

Article

# An Icon in Motion: Rethinking the Iconography of Itinerant Monk Paintings from Dunhuang

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**Abstract:** This essay reconsiders the iconography of the group of paintings from Dunhuang commonly referred to as “itinerant monk paintings.” In an effort to acknowledge the paintings as a tradition unto themselves and highlight their visual language, this study focuses on the issues surrounding Baosheng Buddha and the unique feature of depicting the main icon in motion. The first matter is discussed in relation to the religious and artistic contexts of the inscriptions preserved in some paintings, and possible changes in the main figure’s identity from a monk worshiping Baosheng Buddha to the incarnation itself. The main icon’s mobile nature is examined in terms of its walking posture and cloud vehicle. Considering the tradition of *xingdao seng* or *xing seng* (walking monks) in monastery murals, this paper illuminates a growing interest in the Tang (618–907) period in portraying walking monks that underscores their position and role in the world of sentient beings. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the cloud vehicle played a critical role in underlining the main icon’s extensive and rapid travel to facilitate his encounter with and saving of sentient beings.

**Keywords:** itinerant monk; Baosheng Buddha; walking posture; cloud; *xingdao seng*; Vaiśravaṇa; Dunhuang

## 1. Introduction

An enigmatic painting housed in the National Museum of Korea depicts a figure with a prominent nose and long eyebrows carrying a bulky backpack loaded with a number of scrolls (Figure 1). At first glance, he recalls a Buddhist missionary traveling great distances to promulgate the Dharma while overcoming perils and difficulties. However, a closer examination reveals unusual companions, a Buddha and a tiger, and that fact that he is mounted on clouds, all of which indicate that he must be far from an ordinary practitioner.

A total of twelve paintings originating in Dunhuang and featuring similar iconography rendered on either silk or paper can be found in institutions around the world, which include the National Museum of Korea, the Tenri Library, the British Museum, the Musée Guimet, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and the State Hermitage Museum.<sup>1</sup> The two paintings in the Musée Guimet differ from the others in terms of medium and stylistic features: they are painted in refined brushwork on silks while the other ten show considerably simplified brushwork on paper. Most of the paintings have rectangular space(s) for a cartouche, and the appellation reading “Baosheng rulai” 寶勝如來 (The Buddha Precious Victory) are preserved on five paintings. Besides these paintings in portable formats, comparable iconography can be found in murals in Mogao Cave 45 from the Five Dynasties Period (907–960) and Mogao Caves 306, 308, and 363 from the Xixia period (1032–1227) in Dunhuang.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> (Kim 2013, pp. 148–51; Ōsaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan et al. 1992, pl. 133; Whitfield 1982, pl. 59, Figure 10; Giès et al. 1995, pp. 87–89, 96; Eluosi guoli aiertashi bowuguan 2000, p. 219).

<sup>2</sup> For the itinerant monk figures in the mural paintings of the Mogao Caves, see (Liu 1990, p. 4; Liu 1996, pp. 243–44).



**Figure 1.** *Itinerant Monk*. Dunhuang, 10th century. Ink and colors on paper, 49.8 × 28.6 cm. National Museum of Korea.

In previous scholarship, this group of paintings was often referred to as “itinerant monk paintings” or “*xingjiaoseng tu*” 行脚僧圖.<sup>3</sup> While a fair amount of attention has been paid to these pieces, no consensus exists regarding whom the main figure represents. While few currently support its earlier identifications as Xuanzang 玄奘 (602?–664), inarguably the most famous pilgrim monk from the Tang period (618–907), or Dharmatrāta, one of the Eighteen Arhats in Tibetan Buddhism (Stein 1921; Matsumoto 1937, 1940a, 1940b; Kumagai 1995),<sup>4</sup> it remains difficult to determine whether the figure should be considered Baosheng Buddha or its incarnation, a *bianwen* 變文 (transformation texts) performer, or a historical figure such as Li Tongxuan 李通玄 (635–730) (Akiyama 1965; Mair 1986; Wang [1995] 2016). A major obstacle in identifying the figure is the fact that almost no immediate textual sources survive. This is why, rather than acknowledging these paintings as a tradition unto themselves, previous studies tend to identify them with other better-known visual traditions that can be substantiated by relatively rich textual sources.

To attract greater attention to this tradition of itinerant monk paintings and its distinctive visual languages, this essay reconsiders this iconography with a special focus on an intriguing and unique feature that has received little attention in previous scholarship: the main figure is depicted in motion. The protagonist strikes a walking pose in every one of the examples, and in many he is transported on clouds. This particular posture of walking is interesting given that the divine beings in pre-Song devotional paintings presented as a single icon mainly appear in static poses, either seated or standing. From a broader perspective, this study contributes to the growing interest in issues regarding the ideas

<sup>3</sup> A few later works depicting itinerant monk figures have survived, such as the relief decoration of the Fan Pagoda in Kaifeng, Henan Province, dated to the 10th or 11th century, *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* from the 12th century, and *Decent of Honorable Ones* from the 13th century. In addition, this figural type was employed in several Kamakura era (1185–1333) paintings in Japan. The focus of this essay, however, is the group of paintings from 9th and 10th century Dunhuang, which are the oldest extant examples and represent itinerant monk as the independent subject of the painting. For later examples of itinerant monk images, see (Ide 2008, pp. 22–28; Xie 2009, pp. 82–84; Hara 2011, pp. 216–19).

<sup>4</sup> For the discussion on various figures named Dharmatrāta in the history of Buddhism, see (Demiéville 1978, pp. 43–49).

and representations of walking in various contexts of Buddhist art (Brown 1990; Wang 2016; Kim 2019a, 2019b) and the significance of cloud motifs in Chinese Buddhist paintings (Hida 1999; Bloom 2013). In the following, I will first reexamine the iconographical issues in previous scholarship by focusing on the name of Baosheng Buddha that appears in some of the paintings. Next, as a way to locate the itinerant monk paintings in a larger context of Buddhist practices and artistic traditions, related textual and visual sources will be considered including the tradition of the *xingdao seng* 行道僧 or *xing seng* 行僧 murals from the Tang (618–907) period. Lastly, the cloud motif employed in some of the paintings will be discussed in terms of its function in highlighting the mobile nature of the deity.

## 2. Identifying Baosheng Buddha

One of the most puzzling aspects of these itinerant monk paintings has been the inscription of “Baosheng Buddha” found in five of the twelve extant examples.<sup>5</sup> Written rather large and the only name appearing in the composition, it is natural to associate it with the figure that occupies the most prominent position. However, it is unconventional to refer to a monk-like figure as a Buddha, and scholars have mostly maintained that the name refers to the small Buddha seen hovering in either the upper-left or -right corner of the paintings rather than to the main figure (Demiéville 1978; Whitfield 1982; Mair 1986; Giès et al. 1995).

The name Baosheng Buddha appears in Buddhist scriptures from the Northern and Southern Dynasties Period (420–589) in China. Earlier texts include the *Jinguangming jing* 金光明經 (Sūtra of Golden Light), the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經 (Original Vows of Kṣitigarbha Bodhisattva Sūtra), the *Huayan jing* 華嚴經 (Flower Garland Sūtra), and the *Foming jing* 佛名經 (Sūtra on the Names of the Buddha).<sup>6</sup> While in most cases Baosheng Buddha is simply listed along with other names of the Buddha,<sup>7</sup> his particular role is detailed in the story of a layman named Liushui 流水 in the *Jinguangming jing*. When Baosheng Buddha was a bodhisattva, he vowed that anyone who hears his name on his or her deathbed will be reborn in Trāyastriṃśa. After hearing Baosheng Buddha’s name, a school of fish that Liushui saved was indeed reborn as heavenly beings.<sup>8</sup> Baosheng Buddha is also mentioned in a group of texts translated by Amoghavajra (Bukong jingang 不空金剛, 705–774) including the *Yuqie jiyao jiu Anan tuoluoni yankou guiyi jing* 瑜伽集要救阿難陀羅尼焰口軌儀經 (Conditions and Causes Which Gave Rise to the Teaching to Ānanda Concerning the Yoga Essentials on Distribution of Food to Burning Mouths) and the *Yuqie jiyao yankou shishi yi* 瑜伽集要焰口施食儀 (Ritual of Yoga Essentials on the Distribution of Food to Burning Mouths).<sup>9</sup> In these texts, Baosheng Buddha saves sentient beings from the Hell of Hungry Ghosts or protects people from harm from hungry ghosts.

More stories on the worship of Baosheng Buddha are found in Buddhist historical writings. The *Mingseng zhuan* 名僧傳 (Biographies of Famous Monks) compiled in the Liang period (502–557) recounts that Sengbiao 僧表 from Liangzhou 涼州 visited Yubin 于賓 (most likely indicating Yutian 于闐) in the early 5th century and attained a copy of the Baosheng image enshrined in Zanmo Monastery (Zanmo qielan 讚摩伽藍). Considering that “genuine relics were placed on the top of the statue’s head,” it is likely that the image represented a Buddha.<sup>10</sup> Another anecdote concerns the Korean monk

<sup>5</sup> The paintings bearing this inscription are respectively housed in the National Museum of Korea, the Tenri Library, the Musée Guimet, the Bibliothèque nationale de France, and the State Hermitage Museum. For the image of the Tenri Library piece, which is not included in this paper, see (Osaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan et al. 1992, p. 133; Dainobu 2002, pl. 34).

<sup>6</sup> Relevant sūtras are discussed in (Akiyama 1965, pp. 174–75; Wang [1995] 2016, pp. 98–101; Yō 1998, pp. 171–77).

<sup>7</sup> (T 293, 10: 801c1; T 440, 14: a6–7; T 441, 14: 237b13–16). Although not as detailed as the *Jinguangming jing*, the *Dizang pusa benyuan jing* also mentions that when one hears the name of Baosheng Buddha, he or she will not fall onto an evil path and will be reborn in heaven (T 412, 13: 786a19–20).

<sup>8</sup> (T 663, 16: 353a19–b2, 396a19–b3).

<sup>9</sup> (T 1318, 21: 471a1; T 1320, 21: 478a26–b8).

<sup>10</sup> Only some excerpts of the *Mingseng zhuan* survive in the *Mingseng zhuan chao* (Manuscript Copy of the Biographies of Famous Monks) in *Shinsan Dainippon zokuzōkyō* (新纂大日本續藏經) ed. Watanabe Kokusho kankōkai, (Watanabe 1975–1989), 1523, 77: 358b13–23. It is available online through Zhonghua Dianzi Fodian Xiehui (cbeta.org) and I have used this electronic edition. The story of Sengbiao is also discussed in (Soper 1959, p. 44). Regarding “Yubin” as a mistake for “Yutian,” see (Kumagai 1958, pp. 97–98; Rhi 2005, p. 173, footnote 19).

Muru 無漏 (d. 758 or 762). According to the *Song gaoseng zhuan* 宋高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks Compiled in the Song Dynasty, 988), a former prince of the Silla Kingdom (57 BCE–935 CE) named Muru arrived in China but wished to travel on further to India and pay homage to the eight stupas.<sup>11</sup> After a miraculous encounter with Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva in the Pamir Mountains, however, he decided to return and on the way back ended up in Baichaogu 白草谷 in Helan 賀蘭, in what is now the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region of northwestern China. Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (r. 756–762), who was taking refuge at the time in Lingwu 寧武 in the Ningxia region after the outbreak of the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), had a dream of a monk with a golden body reciting the name of Baosheng Buddha.<sup>12</sup> When he found that Muru was known for the incantation of the Buddha's name, the emperor invited him to his traveling palace and asked him to join Amoghavajra, who was already present there, in praying for the well-being of the imperial family. It is uncertain whether the invocation of Baosheng Buddha was based on a particular scripture.<sup>13</sup> Tales of Sengbiao and Muru, however, indicate that the worship of Baosheng Buddha might have been a regional development in Central Asia and the northwestern area of China and can be traced back to as early as the 6th century.

Direct references to Baosheng Buddha worship in Dunhuang are preserved in the representations of the itinerant monks with inscriptions. One of the silk paintings in the Musée Guimet (EO.1141) bears a dedicatory inscription stating, “In remembrance of my late younger brother Zhiqiu, on the feast of the first seven, [I] have had an image of Baosheng Buddha made and offered it to him with praise” (寶勝如來一軀意為亡弟知球三七齋盡造慶贊供養) (Figure 2).<sup>14</sup> Wang Huimin proposed that this inscription was based on the *Jinguangming jing*, based on his observation on the significance of the sūtra in the Dunhuang region.<sup>15</sup> This painting is unusual not only in having the relatively long inscription but also in lacking the small Buddha. Even if we consider that the uppermost part of the painting could have been removed, it seems there would not have been enough space in the original composition to incorporate a small Buddha.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, it is singular in that the monk is equipped with a halo, making it tempting to regard the monk as the Buddha mentioned in the cartouche.<sup>17</sup> Another reference is the cartouche found in a wall painting in Mogao Cave 45. On the upper part of the west wall, which was repaired in the Five Dynasties Period, two images of itinerant monks are depicted on either side of Vaiśravaṇa. On the southern side of the wall is written “Homage to Baosheng Buddha who subdued a tiger and traveled widely leading sentient beings to enlightenment” (南無寶勝如來伏虎遊歷求度衆生). The cartouche on the northern side of the wall is less well-preserved, and at present only “[Bao]sheng Buddha” [寶]勝如來 and “travel around the world” (遊歷世界) are legible.<sup>18</sup> While the inscription in

<sup>11</sup> (T 2061, 50: 846a25–c12). Muru's story is also found in several later sources, including the *Fozu tongji* (Chronicles of Buddhas and Patriarchs, comp. 1269) (T 2035, 49: 375c18–376a22; T 2036, 49: 598b1–13; T 2064, 50: 1000c17–1001a23). It has been suggested that Muru was either the son of King Söngdök or the fifth son of King Sinmun (Yö 1998, pp. 166–71; Sö 2016, pp. 361–92).

<sup>12</sup> For the circumstances surrounding Emperor Suzong's enthronement in Lingwu, see (Dalby 1979, pp. 561–67).

<sup>13</sup> Some scholars regarded Muru's worship of Baosheng Buddha to be esoteric based on Muru's association with Amoghavajra and the reputation of Baichaogu as an esoteric establishment as attested in the biographies of Zengren (813–871) and Daozhou (864–941) in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*. Although it is difficult to disregard the possibility, no direct evidence remains that substantiates the association (Wang [1995] 2016, pp. 102–5; Yö 1998, pp. 172–75; T 2061, 50: 877a24–b25, 859a20–b12).

<sup>14</sup> This translation of the dedicatory inscription has been adapted with slight modification from (Mair 1986, p. 33).

<sup>15</sup> Wang Huimin also pointed out that a similar context is found in a manuscript from Dunhuang (Tst 4532) that consists of four sūtra copies commissioned by Zhai Fengda for his deceased wife in the fifth year of the Xiande reign (958). The colophon in one of the sūtras mentions that they held the feast on the seventh day after Mrs. Ma's death and Zhai Fengda reverently copied *Wuchang jing* 無常經 (Sūtra on Impermanence) on one scroll and reverently painted one picture of Buddha Baoji (寶如來佛). Wang regarded Baoji Buddha is a variation of Baosheng Buddha (Wang [1995] 2016, pp. 100–2). For more discussions on the manuscript commissioned by Zhai Fengda, see (Teiser 1994, pp. 102–21).

<sup>16</sup> The lines in the upper part of the cartouche were created as part of repair. Akiyama also noted that the missing upper part could be only a few centimeters long considering the missing portion of the cartouche, and that it is unlikely that there was a small Buddha in this painting. On the other hand, Roderick Whitfield suggested the possibility of a small Buddha represented in the missing part of the painting (Akiyama 1965, pp. 165, 167; Whitfield 1982, p. 337; Giès et al. 1995, p. 317).

<sup>17</sup> Another unusual feature is the backpack. It has a round shape and we cannot ascertain whether or not it holds scrolls (Giès et al. 1995, p. 317).

<sup>18</sup> (Wang [1995] 2016, p. 97).



the Guimet piece is related to a particular belief delineated in scriptures, the two in Mogao Cave 45 seem to have been adjusted in order to match their images of itinerant monks. Moreover, it is evident that the traveling figures in the murals of Mogao Cave 45 were regarded as Baosheng Buddhas.

Perhaps a more important question than whether or not the monk represents Baosheng Buddha is the relationship between the main figure and the small Buddha in these compositions. As early as the 1960s, Akiyama Terukazu proposed that the monk was an incarnation of Baosheng Buddha.<sup>19</sup> More recently, in 2009 Xie Jisheng examined Baosheng Buddha's association with the western direction, pointing out that a monk named Baosheng 寶勝—along with Yijing 義淨 (635–713), Śubhakarasiṃha (善無畏, 637–735), and Bodhiruci (菩提流支, ?–727)—was regarded as one of the four Tripiṭaka masters who brought Sanskrit sūtras to China. He also pointed out that Baosheng Buddha represents the west in sūtras such as the *Foshuo chengzan rulai gongde shenzhou jing* 佛說稱讚如來功德神呪經 (Sūtra of Incantation of Praising Buddhas and Merits).<sup>20</sup> For Xie, Baosheng Buddha's association with the west resulted in the small Buddha's inclusion in itinerant monk paintings as the deity venerated by the monk and from the late Tang to the Song (960–1277) period the monk became equated with Baosheng Buddha.<sup>21</sup>



**Figure 2.** *Itinerant Monk*. Dunhuang, 9th–10th century. Ink and colors on silk, 79.8 × 54.0 cm. Musée Guimet (EO.1141). Photo © RMN-Grand Palais (MNAAG, Paris)/image musée Guimet.

<sup>19</sup> (Akiyama 1965, p. 180).

<sup>20</sup> For the primary sources mentioned by Xie Jisheng, see T 2120, 52: 828a25–28, b15–18; T 1349, 21: 863a21.

<sup>21</sup> Xie further suggested that the tiger accompanying the monk in the paintings was the White Tiger that represents the west among the Four Directional Animals, yet the tigers in the surviving paintings mostly have brown fur (Xie 2009, pp. 83–86). For more on the meaning of the tiger images in this type of paintings, see (Feltham 2012, pp. 1–29).

I concur with Xie's assertion that it was only in a later period that the monk became identified with Baosheng Buddha. Regarding the earlier iconography, the two cartouche spaces in a couple of examples suggest that the names of both the monk and small Buddha were supposed to be provided within the compositions. A good example is found in one of the paintings in the Musée Guimet (EO.1138) in which two cartouche frames are present in the upper-right and -left corners (Figure 3). Considering the refined brushwork, balanced composition, and meticulous details in the painting, it is difficult to imagine that the cartouche spaces were demarcated without a specific purpose. This seems to quell any doubt that the left and the right cartouches were assigned respectively for the small Buddha and the monk. Another example is the British Museum piece that features two rectangular frames set one above another in the left side of the composition (Figure 4).<sup>22</sup> Compared with the Guimet piece (EO.1138), the brushstrokes are loose and flaccid, making the depictions appear somewhat flattened and abstract. This lack of artistic sophistication suggests the possibility that the painter simply copied the cartouche frames from an earlier example, yet there is no question that the upper and lower cartouches in the British Museum were designed for the small Buddha and the monk respectively.



**Figure 3.** *Itinerant Monk*. Dunhuang, 9th century. Ink and colors on silk, 79.0 × 53.0 cm. Musée Guimet (EO.1138). Photo © BnF, Dist, RMN-Grand Palais/image BnF.

<sup>22</sup> Based on Victor Mair's interpretation, some scholars have regarded this painting as depiction of a *bianwen* performer. See (Whitfield 2004, p. 128; Karashima 2016, pp. 274–75). This painting was included in the exhibition at Getty Center in 2016. See (Agnew et al. 2016, pp. 200–1).



**Figure 4.** *Itinerant Monk*. Dunhuang, 10th century. Ink and colors on paper, 41.0 × 29.8 cm. The British Museum (1919,0101,0.168). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Another notable aspect of the Guimet painting (EO.1138) is the way in which the trail of the cloud vehicle of the small Buddha extends towards the face of the monk, who holds his mouth open (Figure 3).<sup>23</sup> As noted in previous studies, all of the main figures in the twelve paintings appear to be chanting. The piece in the Bibliothèque nationale de France is particularly notable for the relationship between the monk's recitation and the small Buddha (Figure 5). The phrase "Homage to Baosheng Buddha," signifying the monk's invocation of the Buddha, is written along the left edge, and the monk is facing the characters with his mouth visibly open. With the Buddha's name and the monk located within the same pictorial time and space without a demarcating line between them, it appears as if the scene is capturing the very moment that the sounds "Nanwu Baosheng rulai fo" leave the monk's mouth. The small Buddha positioned immediately above these words reflects its close association with the words. This composition undoubtedly derived from the artist's understanding of the close relationship between these components.

<sup>23</sup> The same observation can be found in (Yu 2011, p. 106).





**Figure 5.** *Itinerant Monk* (detail). Dunhuang, 10th century. Ink and colors on paper, 55.0 × 32.0 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France (Pelliot chinois 4518(39)).

A figure similarly depicted with his mouth open is found in the well-known Kamakura period (1185–1333) image of Xuanzang portrayed as an itinerant monk (Figure 6).<sup>24</sup> In this painting, the legendary pilgrim is believed to be reciting the *Bore xinjing* 般若心經 (Heart Sūtra), which protected him during his journey in the Western Regions.<sup>25</sup> As no small Buddha is depicted in the Xuanzang's portrait, a more comparable example would be the portrait of Shandao 善導 (613–681) from the same period.<sup>26</sup> His signature act of chanting Amitābha's name is illustrated by a golden thread connecting his mouth to several small Buddhas hovering in the upper-right of the painting.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The image of Xuanzang as an itinerant monk is found in a few Kamakura paintings. Besides a portrait in a Japanese private collection similar to the Tokyo National Museum piece, it often appears in the type called "Shaka Jūroku Zenshin (Śākyamuni and Sixteen Protectors)" (Matsumoto 1940a, 1940b; Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2011, pl. 15, p. 224; Hara 2011, pp. 216–19; Sanders 2014, pp. 226–38). For the discussion of Xuanzang worship in Japan, also see (Wong 2002, pp. 43–81). For the esoteric elements in the portrait of Xuanzang in the Tokyo National Museum, see (Li 2012).

<sup>25</sup> According to the *Da Tang Da Ciensi Sanzang Fashi zhuan* (Biography of the Tripiṭaka Master in Great Ciensi Monastery of the Great Tang), Xuanzang obtained the *Bore xinjing* from an old man during his visit to the Shu region and that he recited the sūtra whenever he encountered danger. He also translated the *Da bore xinjing* in 600 fascicles (Matsumoto 1940a, pp. 12–19; T 2053, 50: 224b07–13). For the role of Xuanzang in popularizing the *Bore xinjing*, see (Nattier 1992, pp. 179–99).

<sup>26</sup> (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan 2009, p. 293).

<sup>27</sup> A textual reference for the illustration of small Buddhas coming out of a monk's mouth is found in the biography of Xiaokang, a follower of Shandao (Kobayashi 1954, pp. 21–22; T 2061, 50: 867c11–13).





**Figure 6.** Portrait of Xuanzang as an Itinerant Monk. Kamakura period, 14th century. Ink and colors on silk, 135.3 × 90.0 cm. Tokyo National Museum. Image: TNM Image Archives.

Furthermore, the likening of a monk to a Buddha is not unusual when considering the monastic practices developed around the 10th century.<sup>28</sup> And this provides a basis for understanding how a monk could have been regarded as Baosheng Buddha in the itinerant monk paintings from Dunhuang, most of which have been dated to the 9th and 10th centuries. To mention a couple of references, the *Song gaoseng zhuan* recounts that Xiaokang 小康, an ardent follower of Shandao, who was active during the Zhenyuan era (785–805), wished to meet Shandao during a visit to Shandao’s shrine in Chang’an, and that Xiaokang witnessed “the true image [of Shandao] transformed into a Buddha’s body.”<sup>29</sup> Another reference more relevant to the itinerant monk paintings, since the source is from Dunhuang, is in the *Sengqie Heshang yu ru niepan shuo liudu jing* 僧伽和尚浴入涅槃說六度經 (Sūtra on the Six Perfections as Spoken by the Monk Sengqie before Entering Nirvāṇa) discovered in the Mogao caves and dating to before the 11th century. From this text, it can be ascertained that Sengqie 僧伽 (617–710), who was already revered as an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara in the 10th century,<sup>30</sup> was further elevated to the status of a Buddha based on Sengqie’s remark that “I was called Śākyamuni Buddha.”<sup>31</sup>

In that case, how do the changes in iconography fit into the chronology of the paintings? The dating of the itinerant paintings has been largely dependent upon stylistic analysis, and the silk paintings have been regarded as predating those on paper. The Musée Guimet catalogue, for example, dates the two silk paintings (EO.1138 and EO.1141) respectively to the 9th and late 9th century, while the paintings on paper are assigned to the 10th.<sup>32</sup> Akiyama Terukazu proposed more specific dates for

<sup>28</sup> For the relevant changes attested in the worship of monks’ relics in the 10th century, see (Lee 2010, pp. 202–53).

<sup>29</sup> (T 2061, 50: 867b28–29).

<sup>30</sup> The *Taiping guangji* and the *Song gaoseng zhuan* respectively mention Sengqie as Avalokiteśvara and Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara (Yü 2001, pp. 212–13; T. 2061, 50: 822a28–29; Li 1961, vol. 2, p. 638). For discussions on Sengqie, also see (Makita [1954] 1984, pp. 207–34; Leidy and Strahan 2010, pp. 126–29; Lee 2013, pp. 133–63).

<sup>31</sup> (T 2920, 85: 1463b28–1464a08). For the translation of the *Sengqie Heshang yu ru niepan shuo liu du jing*, see (Yü 2001, pp. 218–20).

<sup>32</sup> (Giès et al. 1995, pp. 316–18).

several pieces. The Guimet painting (EO.1138) is the oldest example, dating to the early Guiyijun 歸義軍 (Return to Allegiance Army) period (after 848) or possibly the Tibetan occupation period (781–848) at the earliest (Figure 3). For the other Musée Guimet painting (EO.1141), he suggested the late 9th or early 10th century based on writings discovered from the back of the painting and a comparison with the depictions of arhats in the Mogao Cave murals (Figure 2). As for the paintings on paper, Akiyama mentioned that the piece in the National Museum of Korea could be dated to the 9th century, while others, including those in the Tenri Library, the British Museum, and the Musée Guimet (MG.17683), were likely from the first half of the 10th century (Figures 1 and 4)<sup>33</sup>.

The silk painting in the Musée Guimet (EO.1138) certainly appears to be the earliest example of this type of painting, and the existence of the two cartouche frames fits the earlier iconography in which the small Buddha and the monk were perceived as separate individual beings. In terms of style, it is unlikely that the painting on paper with two cartouche frames in the British Museum is contemporaneous with the earliest silk painting. It is possible that the two cartouche spaces were created while copying earlier models with these features or that there still existed confusion over the identities of the small Buddha and the monk. The inscriptions in the paintings in the State Hermitage Museum and the Tenri Library omit the word “*nanwu*” before the Buddha’s name, so possibly the original context of the monk’s recitation of the Buddha’s name has been largely forgotten (Figure 7).<sup>34</sup> Additionally, they feature the most simplified and awkward depictions, and it is likely that their dates are later than others among the itinerant monk paintings.



**Figure 7.** *Itinerant Monk*. Dunhuang, 10th century. Ink and colors on paper, 51.8 × 29. 3 cm. Inv. No. Dh-320. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum, Photo by Leonard Kheifets.

<sup>33</sup> (Akiyama 1965, pp. 177–80).

<sup>34</sup> For the painting in the Tenri Library, see (Ōsaka Shiritsu Bijutsukan et al. 1992, pl. 133; Dainobu 2002, pl. 34).

### 3. Monks in Perambulation

Whereas most of the icons from the pre-Song period present the divine beings in static poses either seated or standing, the main figure of itinerant monk paintings strikes a walking pose. And this distinctive characteristic has led scholars to consider its relation with the murals referred to as *xingdao seng* or *xing seng* in the Tang monasteries documented in the *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Records of Famous Paintings of Successive Dynasties, comp. 846), the *Tangchao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄 (Records of Famous Paintings of the Tang Dynasty, 9th century), and the *Yizhou minghua lu* 益州名畫錄 (Record of Famous Paintings of Yizhou, 11th century).<sup>35</sup> The earliest example dates to the Zhenguan era (627–649), but most of them were created in the High Tang (713–765) and Middle Tang (766–835) periods.<sup>36</sup> Ten monasteries with murals, recorded in the sources mentioned above, were located in Chang'an, Luoyang 洛陽, Zhexi 浙西, and Chengdu 成都. They included some of the most prestigious sites of their time and were associated with imperial patronage and prominent monks such as Jianfu Monastery 薦福寺, Cien Monastery 慈恩寺, and Jing'ai Monastery 敬愛寺.<sup>37</sup> The murals mainly consist of multiple figures of monks painted along corridors or a series of walls. Given this, it is fair to say that it was a primary subject matter for the monastery mural paintings of the Tang period.

Xie Jisheng held that paintings of “*qujing gaoseng*” 取經高僧 (eminent monk retrieving sūtras) grew popular with the expanding reputation of Xuanzang after the Zhenguan era and that this iconography evolved into a type of painting designated as *xing seng* or *xingjiao seng*. He also noted that the locations of itinerant monk images in the passageways of Mogao Caves 45, 306, 308, and 363 are analogous to those of many *xing seng* murals in monastery corridors, and furthermore suggested that the *xing seng* images functioned as guardians.<sup>38</sup> Yu Xiangdong acknowledged this common feature in the itinerant monk paintings and *xing seng* murals, but disavowed any close relationship between the two traditions based on their discrepancy in production date and function. Furthermore, Yu explained that *xingdao seng* and *xing seng* murals represented patriarchs and eminent monks, and that the meaning of the term *xing* or *xingdao* is equivalent to “*xingzhou*” 行走 (walking).<sup>39</sup>

In Buddhist dictionaries, the term *xingdao* is explained as “forming a queue and walking the way” and its definition is further detailed as (1) practicing the Buddhist law; (2) *jingxing* 經行 or *caṅkrama*; or (3) circumambulating or performing *pradakṣiṇā* around the Buddha in order to pay respect.<sup>40</sup> The meaning of circumambulation was remarked upon in previous discussions of the patriarchal figures in Leiguitai Central Cave 雷鼓臺中洞 and Kanjing si Cave 看經寺洞 in Longmen Grottoes dated to the late 7th or early 8th century, which some have regarded as the only surviving examples of

<sup>35</sup> (*Zhongguo shuhua yanjiu ziliao shi* 1983, vol. 1, pp. 42, 43, 46, 50, 54–55, 57; vol. 3, pp. 1383, 1386–87, 1396, 1405).

<sup>36</sup> The earliest example was executed by Wang Ding 王定. The other painters mentioned are Wu Daozi 吳道子, Zhou Fang 周昉, Han Gan 韓幹, Zhao Wutan 趙武壇, Liu Xingchen 劉行臣, Lu Yao 陸曜, Lu Lengqie 盧楞伽, Zuo Quan 左全, Li Guonu 李果奴, Wang Shaoying 王韶應, Dong Chong 董忠 (*Sirén* 1956, pp. 14–23; *Nagahiro* 1977, vol. 1, p. 221; *Yu* 2011, p. 103; *Yu* 2016, p. 90).

<sup>37</sup> For more on major monasteries in the Tang era, see (*Ho* 2004, pp. 35–57; *Wang* 2010, pp. 65–106).

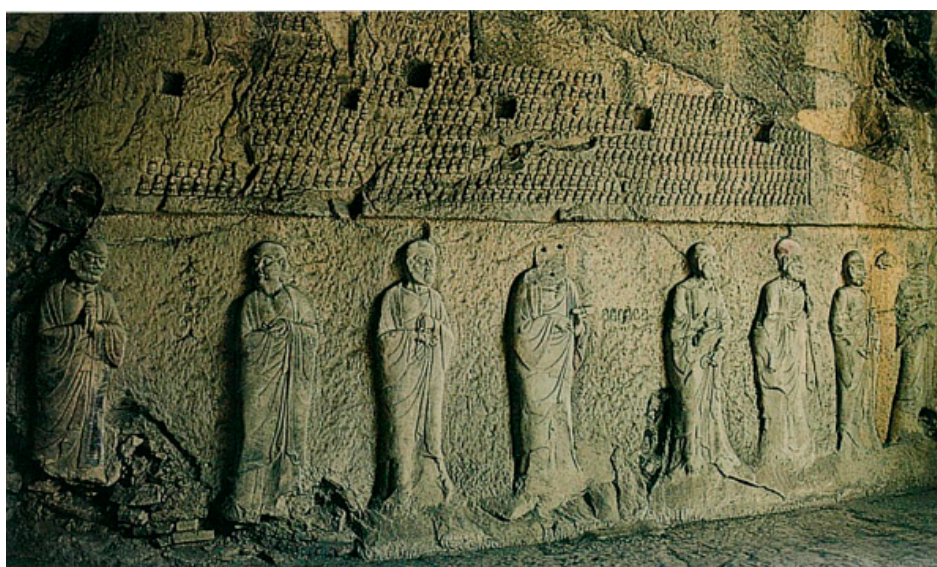
<sup>38</sup> If the itinerant monk figures in these caves were guardians, it would be more fitting for them to face outwards so that they could protect the sacred space from any harmful forces outside. However, those in Mogao Cave 308 are facing inwards. See (*Xie* 2009, p. 83; *Zhongguo bihua quanji bianzuan weiyuanhui* 1996, Explanatory Text for Plate 2).

<sup>39</sup> (*Yu* 2011, pp. 103–8). The textual sources on *xingdao seng* and *xing seng* murals demonstrate that a portion of them can be categorized as portrayals of eminent monks and patriarchs. Dashengci Monastery in Chengdu had murals of *xingdao gaoseng* 行道高僧 that included Aśvaghōṣa, Āryadeva, and 28 patriarchs. The expression “*xingdao gaoseng*” also appears in the description of the murals in Baoli Monastery in Chengdu, and Dashengci Monastery is said to have housed murals of 60 *xingdao luohan* (arhat) figures. Jing'ai Monastery in Luoyang had a *xing seng* mural that featured Tang Sanzang 唐三藏 (Tripiṭaka of the Tang), which indicates Xuanzang (*Zhongguo shuhua yanjiu ziliao shi* 1983, vol. 3, pp. 1383, 1386, 1396, 1405). As for the painting of Xuanzang in Jing'ai Monastery, it is unlikely that he was represented as an itinerant monk carrying a backpack since it is widely accepted that it was only in the later period that this figural type was adopted to represent Xuanzang. Rather, it would have been more similar to the walking image of Xuanzang found on the door panel of a Buddhist shrine housed in Shōsōin (*Wong* 2002, pp. 43–81; *Hara* 2011, p. 217; *Miyake* 1998, pp. 59–93).

<sup>40</sup> (*Mochizuki* 1974, vol. 1, pp. 611–12; *Nakamura and Takeshi* 2002, pp. 244–45; *Taya et al.* 1995, p. 85). For *jingxing*, see (*Mochizuki* 1974, vol. 1, pp. 572–73; *Sasagawa* 1987, pp. 107–12). The different usages of *xingdao seng* and *xing seng* are indistinguishable in the relevant texts, and it is likely that *xing seng* is an abbreviation of *xingdao seng* as has been suggested in previous studies.



*xingdao seng* images (Figure 8).<sup>41</sup> The monk figures are aligned at regular intervals along the lower registers of the side and back walls of these caves. Most of them move forward in a clockwise direction, creating a grand scene in which a group of monks appear to be engaged in ritual circumambulation. The inscriptions flanking each of the 25 monks in Leigutai Central Cave largely accord to the patriarchal lineage narrated in the *Fu fazang yinyuan zhuan* 付法藏因緣傳 (Tradition of the Causes and Conditions of the Dharma-Treasury Transmission), and the 29 figures in Kanjing si Cave resembling those in Leigutai Central Cave are also considered to have portrayed patriarchs.<sup>42</sup> One could argue that the monk images in Ganlu Monastery 甘露寺 in Zhexi documented in the *Lidai minghua ji* also showed a similar arrangement, as it is said that *xingdao seng* was depicted on the four walls of the ante-chamber and the main chamber of Mañjuśrī Hall.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 8.** Patriarchal figures on the south wall of Kanjing si Cave. Longmen Grottoes, late 7th to early 8th century.

Nonetheless, not all of the murals depicting the themes of *xing seng* or *xingdao seng* can be explained by circumambulation. For example, the murals in Jing'ai, Dashengci, and Baoli Monasteries 寶曆寺 are said to have multiple figures of monks on one or two sides of the walls, and for these cases the term *jingxing* is more fitting.<sup>44</sup> Intriguingly enough, Daoxuan's 道宣 (596–667) *Ji Shenzhou Sanbao gantong lu* 集神州三寶感通錄 (Collected Records of Three Treasure Miracles in China, 664) records a story where an association between a monk image and *jingxing* is remarked. This concerns an auspicious monk image from a 5th century cave temple site constructed by Juqu mengxun 沮渠蒙遜 (r. 401–433). The text recounts that this clay statue looked like a human being and conducted *jingxing* by itself when no one is near. People spread dirt on the ground to see whether it actually moved and later found footprints that showed its walking back and forth without a halt.<sup>45</sup> While it is clearly untrue that

<sup>41</sup> (Kucera 2006, pp. 72–74; Yu 2011).

<sup>42</sup> (Mizuno 1980, vol. 1, pp. 115–23; vol. 2, pp. 335–42; Wen 1988, pp. 208–10, 215).

<sup>43</sup> (*Zhongguo shuhua yanjiu ziliao shi* 1983, vol. 1, p. 53). One curious case is the mural in the Western Pagoda precinct of Qianfu Monastery in Chang'an. According to the *Lidai minghua ji*, 24 disciples who transmitted the Dharma are depicted on four boards surrounding the pagoda. Although this description comes closest to the representation of monks in Leigutai Central and Kanjing si in terms of theme and arrangement, the term "*xingdao seng*" is not used (*Zhongguo shuhua yanjiu ziliao shi* 1983, vol. 1, p. 48). Mizuno Seiichi also mentioned this text in his discussion of the patriarch figures in Kanjing si (*Mizuno 1980*, vol. 1, p. 120).

<sup>44</sup> (*Zhongguo shuhua yanjiu ziliao shi* 1983, vol. 1, p. 55; vol. 3, pp. 1383, 1386–87, 1396, 1405).

<sup>45</sup> (T 2106, 52: 417c27–a9). For Japanese and English translations of the text, see (Soper 1959, p. 92; Hida 2014, pp. 14–24; Wang 2016, pp. 25–26).



the statue actually walked, the fact that *jingxing* was singled out as the wondrous act of the monk image hints that this particular practice was perceived as a notable activity of Buddhist practitioners. The story refers to a 5th century image, yet in all likelihood this association remained current in the Early Tang when the text was compiled. A shorter version of this story is also found in Daoxuan's *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志 (Record of the Country of Śākya), and it should be noted that the term *xingdao* is used in the place of *jingxing* in this text.<sup>46</sup> This interchangeability of the terms can be additionally confirmed in Yijing's discussion on *jingxing* in the *Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan* 南海寄歸內法傳 (A Record of Inner Dharma Sent Back from the Southern Seas, 691).<sup>47</sup>

Considering the usages of *xingdao* in the foregoing discussion, it seems Yu Xiangdong was correct in asserting that the terms “*xing seng*” or “*xingdao seng*” should be translated as “walking monk(s).” This makes sense when we consider how these terms effectively differentiated the new type of monk images from the earlier representations of monks as seated or standing.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, I would argue that the bodily movement exhibited in these images implied more than simple bipedal locomotion, and that its religious connotation was related to the definition of *xingdao* in a broader sense. The term “*xingdao*” frequently appears in the accounts of monks' lives in the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 (Biographies of Eminent Monks) and the *Xu Gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳 (Continued Biographies of Eminent Monks). In some instances the term indicates the ritual of circumambulation, but in others it refers to “practicing the Buddhist Law.”<sup>49</sup> In this sense, a depiction of this walking posture can be useful for underlining the monk's presence in this world and the various religious practices and activities undertaken for the sake of his own and others' enlightenment. In terms of visual language, whereas a static pose suggests timelessness and transforms the icon's surroundings into a sacred realm apart from the mundane world, walking locomotion entails the lapse of time and a larger space.<sup>50</sup> It facilitates interaction between the icon and the viewer within a similar temporal and spatial milieu. It is uncertain whether the *xingdao seng* murals included the image of the itinerant monk that we see in the Dunhuang paintings. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that both traditions were part of a broader interest in portraying walking monks that underscores their position and role in the world of sentient beings.

While it is difficult to pinpoint a single textual or visual source for the itinerant monk paintings, related motifs found in surviving texts and images allow conjecture about the religious and artistic traditions and practices from which this type of painting was derived. For example, monks' traveling to different places carrying bookcases on their backs is described in biographical texts as part of their regular life.<sup>51</sup> In addition, these sources abound with tales of charismatic monks, some like Qiyu 耆域 and Gunavarman 求那跋摩 of foreign origin, subduing and preaching to tigers and saving people from the harm and troubles caused by these ferocious animals.<sup>52</sup> Certain historical figures share important features with the itinerant monks in such paintings. One of them is Li Tongxuan (635–730),

<sup>46</sup> (T 2088, 51: 973a15–17; Hida 2014, p. 20).

<sup>47</sup> (T 2125, 54: 221b21–c9; Mochizuki 1974, vol. 1, p. 611; Hida 2014, pp. 21–22). For an English translation of the passage, see (Li 2000, pp. 107–8).

<sup>48</sup> Of particular interest in this context are the images of 24 Indian patriarchs in Dazushengku Cave at Lingquan Monastery dated to 589, which is related to the patriarchal lineage in the *Fu fazing yiyuan zhuan*. The monks are depicted in seated poses (Henan Sheng Gudai Jianzhu Baohu Yanjiusuo 1992, pp. 17–18, 294; Young 2015, pp. 96–111). Textual sources on monastic portraits survive in various sources, and whenever mentioned they are mainly found in seated poses. As for the standing poses, we can see numerous examples when monks appear as attendants of a Buddha or bodhisattva.

<sup>49</sup> For example, see (T 2060, 50: 546b10–11, 20–21, 575c17–18, 583a10). Monks traveling outside the capital area and participating in various activities in the Northern Dynasties are examined in the following (Liu 1995, pp. 19–47).

<sup>50</sup> Wei-cheng Lin explores this issue regarding the Dunhuang murals of the Tang period. Although in different context, Lothar von Falkenhausen's discussion on the three modes of figure representation is also useful in considering the meanings of figures in action (Lin 2013, pp. 172–78; Falkenhausen 2008, pp. 51–91).

<sup>51</sup> For example, the biographies of Fakai in the Liang, Facheng, Jingye; and Sengshi in the Sui; and Daoji in the Tang periods recorded in the *Xu gaoseng zhuan* all mention of monks traveling with *zhi* (帙) on their backs. This term refers to a book cover for either a single book or a set (T 2060, 50: 474a8–9, 499c6–8, 517b22–23, 532b16–17).

<sup>52</sup> Matsumoto Eiichi mentioned several stories involving monks and a tiger, and particularly noted the story of Qiyu, a monk from the Western Regions (Matsumoto 1937, pp. 519–20; T 2059, 50: 388a17–24). Nakamura Kōji explained the tales of monks' subjugating tigers in the context of Sinicization of Buddhism (Nakamura 1984, pp. 20–22).

whom Wang Huimin proposed as a model for the itinerant monk paintings and Dharmatrata images.<sup>53</sup> A descendent of the Tang royal family, Li was praised for his insightful interpretation of the *Huayan jing* in the context of the Chinese traditional thought found in the *Laozi* and the *Yijing* (Book of Changes).<sup>54</sup> Textual sources describe Li as wearing hemp clothing and a hat made of cherry bark while carrying a bag of scriptures on his back.<sup>55</sup> He was believed to have subjugated tigers, and paintings portraying him or illustrating stories about him were reported to have been created in the Five Dynasties and Song periods.

Another notable figure is Senghui 僧會. According to his biography in the *Song gaoseng zhuan*, Senghui was originally from Sogdia and enlightened the emperor of the Wu Kingdom (222–280) in the Chiwu era (238–251). After passing away in the fourth year of the Tianji era (280), he mysteriously reappeared in the Yonghui era (650–656) and the people of the time called him “*youfang seng*” 遊方僧 (itinerant monk). He was described as having the stereotypical appearance of a person from the Indic regions with thick eyebrows, a sharp chin, blue eyes, and emaciated body. When he was about to die, he said that he could leave behind his true body, which would bring good fortune to the monastery in which he resided, and passed away in the pose of taking a step forward. When people tried to bury his body, it could not be inclined or moved, so they preserved it as it was. After applying glue and lacquer, they moved it to a scenic spot and built a worship hall where it could be enshrined.<sup>56</sup> This story evidently falls within the tradition of the whole-body relics of eminent monks documented in medieval Chinese sources, in which the monks are mainly described as having passed away in a seated pose connected to their devoted practice of meditation. This posture was maintained as their incorruptible bodies were admired as whole-body relics and portraits.<sup>57</sup> In Senghui’s case, the walking posture he held in his whole-body relic must have been effective for elucidating and celebrating his career as an itinerant monk.

As for relevant visual sources, some images of Buddhapālita included among numerous episodes found in the panoramic view of Mount Wutai on the west wall of Mogao Cave 61 are worth noting. In one of the scenes, this foreign monk who traveled all the way from India to the sacred mountain in China to pay homage to Mañjuśrī encounters the bodhisattva who manifested before him in the transformed body of an old man (Figure 9). Buddhapālita is wearing a long tunic and a pair of gaiters while a wide-brimmed hat is hanging on his back.<sup>58</sup> The figures of Buddhapālita and the old man with in identical attire and poses can be found in the upper-left part of P. 4049 along with drawings of various images (Figure 10).<sup>59</sup> The close relationship between the Buddhapālita images and the itinerant monk paintings can further be found in the sketch of an itinerant monk on the reverse of P. 3075 (Figure 11). The gaiters, hat, and staff of the figure and the lack of a large backpack in P. 3075 are markedly akin to those of Buddhapālita in P. 4049.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>53</sup> (Wang [1995] 2016, pp. 105–15). Although a large portion of textual descriptions of Li Tongxuan’s career and images overlap with the iconographic features of the itinerant monk paintings, some of their important features cannot be explained in relation to Li Tongxuan, such as the foreign look of the primary figure.

<sup>54</sup> (Lim 2000, pp. 455–80).

<sup>55</sup> It is difficult to determine the materials used for crafting the hats worn by the main figures in the itinerant monk paintings. Soymié explained that the hat is made of bamboo leaves (Soymié 2000, p. 41).

<sup>56</sup> (T 2061. 50: 826c10–827a12). The text is also discussed in (Itō 1978, p. 12).

<sup>57</sup> (Kobayashi 1954, pp. 14–33; Foulk and Sharf 1993, pp. 163–69; Inamoto 2019, pp. 494–97; Lee 2010, pp. 252–57).

<sup>58</sup> Another image of Buddhapālita with similar attire is found in a scene in the mural that illustrates his second encounter with Mañjuśrī (Sun 1999, pp. 202, 234–36).

<sup>59</sup> (Soymié 2000, pp. 50–51; Shimono 2017, pp. 88–90).

<sup>60</sup> Soymié found the reason for the lack of a backpack to be rooted in the incompleteness of the painting (Soymié 2000, p. 50). However, the rectangular frame for the cartouche located behind the figure leaves no room for a backpack to be inserted.



**Figure 9.** Buddhapālita meeting an incarnation of Mañjuśrī, detail of the Panoramic View of Mount Wutai on the west wall of Mogao Cave 61, Mid-10th Century. Reproduced by permission of The Commercial Press (Hong Kong) Limited from the publication of *Art of Dunhuang Caves 12* (敦煌石窟全集12, ISBN: 9620752732).



**Figure 10.** *Mañjuśrī and Four Assistants* (detail). Dunhuang, 9th–10th century. Ink on paper, 30.6 × 42.5 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France (Pelliot chinois 4049).



**Figure 11.** Itinerant monk on the reverse of the *Lotus Sutra* (detail). Dunhuang. Ink on paper, H. 26.1 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France (Pelliot chinois 3075).

#### 4. Function of Clouds

In addition to the walking posture, the movement of the itinerant monk in the painting is further intimated by the cloud on which the monk is set. The cloud appears only in the paintings rendered on paper, as the main figure in the two silk paintings in the Musée Guimet is presented walking through a landscape (Figures 2 and 3). Regarding other differences between the paintings on silk and those on paper, it has been suggested that the main figures in the silk paintings appear Han Chinese while those on paper are intended to look to be of foreign origin.<sup>61</sup> It is difficult to determine the ethnicity of the protagonist in each painting, yet most of the monks featured in the paintings on paper certainly show notably long and crooked noses. For Victor Mair, their foreign appearance was problematic as it would mean that the sūtras they are carrying should be in the form of flat leaves (*pattra*) as commonly employed in India rather than the traditional Chinese scroll format actually depicted in the paintings. This was one of the main reasons he concluded that the main figure was a *bianwen* performer.<sup>62</sup> Intriguing as this may be, Mair's argument is not entirely convincing due to the inability to explain the purpose and function of drawing such a *bianwen* performer. I am thus more inclined to support Michel Soymié's opinion that the inconsistency indicates that these paintings are not based on a realistic description of a particular figure, but are instead largely fabricated.<sup>63</sup> This is particularly true in the case of the paintings on paper, and the clouds transporting the figures further underline the representational nature of the paintings.

A cloud motif symbolizes auspiciousness and otherworldliness, and has been broadly adopted in Chinese art since the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). According to Hida Romi, clouds first appeared in Buddhist art in the late fifth century as ethereal, *qi*-like waves around flying deities and began to serve as the vehicles of heavenly beings during the Northern Qi period (550–577). In the Tang era, clouds took on a fuller and more material form corresponding to the stylistic changes in the figural depiction of Buddhist deities. Moreover, the clouds in Tang *bianxiang* were not for the simple illustration of texts, but were imagery with its own logic and inspired literary compositions in subsequent periods.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> (Mair 1986, pp. 29–30; Soymié 2000, p. 51).

<sup>62</sup> (Mair 1986, pp. 30–31).

<sup>63</sup> (Soymié 2000, p. 52).

<sup>64</sup> Similar observations were made in the previous studies of *bianxiang* and *bianwen* dealing with the themes of “Subjugation of Demons” and *Vimalakītri Sūtra* (Akiyama 1956, pp. 43–77; Fujieda 1958, pp. 87–95; Wu 1992, pp. 138–92).



For example, clouds appear abundantly in the *Vimalakīrti* and *Amitābha bianxiang* of the 7th and 8th century and serve to convey a sense of movement and the flow of time, even though no textual counterparts are found in the *Vimalakīrti* or *Amitābha sūtras*.<sup>65</sup> Unlike these sūtras, later literature such as the *Weimojing jiangjingwen* 維摩經講經文 (*Vimalakīrti Sūtra Lecture Text*) and the *Foshuo Amituo jiangjingwen* 佛說阿彌陀講經文 (*Amitābha Sūtra Lecture Text*) dating to the 9th century include detailed accounts on clouds, which were most likely influenced by cloud imagery in paintings.<sup>66</sup>

Phillip Bloom's discussion of clouds is also worth consideration in the present context. In tracing the origin of the clouds prevalent in Water and Land Rituals Paintings of the Song period, he pointed out the emergence of independent, self-sufficient cloud-borne deities among Dunhuang banners from the 9th to 10th century. The examples he listed are *Vaiśravaṇa* and *Soul-Guiding Bodhisattva* housed in the British Museum, *Guanyin attended by Two Donors* in the Harvard Art Museums, and *Itinerant Monk* (MG. 17683) in Musée Guimet (Figures 12–14). Bloom further explained that these icons were completely divorced from the spatial and narrative concerns that often dominated the decorative schemes of cave-shrines and emerged as autonomous objects of devotion. Describing the new tendencies observed in textual and visual materials of Dunhuang as a "liturgical turn," Bloom addressed how their emergence could be related to the development of the Water and Land Ritual.<sup>67</sup>



**Figure 12.** *Soul-Guiding Bodhisattva*. Dunhuang, 9th century. Ink and colors on silk, 80.5 × 53.8 cm. The British Museum (1919,0101,0.47) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

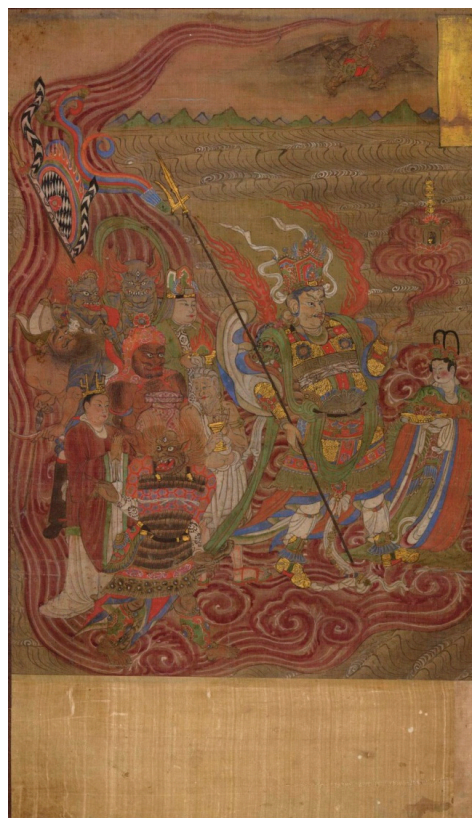
<sup>65</sup> The function of clouds in the Tang Buddhist paintings of Dunhuang is also discussed in (Lin 2013, pp. 172–78).

<sup>66</sup> (Hida 1999, pp. 123–37; Hida 2011, pp. 439–69). Hida's works are explained in detail in Bloom's dissertation. Especially see (Bloom 2013, pp. 283–96).

<sup>67</sup> (Bloom 2013, pp. 310–17, 328–31).



**Figure 13.** *Guanyin attended by Two Donors.* Dunhuang, c. 9th century. Banner; ink and color on silk, 95.3 × 61.8 cm. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Second Fogg Expedition to China Fund (1925,12). Photo © President and Fellows of Harvard College.



**Figure 14.** *Vaiśravaṇa.* Dunhuang, 9th century. Ink and colors on silk, 37.6 × 26.6 cm. The British Museum (1919,0101,0.45) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

As Bloom himself acknowledged, any correlation between the paintings and the early stages of the Water and Land Ritual remains largely speculative, but it is worth noting that the itinerant monk paintings were part of a new trend in 9th and 10th century Dunhuang. The clouds that Bloom mentioned, whose dark red color represents an auspicious purple cloud, extend along the bottom and lateral edges of the compositions.<sup>68</sup> While their formal and stylistic features are similar, the icon's movement traced by the trails of the clouds in each painting slightly differs. In *Soul-Guiding Bodhisattva*, the cloud trail shows Avalokiteśvara's transportation from the upper-right corner to the foreground (Figure 12).<sup>69</sup> Along with the soul of the deceased woman toward whom he turns, the bodhisattva will travel further to a Pure Land indicated by the small architectural complex hovering in the upper-left corner of the painting. In *Guanyin attended by Two Donors*, the bodhisattva descends from the upper-right corner to the foreground and halts there as he gazes straight ahead toward the viewer (Figure 13). In *Vaiśravaṇa*, the Heavenly King's cloud displays the longest trajectory as he appears in the upper-right, proceeds to the upper-left, descends along the left edge, and eventually arrives in the foreground (Figure 14). Unlike the bodhisattva in *Guanyin attended by Two Donors*, however, his movement does not end in the foreground and he continues towards the right. Unlike the deity in *Soul-Guiding Bodhisattva*, no allusion is made regarding his final destination. In terms of the icon's movement and relationship with the figure within the painting and spectator outside it, the itinerant monk paintings are closest to *Vaiśravaṇa*. The cloud trail demonstrates that the monks first appear either in the upper-right or -left side of the painting, move down along one side, and reach the foreground. Without interacting with any others within or outside the painting, he is engaging in a journey the destination of which remains unknown.

Matsumoto Eiichi regarded *Vaiśravaṇa* and two other Dunhuang paintings in the British Museum and the Musée Guimet as examples of *Xingdao Tianwang tu* 行道天王圖, which Roderick Whitfield aptly translated as "The Heavenly King on the March."<sup>70</sup> Although one of the paintings in the British Museum is dated later and shows a slightly different iconography with *Vaiśravaṇa* riding on a horse, the three paintings all feature *Vaiśravaṇa* crossing a body of water with his attendants (Figure 15).<sup>71</sup> This theme appears in several texts, including the *Zhenguan gongsi huashi* 貞觀公私畫史 (Record of Paintings in Public and Private Collections in the Zhenguan Era, 639), the *Yizhou minghua lu*, and the *Xuanhe huapu* 宣和畫譜 (Xuanhe Catalogue of Paintings, 1120), and can be traced back to the time of Zhang Sengyao 張僧繇 during the Liang period (502–557). It continued to be employed in subsequent periods by painters such as Yan Liben 閻立本, Wu Daoyuan 吳道元 (or Daozi), Fan Qiong 范瓊, Sun Wei 孫位 of the Tang era, Yan Yun 燕筠 and Li Sheng 李昇 during the Five Dynasties Period, and Sun Zhiwei 孫知微 of the Northern Song Dynasty.<sup>72</sup> Matsumoto further relates that the titles documented in the *Xuanhe huapu*, such as "Youxing Tianwang tu" 遊行天王圖, "Guohai Tianwang tu" 過海天王圖, and "Duhai Tianwang tu" 渡海天王圖, all of which imply the Heavenly King's travel or crossing an ocean and were created between the Tang and the Northern Song periods, had features similar to "Heavenly King on the March."<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> For the significance of the purple-colored cloud motif, see (Nagata 2009, pp. 740–43; Nagata 2010, pp. 833–36; Bloom 2013, pp. 293–94).

<sup>69</sup> At the foot of the cartouche are preserved three characters "Yin lu pu," which seem to have been intended to refer to the bodhisattva as "Yinlu pusa" (Soul-Guiding Bodhisattva) (Whitfield 1982, p. 302).

<sup>70</sup> (Matsumoto 1937, pp. 463–65; Whitfield 1982, p. 314). For the painting in the Musée Guimet, also see (Nicolas-Vandier 1974–1976, p. 192).

<sup>71</sup> The iconography of *Vaiśravaṇa* riding on a horse can be found in the murals of Bezeklik Caves 15 and 39 (Grünwedel 1912, pp. 238–40, 282–83; Le Coq 1913, Tafel 31; Matsumoto 1937, pp. 470–72).

<sup>72</sup> (Lu 1993, vol. 1, 173; vol. 2, pp. 66, 70, 72).

<sup>73</sup> The painters mentioned in this context are Yan Lide 閻立, Zhao Deqi 趙德齊, Li Sheng, Sun Zhiwei, Wu Zongyuan 武宗元, and Shi Ge 石恪 (Lu 1993, vol. 2, pp. 64, 67, 69–71, 75, 81).





**Figure 15.** *Vaiśravaṇa*. Dunhuang, mid-10th century. Ink and colors on silk, 61.8 × 57.4 cm. The British Museum (1919,0101,0.26) © The Trustees of the British Museum.

For the scriptural basis of the three surviving paintings, Matsumoto mentioned the chapters on Four Heavenly Kings in the *Zhang Ahan jing* 長阿含經 (Long Discourses), the *Daloutan jing* 大樓炭經 (Sūtra of Great Conflagration), the *Qishi jing* 起世經 (Sūtra on the Arising of the Worlds), and the *Qishi yinben jing* 起世因本經 (Sūtra on the Primary Causes of the Arising of the Worlds).<sup>74</sup> He took particular notice of the account in the *Qishi jing* of Vaiśravaṇa with five great *yakṣas* roaming in a park with a pond near his abode in the three cities on the northern slope of Mt. Sumeru. He considered that the paintings illustrated the scene in which Vaiśravaṇa leaves his cities and roams about the park with his entourage.<sup>75</sup>

However, a more careful reading of the sūtras reveals that the divine beings are largely engaged in leisure as they wander about the park. Furthermore, according to some texts, they are bathing in the pond. As for the place where Vaiśravaṇa and his entourage meander, which is referred to as a park or fortress, it appears palatial with seven-fold walls, balustrades, nets, and rows of trees made of seven jewels. The pond in particular recalls those in Pure Lands, lavishly decorated like the park with seven-fold walls, balustrades, nets, and rows of trees made of jewels. From its pure water grow lotus flowers in various colors that radiate light.<sup>76</sup> The sentiment that the scriptural descriptions generate is quite different from the impression one gets from the paintings. In the case of the earlier piece in the British Museum, Vaiśravaṇa and his attendants appear engaged in something far from relaxing or enjoying leisure time, and instead seem to be embarking on the missions assigned to each of them (Figure 16). The Heavenly King displays a lengthy spear and a pagoda at his either side, a fully armored *yakṣa* in the front row with wide-open eyes and mouth is posed in an intimidating stance, a deity at the left end holding a bow and arrow is about to shoot a mystical bird out of the sky, and

<sup>74</sup> (Matsumoto 1937, pp. 466–69; T 1, 1: 130b1–131a2; T 23, 1: 293b12–294a21; T 24, 1: 339c15–341a5; T 25, 1: 394c15–396a6).

<sup>75</sup> (T 24, 1: 339c15–341a5).

<sup>76</sup> (T 1, 1: 130b21–27; T 23, 1: 293c27–294a3; T 24, 1: 340a20–b3; T 25, 1: 395a19–b3).



another *yakṣa* in the rear is carrying a large banner flapping in the wind. Additionally, the large body of water that the deities are crossing is without any railings or flowers and is filled with a constant stream of waves while a series of mountain peaks is lined along the horizon. Rather than the artificially made and decorated pond illustrated in the sūtras, it seems more to be a part of nature. Given this, I believe the painting depicts the Heavenly King and his entourage leaving his abode in Mt. Sumeru and heading towards the wider world.<sup>77</sup>

Another painting in the British Museum with abundant intriguing details that call for further examination conveys a similar ambiance (Figure 15). Vaiśravaṇa riding on a horse is surrounded by armored *yakṣas* with fearsome faces and weapons, and the sense of agitation that the scene produces must have contributed to Arthur Waley's proposal that the painting illustrated the story of Vaiśravaṇa's rescue of Anxi Fortress in 742 as recounted in the *Pishamen yigui* 毘沙門儀軌 (Ritual for Vaiśravaṇa). Waley further pointed out that Vaiśravaṇa is presenting the *vitarka mudrā* with his right hand and translated the inscription in the upper-right part of the composition as "The devarāja on his way across the waters, preaching. Offered with whole heart by the donor Xu [Han]-rong (水路天王行道時施主徐[漢?]榮一心供養)."<sup>78</sup> Although Waley asserted that the "*xingdao*" in the inscription corresponds to "preaching," I would suggest that the word should be examined in relation to the definitions articulated in the foregoing discussion. What is notable in this context is that Vaiśravaṇa is striking a walking posture in the two paintings, including the earliest surviving example in the British Museum. As it would not make sense to be walking while riding a cloud, I suspect that the cloud vehicle is a later addition. Whichever is the case, Vaiśravaṇa's waking posture and horseback riding in the case of the later painting accord with the meaning of the "*xingdao*" as "walking" or "on the march" as in Whitfield's translation. As for its religious meaning, it seems related to the broadest definition of "practicing the Dharma" since it is unlikely that the Heavenly King was practicing circumambulation or *jingxing*. In other words, it would indicate Vaiśravaṇa's carrying out his mission in this world. The cloud vehicle is a visual device employed to emphasize his far-flung and speedy journey to protect and save additional sentient beings in this world.

I believe that the clouds supporting the itinerant monks who are walking and riding clouds at the same time just like the Heavenly King were added for the same reason as in the Vaiśravaṇa paintings: to illustrate the monk's extensive travels in this world. One of the itinerant monk paintings in the Bibliothèque nationale de France demonstrates a further association between the itinerant monk paintings and Vaiśravaṇa paintings (Figure 16). Below the cloud-borne monk is represented a body of water with streaming waves, which is comparable to the composition in the aforementioned Vaiśravaṇa paintings. It is highly likely that this feature in this itinerant monk painting was adopted from the Vaiśravaṇa paintings.

<sup>77</sup> For the shape and surroundings of Mt. Sumeru, see (Sadakata 1997, pp. 26–30).

<sup>78</sup> (Waley 1931, pp. 41–42; T 1249, 21: 228b1–c16).



**Figure 16.** *Itinerant Monk*. Dunhuang, 10th century. Ink and colors on paper, 71.0 × 29.0 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France (Pellio chinois 4074).

## 5. Conclusions

This essay reexamined the iconography of the itinerant monk paintings from Dunhuang focusing on the issues surrounding Baosheng Buddha and the main figure's walking posture and cloud vehicle. Whereas previous studies have tended to regard these itinerant monk paintings as a group and explain them in relation to a particular figure or visual tradition validated by relatively rich textual sources, a closer observation of the individual paintings reveals intriguing clues that improve the understanding of their religious and artistic implications. Regarding the issue of the identity of Baosheng Buddha, the two cartouche spaces in the Guimet painting (EO.1138) demonstrate that the small Buddha and the monk figure in the paintings were regarded as separate beings and that both of their names were given in the composition. Another Guimet piece (EO.1141) and the murals in Mogao Cave 45 point toward the possibility that the monk was identified as Baosheng Buddha, the deity that he venerated and whose name he recited. The worship of Baosheng Buddha presumably developed in relation to funerary and incantation practices attested in the inscription in the Guimet painting (EO. 1141) and the story of Muru. However, as the inscriptions in Mogao Cave 45 suggest, a new emphasis was given in the later period to his role of traveling in the world and leading sentient beings to enlightenment,

something which accorded well with the appearance of the itinerant monk figure. If this supposition is valid, it provides an interesting case in which the role and power of a deity is transformed and adjusted according to its appearance in its images.

The main figure's walking posture was considered in relation to various textual and artistic sources. Of particular interest was its relationship with the murals referred to as "*xingdao seng*" or "*xing seng*," a term which can be translated as "walking monk(s)." Its meaning in a religious context can be understood as first, monks practicing circumambulation; second, *caṅkrama* or *jingxing*; and third, the carrying out of Buddhist teachings. While it is difficult to establish a direct link between the traditions of *xingdao seng* murals and itinerant monk paintings, they are both part of the growing interest in the Tang period portrayal of monks in perambulation to underscore their position and role in the world of sentient beings. Furthermore, several features of the itinerant monk paintings, such as a monk traveling with bookcases and subduing a tiger and his typical attire, including gaiters and a wide-brimmed hat, were discussed through various textual and visual materials.

The cloud vehicle of the main figure was examined in relation to the emergence of independent cloud-borne deities in the 9th and 10th century Dunhuang banners. In terms of the main icon's movement and relationship with the figure(s) within the painting and viewer outside it, itinerant monk paintings are closest to the painting of Vaiśravaṇa in the British Museum (1919,0101,0.45). This British Museum example and two other paintings from Dunhuang have been regarded as "Xingdao Tianwang tu" (Painting of Heavenly King in March). Contradicting the previous interpretation that Vaiśravaṇa is roaming in the park near his cities on Mount Sumeru, I maintain that Vaiśravaṇa and his entourage are being depicted embarking on their mission to protect the sentient beings of the world. The clouds in this context play a critical role in underlining their extensive and rapid travel to facilitate their encounters with and saving of a great number of sentient beings. The cloud vehicle employed in the itinerant monk paintings serves the same function of accentuating the main icon's fleet travel to faraway places.

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## Abbreviations

T Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaikyoku 渡邊海旭 et al. Ed. 1924–1935. *Taishō shinshū dai zōkyō* 大正新修大藏經. Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai.

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*Dafangguangfo Huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經, T 10, no. 293.  
*Da Tang Da Ciensi sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳, T 50, no. 2053.  
*Daizong chaozeng sikong daibian zhengguangzhi sanzang he shangbiao zhiji* 代宗朝贈司空代辨正廣智三藏和上表制集, T 52, no. 2120.  
*Daloutan jing* 大樓炭經, T 1, no. 23.  
*Dizang pusa benyuan jing* 地藏菩薩本願經, T 13, no. 412.  
*Foming jing* 佛名經, T 14, no. 440.  
*Foming jing* 佛名經, T 14, no. 441.  
*Fozu lidai tongzai* 佛祖歷代通載, T 49, no. 2036.  
*Fozu tongji* 佛祖統記, T 49, no. 2035.

- Gaoseng zhuan 高僧傳, T 50, no. 2059.
- Ji Shenzhou Sanbao gantong lu 集神州三寶感通錄, T 52, no. 2106.
- Jingguangming jing 金光明經, T 16, no. 663.
- Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記
- Mingseng zhuan chao 名僧傳抄
- Nanhai jigui neifa zhuan 南海寄歸內法傳, T 54, no. 2125.
- Qishi jing 起世經, T 1, no. 24.
- Qishi yinben jing 起世因本經, T 1, no. 25.
- Sengqie Heshang yu ru niepan shuo liudu jing 僧伽和尚浴入涅槃說六度經, T 85, no. 2920.
- Shenseng zhuan 神僧傳, T 50, no. 3064.
- Shijia fangzhi 釋迦方志, T 51, no. 2088.
- Song gaoseng zhuan 宋高僧傳, T 51, no. 2061.
- Tangchao minghua lu 唐朝名畫錄
- Xu gaoseng zhuan 續高僧傳, T 50, no. 2060.
- Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜
- Yizhou minghua lu 益州名畫錄
- Yuqie jiyao jiu Anan tuoluoni yankou guiyi jing 瑜伽集要救阿難陀羅尼焰口軌儀經, T 21, no. 1318.
- Yuqie jiyao yankou shishi yi 瑜伽集要焰口施食儀, T 21, no. 1320.
- Zhang Ahan jing 長阿含經, T 1, no. 1.
- Zhenguan gongsi huashi 貞觀公私畫史

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