史研究論叢, ed. Jiang Xidong 姜錫東, and Li Huarui 李華瑞, 279–94; Yang Fuxue 楊富學, “Huihuseng yu ‘Xixia Dazangjing’ de fanyi” 回鶻僧與《西夏大藏經》的翻譯, 338–44.

²²¹ Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, “Lüelun Xixia bihua yishu” 略論西夏壁畫藝術, 9-19; Li Yumin 李玉珉, “Heishuicheng chutu Xixia mituo hua chutan” 黑水城出土西夏彌陀畫初探, 3-5; Huang, “Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces,” 131-32; Linrothe, “Peripheral Visions,” 256-57.

²²² Shi Jinbo 史金波, “Xixia huangshi” 西夏皇室, 165-72.

the portrait of the Uyghur emperor in a cave mural in Bezeklik Caves in Xinjiang, China. Therefore, this portrait in the Tangut cave at Mogao Caves is often referred as the Uyghur emperor.²²³ However, through careful analysis based on the historical records on the costumes of Tangut emperors and Uyghur emperors, Shi finds this donor to be a Tangut emperor rather than Uyghur.²²⁴ In his investigation on textual records, the circle-dragon pattern is only recorded as the decoration of Tangut emperors' robes, rather than that of Uyghur emperors. Though many similarities can be observed between the Mogao and Bezeklik murals, the Uyghur emperor's robe in the Bezeklik mural is decorated with circles instead of dragons in circles. Regardless, the influence of Uyghur art in Tangut art was significant, particularly as an example of the influence of Uyghurs in the Tangut culture.

3.5 *Kesi* Paintings

Cave art from the Tangut era is well preserved in the Dunhuang area and its artistic merit has been highly praised in recent years. However, the importance of *kesi* paintings that were primarily found in Khara Khoto also needs to be addressed here.

²²³ Zhao Shengliang 趙聲良, *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianshi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史, 218; Ning Qiang 寧強, *Dunhuang shiku yanjiu* 敦煌石窟研究, 238.

²²⁴ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Xixia huangshi" 西夏皇室, 165-72.

The technique of *kesi* (絨絲) was invented in the Tang dynasty and primarily used for decorations, such as book covers. *Kesi* is a weaving technique that uses silk threads of



Figure 4. Green Tārā kesi painting of Xixia, late 12th-13th century, found in Khara Khoto, China.²²⁶

various colors to produce a cloth with floral patterns or decorative tapestries. The technique flourished in Song China, and later *kesi* tapestries and the technique were brought to Central Asia through the Silk Road.²²⁵ Tangut learned and mastered the technique of *kesi* in its middle to later period. Influenced by the Tibetans, Tanguts also began to use the *kesi* technique to produce Buddhist paintings.

Among the discoveries in Khara Khoto, many Tangut *kesi* paintings are found to be Buddhist themed and some are portraits of Tārā. They are exquisite and delicate, which shows the excellence of Tangut *kesi* technique. Figure 4 is an example of the most

²²⁵ Watt, Wardwell, and Rossabi, *When Silk Was Gold*, 56-59.

²²⁶ Green Tārā kesi painting of Xixia, late 12th-13th century, found in Khara Khoto, China. From The State Hermitage Museum. Accessed May 1, 2018, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/!ut/p/z0/fYyxDoIwFEV_hYXVVxTK3NTEhMEaJngLeWkKltZWofE_X_wBt3tOTi4gdICBXnaiZGMgv3OPfFBC8OIkWaNkdWZCtbeqldeLK0poAP8H-4OdlwUFoI4hmU-CztHDboMJOXvH1W1ZHDNaU86O1WEf-k4m-jhZTf7n7Ug6bTkr67rgHJ4O-y9M8k4v/.

delicate Tārā *kesi* paintings, which is believed to be a product of eleventh to twelfth century.²²⁷

In this painting, Tārā is in the form of Green Tārā, with one face and two arms. Her body is slim and tender and in a subtle movement. She wears a Pāla-style bejeweled three-leaf crown and her curly hair naturally falls over her shoulders. Unlike other Pāla-inspired Tārā paintings, she wears a white short-sleeved cropped form-fitting top, instead of leaving her upper body naked, and a white short lower garment. A white silk belt goes around from her left waist to her right thigh and ends with a bow knot, which is a typical Pāla-style decoration that indicates her transcendental accomplishments. Her left hand holds a blue *utpala* flower and her right hand stretches out with the palm facing down. She sits on a lotus-flower seat that is decorated with a blue snow lion's head on top and is supported by a straight stem of lotus flowers in a pond. Around the stem, two attendants are depicted as protecting and supporting Tārā's seat. Two Bodhisattvas—Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi—accompany her in the two sides of the lotus pond. The background is dark blue and is decorated with strings of white gems. Like in other Tangut paintings, the combination of dark blue, green, and white allows the three colors to naturally blend into each other and to create a tranquil and peaceful ambiance for the presentation of Buddhist deities. Colorful geometric blocks that represent mountains and trees in early Central Tibetan *thangkas* are also seen on the two sides as decorations. Above Tārā, the five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted in five colors and a line of Asoka trees are depicted above the five Buddhas. In the very top register, four celestial beings are dancing on their lotus seats, making offerings to Tārā.

²²⁷ Shi Wei 史偉, "Xixia hexi shiku bihua" 西夏河西石窟壁畫, 100-105.

The *kesi* painting of Tārā presents its Tangut identity among the influences from early Central Tibetan art and Indian Pāla art. Tārā manifests her tranquil and compassionate qualities through the depiction of her facial and physical expressions and the application of colors. Meanwhile, the Tārā *kesi* painting shares many common features with a Tārā *thangka* of the early Central Tibetan art, such as the geometric decorations in the background, the stem-supported lotus seat, and the composition.²²⁸ Therefore, this *kesi* painting possibly shares the same model with the early Central Tibetan Tārā *thangka*.

²²⁸ Shi Wei 史偉, “Xixia hexi shiku bihua” 西夏河西石窟壁畫, 100-105.

Chapter 4. Tārā Mural in Cave No. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves

Cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves is located on the top level of the west cliff. It is a rectangle *caitya* cave with a truncated square pyramidal ceiling, approximately 6.8 meters in width and 9 meters in length. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Tangut *caitya* caves at the Eastern Thousand Buddha site are different from the *caitya* caves from previous dynasties at the Mogao Grottoes. Instead of having a square-shaped pillar with decorations on the four sides in the center of the cave, Tangut built *caitya* caves with pillars as wide as walls, to divide the space into two: front hall and back pathway. On the two sides (left and right) of the pillar wall, aisles connect the front hall to the back pathway, to provide a path to enter the pathway and circumambulate around the pillar. In cave no. 5, the pillar wall splits the cave into a square-shaped front hall and a rectangle pathway in the back. The pathway behind the pillar wall is approximately 1 meter in width, 6.48 meters in length, and 2.3 meters in height. A platform is built before the pillar wall and re-molded sculptures from the late Qing dynasty are placed on it (these will not be discussed in this chapter).

On the north wall of cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, there is an illustration of Green Tārā with her accompanying Tārās. The principal Green Tārā is situated in the center of the entire mural and takes less than one-third of the space of the mural. She sits on a lotus throne with her right leg stretching out and left leg in the *vajrasana* posture. The back of the throne is decorated with strands of pearls. At her two sides, six accompanying Tārās are depicted, and the five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted

above her. On top of them, a line of *Saraca asoca* (Ashoka trees) is painted. Colorful geometric shapes, representing trees and rock mountains, fill the entire background.

This is the cave with the largest number of representations of patrons among the Tangut caves in the Dunhuang area. As a recent study claims,²²⁹ this cave was built under Monk Zhiyuan (智遠和尚)’s guidance and with donations from many groups of patrons, including military and civil officials from both Tangut and Chinese courts, along with their family members and friends. Based on the colophons and the arrangement of patrons’ paintings, each group sponsored the creation of one mural. Four groups of patron images remain in the murals and provide valuable evidence in identifying the history of this cave.

Each Dunhuang cave is often designed as a complete presentation of art at the beginning of creation. Tantric caves are considered to be the manifestation of the *maṇḍala* for visualization. Known as the “secret hall” in the Tangut culture, they are supposed to be designed as a complete manifestation of the Buddhist cosmology by following scriptures. However, there are exceptions among Tangut caves. Due to the decline of noble families in Dunhuang, many late Tangut caves were sponsored by multiple groups of donors.²³⁰ Patron images are divided into different groups and painted at various places in one cave. Based on their robes and decorations, the patrons are not in the same family or castes. Cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves is one of the exceptions.

²²⁹ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, “Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku” 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 58–59.

²³⁰ Sha Wutian 沙武田, “Dunhuang Xixia shiku yingjianshi goujian” 敦煌西夏石窟營建史構建, 23–34.

Since this cave was sponsored by multiple groups of donors, murals in this cave are painted in various sizes, art styles, and cultural conventions. The Green Tārā mural in this cave does not take as large a space on the wall as is normally reserved for a principal deity. But she is depicted as the principal deity for a particular group of donors.

4.1 Art Analysis of the Tārā Mural



Figure 1a. Green Tārā mural (details) in cave no. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, China.

The principal Green Tārā is depicted with an oval-shaped face that is also often seen in Himalayan art and early Central Tibetan art, also known as Pāla-inspired Tibetan art.²³¹ However, the shape of Green Tārā's face in this Tangut mural is longer and slightly square, without the typical Tangut plump cheeks. The entire face depiction is basic and plain without vibrant colors, but the substantially vivid facial expression in smooth lines

illuminates the tranquility and serenity of this transcendent spiritual being. Her eyebrows are gently curling upwards on their outer ends, in a slightly darker green color. Her eyes

²³¹ Kossak, "Pāla Painting," 9-10.

are looking downward smoothly, almost closed, and she is smiling gently, in an altruistic and tranquil expression. With lighter colors applied over her forehead and nose areas, her face appears luminous, and her spiritual quality of serenity is brought to life. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, Tangut artists essentially focused on creating the ultimate spiritual impression in the depiction of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; they were not merely exhibiting their art skills and techniques for their own sake. This depiction of Tārā's face is an essential example of the Tangut approach in Buddhist art. When compared to Pāla art and Tibetan art produced during the same period, this Tangut mural excels in demonstrating the ultimate spiritual state of Tārā in simple lines and colors, with highlighting and gradient effects.

Over her forehead, multiple strands of tiny white jewels are painted as decorations on her three-jeweled triangular crown, also known as the three-leaf crown. This type of crown was originally from the Indian Pāla style, and it had been widely used as an ornament of Buddhist deities in Indian and Nepalese art for centuries.²³² Yet Tangut artists infused their creativity into the depiction of Pāla-style crowns. When compared to this Nepalese Tārā iconography (See figure 5), for instance, Tārā's crown is decorated with the embroidered triangles that are taller and thinner than in the Tangut mural. Also, the entire crown is placed on top of Tārā's head, with multiple strands of jewels in vivid colors laying out over the front of her head, rather than over her forehead, as in the Tangut mural. In the Nepalese representation, a line of spiral hair is shown before the crown ornaments. The three-jeweled triangular crown is also seen in Tibetan *thangkas*,

²³² Huntington and Bangdel, *Circle of Bliss*, 103; Kossak, "Pāla Painting," 7.



Figure 5. Green Tārā painting. Attributed to the Nepalese artist Aniko. Central Tibet, third quarter of the thirteenth century. From The Cleveland Museum of Art.²³³

with a high-top hair knot behind it. However, in this Tangut mural, behind the crown is her black curly hair laying neatly over the top of her head.

The rest of her hair is split into two parts, and each is braided and made into a large oval-shaped bun, placed behind each side of her shoulder. Often, in Pāla and Pāla-inspired Tibetan illustrations, Tārā's hair

naturally drapes down in multiple strands. However, it is especially wavy and curly in Himalayan iconographies. Tārā's hair in this Tangut mural is different from the Pāla tradition and other art convention, yet a similar depiction can be found in the *kesi* painting of Tārā found in Khara Khoto (see figure 4a), which also presents Tārā's hair as neatly laying out on top behind the crown and made into two large oval buns at the bottom. The only difference is that some strands of hair fall just in front of her shoulders this *kesi* painting.

²³³ Steven Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet*, frontispiece.



Figure 4a. Green Tārā *kesi* painting of Tangut (detail).

In this given mural, the illustration of Tārā's upper body is quite slim and tender, and her shoulders are especially sloped and soft even compared to other Tangut Tārā paintings. This representation is suggestive of her oft-praised compassion for all living beings. Her breasts are outlined as two rounded circles in a lighter color of green, and her waist is slim and tender. Her upper body is depicted as in a "V" shape that is commonly applied in Indian Pāla art and Central Tibetan art.²³⁴ Though both the Indian Pāla and Central Tibetan art adopt the V-shaped torso in Bodhisattva and feminine deities' iconographies, subtle

differences can still be found in outlines and composition. Through a careful comparison and examination of Pāla-inspired Tibetan art and Indian Pāla art, Kossak²³⁵ points out that the Indian Pāla iconography of female deities, i.e. Tārā, especially emphasizes feminine characteristics in the body depiction, more so than those same depictions in Central Tibetan art. For instance, the contrasting of wide round shoulders, slim waist, and melon-

²³⁴ Singer, "Painting in Central Tibet," 107.

²³⁵ Kossak, "Pāla Painting," 5.

like large breasts, is overtly emphasized in Indian Pāla style. Another difference is the body twist. In Indian Pāla art, to stress the feminine aspect of a deity, the deity's shoulders are often leaning towards the opposite side of the waist to a large degree to present a gracefully slender and soft upper torso. Also, the naked large round breasts are another important indicator of Indian Pāla art, illuminating the feminine aspect of the deity.

Tārā's upper body is naked and decorated with multiple strands of white tiny pearls, bronze-color necklaces, and two thin long light white ribbons that are presented in a "U" shape. The strands of tiny pearls are exquisite and graceful, which are the essential decoration of Tārā in this mural. Her arms are also decorated with strands of pearls and bronze-color cuffs at upper arms and wrists. And the back of the throne is decorated by the multiple strands of pearls as well, hanging around Tārā like delicate curtains. Meanwhile, she is adorned by a jewel-embroidered belt around her hips and a short *dhoti* skirt. Her skirt pattern is faded for the most part, but some floral depictions can vaguely be seen.

The decorations of Tārā are simple and sophisticated, illuminating the elegance of Tārā. This art practice can be traced back to the Indian Sarnath style. The Sarnath art conventions were originally formed during the Gupta period in East India. It is regarded as part of Gupta art. During the Gupta period, Buddhist art flourished and the relevant art techniques continued to be practiced during the dynasties that followed. The Pāla style inherited many art practices from the Sarnath convention. It is famous for its simple and

elegant decorations of robes in Buddhist paintings and sculptures, as well as visually thin and light clothing, which accentuate the graceful contour of the figure.²³⁶

Later, when transmitted into the Indian Pāla art, Buddhist deities' robes and garments continued to be painted as simple and unadorned. To illustrate, a delicate ribbon goes around the naked upper torso in a "U" shape, a plain necklace with a decorative statement adorns the neck, and a short simple *dhoti* skirt covers the lower body: simplicity, for the purpose of bringing out the supreme essence of the enlightened beings. Often, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are adorned with thin and transparent garments and simple decorations, which illuminates the strong vertical figure of Buddhas and the gentle and graceful figure of feminized Bodhisattvas.²³⁷ It also emphasizes the figures' dynamic and vivid postures. In contrast, in early Central Tibetan art, decorations and garments are depicted in multiple layers of delicate details.²³⁸

Tārā's upper body movement is vivid but subtle. Her right hand stretches out and rests on her right knee, which naturally brings her upper body and shoulders leaning to the right. This movement is natural yet restrained, bringing the compassionate nature of Tārā into the foreground. In comparison, depictions of Tārā's upper-body movement in Indian Pāla and Central Tibetan art conventions are much more dramatic with a strong emphasis on her feminine physical features. Meanwhile, in this Tangut mural of Tārā, the outlines are smooth and soft, painted in slightly darker green. With highlight and gradient effects, this illustration of Tārā expresses her nature of compassion to a greater extent. As previously discussed, one of the most distinctive Tangut artists' approaches was to focus

²³⁶ Kang, "Spread of Sarnath-Style Buddha Images," 45-46.

²³⁷ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 32-38.

²³⁸ Kossak, "Pāla Painting," 6.

on manifesting their understanding of Buddhism in the artworks. This Tangut mural of Tārā also presents this essential feature of Tangut Buddhist art.

Tārā's right hand rests on her right knee with the palm facing out, in a mudra of generous giving. Her left hand holds a preaching mudra at the heart, with two white



Figure 6. Green Tārā painting, Central Tibet, ca. Second half of the eleventh century.²³⁹

utpala flowers—one is fully bloomed, and another is at its initial stage of blooming. Except for the depiction of *utpala* flowers, the portrayal of Tārā's physical movement and gestures in this Tangut mural is identical with that of the Tibetan *thangkas* (i.e. figure 6), and is close to the description in the root text *Tāranātha* and *Arya Tārā Astambhaya*. In this given mural, the Tangut artist applied the color of white to the *utpala* flowers, and the depiction of the flowers is relatively simple. The use

of white in the depiction of *utpala* flowers harmoniously blends the flowers into the green and white illustration of Tārā, which also fulfills the purpose of accentuating her

²³⁹ Steven Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet*, cover image.

compassionate nature. It is worth noting that white is the color that is often used for the depiction of lotus flowers, as it was in previous dynasties' caves in Dunhuang.

Tārā's right leg stretches out to the lotus pond below her seat, which is supported by a large white lotus filled with tiny seeds, and her left leg is in a *vajrasana* posture, which adheres to the description of the root text. As with the depiction of her face, arms, and torso, both her legs are painted in the color of green with highlights of translucent white in order to create a luminous glowing effect, especially in the dim light inside the cave. In addition, the bottoms of her feet are highlighted with white color as well to enhance the glowing effect, an indicator of her enlightenment and her most appreciated quality of compassion.

Tārā sits on a throne that consists of a lotus seat and an arch back, as is often seen in Indian Pāla art. The arch back has two layers and both layers are outlined by dark burgundy lines. The outer layer is light brown and adorned with strands of pearls like curtains draping down, similar to the decorations of the arch back in the Khara Khoto *kesi* painting (figure 4). In addition, the inner layer is painted white and there is a halo behind Tārā's head, representing the flames of wisdom²⁴⁰ and indicating her quality of enlightenment. The inner layer is painted with the gradient technique to create a glowing effect to accentuate Tārā's spiritual significance.

The lotus seat is adorned by double-layered lotus petals in the color of light pink. Petals of the upper layer are longer than petals of the lower layer, but they are in the same width. The upper-layer petals are in the peach shape and pointing upwards. And the lower-layer petals are in an upturned heart shape, arranged vertically paralleling with the

²⁴⁰ Pal, "An Early Tibetan Mandala."

upper-layer petals, just like flipped-out petals of a voluminous bloom. This composition of lotus seat corresponds to Indian, Tibetan, and Khara Khoto *thangkas*, except that artists of these forms applied a variety of colors to the lotus petals. As touched upon earlier, the spiritual expression is skillfully rendered in this Tangut mural, through addition of uncommon details and visual effects based on the artists' spiritual realization. While many other art traditions treat the lotus seat as a flat and plain seat, often with a sun or moon disc on the top, this Tangut mural depicts the lotus seat filled with many tiny lotus seeds, indicating the manifestation of Tārā to be the fruit of enlightenment.



Figure 7. Green Tārā painting. India, Bihar (Bengal border), Vikramashila monastery, ca. 1145.²⁴¹

The entire lotus seat is supported by a stem arising from the lotus pond, with pale pink petals and green leaves twining around it. The lotus pond is filled with white and pale pink lotus flowers that are depicted in basic flower forms and outlined in light pink. Although this Tangut mural illustrates the lotus seat and lotus pond in a

²⁴¹ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 34, figure 16.

simplified approach, the concept is essentially identical with Indian images of Tārā from the second half of the eleventh century (see figure 7) and Khara Khoto *kesi* paintings.

Three accompanying Tārās are painted on each side of the principal Tārā, aligned vertically. Only the top two Tārā depictions survived while the other four are damaged to different degrees. Based on the top two surviving depictions, the accompanying Tārās' hairstyles, decorations, garments, and physical gestures are similar to the principal Tārā. They are also sitting on a lotus seat, with right leg stretching out and left leg bent, with left hand holding at the heart and right hand holding a generous giving mudra and resting on the knee. Some of them are white and some are yellow. Primarily, Tantric artists painted the manifestation of Green Tārā, either accompanied by eight Tārās known as Tārā Who Saves Living Beings From Eight Dangers as it appears in cave no. 2 at the same site, or with twenty accompanying Tārās to present twenty-one Tārās. In the Khara Khoto *kesi* painting, Tārā is also portrayed with two accompanying Bodhisattvas—Vajrapāṇi and Vajrasattva (see figure 6). However, in this Tangut mural, there are only six accompanying Tārās, which is identical to the number of accompanying Tārās in cave no. 4 at the Yulin site. This might be related to the number of colors of Tārās mentioned in the *Praise to Twenty-One Tārā*. According to the text, although the color of each Tārā varies, six colors are primarily used in the description of Tārās' manifestations: white, red, black, yellow, green, and blue. Illustrating six accompanying Tārās is possibly done in order to represent all twenty-one Tārās.

On top of the principal Tārā, five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted around her throne. The five Buddhas share a similar appearance but are depicted with different gestures indicating their own identities: (from left to right) Amoghasiddhi with the left hand in the

dhyana (meditation) mudra and right hand in the mudra of fearlessness; Amitabha with left hand holding the *dhyana* mudra (depiction of the right hand is damaged); Vairocana with two hands holding the *Dharmachakra* (Wheel of Dharma) mudra before him; Ratnasambhava with the left hand in *dhyana* mudra and right hand in *varada* (generosity) mudra; and Akṣobhya with the left hand in the *dhyana* mudra and right hand in the *Bhumisparsa* mudra.

Above them, in the top register, a line of Ashoka trees (*Saraca asoca*), peach-shaped, is illustrated with white flowers floating around them. Though Ashoka trees themselves are not in the shape of a peach, the flower bunch is peach-shaped. The Ashoka trees were not physically seen in the Dunhuang area, and presumably, Tangut artists painted them according to foreign iconographies and descriptions, infused with their imagination.

In the background, mountains and trees are presented in geometric strips, which is a common practice in Tibetan *thangkas*, especially in Central Tibet, during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.²⁴² Each strip is constituted by two or three rhombuses piling vertically and decorated with a small circle in the center of each rhombus. This style of background illustration is in contrast to the realistic depiction of trees and mountains in Chinese murals in Dunhuang.²⁴³ The geometric strips are primarily painted in green, pale pink, white, and brown. The green trips are painted with gradient technique, showing the white light in the center radiating out to the green shades. And green peach-shaped Ashoka trees are randomly inserted in between the colorful strips, which again underlines

²⁴² Shi Wei 史偉, “Heishuicheng tangka zhong de jingtu xinyang” 黑水城唐卡中的淨土信仰, 134-39.

²⁴³ Wang Yanyun 王艷雲, “Xixia Heishuicheng yu Anxi shiku bihua jian de ruogan lianxi” 西夏黑水城與安西石窟壁畫間的若干聯繫, 105-107.

the importance of green in Tangut culture. The Tārā mural is framed and separated from other murals by two bars decorated with lotus flowers and petals.

Below the illustration of the principal Tārā, a group of patrons is depicted. They are standing in one line facing toward the center from two horizontal directions. On the left side, images of four male donors with four written inscriptions are still visible; while on the right side, seventeen donors are painted with written inscriptions, including one monk, and fourteen male and two female patrons. According to the inscription, the only monk is Zhiyuan, who initiated and directed the creation and design of this cave. This group of patrons continues on the east wall, facing the north wall, including nine male patrons with fourteen inscriptions. While all the donors are standing facing Tārā, with two hands folded in front of the chest, monk Zhiyuan sits on a high throne and his inscription is written inside a rectangle-shaped block on top of a lotus-like base with decorations. The importance of sangha had always been significant in Tangut Buddhist culture, and therefore this group of lay patrons is also important in finding this cave. Additionally, according to the tradition of Dunhuang caves, donors of higher social status are usually painted on the left side, which indicates the status of this group of donors is higher than the rest of the three groups in this cave.

The male donors are in long cross-collar robes with belts around the waist that drape down underneath their belly. Their robes vary in color: purple, burgundy, black, and white. Two female donors—the eleventh and twelfth donors on the left side—are female donors inserted in the line of male donors, which indicates a family relationship within this group of donors. Female donors are in long cross-collar robes without belts, and peach-shaped crowns adorning the head. According to the donors' attires and

remaining inscriptions, the group of male donors is known to be a group of Tangut military officials of lower rank, and the female donors are their family.²⁴⁴

As the group with higher social status than the other groups of donors in this cave, these donors' iconographies begin under the Green Tārā mural and extend to its two sides. This arrangement underlines the importance of Tārā among them.

4.2 Cave No. 5 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves

The cave is covered by a truncated square pyramidal ceiling that is typical in Tangut *caitya* caves. Four sides of the truncated square pyramidal ceiling are decorated with paintings. However, due to severe damage, only two celestial offering beings remain: in the west register of the ceiling, a sitting Bodhisattva, with an arhat in the east register. Some decorative patterns are also still visible. Although the rest of the images were invisible when I visited the cave in 2017, Chang²⁴⁵ found more available in 2011, for instance, the iconography of a Tangut preceptor and a Dharma protector.

4.2.1 Murals of Cave No.5

The cave door opens on the east wall. The mural on the southern side of the door has been largely damaged while the northern side murals are still visible. Placed there are two murals separated by a red line. On the right side of the top register, there is a portrayal of a Buddha sitting in the *vajrasana* posture inside a semi-section stupa with his hands holding the *Dharmachakra* mudra, which indicates his identity, assumed to be

²⁴⁴ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku" 瓜州東千佛洞第5窟, 58-59.

²⁴⁵ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, "Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu" 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究, 39-40.

Vairocana. Vairocana is adorned with a hair knot on top of the head, decorations over his forehead, jewelry and ribbons over his chest, and a short red lower garment. His palms and the soles of his feet are painted red. He sits on a white lotus seat placed on top of a high stepped throne. The throne back is decorated with plenty of flowers and two ribbons. The inner layer of the throne back is painted in the Tanguts' favorite color—turquoise green.

On the left side, a *maṇḍala* in the shape of a flower with four large petals is depicted. The principal deity sits in the center of the flower and four other deities each sit on their four respective petals. The principal deity is shown with one face and two hands, in the color of light grey. His left hand holds a flower at the heart and his right hand holds a *varada* mudra. The other four deities are depicted in various colors: green, yellow, and white. This is an illustration of Amoghapāśa five-deity *maṇḍala*, one of the most popular themes in Tangut Buddhist art. Though there are other forms of Amoghapāśa, for example, Amoghapāśa with one face and four arms, the manifestation of Amoghapāśa with one face and two arms, which is based on the root text *Don yod zhags pa lha lnga ba ri lugs kyi sgrub thabs* (Chi. 巴哩系不空羂索五尊成就法 *Balixi Bukong juansuo wuzun chengjiufa*, Eng. *Amoghapāśa Five Deity Method of Accomplishment in Bari's Tradition*) that was translated by Ba ri Rin chen grags (1040-1111/1112) and is the most frequently found in Tangut Buddhist art.²⁴⁶ Similar to the depiction of Vairocana, they are decorated with simple jewelry, ribbons, and short lower garments. They are sitting on white lotus seats and the throne backs are painted with solid turquoise green. On top of the *maṇḍala*, six Buddhas in the Tantric style are illustrated and arranged in two horizontal lines. They

²⁴⁶ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, “Xixia shiku zaixiang” 西夏石窟造像, 32.

are in different colors: white, yellow, and green. Due to the damage, as well as the viewing distance, it was difficult to confirm their identity. Deities in the upper register present features and characteristics of the Tangut Tantric style inspired by Indian Pāla art.

In the lower register, three Tantric deities are painted. The deity in the middle is yellow, sitting on a lotus throne. His right hand holds a red wish-fulfilling jewel and his left hand holds a yellow mongoose, which indicates that he is the wealth deity—Jambhala. In Chinese Buddhism, he is the Dharma protector of the north gate and often seen at the gate in Dunhuang caves. On his two sides, two wrathful deities are illustrated: Acala and Vajrapāṇi.²⁴⁷ Deities of the lower register are depicted in a style that is strongly suggestive of early Central Tibetan art.

On the south wall, five deity murals are painted with two groups of patrons remaining. As mentioned earlier, this cave was not designed and built as a whole. Therefore, each mural takes a different proportion of space on the wall. The far outside mural of the south wall is damaged for the most part. However, given the paint that remains, certain features indicate that this is a mural of the Chinese Mahayana style. Since the mural on the opposite wall in the same location is a Mahayana illustration of Samantabhadra, this damaged mural is presumably to be a Mahayana illustration of Mañjuśrī. The combination of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra is one of the most popular Mahayana themes in Tangut caves in the Dunhuang area. And as mentioned in Chapter 3, the integration of Chinese Mahayana themes and figures into Himalayan-inspired Tantric art is essential to Tangut art. Therefore, many Tangut caves in Dunhuang include both Mahayana and tantra themed murals.

²⁴⁷ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang” 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 76.

The next mural depicts a Tantric deity with two celestial offering beings. This Tantric deity is standing on a white lotus throne in a semi-view stupa decorated with ribbons at the top. On top of the stupa, two groups of peach-shaped Ashoka trees are painted attached to the stupa. Above each group of Ashoka trees, a big white cloud is painted, and two heavenly beings are making offerings while kneeling on the cloud. The principal deity inside the stupa is in light yellow with three faces and eight arms. She is primarily identified as *Mārīcī*, the goddess of the sun in Tantric Buddhism, and this illustration is created based on *Bari's One Hundred Methods of Accomplishments*.²⁴⁸ In this mural, *Mārīcī* is slim and adorned with a three-leaf crown on her head, two white ribbons over her upper body, and a short bright red garment covering her lower body. The lower garment is decorated with a turquoise green belt with ribbons draping down and strings of tiny white jewels. Her throne back is decorated with strings of pearls and a turquoise green aura is painted behind her head. Overall, this is typical of the Tangut approach to illustrating deities, and an example of Tantric art inspired by Indian Pāla art. The decorations, depiction of lotus seat, and coloring techniques are similar to the *Tārā* mural in the same cave. The *Tārā* mural is located in the same position on the wall across the hall.

Under the *Mārīcī* mural are images of a group of female donors with inscriptions. Twelve female donors stand on the right (facing the left) with eleven remaining inscriptions and ten female donors stand on the left with six remaining inscriptions. They are all facing towards the center. Based on the remaining images, this group of female donors also wears long cross-collar robes and peach-shaped crowns over their heads,

²⁴⁸ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Xixia shiku zaixiang" 西夏石窟造像, 30-31.

which is identical with the military officials' female family members' attires that appears in Cave no. 2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, at cave no. 29 at Yulin Caves, and in *kesi* paintings discovered in Khara Khoto. These donors are presumably family members of the donors on the north wall under the Green Tārā mural.

Right next to the Mārīcī mural, separated by a decorated red bar, there is a rendering of a principal deity surrounded by thirty-six Buddhas,²⁴⁹ Bodhisattvas, and Dharma protectors in the Tantric style. This mural is approximately two meters high and three meters wide, which is larger than the other murals on the same wall. The principal deity is portrayed in his peaceful form and he is in the light-yellow color, with one face and twelve arms. Each pair of two hands is painted as a group and holds different mudras and objects. The depiction of this deity manifests many features of Tangut art. His face is round and his limbs are slim. His head is decorated with a high crown and a hair knot on top. There are two white ribbons and pieces of jewelry over his chest, and bracelets and armlets on his twelve arms. There is a turquoise green belt over his waist, and a red short garment covering his lower body. He sits on a white lotus seat with the turquoise green throne back. Accompanying Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are painted around the principal deity. Each accompanying deity is placed on an individual lotus seat. Through lotus stems, everyone's lotus seat is connected to the lotus seat of a Dharma protector in the middle of the lotus pond below the principal deity. Many white and pale pink lotus flowers are floating around in between the accompanying deities.

²⁴⁹ Since there is a large space in the lower right corner of this mural, the original accompanying deities should number more than thirty-six.

Through comprehensive analysis and comparison, Liu²⁵⁰ presents the principal deity to be *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī*, similar to the old model that began in the thirteenth century and flourished since the sixteenth century in Nepal. Liu also suggests this Tangut model of *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī* was created before the old Nepalese model and should be the source of both old and new Nepalese models. The Tangut model was not created by strictly following the description of the root text *Mañjuśrī-Nāmasamgīti* (“A Concert of Names of Mañjuśrī”); however, it was a visual art interpretation of the text. *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī* was not seen in Indian and Tibetan Tantric paintings as frequently as in Nepalese paintings during that time. The *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī* images in Tangut caves—for example, cave no. 2 and no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves—indicate a possible direct Buddhist connection between Nepal and Tangut.

This mural is the only *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī maṇḍala* painting among Dunhuang cave murals from any time period. It is presumably the first mural of *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī maṇḍala* and has been used as the first model in Nepalese Buddhist art for centuries. And it may also be the model of many *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī* created by Tibetan artists in the later period.²⁵¹ This model of *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī maṇḍala* was created based on inspirations from the *Avalokiteśvara maṇḍala*.²⁵²

On the left side of *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī*, another Buddhist deity is painted with four accompanying deities in the Tantric style. The principal deity is painted white, sitting in the *vajrasana* posture under decorative draperies, with one face and two arms.

²⁵⁰ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku” 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 227-241.

²⁵¹ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang” 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像, 79-80.

²⁵² Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, “Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku” 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 227-241.

His right hand holds a *vajra*; the depiction of his left-hand is damaged. He is in a peaceful state. His upper body is decorated by chains of jewelry, and two ribbons are floating on each side of his head. The depiction of his lower body is largely damaged. Around the principal deity, four accompanying goddesses are painted. They are holding a flute, *pipa*, kettle-drum, and drum, respectively, and they are presumably the four musical offering goddess in Tantric texts—*Varṇā*, *Vīṇā*, *Mukundā*, and *Murajā*.²⁵³ Since the principal deity is not fully shown and the four musical offering goddesses are often seen accompanying many other Tantric deities in Tantric paintings, the identity of the principal deity is not clear.

At the bottom of this mural is a display of a group of patrons' portraits, including thirteen male and six female patrons. According to Zhang's findings,²⁵⁴ male patrons are civil officials of the Tangut court. They are in long robes with round collars and narrow sleeves and hold lotus flowers and other offering objects in hands. Female patrons are their family members. They are dressed in long robes with a cross-collar neckline and hair is tied up in a bun on top of the head, which were the fashion styles of the Tangut country dweller.

The last mural of the south wall illustrates a Tantric deity in yellow color with one face and four arms. Due to the serious damage to this mural, it is only possible to determine that his left hand is holding a Dharma text and his right hand is holding a bow. Another right hand is held upwards, but the hand object is damaged and so is the other left hand. Although the sword is not shown due to the damage, by comparing the

²⁵³ Bhattacharyya, *Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 314-316.

²⁵⁴ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku" 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 49-59.

composition of this mural to other Tangut murals, Chang claims the damaged hand object to be the sword and the deity to be Mañjuśrī.²⁵⁵ Due to the widespread dissemination of *Mañjuśrī-Nāmasaṃgīti* excerpted from *One Hundred Methods of Accomplishments* in Tangut Buddhism, Mañjuśrī is often depicted as one face with four arms, and holding a sword, a Dharma text, and a bow in Tangut murals and *kesi* paintings.

Murals on the west wall are largely damaged and only an illustration of a two-headed Buddha on the far left is clear enough to identify. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the two-headed Buddha is a manifestation of Vairocana Buddha presented through the Tangut unique approach of Chinese-style esoteric art.²⁵⁶

In front of the west wall, in the back of the cave, there is a pillar wall that separates the hall into two: the front hall and the back tunnel. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, this type of cave structure was presumably learned from Kucha caves. The pillar wall is painted with murals on its four sides. On the front, statues in the center are severely damaged and so are the murals on the two sides.

On the right side of the pillar wall, a Tangut-style *maṇḍala* is painted. Similar to the *maṇḍala* on the east wall, the principal deity and accompanying deities are painted inside a circle representing a fully bloomed lotus. The principal deity wears a suit of armor and sits on a green lion, holding a victory canopy in his right hand and a mongoose in his left hand. Around him, eight accompanying deities are painted in eight petals,

²⁵⁵ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, “Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu” 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究, 33.

²⁵⁶ Sørensen, “Esoteric Buddhist Art,” 498-511.

respectively. According to previous studies,²⁵⁷ this is a *maṇḍala* of Vaiśravaṇa (Chi. 毘沙門天王 Pishamen tianwang) primarily based on the *One Hundred Methods of Accomplishments* with influences from the Indian tradition of eight yakshas. Vaiśravaṇa in Tantric Buddhism is connected to Jambhala, the God of Wealth. The Tangut mural of Vaiśravaṇa *maṇḍala* is an early model in Tantric art that integrates Chinese art elements and Indian traditional belief and art concepts into the composition.²⁵⁸

On the backside of the pillar wall, there is an illustration of the scene of Buddha's Parinirvana. The Buddha lies on his right side on an embroidered platform, with his right elbow supporting the head. He is calm and peaceful, surrounded by heavenly beings, Dharma protectors, arhats, and other disciples. Some of them are depicted as a combination of human and animal, for instance, a lion head on a human body and a monkey body with a human head. They all look sad and some of them even cry for the Buddha's Parinirvana. The illustration of Śākyamuni Buddha's Parinirvana began to appear in Dunhuang caves since the time of the North Zhou dynasty (557-581 CE), yet disappeared in the late Tang dynasty. In total, fifteen murals of the Buddha's Parinirvana are found in the Chinese styled caves at the Mogao site. During the Tangut's occupation in Dunhuang, the illustration of the Buddha's Parinirvana became popular, frequently seen in caves at the Yulin site, Eastern Thousand Buddha site, and Five Temple Caves (五個廟石窟 Wugemiao shiku).²⁵⁹ Many of them are painted on the walls of the back

²⁵⁷ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, "Anxi dongqianfodong di 5 ku pishamen" 安西東千佛洞第 5 窟毗沙門, 1-5; Zhang Xiaogang 張小剛, "Tianwang yu yecha" 天王與夜叉, 183-204.

²⁵⁸ Liu Yongzeng 劉永增, "Anxi dongqianfodong di 5 ku pishamen" 安西東千佛洞第 5 窟毗沙門, 1-5.

²⁵⁹ Wang Yanyun 王艷雲, "Hexi shiku Xixia bihua zhong de niepan jingbian" 河西石窟西夏壁畫中的涅槃經變, 133-39.

tunnel in the caves of the same structure, which is believed to have been adopted from the Kucha cave art.²⁶⁰

On the north side of the pillar wall, an illustration of a *maṇḍala* is vaguely visible. This *maṇḍala* is depicted as a square-shaped ground supported by a large *vajra*, with an outer circle that protects the ground. According to a previous study,²⁶¹ this is a *maṇḍala* of Vajradhātu of the Tangut Tantric art style. The five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted inside the *vajra* ground and each Buddha is accompanied by four Bodhisattvas. And protectors are painted around the *vajra* ground. The outer circle is decorated with lotus flower petals, *vajras*, and flames.

On the north wall, five deity murals are illustrated with two groups of donors situated in the lower register. In the far left register, it depicts a Chinese Mahayana style Bodhisattva sitting on a rock in a carefree mode, with a full moon, trees, and mountains in the background. A vase is placed on the rock on his left side with a white flower arising from it. Although there is damage and the details of the face are hard to make out, based on the posture of the Bodhisattva and the composition of the scene, the mural presumably represents Water-Moon Guanyin. As discussed in Chapter 3, Tangut artists learned this illustration of Guanyin from Chinese Song art and infused art conventions and image features from their tradition as well as that of neighboring cultures into their creation, and this is certainly reflected in this mural. As an illustration, Guanyin's upper

²⁶⁰ Zhang Baoxi 張寶璽, “Dongqianfodong Xixia shiku yishu” 東千佛洞西夏石窟藝術, 81-94; Wang Yanyun 王艷雲, “Hexi shiku Xixia bihua zhong de niepan jingbian” 河西石窟西夏壁畫中的涅槃經變, 133-139; Chang Honghong 常紅紅, “Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu” 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究, 40.

²⁶¹ Zhang Baoxi 張寶璽, “Guazhou dongqianfodong shiku tancheng bihua kaoshu” 瓜州東千佛洞石窟壇城圖壁畫考述, 85-87.

body is naked but adorned with plenty of jewels and a ribbon across his upper body. Mountains in the background are represented by geometrics, which is primarily seen in Indian Pāla art and other works inspired by Pāla art, such as Tibetan *thangkas*.

On the right side of Water-Moon Guanyin, there is a portrayal of a Tantric deity, white in color, with one face and four arms. He sits in the *vajrasana* posture on a white lotus seat. He has a hair knot on his head and is adorned with a crown, with two ribbons pointing upwards coming out from the back of his neck. Like in many Pāla-inspired Tangut paintings, his upper body is naked, yet decorated with chains of jewels and a ribbon across his upper body. A short burgundy garment covers his lower body and is decorated by chains of white tiny jewels. His legs are adorned with turquoise green ribbons. His arms are adorned with bracelets and armlets. His first two hands are folded before his chest, the second left hand holds a mala of beads, and the second right hand holds a lotus flower. The throne back is in the turquoise green that is often seen in Tangut murals, and other murals in this cave. This is another typical Tangut Tantric painting infused with Pāla art elements. The deity's presentation corresponds to the description of Four-Arm Chenrezig (Avalokiteśvara) in the *Noble Avalokiteśvara of Six-Syllable Sadhana* (Tib. 'Phags pa 'jig rten dbang phyug yi ge drug pa) of Bari's tradition. Similar images of Four-Arm Chenrezig are seen in Tangut caves at the Mogao and Yulin sites²⁶² as well as in the findings of Khara Khoto. The discovery of these paintings reveals that the Four-Arm Chenrezig practice had been popular in Tangut Buddhism, and it was before Tibetan Buddhists began to devote themselves to the practice in the fourteenth

²⁶² For instance, cave no. 3 and cave no. 27 at the Yulin Caves, cave no. 149 at the Mogao site.

century.²⁶³ Bari had been a devoted practitioner to Avalokiteśvara through his life and his endeavors led the Four-Arm Chenrezig practice to become one of the most widely disseminated practices in Tantric Buddhism.

Below the Four-Arm Chenrezig mural, seven patrons images with seven inscriptions are only somewhat clearly shown, including three male adults, one young child, and three females. The males wear white long crew-neck robes with belts, while the females are dressed in cross-collar robes. This group of patrons is supposedly in a lower rank of social status than the group below the Green Tārā mural.²⁶⁴

Next to the Four-Arm Chenrezig is a painting of a series of Buddha stories and each illustration of the story is arranged in an individual square frame. On my visit, this mural appeared to be largely damaged due to the falling of paint and many details could not be observed for image identification. According to previous studies,²⁶⁵ the mural illustrates the Eight Great Stupas of the Buddha that represents the eight events of the Buddha manifesting great miracles in this world. It integrates the essential religious purposes, such as storytelling and worship, into the creation of visual art. The eight great events of Śākyamuni Buddha include birth, great enlightenment, the first turning the wheel of Dharma, display of miracles at Shravasti, subduing a maddened elephant, descent from Tusita Heaven, monkey offering honey to the Buddha, and the Buddha's

²⁶³ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Xixia shiku zaixiang" 西夏石窟造像, 29-30.

²⁶⁴ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku" 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 51-52.

²⁶⁵ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, "Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu" 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究, 23; Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Song Xia hexi diqu 'batabian'" 宋夏河西地區'八塔變', 127-28.

Parinirvana. This Buddhist art theme was first seen in the Hexi Corridor in the Song, and later, the theme flourished in Tangut Buddhist art.²⁶⁶

In this mural, the center painting portrays Śākyamuni Buddha's great enlightenment, and the painting above illustrates the Buddha's Parinirvana. On the left side, three events are presented respectively: subduing a maddened elephant, first turning the wheel of Dharma, and monkey offering honey to the Buddha; while on the right, another three events are painted: Śākyamuni Buddha's birth, display of miracles at Shravasti, and descent from Tusita Heaven. The illustration in the center is larger and better preserved than the others around it. Śākyamuni Buddha sits on a white lotus seat inside a turquoise green stupa that is built of bricks and decorated by the same color ribbons. His throne back is primarily painted in turquoise green with decorations of red and white. On the two sides of the stupa, two colorful peach-shaped Ashoka trees are painted. The Buddha is accompanied by two Bodhisattvas standing on white lotuses. They are adorned with turquoise green ribbons and short red lower garments, with auras depicted behind their heads. Based on the remaining painting, this mural is a typical Tangut artwork with an infusion of Indian Pāla art.

On the right side of the Eight Great Stupas of the Buddha is the Green Tārā image that was discussed in the previous section.

The last painting of the north wall is a Chinese Mahayana style mural. This is one of the few well-preserved murals in this cave. The principal Bodhisattva sits in the *vajrasana* posture on a lotus throne on top of the back of a white elephant, which indicates that this is Samantabhadra Bodhisattva. His left hand is in the meditative mudra

²⁶⁶ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Song Xia hexi diqu 'batabian'" 宋夏河西地區'八塔變', 131.

and his right hand holds a lotus flower with white outer petals and turquoise green inner petals. He wears a long red robe and his throne back is painted in turquoise green, the same as in other Tangut murals. He is accompanied by two other Bodhisattvas and two arhats on each side of his body. Each of them is standing on a celestial cloud. The mural mainly adheres to the Chinese Mahayana style; however, it reproduces many details from the Chinese original model of Samantabhadra illustration, such as a background of a grand landscape.

4.2.2 Historical Background of Cave No. 5

Cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves was constructed and painted during the later Tangut period. Despite the lack of textual historical records of the Tangut caves, it is possible to discover the cave history through analysis of the cave donor images. Fortunately, cave no. 5 contains the largest number of donor paintings among all Tangut caves in the Dunhuang area, which has allowed modern scholars to learn about the history of this cave by means of these portraits.

According to Zhang's study on the remaining donor portraits and inscriptions,²⁶⁷ Monk Zhiyuan was the "abbot" of this temple cave. He organized multiple groups of donors to sponsor the cave and supervised the construction and painting. His donors were laity; they were civil and military officials with families. In some cases, their friends were also invited to contribute, according to the inscriptions in Tangut characters. According to Shi Jinbo's translation of these donors' inscriptions, they were primarily

²⁶⁷ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku" 瓜州東千佛洞第5窟, 49-59.

Tangut families and Chinese Han families living in Tangut, which indicates that different ethnic groups sharing the same religion lived in harmony in Tangut back then.

Zhang²⁶⁸ finds one group of donor portraits different from the rest of the groups. This group of male donors wears a different type of cap from the other groups of donors, and they are portrayed close to each other without any textual inscription. Presumably, this group of donors is in a lower political and social status than the rest of the donors. The painting techniques applied in this group of donor portraits are not as delicate as with the other donor portraits and they were most likely painted by a different group of artists. This group of donors is arranged in a corner that is not as presentable as the space for other donor portraits. In the end, Zhang states that this group of donors came to contribute to this cave later than the other groups and the cave art was not completed all at one time. The cave was possibly completed later than the time of the other three groups of donors.

4.3 Discussion

This cave is painted with both Tantric-themed murals and Mahayana-style murals. The Tantric murals are closely related to *Bari's One Hundred Methods of Accomplishments*. Some of the Mahayana-themed murals are commonly seen in Dunhuang caves, such as portraits of Samantabhadra and Mañjuśrī. And some are the special creation of Tangut Buddhist art, such as the two-headed Buddha painting and the Mañjuśrī *maṇḍala*.

²⁶⁸ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku" 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟, 52-53.

The Green Tārā mural is placed on the north wall along with two Avalokiteśvara murals, Eight Great Stupas of the Buddha, and the Samantabhadra murals. The Tārā mural presumably shares the same model as the Tangut Tārā *kesi* painting discovered in Khara Khoto. The specially shaped mountains and trees, as well as the decorations, indicate the model to be a product of early Central Tibetan art. The mural is placed on an important location inside the cave, where the lead patrons are painted underneath.

The principal Tārā is depicted in a mellow tone, combining the soft turquoise green and white, without dark-color outlines. Unlike other Tibetan-inspired paintings, vibrant and bright colors are avoided in the depiction of Tārā and her decorations. Also, the color of white is skillfully used to create a gradient glowing effect in the illustration of Tārā, which glorifies the gentle and compassionate qualities of this female Buddha. Tangut artists especially favored the color of bluish green due to the symbolic meaning of turquoise in Central Asian, Tibetan, Mongolian and Tangut cultures. The turquoise green color symbolizes protection and victory that are aligned with the essential role of Tārā in Tantric Buddhism.

According to the text, Tārā is one of the principal manifestations of great compassion and she swiftly provides protection for all sentient beings and she is the victress as in the *Twenty-One Praises of Tārā*. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Tangut people suffered in the harsh living conditions of constant wars and migration for generations. The illustration of Tārā and its vast use of turquoise green color reveal that a significant role of Buddhism in Tangut culture is to provide protection to people in danger. Since the Tārā mural is painted right above the portraits of the lead donors of the cave, including Buddhist monk Zhiyuan and military officials, this underlines the

treasured protector role of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism. Meanwhile, the Tārā mural is situated on the same wall with two murals of Avalokiteśvara in different emanations. Tārā and Avalokiteśvara are closely associated and highly praised in Vajrayana Buddhism for they are manifestations of great compassion and vow to protect beings on the path to liberation from *samsara*. The repeated appearance of Avalokiteśvara confirms the importance of protection in Tangut religious pursuits.

Based on the groups of patrons' images and inscriptions found inside the cave, this cave was presumably sponsored by different groups of donors. The theme of each mural was mostly likely decided by its patrons, and therefore the arrangement of murals is not systematic as in other caves. The construction of this cave was organized and led by Monk Zhiyuan. According to the patron images and inscriptions, other major donors were civil and military officials with families. Some of their friends were also invited to contribute to the creation of the cave. Thus, the content of the cave reveals the features of Tangut folks' Buddhist practice and preference, as well as the complexity of Tangut Buddhist pantheon.

Due to the importance of turquoise in Tangut culture, Tangut artists were especially known for mixing it with other colors to create a visual representation of a tranquil and transcendent spiritual state. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Tangut art aimed to provide the medium through which the state of Buddhist enlightenment, the artists' spiritual realization, and the audience's devotion could be communicated. This Tangut Tārā mural presents a tranquil and harmonious religious state of Buddhism and resonates with the spirit of Tangut Buddhist art.

Meanwhile, as Tangut Buddhism integrated many teachings and transmissions from other Buddhist regions into their Buddhist canon and schools of practice, Tangut artists also incorporated techniques and concepts from other art conventions into their works. As mentioned in the art analysis, many details are illustrated in patterns that can be traced back to Indian Pāla art, such as the depiction of Tārā's crown and her physical movement. Similar Pāla-art influences are also seen in Central Tibetan and Nepalese art, but in a modified form. When these foreign art conventions arrived in Tangut—both directly and indirectly—Tangut artists also incorporated them into Tantric paintings, along with their signature modifications. Although there is not enough evidence in this mural to claim any direct connection to Indian Pāla art or Nepalese art, many reflections of these art conventions can be seen in the Tangut Tārā mural in a modified version. These foreign art conventions could have arrived in Tangut directly due to Himalayan monastics' visits, according to historical records, but they also possibly reached in Tangut through Tibetan art.

According to the history outlined in Chapter 2, Tantric Buddhism entered Tangut due to great effort of Tibetan Buddhist monastics and masters. With the support of the Tangut court, they brought scriptures, teachings, and transmissions to Tangut that became the foundation of Tangut Tantric Buddhism. Therefore, Tibetan Buddhist art can be seen as the primary model for Tangut Tantric art. Later, when Mongol monks and teachers were also invited to Tangut for teachings and transmissions, Mongol Buddhist art was introduced to Tangut and its attributes were modified and adopted in the creation of Tangut Buddhist art. Indian and Nepalese masters and artists came to Tangut most often en route to China and they significantly contributed to the development of Buddhism in

Tangut. Features and concepts from the Himalayan Buddhist art conventions can also be seen in Tangut paintings. However, many of them were introduced to Tangut art through Tibetan Buddhist art before the arrival of Himalayan art.

Chapter 5. Tārā Mural in Cave No.2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves

In this mural, Green Tārā is in her form as *Astamabhaya*, Tārā Who Saves Living Beings From Eight Dangers, based on the root text — *Arya Tārā Astambhaya Trata Nama Sadhana*, excerpted from the *One Hundred Methods of Accomplishments* (see figure 2). The principal Tārā sits in the center of the mural, surrounded by four immediate attendant goddesses and six accompanying Bodhisattvas at her two sides. Two celestial beings on a cloud are flying towards her on each side. Close to the four edges of the mural, square-shaped frames are laid out in an orderly way, in which Buddhas and accompanying deities are situated. Before the lotus pond, on the turquoise green ground, a couple of dancing offering attendants are illustrated. On the two sides, eight Tārās Who Save Living Beings From Eight Dangers are depicted in the eight boxes. In the boxes of the top bar, the five Dhyani Buddhas are depicted with two Dharma protectors on the two sides. In the frames of the bottom bar, musical offering celestial beings are illustrated. Compared to the other two Tārā murals from the Tangut period, the color of this mural faded and sections of paint broke apart from the wall, most likely due to climate and other natural conditions. Many details have become indecipherable.

This mural is located on the north wall of cave no. 2 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves. The principal Tārā's face is damaged, especially in the eye area, presumably due to intentional mutilation by non-Buddhist invading tribes. A statue from the late Qing dynasty is placed in front of this mural, which will not be discussed in this dissertation.

5.1 Art Analysis of the Tārā Mural



Figure 2a. Green Tārā mural (details) in cave no. 2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, China.

The principal Tārā is in the form of Green Tārā, situated in the center of the mural. She has one face and two arms, sitting on a lotus throne with her left leg in the *vajrasana* posture and right leg stretching out. Her face was largely damaged, especially the eye area. Based on the remains, her face is depicted as round in shape, with curvy thin eyebrows and red lips outlined in thin lines. As mentioned in Chapter 3, Himalayan artists painted deities with oval-shaped faces, generally inspired by Indian Gupta art; Tangut art, however, illustrates the

deities' faces in the round shape due to the physical features of their ethnic group.²⁶⁹

Tārā's head, decorated with a golden Pāla-style three-jeweled triangular crown, is leaning slightly towards her right side. A line of spiral hair is set along the front of her crown. As adopted from Indian Pāla art and Nepalese art conventions, early Central Tibetan art presents Bodhisattvas and feminine deities with spiral hair decorated before their crowns

²⁶⁹ Subai 宿白, "Yuandai Hangzhou de zangchuan mijiao ji qi youguan yiji" 元代杭州的藏傳密教及其有關遺跡, 67; Samosyuk, *Buddiiskaia Zhivopis Iz Khara-Khoto XII-XIV Vekov. Mezhdur Kitaem i Tibetom* (Buddhist Paintings from Khara-Khoto XII-XIV Centuries. Between Tibet and China), 160.

and draped down in wavy and curvy shapes.²⁷⁰ Later, this approach of illustration was transmitted into the Tangut art convention.

Tārā's hair is split into two and forms two large oval-shaped buns behind her shoulders, which adheres to the Tangut tradition, and which also appears in the mural of cave no. 5 and the Tangut *kesi* painting. Two dark green ribbons are floating upwards from the back of her neck, which is similarly seen in the mural of Four-Arm Chenrezig in cave no. 5. Behind her head, a white aura is painted; however, the paint has mostly faded.

Unlike the Pāla-styled Tārā mural of cave no. 5, this Green Tārā wears a white tight short-sleeved top with a short white *dhoti* skirt, which is not commonly seen in other art conventions like Indian Pāla or Nepalese Buddhist art. Other feminized deities and offering bodhisattvas in the same cave are also dressed in the same tight short-sleeved cropped tops with short lower garments. When Indian Pāla art first entered Tangut, the naked upper body portrayal had not been completely adopted, and certain modifications were applied due to the Chinese Confucian culture that remained influential in the early Tangut period. The tight short-sleeved top as a replacement for the naked upper body is one of the modifications applied to the female deities in Tangut paintings; it is barely seen in other Buddhist art conventions.²⁷¹

In addition, Tārā is adorned with large golden round-shaped earrings, jeweled necklaces, armlets, bracelets, and anklets. The bracelets are different from the simply designed armlets and anklets that are mainly composed of two gold circles. These bracelets are like belt bracelets, constituted of multiple gold circles decorated with

²⁷⁰ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet*, 144-46.

²⁷¹ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, "Lun Guazhou dongqianfodong di'erku shibaodumu tuxiang yuanliu ji xiangguan wenti" 論瓜州東千佛洞第二窟施寶度母圖像源流及相關問題, 73-74.

colorful gems. The space between the gold circles is filled with many tiny white pearls, similar to what is used as the main decoration in the Tārā mural of cave no. 5.

Meanwhile, a long thin white ribbon circles her neck and drapes down to her lotus seat, which is similar to the Pāla-style decorations in the Tārā mural in cave no. 5. As discussed in Chapter 3, in addition to turquoise green, the gold color is also essential in Tangut Buddhist paintings. It is frequently used in decorating Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in both Mahayana and Tantric art of Tangut. Adorning the Buddhist deities with golden decorations was a way of expressing veneration in the Tangut Buddhist culture.

Tārā's shoulders are rounded and wide, yet her waist is slender, forming her torso into a "V" shape that is often seen in the Indian Pāla style. Unlike other murals of female deities in Tangut caves, the shape of breasts is not emphasized in the illustration of Tārā. Her shoulders are slightly leaning towards her left side, manifesting Tārā in a flexible but also concentrated spiritual state. Similar to the other Tangut Tantric paintings, the physical movement of Tārā is very subtle and smooth, and much subtler than in both Indian and Tibetan paintings.

Tārā's left arm twists outwardly and her left hand holds a stem of five *utpala* flowers at her heart: the center flower is fully bloomed in the color of dark blue and the other four flowers are still buds wrapped by green leaves. Her right arm twists inwardly and gracefully extends her right hand upward, which is different from the mudra of generosity depicted in many Tibetan *thangkas* but is identical with the gesture of Tārā in Nepalese painting (figure 5). Although Green Tārā is painted in green, her palms are painted in pale pink. In Himalayan *thangkas*, deities' palms are often painted red regardless of the primary colors of the deities. Tārā wears a short simple *dhoti* skirt

covering her lower body. Unlike the plain lower garments of Tārā in the Pāla art, the skirt of the Tārā in cave no. 2 is decorated with floral patterns of different green colors, with a golden embroidered belt.

Tārā sits on a double-layered lotus seat of white, green, red, and blue lotus petals. Similar to the cave no. 5 Tārā mural, the two layers of lotus petals are parallel to each other but pointing upwards and downwards respectively, like flipped out petals of a voluminous bloom. The colors of the lotus seat suit the design of her arch throne back, which is decorated with various color bars: green, red, and blue, representing the rays of light shining out from Tārā. The edge of the throne back is painted in gold, adorned with white pearls. Different from the simple and unadorned decorations of the throne in the Tārā mural of cave no. 5, Tārā's throne in this illustration presents features of the early Central Tibetan art tradition that were developed from the Pāla style.

The lotus throne is supported by the main stem rooted in the lotus pond underneath. This pond is filled with pale pink lotus flowers with green vines and leaves. The lotus vines are thin and curly, nearly swirling around each lotus flower in this dark green lotus pond. The depiction of Tārā's lotus seat, supporting stem, and the lotus pond are inspired by the same model as that of the Tārā mural of cave no. 5, which is the Indian painting of Tārā from the eleventh to the twelfth century (see figure 7). Compared to the mural in cave no. 5, the cave no. 2 Tārā mural gives a more delicate and elaborate presentation of the lotus pond, sophisticated in its depiction and concept, manifesting the sacred ambiance of Tārā's spiritual realm. As discussed earlier, Tangut artists especially favored the color green. In the depiction of the lotus pond, artists use light and dark green

colors in strong contrast, to further illuminate the vibrance and elegance of the swirling lotuses.



Figure 8. Sketch of the two offering attendants below the throne in the Green Tārā mural. Created by Huo Xiliang 霍熙亮.²⁷²

In front of the lotus pond, on the turquoise green ground, two offering attendants are dancing toward each other (see figure 8). One is dark brown and the other is white. They are both naked but adorned with crowns, armlets, bracelets, and anklets. A large flowing ribbon is tied to the back of each attendant's neck. Each attendant has one foot on the ground crossing the other.

Their other feet are raised, held by their outer arms from underneath, and cross with each other the air. Their outer hands meet each other in front their chests with pinky fingers crossing with each other. Their other arms are twisting with each other and holding a tray of offering objects together. The offering tray is adorned with colorful gems, on which five offering objects are displayed; they are presumably offering of food, liquid, lamp, conch shell, and incense. The two attendants' complex physical interaction is integrated with the harmonious dancing movement through a scene of offering to Tārā. The depiction of two offering attendants below Tārā's lotus seat is also seen in the Kharo Khoto *kesi* painting mentioned in Chapter 3, which indicates the connection between these two paintings. However, the composition

²⁷² Wang Kefen 王克芬, "Zhongguo fojiao yishu zhong wudao xingxiang de kaocha yu yanjiu" 中國佛教藝術中舞蹈形象的考察與研究, *Yishu baijia* 藝術百家 120, no. 3 (2011), 48.

and artistic concept of the offering attendants in this cave mural are more creative and unique, rarely seen in other Tārā paintings.

Around Tārā's lotus seat, four immediate attendant deities are seated at the level of her waist. Each deity has her throne with a throne back in the color of turquoise green. On Tārā's left, a blue-black goddess sits right next to her. The goddess holds a curved knife (*kartrika*) in her right hand and a skull cup (*kapala*) in her left hand. Her red hair stands upward on top of her head. She has three big round eyes with a wrathful expression. She wears a yellow tight short sleeve cropped top with decorative patterns. She is adorned with golden necklaces, armlets, and bracelets. According to the description in *Arya Tārā Astambhaya Trata Nama Sadhana*, by Indian scholar Chandragomin, she is the wrathful goddess Bhrkuti. Left of Bhrkuti, there sits another attending deity in white. She appears in a peaceful state, devoutly looking to Tārā. Her eyes are slim, and her eyebrows are curvy. She holds her left hand at the chest in the mudra of giving teaching and her right hand is on the thigh in the meditation mudra. The upper body is naked yet adorned with a golden necklace around her neck and multiple strands of tiny white pearls over her chest. On one of the pearl necklaces, in between the tiny white pearls, there is a large golden bead inserted in the shape of an eye. A black short *dhoti* skirt with a jeweled belt covers the deity's lower body. Her throne back is painted in the color of turquoise green. Her upper body slightly turns toward the center while she looks to the principal Tārā. The depiction of her physical movement is subtle yet vivid, which is often observed in Tangut art. According to the description in the root text, the deity is Pratisara, known as the Great Fulfiller of Wishes.²⁷³

²⁷³ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 54.

On the right side of Tārā, the immediate attendant who sits at Tārā's thigh level is Mahāmāyā,²⁷⁴ appearing in her peaceful state. Her eyes are long and slim, in the shape of a bow, which is often seen in the Himalayan Tantric art conventions. Her upper body is naked but she wears a golden necklace and multiple strands of tiny white pearls over her chest. Her right hand usually holds at her heart, but her right hand is not showing in this depiction. She wears an embroidered crown, and her hair naturally flows down to her back. Right next to Mahāmāyā, another attending deity is depicted. She has a boar head with two big ears, which indicates that she is Marīcī, the goddess of sun and brightness and part of Tārā's entourage, according to scriptures. Her two hands are folded before her chest. She wears a blue tight short-sleeved cropped top and a blue short *dhoti* skirt with a jeweled belt. She is adorned with multiple strands of white pearls that lie across her chest, as well as golden armlets, bracelets, and anklets. She is looking away from the principal Tārā. She sits with her left leg in *vajrasana* posture and the right knee lifts to touch her right elbow. Her throne back is painted in turquoise green.

Tārā and her four immediate attendant deities are surrounded by six accompanying bodhisattvas. While the four immediate attendants are much smaller than the principal Tārā, these Bodhisattvas are larger than the attendants. On the left side of principal Tārā, three accompanying Bodhisattvas are standing in a line.

A dark-color Bodhisattva is in the front, standing on a lotus platform. His right hand holds a mudra of giving teachings at the heart and his left hand naturally drops down, holding a long green stem in his hand. From the stem, multiple vines extend and a beautiful blue *utpala* flower blooms right next to his shoulder. His torso is slim and

²⁷⁴ Shi Wei 史偉, "Xixia hexi shiku bihua" 西夏河西石窟壁畫, 100-105.

curvy, with sloped shoulders and slender waist. He gently looks down with a peaceful and serene expression on his face. He wears a golden crown of five leaf-shaped decorations filled with colorful gems. A long spiral hair is shown falling before the crown and there are decorations above the line of hair. Behind the crown, part of his hair is formed into a circle, adorning the top of his head. The hair circle is decorated with an ornament of jewels on top and multiple strands of tiny white pearls twining around. A white ribbon is tied to the hair circle and floats behind him. The rest of his hair flows down the back. Meanwhile, His earrings are large and round. His body is in a gentle movement with the chest slightly concave and the belly protruding out. This way of depicting this attending Bodhisattva is also observed Pāla-inspired early Central Tibetan art in the eleventh to the thirteenth century.²⁷⁵ His upper body is naked but decorated with three strands of gems in different sizes, clinging to his body, which accentuate the sense of its curves and the subtle yet vivid physical movement. He wears a short blue lower garment decorated with a golden jeweled belt and a light-blue cape. His four limbs are long, slim, and tender, decorated with armlets, bracelets, and anklets that are often seen in the Pāla and Pāla-inspired artworks. Compared to the decorations of the four immediate goddesses, the accompanying Bodhisattva's decorations are more complicated and delicate. His head aura is painted in light blue and his body aura is in the color of pale pink. He appears in a peaceful state. Presumably, according to the tradition of Tārā paintings—i.e., the Tārā mural in cave no. 5 and the Khara Khoto Tārā *kesi* painting—the dark-color Bodhisattva is Vajrapāṇi, the Bodhisattva of Power, dwelling in a peaceful abiding.

²⁷⁵ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 81.

Behind him is an illustration of a white-color Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva stands on his lotus platform with his two hands folded together before his chest, while his head and upper body are slightly turned to the principal Tārā. As in other Tangut illustrations, his movement is subtle yet vivid. He wears a red robe across his chest, showing his right shoulder. His face is wide, with thin eyebrows, eyes, and lips. His eyebrows are curvy, and his eyes are in the shape of a bow. He wears a golden jeweled crown and a bronze embroidered necklace around his neck. His hair is black and curly, naturally flowing down. He has both head aura and body aura, and his body aura is in the color of turquoise green.

The third Bodhisattva is also in a dark color, wearing a red robe across his chest, exposing his right shoulder. His face is round and short, his eyes and eyebrows are thin and long. He also wears a golden jeweled crown with colorful gems. His curly hair naturally flows down the back. A golden jeweled necklace decorates his neck. His hand gestures are indesipherable due to the deterioration of paint. His head aura is painted in turquoise green. White clouds are painted around his head aura as a sign of auspiciousness. In general, the three accompanying Bodhisattvas reflect many influences from Indian art and early Central Tibetan art. Not only Tangut art concepts but also the artists' creative and unique approaches to composition are observed in this mural.

The other three accompanying Bodhisattvas on Tārā's right side are mostly blocked by the statue from the Qing dynasty. Given what is visible, the first Bodhisattva is of a dark color. He folds his hands together at his heart and his body gently turns to the principal Tārā. He is adorned with gold necklaces and armlets. The second Bodhisattva is also of a dark color and he wears a golden crown and has a turquoise green aura. The

third Bodhisattva is of a light color, most likely white. He wears an embroidered crown and his face is round, with thin long eyes. He wears large earrings and multiple necklaces. He slightly turns his face and upper body to the principal Tārā. He has a turquoise green head aura. Around him, white clouds are painted on top of the dark blue background for contrast, to emphasize this auspicious sign.

In the top two corners, four offering heavenly beings, riding on dark-blue clouds, are flying toward the principal Tārā. Their legs are slightly bent while standing and they hold offering objects in their hands.

On the left and right side of the principal Tārā, eight accompanying Tārās are painted in green and are each set in eight square-shaped frames. The frames are outlined by golden lines and adorned with colorful dots representing jewels. The eight Tārās are painted in the eight scenes of Saving Living Beings From Dangers. On the left side of the principal Tārā, four Tārās, aligned vertically, are shown in scenes where they are saving people from dangers of water, prison, robbery, and non-human attack. On the right side, another four Tārās are shown in scenes where they are saving people from dangers of fire, snake, elephant, and lion.²⁷⁶ Tārās on the left side of the principal Tārā sit with right legs bent in and left legs stretched out, touching the bottom of their thrones. They look down to the left, where people in various kinds of danger are portrayed. Their left arms stretch out while twisting inwardly to rest their wrists on their left knees with fingers pointed upward and palms facing left. Their right hands hold the stems of blue *utpala* flowers opening near their right ears. Meanwhile, Tārās on the right side stretch out their right legs and bend in the left legs. Their left hands hold stems of *utpala* flowers at the

²⁷⁶ Shi Wei 史偉, “Xixia hexi shiku bihua” 西夏河西石窟壁畫, 100-105.

heart, and right hands stretch out and rest on their right knees. They look downward to the right where the people in danger are portrayed. Turquoise green and dark blue are alternatively applied in the background of the frames.

The eight accompanying Tārās are portrayed in a similar manner. Therefore, I take the best-preserved painting as an example of a detailed analysis. On the left side of the principal Tārā, in the second box from the top, there is an illustration of a scene of Tārā saving a person from the danger of prison. Green Tārā sits on her golden throne. Her face is wide and rounded with long and thin eyebrows and bow-shaped eyes, as often observed in Tangut paintings. She looks kind and serene, with a compassionate smile rendered with a careful artist's hand. She wears a Pāla-style five-leaf crown, golden in color with multicolor jewels. Her hair flows down naturally. Her shoulders are wide and sloped, in contrast to her thin and tender waist, but not as exaggerated as in Himalayan art. Unlike the principal Tārā, she is dressed in the Indian Pāla style. Her upper body is naked yet decorated with three layers of jewel-embroidered necklaces: one around her neck, one dropping down to her belly, and one touching her seat. She wears a short dark-brown *dhoti* skirt with a golden embroidered belt below the waist. Her four limbs are long and tender, adorned with golden armlets, bracelets, anklets. Her palms are painted in pale pink while the soles of her feet are painted in red.

She sits on a throne with a golden seat and a red throne back. The bottom of the throne is decorated with red and green leaves. An aura is depicted behind her head. She gently looks down to the right with her upper body slightly oriented to the right, sincerely listening to the person's request. Her body is vividly illustrated as in a smooth and gentle movement, which displays the kind and compassionate aspects of Tārā in Tangut

Buddhism, the essence of the religion. The person who asks for help from Tārā stands on her right side, in a much smaller size. His hair is in the Tangut peasant style. A traditional wood shackle is placed around his neck and his hands are locked to it. Above this man, in the top register of this painting, a yellow-wall house representing a prison is depicted. This person is in danger of being imprisoned and is praying to Tārā for relief.

In the top register, five Dhyani Buddhas are illustrated in individual frames. They are painted as in the early Central Tibetan style, sitting on their thrones with throne backs. They wear red robes with their right shoulders showing. Two Dharma protectors are shown on either side of them. At the bottom of the mural, offering goddesses are painted in a horizontal bar; however, the paint has almost completely deteriorated because of the moisture in the wall.

5.2 Cave No.2 at Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves

Cave no. 2 is the largest and the most well-preserved cave at the Eastern Thousand Buddha site. It is located at the lower level of the west bank, facing toward the east. It is another typical Tangut *caitya* cave with a central pillar that separates the hall into two. The main hall is 9.3 meters long, 6.9 meters wide, and 5.5 meters high. And the back tunnel is 2.3 meters long, 1.8 meters wide, and 3 meters high. The wall-like pillar is 4.3 meters wide. In the front, the ceiling is in the shape of truncated square pyramid, while in the back, the ceiling is flat. The entire cave is painted with murals of Mahayana and Tantric traditions, and the extensive use of the Tangut turquoise green creates a sacred and tranquil ambiance for the cave.

5.2.1 Murals of Cave No.2

The tunnel that leads to the entrance is decorated with paintings. Over the ceiling, there is a painting of one phoenix flying in front and two dragons on either side behind the phoenix—which is the opposite of the Tangut tradition, where two phoenixes and one dragon in a circle represent the emperor and empresses.²⁷⁷ They are situated among numerous flowers of various kinds and sizes. The flowers are painted in the contrasting color combination of dark blue and turquoise green. Facing the main hall, on the left side of the entrance wall, four male patrons are painted with decorative curtains above them. On the right side, six female patrons are painted. However, the bottom of these patron paintings has been damaged due to flooding in the cave. According to Zhang's study on the patrons' identities,²⁷⁸ the four male patrons are middle-rank military officials of the Tangut court during the later Tangut period and the six female patrons are their family members. During the Tangut period, many powerful and wealthy military officials resided in the Guazhou area. Buddhism, the state religion of Tangut, deeply influenced Tangut spiritual life. Therefore, military officials were eager to make merit through sponsoring the construction of cave temples. In cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, paintings of groups of military officials and their family members are also found on the walls.

In the front hall, the ceiling is structured with layers of caissons and painted a *maṇḍala* of the five Dhyani Buddhas. In the center, a square-shaped mansion is painted with the five Dhyani Buddhas and four accompanying Bodhisattvas. Based on their

²⁷⁷ Shi Jinbo 史金波, "Buddhism and Confucianism," 151-52.

²⁷⁸ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di'erku gongyangren shenfen xintan" 瓜州東千佛洞第2窟供養人身份新探, 83-84.

colors and hand objects as well as mudras, in the center is Vairocana Buddha; above him is Amitabha; on his right is Amoghasiddhi; on his left is Ratnasambhava, and below him is Akṣobhya. The four accompanying Bodhisattvas are sitting in between the Buddhas. The mansion is supported by a double-cross *vajra*, which is circled by an outer ring, representing the cemetery ground. Outside the ring, the tips of another four *vajras* are painted on the four corners to indicate that is supported by another double cross *vajra*. An outer layer of caisson is decorated with paintings of Buddhas, nine Buddhas on each side. On the four sides of the pyramidal walls, only some remains of paintings survived while most of the paint is gone. Working on the remaining pieces, one wall originally displayed a scene of Buddha's teaching with the audience of Bodhisattvas and arhats. Bodhisattvas are in various colors—green, blue, and white—and are decorated with short lower garments, jewelry, and hair knots on top. The arhats are in their robes, exposing the right shoulders, and have some hair over their heads and beards on their chins. The depiction of Bodhisattvas and arhats present many influences from Indian art.

Entering the hall, on the left of the east wall, there is an image of a red deity with four attendant deities. The principal deity is red in color, with three faces and four arms. The principal face is red, the left face is white, and the right is blue. The first right hand holds a sword over the head, and the first left hand holds a blue book before the chest. Another two hands hold a bow and an arrow. A snow lion's head adorns the deity's head on top. According to the description in the root text *Mañjuśrī-Nāmasamgīti* ("A Concert of Names of Mañjuśrī") from *One Hundred Methods of Accomplishments.*, this mural presents Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī with his attending Bodhisattvas. Unlike the Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī *maṇḍala* in the cave no. 5, the depiction of Mañjuśrī in this mural strictly

adheres to the description in the root text. The four attending Bodhisattvas are sitting on the two sides and they are in red, yellow, green, and white colors. They all have curly hair, and the illustrations of their physical movements are vivid and vital, which are show the influences of Himalayan art in Tangut paintings. The Sanskrit letter "dī" is drawn at the bottom of Mañjuśrī's throne, which is the seed syllable of Mañjuśrī's essence mantra.²⁷⁹

On the right side of the east wall, there is a painted *maṇḍala* of nine deities. The principal deity is white in color, with three faces and eight arms, sitting on a throne inside a semi-section stupa with plenty of colorful decorations over the top. As discussed earlier, placing the principal deity inside a semi-section stupa is a typical composition of Tangut Tantric art. According to Jia's study on Tangut murals of Uṣṇīṣavijaya *maṇḍala*,²⁸⁰ this mural presents the rare nine-deity Uṣṇīṣavijaya *maṇḍala*. Similar to other Tangut paintings, this mural also displays artistic features from various conventions, especially the Himalayan traditions. As Jia mentioned in her study, on the left side of Uṣṇīṣavijaya, Vajrapāṇi is depicted in the wrathful form that is uncommon in Tangut Tantric paintings, but common in Tibetan Buddhist paintings. However, in Tibetan paintings, wrathful Vajrapāṇi—when as an attendant deity—often holds a fearless mudra with a *vajra* in the right hand up in the air and a *vajra* lasso in the left hand before his chest. The wrathful Vajrapāṇi in this mural holds a *vajra* and a whisk, the same as peaceful Vajrapāṇi in Tangut paintings. The Tangut depiction of wrathful Vajrapāṇi

²⁷⁹ Mañjuśrī's essence mantra: ཨོཾ་ཨ་ར་པ་ཐ་ན་ཏི་ (om ah ra pa tsa na dhi)

²⁸⁰ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Yulinku disanku dingji zunsheng fomu mantuoluo yanjiu" 榆林窟第三窟顶髻尊胜佛母曼荼罗研究, 70-71.

reflects the unique approach of Tangut art, balanced between foreign art traditions and its own visualizations.

In the front hall, three Buddha statues are built before the west wall, and two Bodhisattva attendants are placed on each side of the Buddha statues. These statues were remodeled in the Qing dynasty and therefore will not be discussed here.

On the south wall, two large murals are painted. The outer mural illustrates a white deity with eleven faces and eight arms sitting on a high throne inside a semi-view stupa, accompanied by eight Bodhisattvas at his sides. The first two hands are folded in front of the chest, and other hands hold various objects: a beaded mala, the mudra of generosity, a Dharma wheel, a lotus flower, a jeweled vase, and a bow. The illustration of the deity is identical with the Eleven-Face and Eight-Arm Chenrezig in cave no. 76 at the Mogao site and the Tangut *thangka* of Eleven-Face Chenrezig discovered in Khara Khoto.²⁸¹ By examining the mural contents of cave no. 76 and its related texts, Peng²⁸² discovers the Tangut version of Chenrezig with eleven faces and eight arms is a simplified illustration of Thousand-Arm Chenrezig, which maintained the eight main arms but emitted the countless arms behind them. Meanwhile, two groups of Bodhisattvas are painted in vertical frames at the edges of the two sides. They are depicted as saving human beings from eight different kinds of danger—danger of fire, snakes, elephants, lions, water, prison, robbery, and non-human beings. Also, five Dhyani Buddhas with two Dharma protectors are shown in the top register of the mural. The

²⁸¹ Peng Jinzhang 彭金章, “Mogaoku di 76 ku shiyimianbabi guanyin kao” 莫高窟第 76 窟十一面八臂觀音考, 43.

²⁸² Peng Jinzhang 彭金章, “Mogaoku di 76 ku shiyimianbabi guanyin kao” 莫高窟第 76 窟十一面八臂觀音考, 45-46.

entire composition of the mural is similar to the mural of the Green Tārā with Tārās Who Save Living Beings From Eight Dangers in the same position on the opposite wall across the hall. The consistency of the overall design of the cave suggests that it was completed at one time, unlike the creation of cave no. 5 at the same site, which was completed in stages.

Next to the Chenrezig nine-deity *maṇḍala* is another *maṇḍala*-themed mural. A Buddha sits on a stepped throne inside a semi-view stupa. His right hand touches the ground in the mudra of subduing and his left hand holds a bowl in the mudra of meditation, which indicates that this enlightened being is Śākyamuni Buddha. Behind him, auras of his body and head are depicted, and his body aura is painted in the Tangut turquoise green color. He is accompanied by attendant Bodhisattvas and celestial beings. This entire mural is composed based on Śākyamuni Buddha's depiction in the Himalayan art style with many Tangut art elements, for instance, the semi-view stupa and the large application of turquoise green. In the lower register of the south wall, offering goddesses with musical instruments are painted.

When entering the back tunnel, on the left wall, there is an illustration of one of the most popular Tangut Buddhist themes—Water-Moon Guanyin—which resonates with the mural of the same theme on the wall across the tunnel. The turquoise green color is extensively used in the mural, which evokes the transcendent spiritual state of Guanyin and makes for a tranquil and sacred atmosphere in the back tunnel. As discussed in the previous chapter, the illustration of Water-Moon Guanyin originated in Chinese Tang art; however, it flourished in Tangut Buddhism. The Tangut version of Water-Moon Guanyin also evokes the serenity of Guanyin's spiritual realm. This mural's composition is indeed

based on a Chinese model, yet its visual representation displays many essential features of Tangut art. For instance, the use of turquoise green color is frequently seen in the depiction of water, plants, and Guanyin's decorations. Gold powder is also used in the decorations of Guanyin, which both serves as a way for a Tangut to make an offering to the enlightened being, and also creates the visual effect of a glowing Guanyin in the dim light inside the cave. Guanyin's four limbs are slim and soft; the upper body is naked yet decorated by garments and ornaments; and the lower body is covered by garments of silk, which indicates an Indian influence.

Another important Tangut element in the mural is the depiction of Master Xuanzang's prayer to Guanyin with his disciple Shipantuo (石盤陀) and a white horse. Depictions of Master Xuanzang and Shipantuo have been frequently found in the murals of Water-Moon Guanyin, and these exclusively in the Tangut caves in Shazhou and Guazhou of the Dunhuang section of the Silk Road. Tangut paintings of Water-Moon Guanyin discovered in Khara Khoto, however, rarely contain the depiction of Master Xuanzang and Shipantuo.²⁸³ In addition to the well-known personal connection between Xuanzang and Guanyin, the inclusion of Xuanzang in the Water-Moon Guanyin mural paintings along the Silk Road is indeed in memory of the pioneer who traveled between China and India. This occurred during a time of frequent commercial and cultural

²⁸³ Sha Wutian 沙武田, "Shuiyue Guanyin tuxiang yangshi de chuangxin yu yitu: Guazhou Xixia shiku tangseng qujingtu chuxian yuanyin zaikao" 水月觀音圖像樣式的創新與意圖——瓜洲西夏石窟唐僧取經圖出現原因再考, 6-8.

communication between China and India, when the greater Dunhuang area was under Tangut occupation.²⁸⁴

On the west wall inside the tunnel, three paintings are presented. In the middle, the scene of Śākyamuni Buddha's sermon is painted, while on each of the two outer sides, two murals of Medicine Buddha with attendants are painted. These Chinese Mahayana themes are frequently seen in Chinese caves from previous dynasties at the Mogao Grottoes. Their compositions and depictions of Buddhas and disciples, as well as their robes and clothes, are also similar to those in the Chinese caves at the Mogao site.²⁸⁵ The theme of Śākyamuni Buddha's sermon corresponds to another Chinese-Mahayana-themed painting—Śākyamuni Buddha's Parinirvana—painted on the opposite wall across the tunnel, which is also the back wall of the central pillar. The two Medicine Buddhas on the two sides are illustrated as peacefully standing with disciples, each holding a transparent bowl of medicine and a staff. The two Medicine Buddhas and their followers are dressed in Chinese-style robes that are often seen in Mogao caves, and both of them are shown with a head aura. Yet certain Tangut essential characteristics are integrated into these Chinese-art-inspired paintings. For instance, the Medicine Buddhas' head auras are painted in the Tangut favorite color—turquoise green. And in the depiction of Medicine Buddha on the north side, the Buddha's "hair" is painted in the color of lapis lazuli blue and outlined in the color of turquoise green. The lapis-lazuli blue, as discussed previously, was another color favored by Tangut artists and was often used in

²⁸⁴ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Yulinku disanku dingji zunsheng fomu mantuoluo yanjiu" 榆林窟第三窟頂髻尊勝佛母曼荼羅研究, 68-70.

²⁸⁵ Mao Fang 卯芳, "Dongqianfodong di'erku bihua yishu yanjiu" 東千佛洞第二窟壁畫藝術研究, 54-56.

combination with turquoise green. The combination of lapis-lazuli blue and turquoise green is also applied in the Buddhas' and disciples' robes in these two murals. In addition, the Pure Land of Medicine Buddha is named the "Light of Lapis Lazuli" (琉璃光) and Medicine Buddha is described as cast in the color of lapis-lazuli blue in Buddhist Tantric texts that were popular in the Dunhuang area in the second half of Tangut history.

On the north wall in the back tunnel, another Water-Moon Guanyin is situated to correspond with the one on the south wall in the tunnel. Although the paint is faded somewhat, the extensive use of turquoise green can still be seen in the coloring of water, bamboo leaves, and the decorations of Guanyin. Compared to the illustration of Guanyin on the south wall, this illustration of Guanyin presents more masculine features. For instance, his mustaches and eyebrows are emphasized in the depiction. Guanyin's face is in a round shape that reflects the Tangut ethnic characteristics. Guanyin sits at the bank in the red color with his right leg standing on a turquoise green lotus. Around him, rocks are painted in the deep lapis-lazuli blue with gold powder layered over the surface as decoration. Combining gold with the extensive use of turquoise green was an essential coloring technique in Tangut mural art, employed in order to manifest the serenity and tranquility of the ultimate spiritual state in Buddhism. Similar color technique is also seen in Water-Moon Guanyin illustrations on the south wall in the same tunnel and in Yulin Caves as stated in Chapter 3. The decorations of Guanyin are also depicted with the technique of gold-power gilding, which renders a glowing emanation of Guanyin resonating to his glowing surroundings. As mentioned earlier, another essential Tangut element in murals of Water-Moon Guanyin along the Silk Road—the depiction of Master

Xuanzang and his disciple—is also included in this illustration of Water-Moon Guanyin as a memorial of the pioneer travelers between China and India.

The ceiling of the back tunnel is flat and decorated with paintings of five Buddhas in the design of large lotus flowers and curling grass patterns. Two Buddhas are painted on the ceiling of the each of two sides of the tunnel respectively, and three Buddhas are in the back tunnel. Each Buddha is depicted inside a turquoise green circle and surrounded by large lotus flowers. This particular design of lotus flowers in the ceiling mural is combined of lotus, peony, and dahlia flowers,²⁸⁶ which may indicate an infusion of Buddhist, Chinese, and the western (Indian) cultures. Flowers and grass, in various shapes and forms, are arranged freely and artistically around the five Buddhas, which creates a stylized presentation of the Buddhas' realm. Reflecting the Tangut art tradition, flowers and grass are primarily painted in green, blue and white colors.

The front wall of the back tunnel is the back wall of the center pillar. On the front wall of the back tunnel is painting of the Buddha's Parinirvana scene, which is commonly seen in Tangut caves, following the tradition of Kucha caves ,as discussed previously. The entire mural adheres to the Chinese Mahayana art and figures in the mural are illustrated with Chinese facial characteristics and dressed in robes of the Chinese Tang-Song style. Bodhisattvas, arhats, gods, and celestial beings are depicted as surrounding the lying Buddha. Arhats appear to be very emotional when observing the Buddha's Parinirvana, which is also seen in Chinese paintings of the same scene.

²⁸⁶ Wang Xiaozhen 王曉珍, "Dongqianfodong di 2 ku juancao lianhuawen shenmei fengge" 東千佛洞二窟卷草蓮花紋審美風格, 133.

On the two sides of the central pillar, two gorgeous offering Bodhisattvas in female forms are illustrated respectively. Both Bodhisattvas are granting offerings to beings near them while engaging in elegant dancing moves. Their decorations are similar to the decorations of Green Tārā in the same cave. For instance, the two Bodhisattvas are also dressed in tight short sleeve cropped tops and short white *dhoti* skirts, which exposes their bellies. In the meantime, they are adorned with jewelries and ribbons around the neck. Their physical movements are vivid and dynamic while their female physical features are especially emphasized in their dancing moves. As a matter of fact, many influences of the Indian Pāla art—rather than Chinese Song art—are observed in the depictions of these two female Bodhisattvas. Each of the Bodhisattvas wears a crown that is adorned with an image of a sitting Buddha. In both Chinese Mahayana and Himalayan Tantric traditions in the tenth to thirteenth century, Avalokiteśvara (or Guanyin in the Chinese tradition, Chenrezig in the Tibetan tradition) is commonly seen as adorned with Amitabha Buddha on top of his head, which is suggested by Chang's²⁸⁷ findings based on her textual studies. Chang claims that these two Bodhisattvas are forms of Tārā. They are depicted in such scenes of granting nectar to hunger ghosts and offering seven jewels to poor children, which are excerpted from stories of the Thousand-Arm Avalokiteśvara in the Chinese Tang Esoteric Buddhism.

On the front wall of the pillar, which is also the west wall of the front hall, twelve Buddhas are painted in circles. They are grouped into pairs in two vertical rectangles, with a brown block in between. The circles are painted in the turquoise green and

²⁸⁷ Chang Honghong 常紅紅, “Lun Guazhou dongqianfodong di'erku shibaodumu tuxiang yuanliu ji xiangguan wenti” 論瓜州東千佛洞第二窟施寶度母圖像源流及相關問題, 72–87.

outlined with dark blue color, while the space between circles is painted red. The combination of the colors presents a strong contrast that attracts the viewer's attention right at the entrance and creates a serious religious ambiance for the cave, a technique that is commonly employed in Tangut cave design. Meanwhile, above the two side entrances to the back tunnel, two images of Budai Monk (布袋和尚) are painted. These two paintings are composed according to the story of Budai Monk in Chinese Buddhism and they are painted based on models from Chinese art. The lower register of the west wall is blocked by the three Qing-dynasty statues of Buddhas before it.

On the north wall, two large murals are painted and occupy the entire wall. On the west side, right next to the Water-Moon Guanyin at the entrance of the back tunnel, the mural portrays a Buddha sitting on a stepped throne, accompanied by his disciples. According to Mao,²⁸⁸ this is another *maṇḍala* of Śākyamuni Buddha. He wears a red robe that stands out against the strong contrasting colors in the background. While following the Himalayan art style, this mural also presents many essential Tangut features, such as the large use of the turquoise green color and the semi-view stupa. The other painting on the north wall is the illustration of Green Tārā with eight Tārās Who Save Living Beings From Eight Dangers, which has been discussed previously.

5.2.2 Historical Background of Cave No.2

Like the study of cave no. 5, the exploration of cave no. 2's historical background heavily relies on the analysis of patron portraits. As previously discussed, ten patrons' portraits, intact and visible, are situated on either side of the entrance. Since their

²⁸⁸ Mao Fang 卯芳, "Dongqianfodong di'erku bihua yishu yanjiu" 東千佛洞第二窟壁畫藝術研究, 54-56.

inscriptions are no longer legible, the patrons' attire provides important information as to their identities, which allows modern scholars to gain some insights into the history of cave no. 2 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves.

According to Zhang's study,²⁸⁹ the ten patron portraits represent a group of Tangut military officials and their family members. The male military officials wear round-shaped official caps decorated with gold (貼金起雲鏤冠 *tiejin qiyunlouguan*) and long purple robes with round collars, narrow sleeves, and *hubi* (護髀)²⁹⁰ on the two sides. This attire is identical with the clothing of military officials illustrated in cave no. 29 at the Yulin site as described in Chapter 3.²⁹¹ According to the information provided by the inscriptions along the patron portraits in cave no. 29, the two lead lay donors are high-ranking military officials: Zhao Mayu (趙麻玉), Tangut Imperial Army Censor of Shazhou (沙州監軍), and Zhao Zuyu (趙祖玉), Vice Prefect of Army Censor Department of Guazhou (瓜州監軍司通判). During the later Tangut period, twelve Army Censor Departments were established in various areas of Tangut, including Guazhou and Shazhou. The officials of the Tangut Army Censor Departments were especially wealthy and powerful in their respective jurisdictions. Due to the similarity of the donors' attire in cave no. 2 and cave no. 29, one infers that the male donors in cave no. 2 are presumably in the same or similar rank as those donors of cave no. 29 who are

²⁸⁹ Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, "Guazhou dongqianfodong di'erku gongyangren shenfen xintan" 瓜州東千佛洞第2窟供養人身份新探, 83-84.

²⁹⁰ *Hubi* 護髀 is an ancient decorative garment often worn on the two sides on top of a robe as a symbol of protection for military officials.

²⁹¹ Shi Jinbo 史金波, *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略, 149.

financially capable of affording the creation of this large cave with a great number of murals.

The female patrons are portrayed on the other side of the entrance, following the Dunhuang pattern of visually paralleling the female and male patrons. The females wear peach-shaped crowns, decorated with gold leaf and strands of ornaments on two sides. Traditional ornamented hairpins are placed behind their crowns. They wear cross-collar long robes with narrow sleeves in various colors: purple, red, pink, and green. Similar clothing and hair decorations are also seen in the depictions of female patrons in cave no. 29 at the Yulin site and the paintings discovered in Khara Khoto. By analyzing the similarities of these female patrons depictions, Zhang concludes that the female patrons of cave no. 2 also belong to Tangut noble caste and they are family members of the male patrons.²⁹²

Thus, cave no. 2 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves was presumably sponsored by a family of high-ranking military officials and their female family members. Based on the organization of the paintings inside the cave, this cave was constructed and painted as a whole project and completed at one time, unlike the phased construction of cave no. 5, as previously discussed.

²⁹² Zhang Xiantang 張先堂, “Guazhou dongqianfodong di’erku gongyangren shenfen xintan” 瓜州東千佛洞第2窟供養人身份新探, 83-84.

5.3 Discussion

In this mural, the principal Green Tārā is surrounded by four immediate attends and eight accompanying Tārās, which is a similar arrangement as in the Central Tibetan Tārā painting. As a previous study²⁹³ suggests, the Central Tibetan Tārā painting is the model for the Tangut Tārā mural in cave no. 2.

Like other Tangut Buddhist paintings, the Tārā mural focuses on manifesting the transcendent state of Buddhist deities in the illustration of Tārā and her surroundings through skillful uses of color. The favorite color of the Tangut—turquoise green—is generously applied throughout the entire mural. Unlike the Tārā mural in cave no. 5, by contrasting with a few dark colors and blending with thin golden outlines, the extensive use of the bluish green color evokes a serene and peaceful state of transcendence. As discussed previously, the belief that turquoise offered protection from harm and victory over enemies in Tangut culture likely played a part in the extensive application of this bluish green color in Tangut paintings. The importance and meaning of turquoise also resonate with the essential role of Tārā in Tantric Buddhism. Given the context of constant wars and harsh living conditions, protection was an essential religious pursuit for the Tangut. This mural portrays Tārā with her eight essential manifestations that are all highly regarded as granting protection to people in different kinds of danger. Given the meaning of turquoise in Tangut culture, this mural embodies the importance of Tārā's protective and victory-granting powers in Tangut Buddhism.

Unlike cave no. 5, this cave was intended to display a complete representation of the Buddhist pantheon. The composition of this cave emphasizes the symmetrical

²⁹³ Shi Wei 史偉, "Xixia hexi shiku bihua" 西夏河西石窟壁畫, 100-105.

arrangement of each of the two murals. For instance, there are two Śākyamuni *maṇḍalas* on the same location on two opposite walls, two illustrations of Medicine Buddha on the two sides of the painting of Śākyamuni in the back tunnel, and two murals of Water-Moon Guanyin on the same location on two opposite walls in the back tunnel. Green Tārā and Chenrezig, though not completely identical, are very closely related to each other in Tantric Buddhism, as they are both seen as the emanations of the ultimate Great Compassion. They are displayed at the same location on two opposite walls so as to invite the viewer to notice how they resonate with each other. The symmetrical arrangement was essential in Dunhuang cave art. The design of this cave consists of a systematic arrangement of paintings featuring various cultures and traditions and presents them as one complete artwork: an essential marker of the Dunhuang-style cave art of the time.

Although this cave is designed as a “secret hall” according to the Tantric concept, Mahayana-style paintings also play a role here. For instance, in the back tunnel, the themes of the murals are primarily inspired by Chinese Mahayana art. The figures are painted with Tangut features, along with influences of Himalayan art. As discussed previously, as Tantric Buddhism became dominant and flourished in Tangut, Chinese-influenced Mahayana Buddhism did not entirely disappear in Tangut Buddhism, which can be seen from the design of this cave.

According to the study of the donors, this cave was sponsored by a group of high-ranking military officials and their families, who were financially capable of arranging for the entire cave art to be done at one time. As mentioned previously, cave no. 5 at the same site was sponsored by a group of low-ranking military officials led by Monk

Zhiyuan. The lead patrons' portraits are arranged right underneath the Green Tārā mural, which highlights the importance of Tārā in Tangut religious belief. The group of military officials of cave no. 2 also chose Tārā to be one of the fully illustrated principal deities, which also indicates the significance of Tārā in providing protection from danger. Tangut military officials, who constantly fought in battles and were attacked by enemy troops, likely observed deaths far more frequently than others. To them, receiving protection was essential in their religious beliefs. The repeat appearance of Tārā in Tangut caves in Dunhuang underlines the centrality of protection to the religious beliefs of Tangut citizens.

Chapter 6. Tārā Mural in Cave No.4 at Yulin Caves

The mural features Green Tārā in her various manifestations, along with her accompanying Bodhisattvas (see figure 3). The principal Tārā is depicted inside a semi-section stupa in the center of the mural, taking up two-thirds of the entire mural. She is sitting on a lotus seat on top of a stepped throne. Beneath the throne, there is a lotus pond with many lotus flowers and leaves floating around. Two Bodhisattvas, presumably Vajrapāṇi (blue) and Vajrasattva (white), are sitting in the lotus pond. On the two sides of the main Tārā, six Green Tārās are painted, three on each side, and arranged vertically. A group of five Buddhas sitting on clouds is painted on each side above the accompanying Tārās. In the top register of the mural, five Dhyani Buddhas are illustrated sitting in meditation posture, arranged horizontally. Geometrics in different colors: green, blue, brown, and white, are painted to indicate mountains and trees as the background.

Although there's an ongoing debate about the date of origin of cave no. 4, as discussed in my literature review, this cave was most likely established during the later Tangut period and completed at the beginning of the Yuan dynasty. Many large murals of this cave were painted by Tangut artists, some of whom survived the Yuan conquest. Through the art analysis, I will further argue this Tārā mural to be a Tangut artwork as it presents aspects of Tangut Buddhism and its practice.

6.1 Art Analysis of the Tārā Mural



Figure 3a. Green Tārā mural (details) in cave no. 4 at Yulin Caves, China.

Like the mural in cave no. 2 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves, the illustration of the principal Tārā takes up a large space in the center of the mural. The principal Tārā has a round face, glowing like full moon, and is depicted with Tangut ethnic characteristics.

Unfortunately, due to weathering, the painting of the principal Green Tārā is not intact; the face shows some damage. This is the case with

some of her other manifestations

as well, except the one on the top left. In the only remaining face of Tārā, she is depicted with long thin eyebrows, in the shape of a bow, with the two ends slightly pointing upwards. Between the eyebrows, a white pearl is painted, representing the white swirl—one of the thirty-two signs of enlightened beings according to the *Maitreyasimhanāda*

Sūtra. Tārā's face expresses an altruistic but subtle smile. Similar renderings of Tārā's face can be frequently seen in Indian Pāla art as well as early Central Tibetan art.²⁹⁴

Further, a line of spiral hair is depicted along the front of her crown, which is similar to the depiction of Tārā in the cave no. 2 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves. Her hair is black, draping down like wavy, curvy, spiral lines along her shoulders and over her chest, which follows the general style of Tangut Tantric art, as learned from the Himalayan art conventions. Meanwhile, the main Tārā's crown is painted in the color of bronze, decorated with the Pāla-style three jeweled triangular crown.

On their ears, the principal Tārā and her accompanying Tārās are adorned with large circular earrings in two colors without any additional decoration. Tārā's shoulders are rounded and wide, while her waist is slim and curvy, which renders her torso in a "V" shape. Her full breasts are naked, large but not exaggerated, slightly covered by a white transparent thin silk ribbon that elegantly drapes around her neck and falls onto the lotus seat. In general, she is slender, her subtle body curves outlined in smooth contours, as is commonly seen in Indian Pāla art and Central Tibetan art. Her body and the throne also form an hourglass shape that is frequently observed in the Tangut *kesi* paintings discovered in Khara Koto.²⁹⁵ Meanwhile, her upper body slightly leans to the opposite side of her waist. The Tangut depiction shows Tārā's torso twist even more subtly than the Tibetan paintings.

Tārā's right hand holds the mudra of *varada*, with the palm facing upward resting on her right knee. Her left hand rests on the left thigh, holding a blue *utpala* flower, with

²⁹⁴ Kossak, "Pāla Painting and the Tibetan Variant of the Pāla Style," 3-22; Pal and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Art of Tibet*, 202-204.

²⁹⁵ Watt, Wardwell, and Rossabi, *When Silk Was Gold*, 92-93.

the palm facing outward. Her right arm twists outward, and gradually, her right hand shows the full view of her palm, while her left arm twists inward and her left wrist turns out, presenting the full view of her left palm.

In the Nepalese Tārā painting (see figure 5), both her hands gently and softly twist outward, showing three-quarters of her palms and a smooth and gentle turning of her arms. Meanwhile, in Tangut painting, the turning movement is not as vivid or smooth as it is shown in the Nepalese painting. Tārā's fingers in this Tangut mural are long and slim, presenting a similar elegance and movement as in the Nepalese painting. Tārā's left hand lightly presses down on the left thigh while holding an *utpala* flower; this is different from most Tārā depictions in Tibetan *thangkas*. Her right arm twists inward and extends her right hand upward, which is identical with the gesture of Tārā in the Nepalese paintings.

Tārā's upper body is naked and graced with a delicate white ribbon. A brown necklace encircles her neck, adorned by a triangle-shaped decoration with three components in the center. The necklace is similar in shape to the decoration that goes around her wrists, arms, and ankles. A delicate string of tiny pearls also gracefully decorates her naked upper body. The same decoration is also seen in the depiction of the accompanying Tārās. On the back throne of each accompanying Tārā, exquisite strands of pearls are depicted as the decoration of their thrones; this echoes a similar special adornment that is seen in Indian Sarnath art.

Another essential feature of the Indian Pāla style presented in the Tangut Tārā mural is Tārā's simple decoration and light garments. To wit, her lower body is covered by a short plain white *dhoti* skirt without any decorative pattern and few folds; the skirt is

visibly light, gently drapes down on the lotus seat, and splays into a fan shape, gently touching her lotus seat; the skirt is adorned by strands of exquisite pearls and a couple of light blue ribbons. The simple yet exquisite decoration and garments accentuate the graceful and lively posture of Tārā.

The principal Tārā sits on a high throne that is constituted of two lotus seats and five steps stacked in a corbel shape. Adopted from the Indian Pāla convention, Tangut artists often illustrated thrones as layered with corbels.²⁹⁶ They also incorporated their own unique visual approaches. The stepped throne with one lotus seat on top is often seen in many Tibetan and Khara Khoto *thangkas*. Yet in this mural, the artists added another lotus seat underneath the steps to support the entire throne. The lotus seat is also decorated in a typical Tangut style. The lotus petals are only in one color—maroon—with the top layer petals pointing upward and the lower layer petals pointing to the two sides. In addition, lotus petals are of a long, round, and flat shape, and the tips of petals are slightly coiling outwards, which is seen in other later Tangut artworks, for instance, in the caves of *Feilai feng* 飛來峰.²⁹⁷

An arch throne back adorned with ornaments is illustrated behind the deity as in the Indian Pāla style, representing the flames of wisdom. On top of the throne back, a *Garuda* is illustrated in his wrathful manifestation, with his fangs sticking out and biting two snakes representing *nāgas*. Placing a *Garuda* in this prominent position is a common Tibetan art practice that continues until the present day. Stoddard²⁹⁸ believes that the

²⁹⁶ Khokhlov, “The Xi Xia Legacy.”

²⁹⁷ Xiong Wenbing 熊文彬, “Cong banhua kan Xixia fojiao yishu dui yuandai neidi zangchuan fojiao yishu de yingxiang (xu)” 從版畫看西夏佛教藝術對元代內地藏傳佛教藝術的影響 (續), 66-79.

²⁹⁸ Stoddard, “Early Tibetan Paintings,” 41.

decoration of *Garuda* on the throne back is so unique to Tibetan Buddhist art that it is rarely seen in any other art conventions. However, in later studies, both Kossak²⁹⁹ and Huang³⁰⁰ argue that placing a *Garuda* on top of the throne is a Tangut practice appropriated from Himalayan art. In this Tangut mural, the *Garuda* sits on a multi-layered decorated small throne with its edges pointing upward perpendicularly, a depiction following Indian Pāla convention.

Beneath the throne, blue and purple flowers are blooming in the lotus pond. A dragon-like animal intertwines with the lotus stems in the pond. This is consistent with the Pāla style, where animals were often depicted around thrones as a means of supporting and protecting the thrones.³⁰¹

Accompanying bodhisattvas and Tārās are painted around the principal Tārā. Inside the lotus pond, two accompanying bodhisattvas sit in their lotus seats, surrounded by lotus flowers. On the right, a blue Bodhisattva, presumably Vajrapāṇi, the Bodhisattva of Power, holds his right arm up over the head with a *vajra* in his hand. His left hand holds to his heart with the left elbow resting on his left knee. His left knee is held up and his right leg is in the *vajrasana* position. On the left side sits a white Bodhisattva, possibly Vajrasattva, the deity of purification. His right knee is held upward, and his left leg sits in the *vajrasana* posture, with both hands joined at his heart. However, objects in his hands cannot be seen due to damage of the mural.

On each side of the stupa, three Green Tārās are arranged vertically. They are sitting on their lotus seats with right legs stretching out, surrounding the principal Tārā.

²⁹⁹ Kossak, "Pāla Painting," 9.

³⁰⁰ Huang, "Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces," 161-62.

³⁰¹ Kossak et al., *Sacred Visions*, 34-36.

Each accompanying Tārā's background is decorated with curtains of pearls. Above each group of Tārās is a depiction of a group of five Buddhas gathering on a cloud, representing the Buddhas from all ten directions. It is worth mentioning that the two groups of Buddhas are presented via the Mahayana style. As previously discussed in Chapter 3, the incorporation of the Mahayana figurative design into Himalayan-style painting is one of the particular trademarks of Tangut art.

The background also presents many visual aspects of the Tangut approach. For example, geometric shapes with circles inside are arranged in a crisscross pattern, primarily in blue, green, white, and brown, which are commonly illustrated as mountains and trees in Tangut art. And a line of Ashoka trees in the shapes of peaches is painted above the semi-section view stupa. In the register above the main composition, five female deities are illustrated in the Tibetan-inspired Tangut style. They are in the same form and posture as the principal Tārā, each sitting on white lotus flowers.

Another essential Tangut visual element in this mural is the use of colors. This mural is composed in a subtle and soft color combination of green and blue. For example, all the Tārās are painted in green, and behind the main throne, the stupa is painted in the color of light blue. In the background, geometric shapes representing trees and mountains are mainly painted in the combination of green and blue, in a humble and mellow tone, blended with white. In the lotus pond of the lower register, lotus buds, stems and leaves are all in this soft green tone. This color combination presents a harmonious blend of green and blue that evokes the gentle and compassionate aspect of Green Tārā. As discussed in the analysis of the other two murals, Tangut artists applied this soft and gentle color combination to illuminate the subtle elegance of Buddhist deities and to

present a harmonious spiritual realm where deities dwell. In this mural, this special color combination is the essential means by which the artists create a soft and subtle visual effect as a manifestation of the ultimate spiritual realm.

6.2 Cave No. 4 at the Yulin Caves

This cave is constructed based on the theme of *maṇḍala* art in Tantric Buddhism. In the center, an altar holds a Buddha statue and nine attendant Bodhisattva statues (rebuilt in the Qing dynasty). On each of the walls of the cave, images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are painted inside of their spiritual realms. The entire cave serves as a three-dimensional view of the Buddhas' realm.

6.2.1 Murals of Cave No. 4

On the main wall (east), two illustrations of Śākyamuni Buddha are presented respectively in the north register and south register. The center content of the east wall is not visible due to the placement of the center Buddha statue.

In the left register, Śākyamuni Buddha sits on a lotus throne with accompanying Bodhisattvas, arhats, gods, goddesses, and celestial guardians. This mural shows a special combination of two different conventions of Tangut art: the Chinese-inspired Mahayana Buddhist art and the Tibetan (or Himalayan)-inspired Tantric Buddhist art. The illustration of the main Buddha and accompanying Bodhisattvas mainly shows the Tibetan or Himalayan inspiration in the Tangut art. The Buddha sits on a lotus seat on top of a stepped-throne, dressed in a red robe, showing his right shoulder, and holding a meditation mudra and a subduing mudra in each hand. Accompanying Bodhisattvas are

in the colors of green and white; they are top-naked and in short skirts; their hair is curly and wavy in lines like in the Indian Pāla art; they hold various mudras instead of only folding hands, and their crowns are decorated by three jewels in the shape of a triangle, showing their hair knot on top. On the top register, five Dhyani Buddhas are painted in their five different colors based on the description in Tantric Buddhism.

Meanwhile, the arhats and gods are depicted in the Chinese-inspired Tangut style. Arhats wear the long and multi-layered colorful robes with decorative patterns, which are typically seen in the Chinese art in Dunhuang. Besides the two main disciples standing on each side of the Buddha's throne, another eight arhats in the Chinese style are displayed on the two sides of the main register. On the right bar, the third arhat (counting from the top) wears a hood and his robe is in the combination of green and red, without a decorative pattern. Wearing a hood is not limited to the Uyghur tradition. However, when it is discussed as a Buddhist art element that was incorporated into the Dunhuang Chinese art, the Uyghur convention is clearly the source.³⁰² Gods and celestial guardians are also represented in the Chinese style: They are decorated with long beards, complicated high crowns, and multi-layered long robes with decorative patterns. Their hands are folded at the heart.

In the south register of the main wall is another mural of Śākyamuni Buddha preaching. Śākyamuni Buddha holds the meditation mudra in his left hand and the preaching mudra in his right hand. The Buddha's two main disciples—in the Chinese style—stand by the two sides of the throne. Unlike the painting of the Buddha preaching in the north register, the accompanying Bodhisattvas are in the Tibetan-Himalayan style,

³⁰² Russell-Smith, *Uyghur Patronage*, 203-204.

in colors of green, blue, white, and red. They are grouped into two and a lotus seat is depicted beneath each group of the accompanying Bodhisattvas. They are the only audience at the bottom of the throne and the Chinese-style gods and guardians are not shown in this mural. Meanwhile, on the two sides of the main composition, Himalayan-style goddesses are displayed instead of arhats.

In the west register of the south wall, there is a mural of the theme of the Buddha's preaching. Unlike the previously discussed two murals of Śākyamuni Buddha's preaching, the Buddha wears a plain white robe that covers his entire body. His facial and bodily expression is more closely related to the "White Tārā" mural with elements of Yuan art. He sits on the lotus seat placed on top of the stepped throne, and both hands are in the mudra of giving teachings. He is surrounded by Buddhas in a similar depiction of him, and five Dhyani Buddhas are painted in the top register. Blue and green geometric shapes are painted as background trees and mountains.

On the south wall, right next to the Buddha's preaching mural, a *maṇḍala* of an eight-arm Avalokiteśvara is depicted. Avalokiteśvara sits in the center of the *maṇḍala* with his eight accompanying Bodhisattvas. This composition of the *maṇḍala* is dominated by the Himalayan-inspired Tangut style without combining any main Chinese-inspired element, which is different from other Tangut *maṇḍalas*, for instance, the Uṣṇīṣavijaya *maṇḍala* and Marīcī *maṇḍala* in the cave No. 3 at Yulin Caves.³⁰³

On the east plane of the south wall, an enlightened being is illustrated in her realm, along with her accompanying Bodhisattvas and dancing goddesses. In illustrated

³⁰³ Khokhlov, "The Xi Xia Legacy."

publications by Dunhuang Research Academy,³⁰⁴ the principal deity of this mural is identified as White Tārā—another manifestation of Green Tārā. It is a reasonable assumption based on its location. This mural is located on the east register of the south wall that is facing the west register of the north wall, where the given Green Tārā mural is located. Both Green Tārā and White Tārā are popular in Tantric Buddhism. Since they are manifestations of each other, it is logical to place them as a pair inside the cave. However, based on my observation, indicating features of White Tārā are not illustrated here. For instance, according to the root text—*Arya Tārā Astabhaya*, translated by Atisha, that is commonly used for paintings of White Tārā, she holds a lotus in her left hand at her heart; her right hand holds the mudra of *varada*, perfect giving, and rests on her right knee. In this mural, the principal deity's two hands hold the Dharma preaching mudra at her heart. Meanwhile, this deity is painted in the color of khaki-yellow and the seven eyes of White Tārā are not painted. This "White Tārā" depiction lacks the feminine characteristics that are portrayed in the Green Tārā mural across the hall.

In recent studies, Jia³⁰⁵ argues that this mural portrays the manifestation of Prajñāpāramitā (Chi. 般若佛母 bore fomu, Tib. Sher-phyin-ma), who is the source of the transcendental wisdom as described in the *sGrub thabs brgya rtsa* (or *Ba ri brgya rtsa*, Eng. *One Hundred Methods of Bari*). According to the root text, Prajñāpāramitā is yellow in color with one face and two arms, with her two hands in the Dharma preaching mudra at her heart, and two lotuses arise behind her shoulders holding a Dharma text—

³⁰⁴ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Zhongguo shiku yishu yulinku* 中國石窟藝術榆林窟, 188; Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Zhongguo Dunhuang* 中國敦煌, 145.

³⁰⁵ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, "Xixia shiku zaixiang" 西夏石窟造像, 25-26.

Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra. This description matches the portrait of this principal deity in this mural.

Right next to the Green Tārā mural, in the east register of the north wall, the sutra story of PrabhūTārātna Buddha and Śākyamuni Buddha preaching is depicted.³⁰⁶ This theme is commonly seen in Chinese Buddhist art due to its significance in Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. The content of the mural is based on the story in the "Vision of the Jeweled Stupa Chapter" (Chinese: 見寶塔品) of the *Lotus Sūtra* (Chinese: 妙法蓮華經, Sanskrit: Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra) where PrabhūTārātna Buddha's stupa rises from the ground when Śākyamuni Buddha is expounding the Lotus Sutra at Vulture's Peak. PrabhūTārātna Buddha gives Śākyamuni Buddha half of his seat and the two Buddhas give discourses together while sitting inside the stupa. It is a common Buddhist art theme in the Chinese murals in the Dunhuang area, and the earliest depiction of this theme is found in the cave No. 259 (Northern Wei 439-534AD) at Mogao Caves in Dunhuang. In Chinese murals, this theme is frequently illustrated as two Buddhas sitting together inside a stupa.³⁰⁷

Although it is a Chinese-Mahayana-themed story, the Tangut artists did not follow the Chinese style of illustration. Instead, they composed the mural in the Himalayan-inspired style. The two Buddhas are depicted with elegant body movement. They sit with their inside legs placed on top of the outside legs. Their bodies are gracefully twisting to face each other. They have long, curly, spiral hair, with hair knots on top of their heads behind their crowns. As in other Tangut artworks, the two Buddhas

³⁰⁶ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Zhongguo shiku yishu yulinku* 中國石窟藝術榆林窟, 187, 248.

³⁰⁷ Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩, *Yulinku yishu* 榆林窟藝術, 111-112.

are depicted with long and gentle torsos and limbs. The stylized design illuminates the vivid and animated body movement. The tops of their bodies are naked, and they are dressed in lower garments that are short, light, plain but delicate. Their necklaces and bangles are adorned by triangle-shaped jewels on their neck, arms, wrists, and ankles. In the upper register, a group of five Buddhas is placed on a flying cloud on top of each Buddha. Six dancing goddesses are placed on the two sidebars and two accompanying Bodhisattvas are sitting under the throne.

When comparing this mural with the other two of Śākyamuni Buddha preaching in the same cave, the manner of depicting the two Buddhas is closer to the visualization of Bodhisattvas in Tangut art. For instance, Buddhas' hair often goes into the top knot without draping down, while Bodhisattvas usually have a top knot and half of their hair draping down to the chest and back. Also, a Buddha's upper body is commonly covered by a long robe with right shoulder exposed and without any necklace or bangle, while a Bodhisattva's upper body is often naked and the lower body is covered by a short skirt, decorated by necklaces and bangles. This style of the depiction of the two Buddhas is uncommon in Tangut art. It is possible that this painting is not based on the "Vision of the Jeweled Stupa Chapter" of the *Lotus Sutra*. However, between the two Bodhisattvas, three stupas are painted under three different-sized canopies, which is considered to represent the scene where Śākyamuni Buddha and PrabhūTārātna Buddha expound the *Lotus Sutra* together.³⁰⁸ Nevertheless, this mural shows many similar features with the Green Tārā mural next to it in the same cave. Green Tārā is a female Buddha in Tantric Buddhism. Due to the characteristics of her manifestation and her spiritual connection to

³⁰⁸ Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩, *Yulinku yishu* 榆林窟藝術, 111-112.

Avalokiteśvara and the image of loving-kindness and great compassion, she is often depicted in a female Bodhisattva or Yogini form. However, the reason that the two Buddhas are depicted in the Bodhisattva forms still needs to be discovered.

On the two sides of the cave gate (on the west wall), two murals are painted, respectively: one has a theme of Samantabhadra and the other has a Manjushri theme. Unlike the rest of the murals in this cave, these two Bodhisattvas are depicted in their Chinese Mahayana forms.

In the south register, Samantabhadra is depicted as sitting on an elephant, accompanied by a Bodhisattva by his left side and an arhat by his right side. A man with curly hair and a corolla over his head holds the rein of the elephant. Samantabhadra's hair, eyebrows, and mustache are painted in turquoise green. Like in other Tangut paintings in Dunhuang caves, the combination of blue and turquoise green is used as the theme color in this mural. Samantabhadra wears a high and extensive crown full of decorations. His robe is colorful, multi-layered, with heavy flowing drapery. In the background, the mountains and trees are depicted in the style of Chinese mountain-water paintings. Also, following the Chinese Mahayana tradition, donors of the cave or mural are depicted in the lower register of the mural.

This way of illustrating Samantabhadra can be also found in the other Tangut cave murals in Dunhuang, for instance, the two murals of Avalokiteśvara in the cave no. 2 at the Yulin site. The two murals of Avalokiteśvara show a very close artistic and religious relationship with the illustration of Samantabhadra as well as the mural of Manjushri painting on the other side of the cave gate, based on their religious themes, art

techniques, composition, and coloring. Especially noteworthy is the romanticism that is rendered in the entire visualization.

6.2.1 Historical Background of Cave No. 4

Cave no. 4 at the Yulin site is believed to have been constructed during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) according to early studies of caves in Dunhuang.³⁰⁹ Unlike the two previous caves, the existing patron portraits and inscriptions are not suitable for the study of the history of this cave, because the existing patron images are of the Mongol donors who overpainted the original patron portraits. The “invasion” approach of Mongols has been found in several caves at the Mogao and Yulin sites.³¹⁰ Meanwhile, similar to cave no. 3 at the same cave site, it is difficult to definitively establish the actual date of the creation of cave no. 4. This is due to the complexity of the blending of content and art styles in the murals inside the caves. Another study used the distinct Tangut art element—the “three-jewel flame” pattern—to define the date of creation of cave no. 4, noting that it had to have been created during the Tangut reign.³¹¹ However, the debate on the actual date of production of cave no. 4 is still ongoing.

Based on the previous description of the murals in cave no. 4, it is difficult to draw a fine line on the actual time of the creation of this cave based on its complex art styles. Murals of this cave demonstrate both Tangut and Yuan art elements and styles,

³⁰⁹ Liu Yuquan 劉玉權, “Dunhuang mogaoku, Anxi yulinku Xixia dongku fenqi” 敦煌莫高窟、安西榆林窟西夏洞窟分期, 317–359.

³¹⁰ Jia Weiwei 賈維維, “Yulinku disanku dingji zunsheng fomu mantuoluo yanjiu” 榆林窟第三窟頂髻尊勝佛母曼荼羅研究, 111–119.

³¹¹ Yue Jian 岳鍵, “Dunhuang Xixia shiku duandai de xin zhengju” 敦煌西夏石窟斷代的新證據, 235–42.

greatly influenced by Chinese, Tibetan, and Himalayan art. However, it is possible to identify the time of production of each mural accurately based on its art presentation and elements.

6.3 Discussion

The visualization of the entire cave illustrates a sacred spiritual realm by using contrasting colors, detailed depiction, vivid animation, and graceful contours. It presents a mixture of three Tangut art styles merged at different times: from the Chinese-inspired Mahayana theme to the Tibetan-Himalayan-inspired Tantric art, and to the Yuan-influenced Tangut art. This combination of art styles is reflective of the chronological development of Tangut Buddhism that was mainly influenced by the Chinese Mahayana Buddhism due to its political connection with China Song, then revived by Tibetan (or Himalayan) Tantric Buddhism. Eventually, after the destruction of Tangut Empire, surviving Tangut artists continued their practice under the influence of Yuan (Mongol) art in Dunhuang and other sites.³¹² The ongoing art analysis and debate in distinguishing Tangut art and Yuan art in this cave indeed indicates the close relationship between the two art traditions and their cultures. And the historical evidence also suggests its art production continued from the Tangut Empire into the Yuan dynasty.³¹³ Therefore, each painting's origin needs to be discussed and determined individually. Based on the above art analysis of the Tārā mural and historical studies by previous scholars, I argue that this mural is a Tangut painting.

³¹² Leidy, "Buddhism and Other 'Foreign' Practices," 101-103.

³¹³ Huntington, J., "A Note on Dunhuang Cave 17, 93-101; Khokhlov, "The Xi Xia Legacy in Sino-Tibetan Art of the Yuan Dynasty."

First of all, by bringing in the later Tangut artworks at Feilai Feng, Tangut *kesi* paintings, as well as the previous two murals as references, this Tārā mural presents similar art expression, coloring skills, and arrangement of the principal deity and her attendants. As discussed earlier, figures in this mural present many Tangut ethnic characteristics, with influences from Central Tibetan, Indian, Nepalese art. In this Tārā mural, Tārā and her accompanying deities are illustrated as slim and tender, and their physical gestures indicate that their bodies are engaged in subtle movements. Tārā's tranquil and carefree spiritual state is expressed through the facial expressions and physical gestures, similar to the depiction in other two Tangut Tārā murals. In addition, Tārā's garments, decorations, ornaments, and hairstyles are typical of Tangut Tantric art that was originally adopted from Indian and Central Tibetan art. As borrowed from the Indian Pāla convention, Tangut artists often illustrated thrones as layered with corbels. However, these attributes are not as frequently as seen in Yuan art.

As with other Tangut murals, while foreign art elements were incorporated into their creation, this Tārā mural also maintains its identity as uniquely Tangut art. In the mural, Tārā is placed on a stepped throne inside a semi-view-stupa frame, which is a distinctly Tangut approach that combines the stupa worship from the ancient Indian Buddhist tradition with the emanation of Tantric deities. As another unique feature of Tangut Tantric art, Chinese art elements and attributes are integrated in this Tārā mural. The ten Buddhas on the two sides across the top of the stupa are dressed in Chinese-style robes. As discussed earlier, Tangut artists integrated Chinese visual elements into the depiction of Tantric deities and themes, which is a unique Tangut approach and often seen in Tangut caves in Dunhuang.

Meanwhile, the composition of the Tārā mural also reveals its Tangut identity. The combination of the principal Tārā with six accompanying Tārās and two Bodhisattvas is not commonly seen in Tibetan or Indian models. In Tibetan *thangkas*, Tārā is often seen accompanied by either eight or twenty secondary Tārās by following the description in its root text. The two Bodhisattvas—Vajrasattva and Vajrapāṇi—accompanying the principal Tārā on her two sides, however, is mainly seen in Tangut paintings, such as in the Khara Khoto *kesi* painting and the Tārā mural in cave no. 5. In addition, this Tārā mural presumably shares the same model with the Tangut Tārā mural in cave no. 5.

Moreover, similar to the other two Tārā murals, turquoise green is extensively used in the painting. As discussed earlier, turquoise green symbolized protection, victory, and honor in Tangut culture. Tangut artists enthusiastically applied turquoise green in Buddhist paintings to honor Buddhist deities, which also demonstrates the importance that was placed on providing protection. In addition, Tangut artists often used green turquoise in the combination with blue and white to render a tranquil and serene ambiance, in order to present the spiritual state of transcendence in Buddhism. This approach of coloring is also seen in the given Tārā mural.

The reappearance of the Tārā mural in Dunhuang Tangut caves again underlines the significance of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism. The presence of the two attending Bodhisattvas, symbolizing power and purification in Tantric Buddhism, reinforces the importance of Tārā's role of bestowing protection from dangers and mental afflictions. The six accompanying Tārās possibly represent the twenty-one manifestations of Tārā that were also important in providing protection and victory to the Tangut. These

attributes of Tārā, as well as her attendants' roles in Tantric Buddhism, constitute the reasons for the symbolic significance of turquoise in Tangut culture. The extensive use of turquoise green in this Tārā mural emphasizes her essential role for Tangut Buddhists.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 The Three Tārā Murals

When the Tangut Empire occupied Dunhuang, many cave temples were built at the Yulin and Eastern Thousand Buddha sites. Tantric-themed caves were constructed during the later Tangut period when Tantric Buddhism became dominant in Tangut. Mural paintings inside these caves are highly regarded for their artistic merit and historical value. Inside the Tangut caves, Tārā is one of the recurring principal deities in these mural paintings. In the Buddhist Tantra, Tārā is a female Buddha who is the emanation of all Buddhas' activities of compassion. She is the protectress who swiftly saves sentient beings from dangers and the victress who bestows victory over enemies. In the three given murals, Tārā is illustrated in the form of Green Tārā accompanied by attending Tārās and Bodhisattvas. The three Tārā murals presumably share the same model with the Khara Khoto *kési* painting of Tārā, which is a Central Tibetan Tārā painting.

The three Tārā murals consistently used turquoise green as the primary theme color and as the color used for the depiction of the Tārās. The belief is that turquoise was introduced to the west rim of China through the Silk Road from Central Asia. Not only Tangut and Dunhuang, but also Tibet and Mongolia greatly valued turquoise for both cultural and economic reasons. The significant symbolism of turquoise—protection and victory—was commonly understood in these areas, so much so that the color of turquoise is held in the same high regard as the turquoise stone. However, genuine turquoise was expensive and rare, and its color actually fluctuates from the time of mining. Therefore,

imitated turquoise green color was often used in decoration to arouse a sense of honor and protection, for both religious and political purposes, as is seen in these three murals. Coincidentally, the symbolism of the turquoise color and the meaning of Tārā resonate with each other: they are both considered to represent protection and victory. Tangut artists favored the turquoise green so much so that Tangut murals are also referred to as “green murals.” Tangut artists were skilled in using the soft-toned turquoise green color with lapis blue and white colors to express the spiritual state of transcendence in Buddhism, as seen in the three Tārā murals. For example, in the Tārā mural of cave no. 5, the artists used the mellow-toned combination of green and white, without dark-color outlines, to accentuate Tārā’s gentle and tranquil spiritual state as well as her loving and compassionate qualities. Although these Tangut Tārā murals were created based on Central Tibetan paintings, instead of using the typical Tibetan vibrant and contrasting colors, as seen in the models for these cave paintings, the Tangut murals combined turquoise green with other soft-toned colors to manifest the ultimate tranquil and transcendent spiritual state.

During the later period of the Tangut reign, artists were far more skilled in painting and coloring techniques than during the earlier part of its history. With influences of Chinese Song art, Tangut artists emphasized expressing the concept of serenity and tranquility that was highly praised in the Buddhist culture. They use smooth, detailed contours and soft-toned colors to illustrate Buddhist figures and the transcendent state in Buddhism, all of which is evidenced in the three Tārā murals. When compared with the Central Tibetan and Indian models of Tārā painting, Tangut Tārā murals presented a strong emphasis on the manifestation of the serenity of the transcendent

spiritual state. Dunhuang caves with murals were often built as temple caves for Buddhists' religious practices, such as worshiping and visualization. The murals also served as the medium by which practitioners could obtain a direct understanding of Buddhist teachings, in this case, through visual imagery. Tangut artists intended to represent the transcendent state of enlightened beings through detailed depiction and skilled use of soft-toned colors, thus offering a visual understanding of Tārā's transcendent qualities in the given three murals.

Aside from the attributes of the Tangut cultural identity, influences from other Buddhist art conventions are also discussed in the three given murals. Among them, influences and inspirations from early Central Tibetan art are frequently observed in the three Tangut murals of Tārā and other Tantric murals in the same caves. The three Tārā murals were presumably created by using the Central Tibetan Tārā painting as a model for composition and structure. Tibetan art elements are also seen in the detailed depictions of Tārā in the Tangut murals, from the Tārās' decorations to their physical gestures. Based on the earlier discussion, Tibetan *thangkas* provided the fundamental guidelines and models for Tangut Tantric paintings. Tibetan Buddhist art is the primary source of Tangut Tantric art, which is also reflected in the three Tangut murals.

While the contributions of Tibetan Buddhist art are undeniable, Indian and Nepalese influences are also noticeable in these Tārā murals. Although many Himalayan art features were introduced to Tangut through Tibetan *thangkas*, in some paintings, certain Himalayan art elements were infrequently seen in Tibetan *thangkas* at the same time. For instance, in cave no. 4 at the Yulin site, Tārā is situated inside a Pāla-style semi-view stupa, a form that was presumably adopted and modified from early concepts

of Buddhist art found in Indian caves. Also, a few subtle but typical Nepalese elements are seen in the Tārā murals, such as the depiction of Tārā's hair over the forehead in cave no. 5 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha Caves and decorations of Tārā's throne in cave no. 4. Therefore, aside from the indirect influences, some direct attributes of Himalayan art were also incorporated in the three Tārā murals.

In addition, concepts from Chinese art were also influential in the creation of the three Tārā murals. Chinese Song art continued to influence Tangut art in its later period when Tantric Buddhist art flourished in Tangut culture. Chinese Buddhist concepts, such as "peace of mind," "liberation," and "the transcendental state," were important to Tangut Buddhists at the time when Tangut Buddhism was mainly influenced by Chinese Mahayana Buddhism. And these concepts were translated into a visual language and illuminated as Tangut Mahayana Buddhist art developed. Even during its late time when Tantric Buddhism was already flourishing, the Mahayana theme of Water-Moon Guanyin was also repeatedly seen in Tangut Dunhuang caves. The concepts of tranquility and peacefulness are prominent themes in the illustration of Guanyin and his surroundings. The frequent reoccurrence of Water-Moon Guanyin in Tangut caves, as well as their highly praised artistic merit, suggest the significance of these concepts in Tangut Buddhism. The same concepts are also reflected in the three Tārā murals, and the virtues of these qualities continues to illuminate Tangut Tantric art. The unique Tangut approach to color was one of the most apparent means by which this was accomplished.

In summary, the three Tangut Tārā murals were created based on the Central Tibetan Tārā painting. Tangut artists used the Tibetan model as fundamental guidelines for the composition and arrangement of these murals. But unlike their model, Tangut

artists used the unique combination of turquoise green and soft-toned colors to manifest the tranquil and serene spiritual state of Tārā. In the depictions of the Tārās, Tangut artists modified the Tibetan model and integrated their own ethnic characteristics and other distinctive visual elements. Influences from other art conventions, such as Indian and Nepalese, are also seen in depictions of details and decorations. The continued influence of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism is reflected in the design concept of the three Tārā murals. The three Tārā murals illuminate the ultimate tranquil state of transcendence that is essential in Tangut Buddhist art and Tangut Buddhism. They also reveal the unique approach of Tangut art, that is, the adoption and integration of elements from other art traditions while maintaining its identity rooted in Tangut culture.

7.2 Tangut Tantric Buddhist Art

As mentioned earlier, Tangut Tantric art is closely related to Tibetan art due to the relationship between Tangut and Tibetan Buddhism. According to historical accounts, Vajrayana Buddhism was introduced to Tangut primarily by Tibetan monks and teachers, and Tangut Vajrayana Buddhism was gradually established with the great effort of Tibetan teachers and their teachings. Tibetans and Tanguts originally belonged to the same tribe—Qiang—and the common origin provided ease of their frequent communication with regard to politics, Buddhism, and culture. The political relationship between Tangut and Tibet can be traced back to the seventh century and it was developed through religious communication and political marriages later. Highly regarded Tibetan monastics had been invited to Tangut since the twelfth century. Among them, Kargyu and Sakya masters became the State Preceptors of Tangut and organized sutra translation

for Tangut Emperors. Numerous Buddhist texts were translated into Tangut from Tibetan, which became the foundation of Vajrayana Buddhism in Tangut. And many of these Tangut manuscripts contained side-notes in Tibetan. Meanwhile, many Tibetan *thangkas* were taken into Tangut by Tibetan teachers. Those Tibetan paintings provided the principal design guidelines for the creation of Tangut Tantric paintings. Therefore, the composition and arrangement of Tangut Tantric paintings are often similar to the Tibetan *thangkas*, such as the three murals of Tārā.

Meanwhile, as previous studies claim, Indian and Nepalese visual elements are also frequently seen in Tangut Tantric art, especially in the detailed depictions. By comparing the Tangut Tārā murals with the Tibetan and Himalayan Tārā paintings, I argue many of the Himalayan-inspired features are adopted from the Central Tibetan model. However, some are possibly learned from and inspired by Indian and Nepalese art directly. According to historical accounts, Indian, Nepalese, Central Asian, and Mongol monastics visited Dunhuang and Tangut due to the religious persecution in their countries and regions. Some Indian masters taught Buddhism in Tangut on their way to China and Tibet through Hexi Corridor. Indian monks were also invited by the Tangut court for the translation projects of Buddhist scriptures. And many manuscripts discovered in Khara Khoto nowadays were written in both Sanskrit and Tangut languages. These historical events suggest a direct connection between Indian Buddhism and Tangut Buddhism in its later period. To this extent, Indian Buddhist art could also have had a direct influence on Tangut art. The influences of Nepalese art to Tangut art are comparatively subtler but can be found in three Tārā murals. And Tangut art also possibly influenced Nepalese art, in turn. For instance, the unique composition of *Nāmasamgīti Mañjuśrī* in cave no. 5 and

no. 2 at the Eastern Thousand Buddha site can only be found in Nepalese art during a later time. These encounters in Tangut gave opportunities for Tangut Buddhists to learn and study with Indian Buddhist teachers directly.

Another important art tradition that provided inspiration for the Tangut was Chinese Song art. Chinese art greatly influenced Tangut art during its early period when Mahayana Buddhism was dominant in Tangut Buddhism. Its enduring influences also continued to be seen in Tangut Tantric art. Chinese Buddhist art placed an emphasis on visualizing concepts that were related to the spiritual state of tranquility, serenity, and transcendence. Tangut artists also practiced expressing these concepts visually while learning techniques from Chinese Song art. This practice had been passed on through generations. Even during the later Tangut period when Tantric Buddhism flourished and Tangut Tantric art was developed based on Tibetan Buddhist art, the practices that had been acquired from Chinese Mahayana art were still implemented in Tangut art. For instance, instead of using the vibrant and strong contrasting color palette of the Tibetan *thangka*, Tangut artists combined soft-toned colors with turquoise green and smooth contours to manifest the concept of transcendence, as is seen in the three Tārā murals. The same coloring approach is also seen in other murals in the given Tangut caves.

Tangut Tantric art also maintained its own identity while being inspired and influenced by other art conventions. For instance, Tangut ethnic characteristics are often seen in the illustration of transcendent beings as well as patrons. Also, instead of accurately following the root texts, Tangut artists integrated their understanding and creativity in the creation of Tantric deities with a focus on manifesting the transcendental state in Buddhism. Meanwhile, due to the culture of turquoise veneration in Tangut,

turquoise green was especially favored by Tangut artists, so much so that the Tangut murals are also often regarded as “green murals.” Tangut artists skillfully combined turquoise green with other soft-toned colors as well as gold powder to express a dignified tranquil spiritual state. In addition, Tantric and Mahayana murals coexist in many Tangut caves, which is rarely seen in non-Tangut caves in Dunhuang.

In summary, Tangut Tantric Buddhist art uses early Central Tibetan art as its principal model and guidelines. As it developed, it learned and adopted Indian and Nepalese art elements and features while skillfully integrating Chinese art concepts and techniques in the creation of Tantric art. At the same time, attributes of Tangut culture are also visualized in the Tantric paintings.

7.3 Tārā in Tangut Tantric Buddhism

Although Tantric practices emphasize the self-emanation of a fully enlightened beings to develop the qualities of enlightenment, Buddhist deities that are believed to provide protection were especially honored and worshipped in Tangut culture, such as Tārā. In the three murals, the principal Tārā is surrounded by eight or six Tārās that are shown in scenes of protecting people from various dangers and harms. This is connected to the history of Tangut. For generations, Tangut citizens went through a great number of hardships during constant wars and migrations, which caused their intense need for protection and victory over the difficult external living circumstances. Being protected was an essential pursuit of Tanguts in their religion and culture, which is likely the reason that Tārā appears in the two caves sponsored by military officials of the Tangut court. Especially, in cave no. 5, portraits of lead patrons are arranged directly underneath the

Tārā mural. The Tangut people's belief in turquoise for protection and victory, which was transmitted from Iran and Central Asia, is another example of their intense need for protection and victory. Turquoise stone, and the color that imitates it, were widely used in decorating significant political and religious objects as a sign of respect for the powers of protection and victory that they bestowed upon the holder or viewer. Therefore, as Tārā was widely worshipped as the protector and victress, Tārā's images were frequently found in Tangut art, both in Dunhuang and Khara Khoto. Tārā provided emotional relief and spiritual remedy for Tanguts who believed that she offered protection and victory to people who might be exposed to danger and harm.

7.4 Limitations

This dissertation aims to reveal the practice of Tārā in Tangut Buddhism in various aspects by primarily focusing on graphic evidence in the three Dunhuang caves and their connection to the history of Tangut Buddhism. Yet the opportunity to visit the relevant caves is quite conditioned and limited since they are not open to the public and can only be visited during the wintertime. Restrictions on photographing inside the caves are also enforced. Due to the limits on the amount of time one could stay and work inside the caves, only detailed notes and sketches could be taken from repeated trips to visit to the caves. Also, due to the environmental damage some cave murals have sustained over the years, as well as a lack of textual documents, certain mural contents could not be identified clearly. This is particularly true for cave no. 4 at the Yulin site: because of the absence of patron portraits, the information of its history is insufficient. In addition, access to the paintings of Tārā discovered in Khara Khoto are also limited and so online

sources are principally used for the examining process. These sources may present minor differences in coloring.

Taking all these limitations into account, this dissertation was likely not able to examine all Tangut paintings of Tārā, especially the ones that are currently preserved in museums in Russia. Therefore, the examination and comparison of the given murals are treated as the main body of the dissertation.

7.5 Expected Contribution

This dissertation aims to provide detailed analysis and comparison of the visual representations of Green Tārā in Tangut Buddhism, to offer an understanding of Tangut Tantric Buddhism through the lens of art. By applying historical texts about the Tangut Empire and Buddhism to the art discussion, this dissertation also traces the previously unrecorded lineage of the Buddhist art tradition of representing Green Tārā in Tangut and discusses the essential characteristics of Tangut Buddhist Tantric art.

Another manifestation of great compassion, Avalokiteśvara, also repeatedly appears inside the three Tangut caves in both the Mahayana and Tantric forms. His manifestation as Water-Moon Guanyin, originally from Chinese-Mahayana art, also repeatedly appears in Tangut caves in Dunhuang. The artistic merit of these images presenting Guanyin's serene state has been highly praised, which also indicates the significance of Buddhism as a practice for attaining inner peace and mental comfort in Tangut culture.

7.6 Suggestion for Future Studies

Since this dissertation primarily focuses on the analysis of the three murals of Tārā in the Dunhuang caves and other murals in the same caves, future studies could include additional analysis of the *kesi* paintings of Tārā that were discovered in Khara Khoto, to provide more evidence for the understanding of the history of Tārā practice in Tangut Buddhism.

Bibliography

- Beckwith, Christopher I. *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Behrendt, Kurt. *Tibet and India: Buddhist Traditions and Transformations*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014.
- Bell, Alexander Peter. *Didactic Narration: Jataka Iconography in Dunhuang with a Catalogue of Jataka Representations in China*. Hamburg: LIT Verlag Münster, 2000.
- Berger, Patricia Ann, Richard Kent, Helen Foresman Spencer Museum of Art, and Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850 - 1850; [Exhibition, August 27 - October 9, 1994 ...]*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994.
- Beyer, Stephan. *The Cult of Tārā: Magic and Ritual in Tibet*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Bhattacharyya, Benoytosh. *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*. Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1958.
- Chang, Honghong 常紅紅. “Gansu Guazhou dongqianfodong diwuku yanjiu” 甘肅瓜州東千佛洞第五窟研究. Master’s thesis, Capital Normal University, 2011.
- . “Lun Guazhou dongqianfodong di’erku shibaodumu tuxiang yuanliu ji xiangguan wenti” 論瓜州東千佛洞第二窟施寶度母圖像源流及相關問題 [On Iconographical Source of Sgrol Ma Yid Bzhin nor Bu (Cintāmani Tara) of Cave 2 of Eastern Qianfo Grottoes of Guazhou County and Other Issues Concerned]. *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 2, no. 172 (2014): 72–87.
- Chen, Aifeng 陳愛峰, and Yang Fuxue 楊富學. “Xixia Yindu fojiao guanxi kao” 西夏印度佛教關係考. *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學 153, no. 2 (2009): 104–8.
- Chen, Yuning 陳育寧, and Tang Xiaofang 湯曉芳. “Shanzuigou Xixia bihua tanxi” 山嘴溝西夏壁畫探析. *Xixia xue* 西夏學, no. 1 (2006): 14–20.
- Cui, Hongfen 崔紅芬. *Xixia Hexi fojiao yanjiu* 西夏河西佛教研究 [Buddhism in Hexi Region During the Xi Xia Regime]. Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2010.
- . “Xixia ‘Jingguangming zuishengwang jing’ xinyang yanjiu” 西夏《金光明最勝王經》信仰研究. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 108, no. 2 (2008): 54–61.

Davidson, Ronald M., *Tibetan Renaissance: Tantric Buddhism in the Rebirth of Tibetan Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Devers, Quentin, Laurianne Bruneau, and Martin Vernier. "An Archaeological Account of Ten Ancient Painted Chortens in Labal and Zanskar." In *Art and Architecture in Ladakh: Cross-Cultural Transmissions in the Himalayas and Karakoram*, 100–140. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Duan, Wenjie. "Cultural Exchange Between China and West as Seen from the Styles of the Early Art of Dunhuang." In *Eastern Asia*, ed. Bernard Hung-Kay Luk, 402–408. Vol. 3 of *Contacts Between Cultures*. Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992.

———. *Dunhuang Art: Through the Eyes of Duan Wenjie*. Edited by Chung Tan. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1994.

Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 [Dunhuang Research Academy]. *Dunhuang mogaoku neirong zonglu* 敦煌莫高窟內容總錄 [Complete Records of Dunhuang Mogao Cave Interior]. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982.

———. *Zhongguo Dunhuang* 中國敦煌. Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2000.

———. *Zhongguo shiku: Anxi yulinku* 中國石窟：安西榆林窟. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 2012.

———. *Zhongguo shiku yishu yulinku* 中國石窟藝術榆林窟. Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2014.

Dunnell, Ruth W. "Esoteric Buddhism Under the Xixia (1038–1227)." In *Esoteric Buddhism and Tantras in East Asia*, edited by Charles Orzech, Henrik Sorensen, and Richard K. Payne, 465–77. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

———. *The Great State of White and High: Buddhism and State Formation in Eleventh-Century Xia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1996.

———. "Translating History from Tangut Buddhist Texts." *Asia Major* 22, no. 1 (2009): 41–78.

Fan, Jinshi 樊錦詩, ed. *Yulinku yishu* 榆林窟藝術. Nanjing: Jiangsu meishu chubanshe, 2014.

Fraser, Sarah Elizabeth. *Performing the Visual: The Practice of Buddhist Wall Painting in China and Central Asia, 618–960*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

Gao, Chunming 高春明, ed. *Xixia yishu yanjiu* 西夏藝術研究. Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 2009.

- Ghosh, Suchandra. "Locating South Eastern Bengal in The Buddhist Network of Bay of Bengal (C. 7th Century Ce-13th Century Ce)." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 74 (2013): 148–53.
- Gu, Ying 顧穎. "Xixia zangchuan fengge huihua yu xizang fohua de yitong bijiao" 西夏藏傳風格繪畫與西藏佛畫的異同比較. *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學, no. 4 (2009): 94.
- Guo, Jing 郭靜. "Yulinku di 3 ku wushiyimian qianshou guanyin jingbian zhong de Xixia wuzhi wenhua yingxiang" 榆林窟第3窟五十一面千手觀音經變中的西夏物質文化影像. *Ningxia shifan xueyuan xuebao* 寧夏師範學院學報 no. 2 (2018): 79–87.
- Hamilton, James. "On the Dating of the Old Turkish Manuscripts from Tunhuang." In *Turfan, Khotan Und Dunhuang*, 135–45. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996.
- Huang, Shih-shan Susan. "Reassessing Printed Buddhist Frontispieces from Xi Xia." *Zhejiang University Journal of Art and Archaeology* 1 (2014): 129–82.
- Hung, Wu. "Reborn in Paradise: A Case Study of Dunhuang Sutra Painting and Its Religious, Ritual and Artistic Context." *Orientalism* 23, no. 5 (1992): 52–60.
- . "What Is Bianxiang? -On the Relationship Between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 (1992): 111–92.
- Huntington, John C. "A Note on Dunhuang Cave 17, 'The Library,' or Hong Bian's Reliquary Chamber." *Ars Orientalis* 16 (1986): 93–101.
- Huntington, John C., and Dina Bangdel. *The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art*. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2003.
- Huntington, Susan L. *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India (8th-12th Centuries) and Its International Legacy*. Ohio: Dayton Art Institute, 1989.
- Jackson, David P. *Mirror of the Buddha: Early Portraits from Tibet*. New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2011.
- Javid, Ali, 'Alī Jāvīd, and Tabassum Javeed. *World Heritage Monuments and Related Edifices in India*. New York: Algora Publishing, 2008.
- Jia, Weiwei 賈維維. "Yulinku di 3 ku bihua yanjiu" 榆林窟第3窟壁畫研究. PhD diss, Capital Normal University, 2014.
- . "Yulinku disanku dingjizunsheng fomu mantuluo yanjiu" 榆林窟第三窟頂髻尊勝佛母曼荼羅研究. *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊, no. 2 (2014): 52–71.

- . “Yulinku di 3 ku bukongjuansuo wuzun zuxiang yanjiu” 榆林窟第3窟不空羼索五尊組像研究 [Study on the Five Statues of Amoghapaśa in No. 3 Grotto in Yulin]. *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學 2 (2016): 111–19.
- . “Song Xia Hexi diqu ‘Batabian’ tuxiang de lai yuan yu liubu” 宋夏河西地區‘八塔變’圖像的來源與流布. *Wenyi yanjiu* 文藝研究, no. 8 (2019): 127–39.
- . “Xixia shiku zaoxiang tixi yu bali ‘Chengjiu baifa’ guanxi yanjiu” 西夏石窟造像體系與巴哩《成就百法》關係研究. *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 210, no. 10 (2019): 20–36.
- Kang, Heejung. “The Spread of Sarnath-Style Buddha Images in Southeast Asia and Shandong, China, by the Sea Route.” *KEMANUSIAAN The Asian Journal of Humanities* 20, no. 2 (2013): 39–60.
- Kano, Kazuo. “The Case of a Manuscript Collection in the Possession of Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna (980-1054).” In *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, edited by Carmen Meinert, 82–120. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Karetzky, Patricia Eichenbaum. *Early Buddhist Narrative Art: Illustrations of the Life of the Buddha from Central Asia to China, Korea, and Japan*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2000.
- Kasai, Yukiyo. “Uyghur Legitimation and the Role of Buddhism.” In *Buddhism in Central Asia I*, 61–90. Brill, 2020.
- Kessler, Adam T. *Song Blue and White Porcelain on the Silk Road*. Leiden: Brill, 2012.
- Khazeni, Arash. *Sky Blue Stone: The Turquoise Trade in World History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.
- Khokhlov, Yury. “The Xi Xia Legacy in Sino-Tibetan Art of the Yuan Dynasty.” September 15, 2016. Accessed August 27, 2019. <http://www.asianart.com/articles/xi-xia/index.html>.
- Kossak, Steven M. “Pāla Painting and the Tibetan Variant of the Pāla Style.” *The Tibet Journal* 27, no. 3/4 (2002): 3–22.
- Kossak, Steven, Jane Casey Singer, Robert Bruce-Gardner, and Metropolitan Museum of Art. *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998.
- Lee, Sonya S. *Surviving Nirvana: Death of the Buddha in Chinese Visual Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.

- Lee, Yu-min 李玉珉. “Dunhuang yaoshi jingbian yanjiu” 敦煌藥師經變研究. *Gugong xueshu jikan* 故宮學術季刊 7, no. 3 (1990): 1–39.
- Leidy, Denise Patry. “Buddhism and Other ‘Foreign’ Practices in Yuan China.” In *The World of Khubilai Khan: Chinese Art in the Yuan Dynasty*, 87–126. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010.
- Li, Fanwen. “The Influence of Tibetan Buddhism on Xi Xia.” In *Tibetan Studies, Proceedings of the Seventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, 159–72. Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1997.
- Li, Yinxia 李銀霞. “Xixia fota de tedian” 西夏佛塔的特點. *Journal of ABA Teachers College*, no. 4 (2008): 55–56.
- Li, Yumin 李玉珉. “Heishuicheng chutu xixia mituo hua chutan” 黑水城出土西夏彌陀畫初探. 故宮學術季刊 *Gugong xueshu jikan* 13, no. 4 (1999): 1–39.
- Linrothe, Rob. “Peripheral Visions: On Recent Finds of Tangut Buddhist Art.” *Monumenta Serica* 43 (1995): 235–62.
- . “Ushnishavijaya and the Tangut Cult of the Stūpa at Yulin Cave 3.” *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 31, no. 4–5 (1996): 1–25.
- . “Xia Renzong and the Patronage of Tangut Buddhist Art: The Stūpa and Ushnīshavijayā Cult.” *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies*, no. 28 (1998): 91–121.
- Linrothe, Rob, and Melissa Kerin. “Discovery through Deconsecration: The Art of the Karsha Kadampa Chorten Revealed.” *Oriental Art* 32, no. 10 (2001): 52–63.
- Liu, Jianli 劉建麗. “Lüelun Xixia yu Jinchao de guanxi” 略論西夏與金朝的關係. *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學, no. 3 (2005): 79.
- Liu, Yongzeng 劉永增. “Anxi dongqianfodong diwuku pishamen tianwang yu bada yecha mantuluo jieshuo” 安西東千佛洞第 5 窟毗沙門天王與八大夜叉曼荼羅解說. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 97, no. 3 (2006): 1–5.
- . “Guazhou dongqianfodong de tuxiang yuanliu yu lishi jiazhi: Jiantan dongqianfodong de chuchuang niandai” 瓜州東千佛洞的圖像源流與歷史價值——兼談東千佛洞的初創年代. *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 故宮博物院院刊 186, no. 4 (2016): 71–81.
- . “Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku mingdengsongwenshu mantuluo tuxiang jieshuo” 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟名等誦文殊曼荼羅圖像解說. In *2011 Gu sizhou zhilu: Yazhou kuawenhuaqiaoliu yu wenhuayichan guoji xueshu yantaohui lunwenji*

- 2011 古絲綢之路——亞洲跨文化交流與文化遺產國際學術研討會論文集, edited by 秦大樹 Qin Dashu and 袁熾 Yuan Jian, 227-241. Global Publishing: 2013.
- Liu, Yuquan 劉玉權. “Guasha Xixia shiku gailun” 瓜沙西夏石窟概論. In *Zhongguo shiku Dunhuang mogaoku (5)* 中國石窟·敦煌莫高窟 (五). Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982.
- . “Lüelun Xixia bihua yishu” 略論西夏壁畫藝術. *Xixia wenwu* 西夏文物, no. 3 (1988): 9–19.
- . “Dunhuang Xixia dongku fenqi zaiyi” 敦煌西夏洞窟分期再議. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 3 (1998): 1–4.
- . “Zailun Xixia ju guasha de shiian jiqi xiangguan wenti” 再論西夏據瓜沙的時間及其相關問題. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 37, no. 4 (1993): 68–79.
- . “Dunhuang mogaoku, Anxi yulinku Xixia dongku fenqi” 敦煌莫高窟、安西榆林窟西夏洞窟分期. In *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji: dunhuang shiku kaogu pian* 敦煌研究文集·敦煌石窟考古篇, 317–359. Lanzhou: Gansu minzu chubanshe, 2000.
- Lojda, Linda, Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, and Monica Strinu. “Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries).” In *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Malandra, Geri Hockfield. *Unfolding a Maṇḍala: The Buddhist Cave Temples at Ellora*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1993.
- Mao, Fang 卯芳. “Dongqianfodong di’erku bihua yishu yanjiu” 東千佛洞第二窟壁畫藝術研究. *Xixia yanjiu* 西夏研究, no. 3 (2016): 54–56.
- Meinert, Carmen, ed. *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*. Leiden: Brill, 2015.
- Mookerji, Radhakumud. *The Gupta Empire*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1989.
- Mote, Frederick W. *Imperial China 900-1800*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Myers-El, Noble Timothy. *The Unknown Lore of Amexem’s Indigenous People: An Aboriginal Treatise*. Bloomington: Author House, 2008.
- Ning, Qiang. *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Cave of the Zhai Family*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004.

- . “Gender Politics in Medieval Chinese Buddhist Art: Images of Empress Wu at Longmen and Dunhuang.” *Oriental Art* 94, no. 2 (2003): 28–39.
- . *Dunhuang shiku yanjiu* 敦煌石窟研究. Lanzhou: Gansu renmin meishu chubanshe, 2010.
- Orzech, Charles, Henrik Sørensen, and Richard Payne. *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*. Vol. 24. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Pal, Pratapaditya. *The Arts of Nepal II: Painting*. Leiden: Brill Archive, 1974.
- . “An Early Tibetan Maṇḍala of Ekallavira Achala in a Private Collection: An Art Historical Analysis.” Asianart.com. September 9, 2013.
<http://asianart.com/articles/achala/index.html>.
- Pal, Pratapaditya, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. *Art of Nepal: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.
- . *Art of Tibet: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999.
- Peng, Jinzhang 彭金章. “Mogaoku di 76 ku shiyimianbabi guanyin kao” 莫高窟第 76 窟十一面八臂觀音考. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究, no. 3 (1994): 42–48.
- Rong, Xinjiang. *Eighteen Lectures on Dunhuang*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Rong, Xingjiang 榮興江. “Dunhuang cangjingdong de xingzhi jiqi fengbi yuanyin” 敦煌藏經洞的性質及其封閉原因. *Dunhuang tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 2 (1997): 23–48.
- Rössch, Petra. “Retracing the Origin of the Water-Moon Guanyin Iconography.” In *Chinese Wood Sculptures of the 11th to 13th Centuries: Images of Water-Moon Guanyin in Northern Chinese Temples and Western Collections*, 19–54. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.
- Russell-Smith, Lilla. *Uygur Patronage In Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres On The Northern Silk Road In The Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Samosyuk, Kira Fyodorovna. *Buddiiskaia Zhivopis Iz Khara-Khoto XII-XIV Vekov. Mezhdru Kitaem i Tibetom (Buddhist Paintings from Khara-Khoto XII-XIV Centuries. Between Tibet and China)*. St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo Gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha (The State Hermitage Publishing House), 2006.
- . “‘Donors’ in the Tangut Painting from Khara-Khoto: Their Meaning and Function.” *The Tibet Journal* 26, no. 3/4 (2001): 165–98.

- Sen, Tansen. *Buddhism, Diplomacy, and Trade: The Realignment of India–China Relations, 600–1400*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
- Sha, Wutian 沙武田. “Dunhuang Xixia shiku fenqi yanjiu zhi sikao” 敦煌西夏石窟分期研究之思考. *Xixia yanjiu* 西夏研究 2 (2012): 23–34.
- . “Dunhuang Xixia shiku yingjianshi goujian” 敦煌西夏石窟營建史構建. *Xixia yanjiu* 西夏研究, no. 1 (2018): 3–12.
- . “Shuiyue guanyin tuxiang yangshi de chuangxin yu yitu: Guazhou Xixia shiku tangseng qujingtu chuxian yuanyin zaikao” 水月觀音圖像樣式的創新與意圖——瓜洲西夏石窟唐僧取經圖出現原因再考. *Minzu yilin* 民族藝林 292, no. 1 (2019): 5–26.
- Sha, Wutian 沙武田, and Li Guo 李國. “Dunhuang mogaoku di 3 ku wei xixia dongku kao” 敦煌莫高窟第3窟為西夏洞窟考 [Mogao Cave 3 at Dunhuang Should Be Considered a Western Xia Cave]. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 4 (2013): 1–11.
- Shaw, Miranda Eberle. *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Shi, Jinbo 史金波. “Buddhism and Confucianism in the Tangut State.” *Central Asiatic Journal* 57 (2014): 139–55.
- . “Xixia de fojiao xinyang he fengsu” 西夏的佛教信仰和風俗. *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報 14 (2003): 1–26.
- . “Xixia de zangchuan fojiao” 西夏的藏傳佛教. *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學, no. 1 (2002): 33–49.
- . *Xixia fojiao shi lue* 西夏佛教史略. Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin chubanshe, 1988.
- . “Xixia fojiao xintan” 西夏佛教新探. *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學, no. 5 (2001): 70–78.
- . “Xixia huangshi he Dunhuang mogaoku zouyi” 西夏皇室和敦煌莫高窟芻議. *Xixia xue* 西夏學 4 (July 2009): 165–72.
- . *Xixia shehui* 西夏社會. Shanghai: Shanghai People Publishing House, 2007.
- . “Xixia xue gaishuo” 西夏學概說. *Xixia xue* 西夏學 1 (2006): 167–88.
- Shi, Jinbo 史金波, Nie Hongyin 聶洪音, and Bai Bin 白濱, trans. “Tiansheng gaijiu xindinglü ling” 天盛改舊新定律令. Vol. 10. Beijing: Falü chubanshe, 2000.

- Shi, Jinbo 史金波, and 翁善珍 Weng Shanzhen. "Ejinaqi Lücheng xinjian Xixia wenwu kao" 額濟納旗綠城新見西夏文物考 [Some Remarks on the Newly Discovered Remains of the Xixia Kingdom at Lucheng, Ejina Banner, Inner Mongolia]. *Wenwu* 文物 10 (1996): 72–80.
- Shi, Wei 史偉. "Heishuicheng tangka zhong de jingtu xinyang" 黑水城唐卡中的淨土信仰. *Xixia xue* 西夏學 6 (2010): 134–39.
- . "Xixia hexi shiku bihua zhong de lü dumu tanyuan" 西夏河西石窟壁畫中的綠度母探源. *Xixia xue* 西夏學 7 (2011): 100–105.
- Shichang, M.A. "Buddhist Cave-temples and the Cao Family at Mogao Ku, Dunhuang." *World Archaeology* 27, no. 2 (October 1, 1995): 303–17.
- Singer, Jane Casey. "Painting in Central Tibet, ca. 950-1400." *Artibus Asiae* 54, no. 1/2 (1994): 87–136.
- Solonin, Kirill J. "Buddhist Connections between the Liao and Xixia: Preliminary Considerations." *Journal of Song-Yuan Studies* 43 (2013): 171–219.
- . "'Chan Contemplation' in the Tangut Buddhism." *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2014): 203–45.
- . "Hongzhou Buddhism in Xixia and the Heritage of Zongmi (780-841): A Tangut Source." *Asia Major* 16, no. 2 (2003): 57–103.
- . "Huayan Repentance by Yixing Huijue, a Tangut Monk during the Yuan." 臺大佛學研究 *Taiwan Journal of Buddhist Studies* 23 (2012): 1–76.
- . "Khitan Connection of Tangut Buddhism." In *Heishuicheng renwen yu huanjing yanjiu* 黑水城人文與環境研究, edited by Shen Weirong 沈衛榮, Nakao Masayoshi 中尾正義, and Shi Jinbo 史金波, 371–95. Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007.
- . "The Glimpses of Tangut Buddhism." *Central Asiatic Journal* 52, no. 1 (2008): 66–127.
- . "Xixia fojiao zhi 'xitongxing' chutan" 西夏佛教之「系統性」初探 [First Exploration of 'Systematicness' of Buddhism in Xixia]. *Shijie zongjiao yanjiu* 世界宗教研究 4 (2013): 22–38.
- Sørensen, Henrik. "Esoteric Buddhist Art in China, 960-1279." In *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 498–511. Leiden: Brill, 2011.

- Sørensen, Per K., and Guntram Hazod. *Rulers on the Celestial Plain: Ecclesiastic and Secular Hegemony in Medieval Tibet. A Study of Tshal Gungthang*. 2 vols. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, n.d.
- Spink, Walter. *Ajanta: History and Development*. Vol. 2, Arguments about Ajanta. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2006.
- . *Ajanta: History and Development*. Vol. 4, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture - Year by Year. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Stoddard, Heather. “Early Tibetan Paintings: Sources and Styles (Eleventh-Fourteenth Centuries A.D.).” *Archives of Asian Art* 49 (1996): 26–50.
- Su, Bai 宿白. “Yuandai Hangzhou de zangchuan mijiao ji qi youguan yiji” 元代杭州的藏傳密教及其有關遺跡. *Wenwu* 文物, no. 10 (1990): 67.
- Sun, Changsheng 孫昌盛. “Lüelun Xixia de jingtu xinyang” 略論西夏的淨土信仰. *Ningxia daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 寧夏大學學報 (哲學社會科學版), no. 2 (1999): 27–30.
- . “Shilun zai Xixia de zangchuan fojiao sengren jiqi qiwei zuoyong” 試論在西夏的藏傳佛教僧人及其地位、作用. *Xizang yanjiu* 西藏研究, no. 1 (2006): 35–45.
- Sun, Xiushen 孫修身. “Xixia zhanju shazhou shijian zhi wojian” 西夏佔據沙洲時間之我見. *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊 20, no. 2 (1991): 40–41.
- Tartakov, G.M. “Art and Identity: The Rise of a New Buddhist Imagery.” *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (1990): 409–16.
- Templeman, David. *Tārānatha (The Origin of Tārā Tantra)*. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1981.
- The State Hermitage Museum Online Catalog. Accessed April 1, 2021.
<https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection>
- Van Schaik, Sam. “Tibetan Buddhism in Central Asia: Geopolitics and Group Dynamics.” In *Transfer of Buddhism Across Central Asian Networks (7th to 13th Centuries)*, edited by Carmen Meinert, 57–81. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Vitali, Roberto. *Early Temples of Central Tibet*. Chicago: Serindia Publications, 1990.
- Wang, Huimin 王惠民. “Dunhuang Xixia dongku fenqi ji cunzaide wenti” 敦煌西夏洞窟分期及存在的問題, *Xixia yanjiu* 西夏研究, no.1 (2011): 59–65.
- Wang, Kefen 王克芬. “Zhongguo fojiao yishu zhong wudao xingxiang de kaocha yu yanjiu” 中國佛教藝術中舞蹈形象的考察與研究, *Yishu baijia* 藝術百家 120, no. 3 (2011): 43–52.

- Wang, Xiaozhen 王曉珍. “Dongqianfodong di 2 ku juancao lianhuawen shenmei fengge” 東千佛洞二窟卷草蓮花紋審美風格. *Yishu jiaoyu* 藝術教育, no. 12 (2012): 133.
- Wang, Yanyun 王艷雲. “Hexi shiku xixia bihua zhong de niepan jingbian” 河西石窟西夏壁畫中的涅槃經變. *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 1 (2007): 133–39.
- . “Xixia Heishuicheng yu Anxi shiku bihua jian de ruogan lianxi” 西夏黑水城與安西石窟壁畫間的若干聯繫. *Ningxia shehui kexue* 寧夏社會科學, no. 1 (2008): 105–7.
- Wangu, Madhu Bazaz. *Images of Indian Goddesses: Myths, Meanings, and Models*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 2003.
- Watt, James C. Y., Anne E. Wardwell, and Morris Rossabi. *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997.
- Wong, Dorothy C. “A Reassessment of the Representation of Mt. Wutai from Dunhuang Cave 61.” In *Archives of Asian Art* 46 (1993): 27–52.
- Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Xie, Jisheng. “The Murals of Mogao Cave 465: New Evidence for 12th Century Tangut Xia Patronage.” Translated by Rob Linrothe. *Oriental Art* 35, no. 5 (2004): 38–45.
- Xie, Jisheng 謝繼勝. “Tubo Xixia lishi wenhua yuanyuan yu xixia zangchuan huihua” 吐蕃西夏曆史文化淵源與西夏藏傳繪畫. *Xizang yanjiu* 西藏研究, no. 3 (2001): 35–44.
- . *Xixia zangchuan huihua: Heishuicheng tangka yanjiu* 西夏藏傳繪畫: 黑水城出土西夏唐卡研究. Vol. 2. Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002.
- . “Hangzhou feilaifeng zangchuan shike zaixiang de fengge yuanyuan yu lishi wenhua jiazhi” 杭州飛來峰藏傳石刻造像的風格淵源與歷史文化價值. *Xizang yanjiu* 西藏研究, no. 2 (2003): 41–49.
- Xiong, Wenbing 熊文彬. “Cong banhua kan xixia fojiao yishu dui yuandai neidi zangchuan fojiao yishu de yingxiang” 從版畫看西夏佛教藝術對元代內地藏傳佛教藝術的影響. *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學, no. 1 (2003): 66–79.
- . “Cong banhua kan xixia fojiao yishu dui yuandai neidi zangchuan fojiao yishu de yingxiang (xu)” 從版畫看西夏佛教藝術對元代內地藏傳佛教藝術的影響(續). *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學, no. 3 (2003): 87–93.

- Yang, Fuxue 楊富學. "Huihuseng yu 'Xixia dazangjing' de fanyi." 回鶻僧與《西夏大藏經》的翻譯. *Dunhuang Tulufan yanjiu* 敦煌吐魯番研究 7 (2004): 338–44.
- . "Lun Huihu wenhua dui xixia de yingxiang" 論回鶻文化對西夏的影響. In *Songshi yanjiu luncong* 宋史研究論叢, edited by Jiang Xidong 姜錫東 and Li Huarui 李華瑞, 5:279–94. Baoding: Hebei daxue chubanshe, 2003.
- Ying, Weifeng 英衛峰. "Shilun 11-13 shiji weizang fojiao yishu zhong de youguan boluo yishu fengge" 試論 11~13 世紀衛藏佛教藝術中的有關波羅藝術風格. *Zhongguo zangxue* 中國藏學, no. 4 (2008).
- Yü, Chün-fang. *Kuan-Yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Yue, Jian 岳鍵. "Dunhuang Xixia shiku duandai de xin zhengju: Sanzhu huoyan wen he yinyangzhu huoyan wen" 敦煌西夏石窟斷代的新證據——三珠火焰紋和陰陽珠火焰紋. *Xixia xue* 西夏學, no. 1 (2011): 235–42.
- Zhang, Baoxi 張寶璽. "Dongqianfodong Xixia shiku yishu" 東千佛洞西夏石窟藝術. *Wenwu* 文物, no. 2 (1992): 81–94.
- . "Guazhou dongqianfodong shiku tancheng bihua kaoshu" 瓜州東千佛洞石窟壇城圖壁畫考述. *Sizhou zhilu* 絲綢之路 211, no. 18 (2011): 85–87.
- Zhang, Xiantang 張先堂. "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 2 ku gongyangren shenfen xintan" 瓜州東千佛洞第 2 窟供養人身份新探. *Sichou zhilu* 絲綢之路 211, no. 18 (2011): 83–84.
- . "Guazhou dongqianfodong di 5 ku xixia gongyangren chutan" 瓜州東千佛洞第 5 窟西夏供養人初探. *Dunhuangxue jikan* 敦煌學輯刊, no. 4 (2011): 49–59.
- ed., *Guazhou dongqianfodong Xixia shiku yishu* 瓜州東千佛洞西夏石窟藝術, Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2012.
- Zhang, Xiaogang 張小剛. "Tianwang yu yecha: Shishi yudian yinyan qixing renwu de shenfen" 天王與夜叉——試釋于闐引雁騎行人物的身份. *Yishushi yanjiu* 藝術史研究 17 (2015): 183–204.
- Zhang, Yanyuan 張彥遠. *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記. Vol. 10. Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 2000.
- Zhang, Zong 張總. "Buddhist Arts: A Survey of Sites, Paintings, and Iconography." In *Modern Chinese Religion I (2 Vols): Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368 AD)*, edited by Pierre Marsone and John Lagerwey, 844–928. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

- Zhao, Shengliang 趙聲良. *Dunhuang shiku yishu jianzhi* 敦煌石窟藝術簡史 [A Brief History of Dunhuang Grottoes Art]. Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2016.
- . “Dunhuang suidai shanshui yu kongjian biao xian” 敦煌隋代山水與空間表現. *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 135, no. 5 (2012): 16–21.
- Zhao, Shenting 趙藩亭. “Mogaoku Xixia dongku bihua mile jingbian kao” 莫高窟西夏洞窟壁畫彌勒經變考. *Xixia yanjiu* 西夏研究, no. 1 (2019): 59–61.
- Zhao, Xiaoxing 趙曉星. “Xixia shiqi de Dunhuang wutaishan tu” 西夏時期的敦煌五台山圖. *Xixia xue* 西夏學 11 (2015): 228–34.
- Zhao, Yonghong 趙永紅. *Hexi zoulang zangwenhua shiyao* 河西走廊藏文化史要. Lanzhou: Gansu minzu chubanshe, 2010.
- Zhou, Weina 周維娜. “Xixia wanqi shiku bihua fengge tanxi” 西夏晚期石窟壁畫風格探析. *Lantai World* 蘭台世界, no. 6 (2015): 95–96.