What is *Bianxiang* 變相?
—On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature

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Since the discovery of *bianwen* 變文 texts some ninety years ago in a sealed library at Dunhuang, much scholarship has been devoted to this lost literary genre in terms of its origin, etymology, form, content, performance, popularity, and influence on later Chinese literature and performing arts. A persistent argument in this scholarship is that *bianwen*, as a kind of popular storytelling script, is intimately related to a type of picture called *bianxiang*. This association seems self-evident: both terms share the key-character *bian* 變 and can be simplified as *bian*. Thus, Zheng Zhen-duo 鄭振鐸 stated some sixty years ago, “Just as in the term *bianxiang*, the character *bian* in *bianwen* means an original sūtra being...

Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Annual Symposium of the *Chinese Cultural Quarterly*, Harvard University, 1989; the International Conference on Dunhuang Studies, Dunhuang, 1990; and the University of Washington, Seattle, 1990. I want to thank the Dunhuang Research Academy, the British Museum, and the Bibliothèque Nationale for allowing me to examine and copy illustrations of the “Subjugation of demons” in their collections.

1 The definition of *bianwen* is still a topic of scholarly speculation. According to Victor Mair, “there are presently operative at least five different definitions of pien-wen.” See Mair, *T'ang Transformation Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 12–14. Some scholars use the term to refer to both popular storytelling and sūtra lectures; others consider that these two must be strictly separated and that only texts used in popular storytelling can be called *bianwen*.
‘transformed’ into ‘popular storytelling.’”

Sun Kaidi likewise suggested that the character bian had the same meaning in both bianwen and bianxiang but that it should be interpreted as “miraculous transformations” recorded in religious texts: “When such figures and events are described in writings people called them bianwen, or bian for short. When these are depicted in pictures people called them bianxiang, or again, bian for short. Their meanings are the same.” Both opinions have been followed and refined by scholars. The relationship between bianwen and bianxiang has also been considered in terms of bianwen performance. For example, Sun Kaidi noted that the “Wang Zhaojun 王昭君 Bianwen” from Dunhuang ended with the phrase: “The end of the ‘standing-pu’ 立軸 of the first juan 卷; from here the following part of the text begins.” Since the term pu was a measure word for art works including paintings, he contended, “this makes it clear that a popular lecture had pictorial images as aids.”

The etymological and functional approaches were synthesized by Fu Yunzi 傅芸子 in an important proposal: “Originally bianwen supplemented (i.e., explained) bianxiang pictures. . . . Bianwen and bianxiang are identical in implication but different in their methods of presentation: one uses words while the other uses pictorial images. Pictorial spatial representations are bianxiang; and oral temporal presentations are bianwen.” To support his argument, Fu listed subjects that appeared in both bianwen literature and bianxiang murals, such as the “Hell bian” 地獄 bian, the “Bian on the subjugation of demons” 降魔 bian, the “Mahāmaudgalyāyana bian” 目連 bian.

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4 An introduction to different interpretations of bian can be found in Mair, T’ang Transformation Texts, pp. 36–72. Mair himself insists that bian in both terms, bianwen and bianxiang, means “supernatural transformation.”


and the “Vimalakirti bian” 維摩變. He then deduced that these literary and artistic works “originally formed pairs.” Going one step further, he proposed that, in addition to these fixed wall paintings, illustrations in a portable scroll format could have also been used in the telling and singing of Buddhist bianwen; so suggested the Dunhuang manuscript “Bianwen on Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s rescue of his mother from hell” (S.2614), which was inscribed with the words: “with pictures, one scroll.” Moreover, he argued that paintings were also employed in telling non-Buddhist bianwen stories, as suggested by Ji Shilao’s 吉師老 poem, which describes a singing girl from Sichuan performing the Zhaojun bian (看蜀女轉昭君變) with “a picture scroll.”

Written half a century ago, Fu Yunzi’s discussion contains all the major arguments of some recent scholars who, in attempting to define bianwen precisely, consider the interdependence of bianwen and bianxiang to be one of bianwen’s essential features. Reiterating Fu’s view, Cheng Yizhong 程毅中 claimed that “bianwen are explanatory texts of bianxiang pictures.” His proposal was supported by Bai Huawen. After investigating some twenty surviving Dunhuang manuscripts specifically entitled bianwen, Bai asserted that a bianwen must possess two primary characteristics: a prosimetric structure and a bianxiang picture as a visual aid in its performance. The first feature is visible in the text itself. The second is indicated by an extant Dunhuang scroll painting illustrating the bianwen on “Subjugation of demons”; by the terms tu (圖, picture) or pu 舖 found in some titles or texts of bianwen; and by phrases regularly appearing at the junction between spoken and sung parts in a bianwen text that often “direct the audience to ‘look’ at the same time as they listen.” Bai’s strategy and conclusion have been accepted and further developed by Victor Mair, in whose enriched

9 Among a number of definitions of bianwen, the one Mair “hold(s) ultimately to be the only truly workable one” “results in a corpus of less than 20 extant bianwen manuscripts.” See Mair, T’ang Transformation Texts, p. 14.
formulation of bianwen’s characteristics we again find ‘an implicit or explicit relationship to illustrations.’

Then, what are bianxiang according to these authors? After defining picture scrolls used in bianwen performances as bianxiang, Bai further addresses the following question: given that bianwen texts from Dunhuang far outnumber such scrolls, ‘How then, may they be said to go together?’ In response, he points out that the Thousand Buddha Caves at Dunhuang are covered with bianxiang murals and many banners from the caves are also painted with narrative scenes. Again following Fu Yunzi, he concludes: ‘Not only could bianwen be used in combination with painted scrolls for general, secular performances, they could also be used in combination with wall-paintings, painted banners, and so forth for performances in Buddhist temples, in stone grotto chapels, or in certain specially designated situations.’

Unsatisfied with Bai’s reasoning, Mair has made an admirable effort to collect all the ancient literary evidence for bianxiang. On the basis of this research, Mair both agreed and disagreed with Bai’s contention: on the one hand, he realized that this data failed to yield any specific proof for the performing function of bianxiang murals; on the other, he insisted on the ‘narrative nature’ of bianxiang pictures, which permitted him to translate the Chinese term bianxiang as ‘transformation tableaux’:

Probably most importantly in terms of its true identity, pien-hsiang [bianxiang] must be recognized as a kind of narrative art. From literary descriptions and first-hand observation of painting and sculpture, we may induce that, while various devices

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10 Other basic features of a bianwen in Mair’s definition include: “a unique verse-introductory (or pre-verse) formula, an episodic narrative progression, homogeneity of language, . . . and prosimetric structure.” See ibid., p. 15.
11 Bai Huawen, p. 505.
12 Ibid., p. 507.
14 Without ruling out a possible relationship between bianxiang and bianwen performance, Mair cautions his readers, very correctly in my opinion, not to take such a relationship for granted: “We have yet to discover specific proof that any of the titled pien-hsiang (bianxiang) recorded herein were used for purposes of narrative recitation. This is not, of course, to deny that they may have been so used, and, indeed, the likelihood that they were seems great. Still, in order to avoid the imprecision concerning pien that has been rampant in the past, extreme caution should be exercised in making any claims about the relatedness of pien-wen and pien-hsiang.” See ibid., p. 43.
and techniques were available to the *pien-hsiang* artist for indicating sequential actions and events, his chief aim was generally to portray a story of some sort.\(^{15}\)

Mair’s reservations towards Bai’s functional definition of *bian-xiang*, however, seem to have largely disappeared in his more recent publications, as when he states: “Essentially, it was the task of the artist to represent these manifestations [of the Buddhist figures] on paper or silk, or in wall-paintings, in which case they may be called *pien-hsiang* (‘transformation scenes or tableaux’). The *pien*-storyteller would then use the *pien-hsiang* as an illustrative device during his performance.”\(^{16}\) The two authors seem to have reached a basic consensus.

Thus, for more than half a century there has been a continuous effort to establish a direct link between Dunhuang *bianwen* (and other types of literature) with paintings, including Dunhuang murals. In this process scholars have gradually changed their focus from speculating on the relationship between *bianwen* and certain illustrations to hypothesizing that all paintings called *bianxiang* are illustrations of *bianwen*. This second argument, first introduced by historians of Chinese literature, has further influenced art historians in their interpretations of Dunhuang art. For example, Shi Weixiang 史苇湘 interpreted the Dunhuang murals of the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, or the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish*, as visual aids of “popular sūtra lectures” held in cave-temples.\(^{17}\) Similarly, Roderick Whitfield commented on a fragment of a Dunhuang silk painting illustrating the contest between Raudrākṣa 劳度叉 and Śāriputra 舍利佛: “This painting is of great interest as an example of the literary genre known as *pian-wen* [*bianwen*], dramatized recitations by monks in return for donations from the faithful. They correspond to the *pien-hsiang* or pictorial illustrations of the sūtras, of which most of the wall paintings in the caves, as well as those on silk, are examples.”\(^{18}\)

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 43.


ARE BIANXIANG “VISUAL AIDS” FOR BIANWEN PERFORMANCES?

The specific relationship between bianwen and bianxiang defined by these authors is of ultimate importance to the study of Chinese art history because it concerns the form, content, and function of the entire range of religious (and perhaps also secular) art from the fifth century to twelfth century. Unlike the term bianwen, which may have only designated a particular literary form and rarely appears in historical records, the word bianxiang was widely used during this period for all sorts of Buddhist art and even for some non-Buddhist art works. The astonishing popularity of bianxiang is evident; it was said that the monk Shandao 善導 (617–81) “painted more than three hundred walls with Pure Land bianxiang,” and that the late Tang painter Fan Qiong 范瓊 covered more than two hundred walls with various bianxiang pictures. More bianxiang murals and picture scrolls are recorded in Tang-Song painting catalogues and other writings, and still more such paintings and engravings exist in Buddhist cave chapels. Based on these records, the modern scholar Guan Dedong 關德棟 concluded, “It can be said that no Buddhist temple during the Tang was without bianxiang.”

Bai Huawen’s and Mair’s arguments reviewed earlier consist of two interrelated theses: (1) bianxiang were narrative representations, and (2) bianxiang were used as visual aids in bianwen storytelling. A closer look at the historical concept of bianxiang and a careful examination of this type of painting, however, leads to radically different conclusions: (1) strictly speaking, most paintings labeled as bianxiang are not “narrative” in either content or format, and (2) bianxiang paintings executed in Buddhist cave-temples were not used in storytelling. Starting from the term bianxiang itself, we find that its meaning seems to have changed over time. A major change occurred some time around the High Tang. Before the eighth century,

20 Huang Xiuju 黃休復, Yizhou minghua lu 益州名畫錄 (Beijing: Renmin Meishu chuban-she, 1964), A.4.
this term was used for various kinds of art forms, including three-dimensional statues, relief carvings, book illustrations, scroll paintings, and murals. An early reference to bian or bianxiang is found in the Fuguo ji (佛國記, Record of Buddhist kingdoms), in which Faxian 法顯 recorded a Ceylonese ritual he witnessed in 410: "The king exhibits, so as to line both sides of the road, the five hundred different bodily forms in which the Bodhisattva has in the course of his history appeared:—here as Sudāna 須大 novembre, there as Syāma(bian) 紫炎, now as the king of elephants, and then as a stag or a horse. All these figures are brightly colored and grandly executed, looking as if they were alive." 22 The various forms of the bodhisattva described in this passage were represented by painted life-size statues. This usage of the term bian or bianxiang was confirmed by Duan Chengshi 段成式, who wrote that "during the Liang dynasty (502–57) sculptured images were also called bian." 23

Another type of bian-sculpture are miniature carvings. It was reported, for example, that the Eastern Jin ruler Yao Xing 姚興 (r. 394–416) presented "various bianxiang" (zabianxiang 雜佛變象) from Kucha to the Buddhist Master Huiyuan 慧遠. 24 These works are described as being executed in the form of "xilǔ 細糅," a term which


24 Huijiao 慧皎, Liang gaozeng zhuan 梁高僧傳, in T 2999.360. Huiyuan’s biography is translated by E. Zürcher in The Buddhist Conquest of China, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 1:240–253. The identification of Yao Xing’s gift as bianxiang, however, was challenged by Mair, who argued that the three characters, zabianxiang, should be read as “various,” “unusual,” and “shapes.” See “Transformation tableaux,” pp. 6–7. But similar terms definitely referring to bianxiang scenes are also found in painting catalogues and include zaobao 雜佛變 (various Buddhist bian) and zaubianxiang 雜物變像 (bianxiang of various things). See Pei Xiaoyuan 裴孝源, Zhengong gongzi huashi 聞公私畫史, in Chen Liantang 陳蓮塘, ed., T’angtai congshu (Shanghai: Jinzhang shuju, 1921), 58.22a., and Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠, Lidai minghua ji 歷代名畫記, in William Reynolds Acker, trans., Some T’ang and Pre-T’ang Texts on Chinese Painting, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1954–74), 2:203. Based on this evidence and a possible relationship between Yao Xing’s zabianxiang and miniature carvings from Chinese Turkistan, I follow Zürcher’s identification of these carvings as “various scenes from scriptures executed in fine embroidery.” See Zürcher, 1:249.
Zürcher translated as “fine embroidery” and Mair interpreted as “fine thread” or “inlaid stone.”

The character lū is often used interchangeably with lou 鍾, meaning “to carve”; and the word xilou 細鍾 can be explained as “fine carving” or “openwork carving.” Buddhist art in the Gandhāran area and Chinese Turkistan is famous for a kind of miniature sculpture intricately engraved with scenes of the Buddha’s life. They seem to fit the description of “fine carvings of various bianxiang” perfectly.

The word bianxiang, moreover, was used in the mid-sixth century to refer to two-dimensional relief decorations on a stūpa. Yang Xuanzhi 楊衒之 recorded that at Gandhāra the traveling monk Huisheng 慧生 hired skilled artists to copy in bronze a certain “Four-stūpa bian of Śākyamuni” 釋迦四塔變. As scholars have argued, the iconography of this work must have resembled a stūpa in the King Aśoka Monastery 阿育王寺 in Zhejiang, which the Tang monk Jianzhen 鑑真 described as follows: “On one side is the Mahāsattva bian 薩埵王子變, on another side is the Sunetra bian 快目王變, on another side is the Candraprabha bian 月光王變, and on another side is the Śibi bian 居毗王變.” These four jātaka scenes all appear in pre-Tang murals at Dunhuang.

During the pre-Tang and early Tang periods, the term bian designated not only statues and reliefs but also paintings. It is recorded that the celebrated Liang dynasty painter Zhang Šengyou 張僧繇 was a master of jingbian 經變, or “sūtra bianxiang.” While it is not clear whether Zhang painted his bian-pictures on walls or silk scrolls, all six bian from the Sui royal art collection, catalogued by the early Tang art historian Pei Xiaoyuan, appear to be scroll paintings. The last usage of the term bian during this period was as textual illustration. The “Bibliography” chapter in the History of Sui Dynasty (Sui shu 隋書; compiled 629–36) lists two books, one about

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26 Some examples of such miniature carvings can be found in the exhibition catalogue, Afghanitan gudai bijutsu ten 阿富汗古代美術展 (Nihon keizai shimbunsha, 1963), pl. 53–84.
28 T’2089.989. The text only explicitly identifies one scene: the bian of Mahāsattva. Here I have identified the other three pictures according to their descriptions: “giving up of eyes” (Sunetra), “giving away the head” (Candraprabha), and “the rescue of the dove” (Śibi).
29 Yao Silian 姚思廉, Liang shu (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), 54.793.
horse-riding and the other about the game of pot-pitching, both consisting of a textual section and a bian (pictorial) section.\textsuperscript{31}

From the High Tang on, the terms bian and bianxiang were used more strictly: they no longer designated sculptured forms but referred only to pictorial images; they were mainly associated with complex sûtra illustrations and never with individual icons, even painted ones. We reached this conclusion in part by investigating inscriptions that commemorated patrons who had Buddhist chapels constructed and decorated; in the four documents summarized below, the use of the term bian and bianxiang shows these principles:

Cave 148 (776).\textsuperscript{32}

(non-bianxiang): sculptures representing a parinirvāṇa scene, and Cintāmaṇi-cakra 如意輪觀音 and Amoghapāśa 不空羂索觀音; painted icons of a Thousand Buddhas.

(bianxiang): large murals of the Baoen 靜恩 bian, the Tianqingwen 天請問 bian, the Mañjuśrī 文殊 bian, the Samantabhadra 普賢 bian, the Eastern Bhaisajyaguru 東方藥師 bian, the Western Paradise 西方浹土變 bian, the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Avokokeśvara 千手千眼觀音 bian, the Maitreyā 彌勒 bian, the Cintāmaṇi-cakra bian, and the Amoghapāśa bian.

Cave 231 (839).\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} These are the Qima duge 駱馬都格 and Touhu jìng 投壺經. Mair has argued that the term bian here simply means various ways of riding horses or playing the game of pitch-pot ("Transformation tableaux," pp. 5–6), but the combination of a jìng 經 (a Classic or a sûtra) and a bian seems to indicate that such bian-pictures are the illustrations of the texts. See Zhou Yiliang 周一良, "Du ‘Tangdai sujiang kao’ " 讀唐代俗講考, in LWZ 1:163.

\textsuperscript{32} This information is derived from "The Record of the merit achieved by his honor Li Taibin 李太賓, a native of Longxi 陇西 during the Tang," which is inscribed on a stele in Dunhuang Cave 148. He Shizhe 賀世哲 has compared the statues and paintings mentioned in the text with those in the actual cave. "Cong gongyanggren tiji kan Mogaoku bufen dongku de yingjian niandai" 從供養人題記看莫高窟部分洞窟的營建年代, in Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, ed., Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyanggiren tiji 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), pp. 205–6. The inscription is partially translated in Mair, "Transformation tableaux," p. 11.

\textsuperscript{33} This information is derived from "The Record of the merit achieved under the Tibetans by the retired scholar Yin 際 at the Grottoes of Mogao Caves in the former Dunhuang prefecture." He Shizhe has compared the statues and paintings mentioned in the text with those in Cave 231 at Dunhuang. See ibid., pp. 207–8.
(non-bianxiang): statues of Śākyamuni Buddha and bodhisattvas; painted icons of Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and heavenly kings.

(bianxiang): large murals of the Western Paradise bian, the Lotus 蓮花經 bian, the Tianqingwen bian, the Baoen bian, the Bhaiṣajyaguru bian, the Huayan 華嚴 bian, the Maitreya bian, and the Vimalakīrti bian.

Cave 192 (876):

(non-bianxiang): seven statues centered on Amitābha 阿彌陀佛 Buddha, as well as those of Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra; painted icons of Cintāmaṇiçakra, (Amoghapāśa), the four directional Buddhas, and 66 other Buddhist icons.

(bianxiang): large murals of the Bhaiṣajyaguru bianxiang, the Tianqingwen bianxiang, the Amitābha bianxiang, and the Maitreya bianxiang.

Dunhuang manuscript (S. 4860v) “A record of merit achieved” (Gongde ji 功德記).

(non-bianxiang): statues of Śākyamuni Buddha and attendants; painted icons of Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Avolokiteśvara, Cintāmaṇiçakra, Amoghapāśa, four heavenly kings and attendants.

(bianxiang): large murals of the “Subjugation” bianxiang and other unnamed bianxiang.

These documents also include a number of measure words that are regularly connected with certain types of art work: pu, “layout” or “composition,” appears to be a general measure word, most frequently used for a group of statues or a complex bianxiang mural; while the word qu 畫, or “image,” is used for counting individual icons, either sculptured or painted. This distinction helps clarify a previous confusion. Commenting on the record of “one pu of seven statues (centered on) the Amitābha Buddha in the (central) niche” of Cave 192, Mair states, “From this inscription, we gain the sure knowledge that a single ‘layout’ or ‘spread’ (p’u) could depict more

34 This inscription in Cave 192 by the patrons Zhu Zaijing 朱再靖, Cao Shanseng 曹善僧, and 28 others is transcribed in ibid., pp. 84–85, and is briefly discussed by Mair in “Transformation tableaux,” p. 12.

35 This text is translated in ibid., pp. 7–10.
WHAT IS BIANXIANG? 121

than one event or episode.’ But neither this passage nor the measure word pu implies any narrative representation. In fact, these statues, which still partially exist in the cave, show a layout of a static Buddha icon flanked by his attendants.

The claim that, from the High Tang on, the terms bian and bianxiang pertained only to complex pictorial images is further supported by several important painting catalogues and texts compiled during the period from the ninth to eleventh centuries. These include Zhang Yanyuan’s (ca. 847–74) Record of Famous Paintings of Successive Dynasties, Duan Chengshi’s Record of Monasteries and Pagodas (Sita ji 寺塔記, mid-ninth century), Zhu Jingxuan’s 朱景玄 Record of Famous Paintings of the Tang (Tangchao minghualu 唐朝名畫錄, mid-ninth century), Huang Xiufu’s Famous Paintings of the Yizhou (Yizhou minghua lu, ca. 1006), and Guo Ruoxu’s 郭若虚 Record of Paintings Seen and Heard (Tuhua jianwen zhi 圖畫見聞志, late eleventh century). No less than forty-four bianxiang are catalogued, and they are all paintings, including both temple murals and picture scrolls.37 Moreover, their titles and descriptions suggest that they were complex compositions, not individual icons.

Information on the meaning of bianxiang during and after the High Tang may also be derived from divergent textual sources dating from the eighth century and after. Most of these materials have been collected by Mair and will not be cited here.38 Again, the bianxiang mentioned in these documents are mostly paintings. One exception is a nirvāṇa bian engraved on a stele, made for Empress Wu 武 in the Dayun Monastery 大雲寺;39 but this scene must have

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36 Mair’s understanding is partially influenced by his misinterpretation of the character shì 事, which he translates as “event.” See ibid., p. 12. Here this character means “work” or “a piece of work,” as we find in other Tang writings. See Či yuán 辛恿 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1988), 66. The phrase jìpú qìshì 一鋪七事 thus refers to a group of sculptures consisting of seven statues.


39 See ibid., p. 17. Xiang Da 向達 mentions a “nirvāṇa bian” in the Longmen Caves, but, as Mair suspected, this may in fact refer to the stele.
been executed in low relief or in line engraving, and is thus again a two-dimensional representation.\textsuperscript{40}

From studying these sources, we have arrived at the conclusion that, from the High Tang on, bianxiang were generally understood as a kind of two-dimensional, complex pictorial representation. Because they are two-dimensional, they are not sculptures,\textsuperscript{41} and because they are complex pictorial representations, they exclude individual icons. Yet the term bianxiang is certainly not synonymous with "painting" or "pictorial art"; it only refers to certain types of religious, mostly Buddhist, painting. In fact, except for a few references to Daoist paintings,\textsuperscript{42} the huge amount of works labeled as bian or bianxiang in the above sources are strictly Buddhist. Not a single secular painting created during the Tang-Song period was called bianxiang.

This observation forces us to realize a fundamental discrepancy between bianxiang and bianwen. The two most frequently quoted textual references to the bianwen performance—two poems by Ji Shilao and Li He 李賀—both suggest that the performers of bianwen were lay people—a singing girl in one case and a concubine in the other.\textsuperscript{43} Bianwen may be defined in many different ways but can never be claimed as a "religious" literary genre.\textsuperscript{44} According to Mair, seven

\textsuperscript{40} A similar stele is discussed by Alexander C. Soper, "A T'ang parinirvåna stele," \textit{Artibus Asiae} 12.1/2 (1959): 159-69.

\textsuperscript{41} This is also suggested by Duan Chengshi's remark, "During the Liang dynasty sculptured images were also called bian." By "also" Duan implied that during his time bian no longer referred to sculptured images.

\textsuperscript{42} Emperor Zhongzong 中宗 of the Tang declared that he heard that Daoist followers throughout the country had all been painting the bianxiang of Laozi's conversion of the Barbarians. See Mair, "Transformation tableaux," p. 41. Guo Ruoxu mentioned a bianxiang of a Daoist scripture by Feng Qing 濮清, and the Xuanhe huapu 宣和畫譜 of the Song contains the record of another Daoist bian by Dong Boren 董伯仁. See Mair, "Transformation tableaux," pp. 38, 40.

\textsuperscript{43} For English translations of the two poems, see Mair, \textit{T'ang Transformation Texts}, pp. 152, 155. For other textual evidence for the secular nature of bianwen performances, see Gao Guofan 高國藩, "Lun Dunhuang minjian bianwen" 論敦煌民間變文, in Gansusheng shehui Kexueyuan wenxue yanjiusuo 甘肅省社會科學院文學研究所, ed., \textit{Dunhuangxue lunji 敦煌學論集} (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1983), pp. 188-94; and Mair, \textit{T'ang Transformation Texts}, pp. 152-60.

\textsuperscript{44} See n. 1. It should be noted that Mair has made a similar distinction: "The data adduced in this article indicate that pien-hsiang were largely products of the elite (including the ecclesiastical establishment). This is in contrast to pien-wei and its oral antecedents which were situated in the folk and popular realms." See Mair, "Transformation tableaux," p. 43.
Dunhuang texts can be securely identified as bianwen.\textsuperscript{45} Of these, five are historical, secular stories, and two are based on Buddhist sūtras. Not coincidentally, only these two have their counterpart bianxiang recorded in Tang painting catalogues,\textsuperscript{46} and only the bianxiang of the “Subjugation of demons” appears in the Dunhuang Caves.

The heading of the “Bianwen on Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s rescue of his mother from hell” originally included a phrase “with pictures” (bìngtù 並圖), which was later crossed out, perhaps because the illustrations were lost. Another Dunhuang text, “Story of Han Qinhu 韓擒虎,” ends with the sentence, “The illustration (huaben 畫本) has come to an end.”\textsuperscript{47} In Ji Shilao and Li He’s poetic descriptions of performances of the “Zhaojun bian,” pictorial illustrations are introduced as huajuan 畫卷 (picture scroll) or shuzhi 蜀紙 (Sichuan paper).\textsuperscript{48} It should thus be clear that all pictures directly related to bianwen, as well as the only extant definable bianwen illustration of the “Subjugation of demons” (Fig. 5), are painted scrolls, not murals. It should also be clear that these actual bianwen illustrations were never called bianxiang. We must consider why in an age when the term bianxiang was so frequently used to describe painted scenes, the writers or copiers of these bianwen scripts seem to have deliberately avoided this word.

A general principle in studying religious art, including Buddhist cave-paintings, is that individual pictures and statues must be observed in their architectural and religious contexts: they are not

\textsuperscript{45} These are “Bianwen on Mahāmaudgalyāyana’s rescue of his mother from hell,” “Bianwen on the subjugation of demons,” “Bianwen on the Han general Wang Ling 王陵,” “Wang Zhaojun bianwen,” “Li Ling 李陵 bianwen,” “Zhao Yichao 張議潮 bianwen,” and “Zhang Huishen 張淮深 bianwen.” See Mair, T’ang Transformation Texts, pp. 17–23.

\textsuperscript{46} Fu Yunzi mentioned a “Mahāmaudgalyāyana bianxiang” (LWL 1:154), but I have been unable to locate the source. A “Subjugation” bianxiang was also executed by two religious painters, Li Yongji 李用及 and Li Xiangkun 李象坤, in the Anguo 安國 Temple. See Alexander C. Soper, Kuo Jo-shū’s Experiences in Painting: An Eleventh Century History of Chinese Painting Together with the Chinese Text in Facsimile (Washington, D. C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1951), pp. 52, 98; cited in Mair, “Transformation tableaux,” p. 39.

\textsuperscript{47} For discussions of this case, see Mair, T’ang Transformation Texts, pp. 11–12.

\textsuperscript{48} See n. 43.
portable objects that can be carried around and appreciated independently but are components of a larger pictorial program designed for a particular ritual structure for religious worship. In other words, Dunhuang murals were an integral part of cave-temples and the act of painting (and viewing) was itself a ritual practice. Our interpretation of such "works of art" must take these points into account.

Applying this idea to analyze the bianxiang pictures in Dunhuang caves, we find without much difficulty that it would have been impossible to use these paintings for bianwen storytelling. The subject matter of surviving bianwen stories, after all, was predominantly secular and the original performers and audience were in most cases lay-people. Unlike the picture scrolls used in bianwen performances, Dunhuang bianxiang are integral parts of cave temples, which fall into four architectural types of distinctive religious functions.49 Those belonging to Type 1 have a number of tiny cells attached to the main chamber (Fig. 1a), which contains a large Buddha statue at the rear and is richly decorated with iconic and narrative scenes on its walls and ceiling. In the best preserved cave of this type, Cave 285, the walls are covered by images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, various Buddhist deities, and meditating monks, as well as some of the most beautifully executed narrative scenes from the Western Wei period (535–56). The largest narrative sequence appears on the south wall and illustrates the story of five hundred bandits who, symbolized by five figures, appear six times in the picture: fighting with soldiers, being punished by officials, wandering in the wilderness, devoting themselves to Buddhism, and attaining enlightenment. This and other compositions in this cave unmistakably fall into a typical narrative mode called a "sequential" or "cyclic" representation.50

49 See Xiao Mo 肖黙, "Dunhuang Mogaoku de dongku xingzhì" 敦煌莫高窟的洞窟型制, in Dunhuang yanjiusuo, ed., Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku 中國石窟·敦煌莫高窟, 5 vols. (Beijing and Tokyo: Wenwu chubanshe and Heibonsha, 1982–87), 2:187–199. Xiao's typology also includes the "Nirvāṇa cave" and the "Giant Buddha cave," but caves of these types are few and not germane to my study.

50 In Kurt Weitzmann's definition, a "cyclic" narrative is "a series of consecutive compositions with separate and centered actions, repeating the actors in each and so observing at the same time the rules of the unity of time and place." See his Illustrations in Roll and Codex: A Study of the Origin and Method of Text Illustration (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 17.
Figs. 1a–d. Floor plans of Dunhuang caves. (a) Cave 285 (Type 1), Western Wei dynasty; from *Dunhuang mogaoku* 1:209. (b) Cave 254 (Type 2), Northern Wei dynasty; ibid. 1:208. (c) Cave 45 (Type 3), High Tang; ibid. 3:239. (d) Cave 196 (Type 4), late Tang; ibid. 4:236.
However, they were definitely not used in popular story-recitation, because this cave was built for the practice of meditation by monks. This type of cave, called a *Vihāra* (monastery) in Sanskrit, originated in India. The tiny cells, where monks sat in silence for days and nights, flanked the main chamber; the Buddha statue in this main chamber provided them with the subject of mental concentration, while the narrative pictures presented them with precedents of devotion. The religious idea and practice associated with the *Vihāra* caves at Dunhuang are entirely alien to any kind of secular entertainment.

Caves belonging to Type 2 have a sculptured "pagoda" in the center (Fig. 1b) and again derived their basic structure from an Indian prototype. The religious practice related to this architectural form was commonly known as circumambulation, in which the worshiper, entering the cave by the east gateway, walked around the pagoda in a clockwise direction. Since the central pagoda (which developed from the Indian stūpa) was a chief symbol of Śākyamuni, circumambulation expressed the devotion to the historical Buddha. In practicing this ritual the worshipers accumulated good deeds. So preached the *Sūtra on the Life and Conduct of the Bodhisattva* (*Pusa ben-xing jing* 菩薩本行經): "Those who keep circumambulating around the Buddha’s [image] or the place of a Buddha’s pagoda will gain countless blessings."\(^{51}\) It is interesting to note that many narrative paintings created during the Northern Dynasties, including jātaka-tale pictures and illustrations of Śākyamuni’s life, appear in such pagoda-caves (where ten of the eleven compositions of the Buddha’s life scenes are found).\(^{52}\) Bai Huawen has interpreted these pictures as visual aids in *bianwen* storytelling.\(^{53}\) But considering the religious function and symbolism of the pagoda-caves, we can only conclude that these murals, whose major theme is the Buddha’s own accumulation of merits extending back into countless rebirths in the past, functioned to inspire faith among the worshipers. Such a close relationship between pictorial narrative and the ritual of circumambulation had been displayed in Indian Buddhist art as early as the second and first centuries B.C.; stories from the Buddha’s

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\(^{51}\) Quoted in Xiao Mo, p. 190.

\(^{52}\) These are Dunhuang Caves 254, 260, 263, 428, 431, and 290.

\(^{53}\) Bai Huawen, p. 505.
lives were illustrated on the gates and railings along the circular paths surrounding the great stūpas at Sāndhī and Bhārhut. A It is difficult to imagine that in these Buddhist holy sites the ritual of circumambulation could be replaced by or mixed with colorful storytelling for public amusement. If the narrative scenes were "visual aids," they could only have been assisting the Buddhist rite.

Both the Vihāra and pagoda caves were popular before the Sui unification of China. They have close ties with Buddhist architecture of India and Central Asia and an ideology that has strong Hīnayāna overtones, as pictures in these caves often stress monastic practices, self-discipline, and aloofness from society. In contrast, other types of Dunhuang caves have an architectural style that is essentially "Chinese," and their murals and sculptures, which illustrate Mahāyāna sūtras, attest to the dominance of Mahāyāna doctrines. A majority of Sui and Tang caves belong to Type 3 (Fig. 1c), while most caves built during the Five Dynasties and Song fall into Type 4 (Fig. 1d). Scholars have demonstrated that these new caves imitated the wooden-framed Buddha or Image Hall in a monastery, which in turn was derived from the Throne Hall in the imperial palace. A majority of Sui and Tang caves belong to Type 3 (Fig. 1c), while most caves built during the Five Dynasties and Song fall into Type 4 (Fig. 1d). Scholars have demonstrated that these new caves imitated the wooden-framed Buddha or Image Hall in a monastery, which in turn was derived from the Throne Hall in the imperial palace. In cave Types 3 and 4, the central pagoda has disappeared, leaving a Buddha statue as the main icon, either in a large niche on the rear wall (Type 3), or on a U-shaped platform in the middle of a cave (Type 4). The form of religious worship associated with these cave chapels and their interior decorations was guanxiang 觀像, or "contemplating holy icons."

A number of Mahāyāna sūtras teach the guanxiang exercise, through which one aims to visualize the true images of various Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Often by initially concentrating on a painted or sculptured icon, the worshiper could attempt "a systematic building-up of visual images (in his mind’s eye), each as
complete and precise as possible, in a sequence from the simple toward the complex.’’57 It is possible that guanxiang texts did not originate from India but were invented by Central Asian or Chinese Buddhists.58 These texts had appeared by the mid-fifth century, but it was during the Tang dynasty that the guanxiang practice became especially popular, as indicated by the appearance of Chinese commentaries on these sūtras and abundant jingbian (sūtra bianxiang) related to the ritual. The monk Shandao, who painted some three hundred Amitābha bianxiang in his lifetime, also composed an essay, ‘‘Methods for the merit of samādhi by contemplating the image of the Amitābha Buddha’’ (Guan nian Amitu o fo xiang hai san mei gongde famen 觀念阿彌陀佛相海三昧功德法門), in which he instructed: ‘‘If there is a person who paints and constructs a bianxiang of the adornments of the Pure Land in accordance with the Sūtra on Visualizing Amitābha and contemplates the divine place day and night, ... If there is a person who paints a bian-picture in accordance with the sūtra and contemplates its adornments such as the divine trees, divine ponds, and divine buildings, he will absolve his multitudinous sins in his present life.’’59 Such demands that religious devotion be expressed by dedicating and contemplating ‘‘sūtra bianxiang’’ explain the great proliferation of such art works at Dunhuang indicated in Table 1.60

57 Soper, Literary Evidence, p. 144.
58 See Abe, ‘‘Art and practice.’’ The guanxiang practice was also associated with some early Chinese Buddhist sects. One of the most important events in the history of Chinese Buddhism was the establishment of the Pure Land Sect by Huiyuan: in 402, this master monk assembled his followers on Mt. Lu and together they made the vow to be reborn in the Buddha’s Western Paradise. The vow was made before an image of Amitābha and accompanied by an offering of incense and flowers. As Zürcher has remarked: ‘‘This urge to have a concrete object of worship, perceptible by the senses, characterizes the Buddhism of the Lushan. Everywhere, in the biographical records as well as in Hui-yuan’s own writings, we find the same stress on visual representation: the use of icons in meditation, visualization of Amitābha, his hymns to the ‘shadow of the Buddha,’ the dharmakāya (transcendent body) of the Buddha and that of the Bodhisattva etc.’’ Zürcher, 1:220.
59 T’1959.25.
60 These statistics are based on the motif index of Dunhuang murals provided in Dunhuang wenwu yanjusuo, ed., Neirong zonglu, pp. 221–42. I exclude illustrations of the Parinirvāṇa Sūtra, the Xianyu jing or the Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish, and the Vimalakīrti Sūtra. The Tang Parinirvāṇa bianxiang follows earlier Nirvāṇa scenes depicting an episode in the life of the Buddha and does not show an exact ‘‘iconic’’ representation; the Xianyu jing, which is essentially a collection of Buddhist tales, is not a typical ‘‘Sūtra’’; while Vimalakīrti bianxiang are composed according to the ‘‘oppositional’’ mode and will be discussed later. The method
It should be noted that all the bianxiang listed in Table 1 are “iconic” representations, not typical pictorial narratives.\textsuperscript{61} Differing from a narrative painting, whose main purpose is to tell a story, an iconic depiction is a symmetrical composition centered on an icon\textsuperscript{62}—a Buddha or a bodhisattva. The visual centralization is not only apparent in the icon’s extraordinary size and solemnity, but is also reinforced by surrounding figures and the architectural setting, which guide the viewer’s gaze toward the central icon. The most

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Dunhuang “sūtra bianxiang”}
\begin{tabular}{lcccccc}
\hline
Bianxiang & Pre-Tang & early & Tang high & mid & late & Post-Tang & Total \\
\hline
Amitābha 阿彌陀 & 1 & 12 & 7 & 7 & 12 & 24 & 63 \\
Amitāyus 無量壽 & 0 & 1 & 21 & 34 & 18 & 10 & 84 \\
Maitreya 彌勒 & 5 & 6 & 14 & 24 & 17 & 21 & 87 \\
Bhaiṣajya 藥師 & 4 & 1 & 3 & 21 & 31 & 26 & 96 \\
Lotus 蘭花經 & 2 & 1 & 5 & 7 & 8 & 13 & 36 \\
Avalokiteśvara 觀音經 & 0 & 0 & 4 & 2 & 2 & 5 & 13 \\
Huayan 華嚴經 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 5 & 9 & 14 & 29 \\
Baoen 報恩經 & 0 & 0 & 2 & 7 & 11 & 12 & 32 \\
Tianqingwen 天請問經 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 10 & 8 & 13 & 32 \\
Jin’gang 金剛經 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 8 & 9 & 0 & 17 \\
Jinguangming 金光明經 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 4 & 4 & 3 & 11 \\
Lengjia 楞伽經 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 2 & 5 & 5 & 12 \\
Siyi Fantian wen 思益梵天問經 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 3 & 8 & 12 \\
Miyan 密嚴經 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 2 & 2 & 4 \\
Fumu enzhong 父母恩重經 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 0 & 1 & 0 & 1 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}


\textsuperscript{62} In this study, instead of following a modern semiotic definition, I use the term “icon” to designate a sacred image, specifically a type of painting that intended to be the focus of prayer and devotion.
crucial difference between this type of mural and a narrative representation, however, lies in the relationship between the picture and the spectator. In a narrative painting the principal figures are always engaged in certain events, acting and reacting to one another. The composition is thus essentially self-contained; and the significance of the representation is shown in its own pictorial context. The viewer is a witness, not a participant. In an iconic scene, the central icon, portrayed frontally as a solemn image of majesty, ignores the surrounding crowds and stares at the viewer outside the picture. The composition is thus not self-contained; although the icon exists in the pictorial context within the composition, its significance relies on the presence of a viewer or worshiper outside it. In fact, the openness of the composition is based on the assumption that there is a worshiper who is engaged in direct relationship with the icon. It is based on this assumption that the iconic composition has become universal in various religious art traditions around the world.\footnote{For example, we find that the Eastern Christian church decreed that icons partake of the spiritual essence of the figures they depict and that they constitute "the essential point of contact between the human and divine realms." See G. B. Ladner, "Concept of the image in the Greek Fathers and the Byzantine iconoclastic controversy," Dumbarton Oaks Papers 7 (1953): 10.}

Given their ritual functions and pictorial forms, the iconic "sūtra bianxiang" in the Dunhuang caves could not have been used in storytelling. It is true that in some "sūtra bianxiang," such as the Lotus bianxiang and the Amitāyus bianxiang, the central icon is encircled or flanked by "narrative scenes." These scenes, however, are based on selected passages from various chapters of the sūtras and rarely form a coherent narrative sequence.\footnote{For example, in a typical Lotus Sūtra bianxiang, the Buddha image is surrounded by scenes that derive their subjects from the twenty-seven chapters of the sūtra. See Shi Pingting 施萍婷 and He Shizhe, "Dunhuang bihua zhong de Fahua jingbiang chutan" 敦煌壁畫中的法華經變初探, in Dunhuang Mogaoku, 3:171–91; Joseph L. Davidson, The Lotus Sūtra in Chinese Art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954); Matsumoto Eiichi 松本栄一, Tonkōga no kenkyū 敦煌畵的研究, 2 vols. (Tōhō bunka gakuen Tōkyō kenkyūjo, 1937), 1:110–42. An Amitāyus bianxiang often includes a depiction of Ajatasatru’s story in a side panel. But as Arthur Waley has pointed out, this illustration is most likely based on Shandao’s commentary on the Sūtra, rather than illustrating the original script. See An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Painting (New York: Grove Press, 1923), p. 128. See also Matsumoto Eiichi, 1:45–59. Instead of telling stories, these so-called "narrative" scenes allude to and explain Buddha’s teaching and are thus similar to the "analogies" and "parables" used widely in sūtra lectures.} Sūtras, such as the
Huayan jing (Buddhāvatamsakamahāvaipulya-sūtra) and the Yaoši liuliguang jing 藥師琉璃光經 (Bhaiṣajyaguruvaidūryaprabha-sūtra), are highly abstract, and their bianxiang either contain no narrative scenes or include discrete illustrations of the "twelve great vows of the Bhaiṣajya Buddha" and the "nine forms of violent death." Again, at Dunhuang there are numerous bodhisattva bianxiang whose sole content are the images of these Buddhist divinities and their attendants. Because of their boundless compassion, these bodhisattvas were believed to be able to intervene in people’s lives to save them from danger, help them to achieve happiness, and guide them to bliss in the afterlife. The fundamental method of seeking help from these compassionate deities was to invoke their names, recite their merits, and reproduce and contemplate their images. At Dunhuang these images were copied from large murals into woodblock prints. Among these is an image of Avalokiteśvara accompanied by instructions on the proper use of the icon:

He who wishes by reciting this spell to obtain the protection of the Holy One must first in a clean place put this holy image, make appropriate offerings, and then submit and do obeisance before he recites. He must with whole heart accept and do obeisance to all the Tathāgatas, put away all turbid emotions and share the nature of the Great Merciful Ārya Avalokiteśvara Mahāsattva; and he must pray that all Sentient Beings may be in this accord, himself doing obeisance ten times with head and visage. Then he must sit straight and with undistracted heart concentrate upon the recitation of Ārya Avalokiteśvara’s Lotus Flower Division Heart-spell, to wit: Om Ārolīka. Svāhā. The might and virtue of this heart-spell are wide and great. It can diminish evil-karma and keep away disaster. It can prolong life, increase prosperity. If you can recite it a full 300,000 times, even the most evil karma can be completely abolished, and no misfortunes or disasters can molest you. You can become intelligent and eloquent to any extent you please. If you can manage to recite it a million times all sentient beings who behold you will attain a completely illumined state of mind and in the future certainly be born in Paradise, to such limits as are defined in the original sūtra.

65 See Waley, Catalogue, pp. 62-70.
66 In addition to the many Guanyin jing 觀音經 bianxiang that are centered on Avalokiteśvara, at Dunhuang there are 65 Cintāmanicakra bianxiang, 57 Amoghapāsa bianxiang, 40 Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Avalokiteśvara bianxiang, 10 Water-moon Avalokiteśvara bianxiang, 131 Mañjuśrī bianxiang, 16 Qianshoubuo 千手觀音 Mañjuśrī bianxiang, and 125 Samantabhadra bianxiang. These statistics are based on Dunhuang wenwu yan-jiusuo, ed., Neirong zonglu, pp. 221-42.
67 Trans. in Waley, Catalogue, pp. 195-96. The woodblock print is reproduced in Whitfield, 2:140.
The chief compositional mode of Dunhuang art was, from the very beginning, "iconic." All 492 Dunhuang caves, built over a period of more than seven hundred years, contain large or small icons in painted and sculptured forms, and iconic murals constitute over ninety-five percent of the total pictorial compositions. It is well-known that depictions of jātaka tales (bēnshēng 本生), Buddhist didactic stories (bīyu 聽喻; avadāna), and the Buddha's life (bēnxīng 本行) flourished during the Northern Dynasties and the Sui. But even during this "golden age" of Dunhuang narrative art such paintings were limited in number: in the 110 caves dated to this period only twenty-seven pictures illustrating eleven jātaka tales have been found. Depictions of Buddhist didactic tales are even fewer—seven illustrations of five stories.68

The narrative content and format of these paintings, however, do not automatically suggest that they were used in oral storytelling. Our question is: Could they have been practically used in bianwen performances? The Dunhuang caves are carved into a mountain cliff. Most of them consist of double chambers connected by a narrow corridor, while others have a single chamber with a passage-way sometimes thirty feet long. In front of each cave was built a wooden-framed facade.69 With the caves designed in this way, the rear chambers, which contain most paintings and statues, would have been very dark. Even today, when most wooden facades have collapsed, a visitor can barely make out the tiny images and inscriptions in these cave-chambers. Rather strangely, the ceiling of a cave, which is especially obscure, is often richly decorated with narrative scenes. In fact, typical narrative paintings in the "sequen-

68 These jātaka tales include the Śyāma jātaka (Caves 461, 438, 299, 301, 302), the Ruru jātaka (九色鹿, Cave 257), the Śibi jātaka (Caves 275, 254, 302), the Brāhmaṇa 婆羅門 jātaka (caves 285, 302), the Candraprabha jātaka (Caves 275, 302), the Sunetra jātaka (Cave 302), the Mahāśāttra jātaka (Caves 254, 428, 299, 301, 302, 419, 417), the Sujāta 須闍提 jātaka (Cave 296), the Sudāna jātaka (Caves 428, 419 423, 427, 423, 427), the Kalyāṇakārīn 善士太子 jātaka (Cave 296), the Pradyotaprādīpa 晴明王 jātaka (Cave 302), the Byilin-gar-li 毗楞竭梨王 jātaka (Caves 275, 302), and the Jalavāhāna 流水長者 jātaka (Cave 417). Buddhist didactic tales include the story about a suicidal monk (Caves 257, 285), Nanda's 難陀 story (Cave 254), Sumati's 須摩提女 story (Cave 237), the story of five hundred bandits (Caves 285, 296), and the story about a virtuous nun (Cave 296). See Takada Osamu 高田修, "Fojiao gushihua yu Dunhuang bihua" 佛教故事畫與敦煌壁畫, in Dunhuang Mogaoku, 2:200–208.
tial’’ style created during the Northern Wei and Sui dynasties always appear on the ceiling.\textsuperscript{70}

The difficulty in seeing these cave-paintings disappears when we study the pictures in beautifully printed catalogues, which are now the chief research source of those scholars outside the Dunhuang Academy. When individual scenes and statues are photographed with the help of modern technology and reproduced with extraordinary clarity, they are divorced from their contexts and seem analogous to individual ‘‘paintings.’’ They are readily viewed as self-contained ‘‘pictorial stories,’’ or as ‘‘visual devices’’ in certain oral performances. The most telling example of this kind of misreading concerns murals depicting the story of the ‘‘Subjugation of demons,’’ which various authors have used as evidence for the relationship between Dunhuang wall-paintings and bianwen performance. Cheng Yizhong, for example, making much of the word chu 處 (the place where . . .) in the bianwen version of the story found in the secret library at Dunhuang, argued that the storytellers relied on the mural:

We find that most Dunhuang illustrations of this bianwen are centered on Sārīputra and Raudrākṣa—the two main characters of the story—and that various episodes in their magical contest are woven between these two figures to form a coherent cartoon-like pictorial representation. If the ‘‘place’’ (chu) of each episode were not specifically indicated in an oral recitation, the audience would not be able to comprehend the picture. Thus the story-teller pointed out explicitly the ‘‘place’’ (chu) of an episode in every verse part, so the listeners would find the corresponding scene in the mural. This is a definite proof of how bianwen and bianxiang were closely used together.\textsuperscript{71}

Cheng’s theory sounds convincing, especially when we find in the newly published Grotto Art of China: the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang that these murals are full of dramatic details painted in brilliant colors and inscribed with explanatory cartouches often copied from the bianwen. However, this theory seems to work only when these murals are studied from these reproductions; in the actual caves they can hardly be seen, and would be extremely difficult to be used in a

\textsuperscript{69} Xiao Mo, p. 188.

\textsuperscript{70} These outstanding narrative paintings can be found on the ceilings of Caves 290, 296, 301, 303, 423, 420, and 419. See Takada Osamu, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{71} Cheng Yizhong, p. 389.
performance. The kind of mural Cheng mentioned appeared during the late Tang and continued to enjoy popularity through the Song. The most elaborate of these murals are found in Type 4 caves, in which a group of statues stand on a U-shaped platform in front of a large partition (Fig. 1d). A pictorial representation of the story of the “Subjugation of demons” often appears on the rear walls behind the central platform, with a narrow space about three feet wide between it and the partition. As two art historians, Li Yongning 李永寧 and Cai Weitang 蔡偉堂, have pointed out, it would be impossible for a picture at that particular location in a dark cave-chamber to serve any kind of oral recitation.72

At this point, we might ask whether bianxiang murals were designed to be viewed in a conventional manner at all. The discipline of modern art history is largely based on the theories of perception: analyses of forms and perspective always assume a viewer through whose eyes the researcher observes and interprets a work. We can trace this notion to the fifteenth-century Italian theoretician Alberti, who first defined “painting.” According to Alberti, as summarized by Svetlana Alpers, “[a painting] is conceived of as a window onto a second world. The viewer, rather than the world seen, has priority.”73 It is no accident that this theory did not appear until the Renaissance, when painting began to gain an independent status and was commissioned by individual patrons.

If a painting was not made to be seen in this “modern” manner, our whole methodology based on viewing and reading is shaken. We are forced to answer the question: who was the supposed viewer or reader? It is said that a master sculptor and his student were making an icon. While the master was carefully modeling and decorating the back of the statue, the student became impatient and asked him, “Why do you waste paint and time on a spot no one will see?” To this his teacher answered, “The god will see.” This anec-


dote reveals two fundamentally different attitudes toward artistic creation. To the student, the purpose of the statue was to please ordinary viewers like himself. To the master, the act of making the statue was an expression of religious commitment. He did not rule out the problem of “viewing,” but, for him, the viewers included not only worshipers but also the unseen god, and the value of his work lay primarily in his devotion to the god.

This anecdote thus reveals an important aspect of religious art that is often overlooked in a standard artistic analysis. Some seven thousand inscriptions in the 492 caves at Dunhuang explain the purposes of making caves and images. They were written by donors of different social statuses from local rulers to a peasant wife, and they vary in length and literary style. But the central theme of these inscriptions remains the same: devotion. In a thorough check of these inscriptions, I have found not one word pertaining to “seeing” or “exhibiting” (or, for that matter, to “performance”). Most short inscriptions follow a simple formula: “[the donor] dedicates,” or “[the donor] dedicates wholeheartedly.” Long inscriptions, which are often entitled “a record of merits and virtues” (gongde ji), often begin with praise for the Buddha and the greatness of his benevolence. They then describe in detail the process of constructing the cave, the statues and murals, and the donor(s)’ hope that the merit earned from this devotion will be transferred to the ruler, local community, and deceased ancestors or living relatives. Short or long, these inscriptions document the donors’ hopes that by constructing a cave or painting a bianxiang they could accumulate merit. The same idea must have motivated people to make caves and images on vertical cliffs and high ceilings. The near impossibility of reaching these dangerous places became itself a challenge in religious devotion and artistic creation.

Returning to the murals depicting the “Subjugation of demons” at Dunhuang, these paintings present another problem that has long troubled their researchers. Following the commonly accepted approach that these works are illustrations of the bianwen, a researcher naturally begins his investigation by identifying painted

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74 Such long inscriptions include the “records of merit and virtue” of Zhai Fengda (642, Cave 220), Li Huairang 李淮譚 (698), Li Taibin (776), a gentleman Yin, Wu sengtong 吳僧統, Suo Falü 索法慮, and the Zhai 翟 family.
scenes (and their inscriptions) with certain passages in the literary source; he then arranges the scenes sequentially, according to the textual narrative. The result of such a research is shown in Fig. 2, in which all scenes in a “Subjugation” mural have been identified and are replaced by serial numbers. In terms of iconography such research seems fruitful, but exactly at this point the researcher reaches a dead end. The sequence indicated in the painting by his numbering system is illogical because it does not suggest any “sequence” or “order” of visual images. To read these scenes according to their assigned numbers, it is necessary to shift our gaze from one corner to another, to cross the whole width of the painting (which could be forty feet across), or to “scan” the complex composition to search for a minute detail. Our eyes and mind would spin until we got totally dizzy and finally gave up. However, all “Subjugation” murals created during the late Tang and Song have such irregular compositions.

The design of the “Subjugation” murals might be explained in several ways. It is possible that, since the “Subjugation” story had

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**Fig. 2.** Reconstruction of the narrative sequence of the “Subjugation” bianxiang in Dunhuang Cave 9; from Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, p. 173.
become so well-known by the late Tang, visitors to the caves would find no difficulty in reading these illustrations no matter how they were organized. It is also possible that such a painting was a deliberate ‘pictorial riddle,’ which demanded deciphering and thus engaged interest. One might also argue that because of the difficulty in comprehending the mural, a storyteller was necessary in guiding the audience through the painted scene.  

None of these explanations, however, are persuasive enough to resolve the problem. If it was indeed assumed that the contemporary visitors could easily identify the painted scenes, the explanatory cartouches would have been unnecessary. If the mural was a deliberate ‘riddle,’ then some quick clues would be evident, but instead these pictures seem only to demand hard labor. And if the mural was designed for a storyteller conducting a tour, then surely it would have been located where there would be enough room. Stymied by the dilemma, some scholars have finally found a solution: the design of these murals is simply a ‘mystery.’

To resolve this and other problems we need new angles of observation. I want to propose that (1) devotional art is essentially an art of image-making rather than image-viewing, and (2) the process of image-making has its own logic that differs from those found in writing and oral recitation. Based on these two propositions I will closely analyze a large group of murals depicting the tale of the ‘Subjugation of demons,’ whose various compositions created over the course of five hundred years provide us with excellent materials in studying the nature of Dunhuang bianxiang, especially its relationship with Dunhuang literature.

75 See Cheng Yizhong, p. 389. Indeed, scholars have noticed that pictures used in storytelling, such as the painted banners and scrolls in the par tradition in India, do not always follow a linear narrative sequence. Joseph C. Miller, for example, has observed that ‘Some pictorial scenes combined two or more narrated events in a visually integrated way. This finding underscores the different communication potentials between linearly patterned verbal narrative and spatially patterned pictorial narrative.’ See J. C. Miller, Jr., ‘Current Investigations in the Genre of Rājasthāni par painting recitations,’ in Winand M. Callewaert, ed., Early Hindi Devotional Literature in Current Research, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta no. 8, p. 118. But since paintings used in these traditions are portable scrolls and banners, they are not comparable with Dunhuang ‘Subjugation’ murals and cannot be taken as direct evidence in interpreting the function of these murals.
BIANXIANG AND BIANWEN: DUNHUANG PAINTINGS
ON THE "SUBJUGATION OF DEMONS"

Painting and literature on the "Subjugation of demons" have been well researched. Various versions of the story have been found in a number of sūtras and in a complete bianwen text,76 and we also know at least twenty-one Dunhuang paintings (eighteen murals, a picture scroll, a fragment of a silk banner, and a set of ink drawings) depicting the tale.77 The bianwen text has been studied by many historians of Tang literature and has been excellently translated into English by Mair,78 and the paintings have been catalogued and discussed by art historians in China, Japan, and the West.79 While these studies have shed much light on the development of this impor-

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76 Altogether four copies of the Xiangmo bian 降魔變 were found in the secret library at Dunhuang. One, which originally belonged to Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, is now missing and only a transcript of the text survives in Luo’s book, Dunhuang lingshi 敦煌零拾. Another version, in the Pelliot collection (P. 4615), is broken into six pieces and severely damaged. The third manuscript (S. 4398) is also a segment and contains only the first forty-one lines of the bianwen. Fortunately, the fourth copy appears to be complete. The two fragments of this version are preserved in the British Library (S. 5511) and the Beijing Library.

77 Li Yongning and Cai Weitang listed nineteen Dunhuang murals depicting the "Subjugation" story. The one in Cave 94, however, is identified according to a text. The picture itself can no longer be seen. See Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, pp. 170–71. For scholarly works on these paintings, see n. 79 below.


tant theme, there is a general tendency to emphasize a one-sided relationship between art and literature, in which pictures passively "illustrate" the bianwen. I would argue, however, that the relationship between the paintings and texts was far more complex and dynamic. Most noticeably, the development of visual imagery followed its own logic. The story was constantly restructured and enriched in pictorial forms, and new images in turn influenced literary compositions and contributed to the general development of the story. A close examination of such interactions will not only reshape the developmental sequence of this specific tale, but will also sharpen our method in studying Dunhuang art and literature in general.

The full version of the "Subjugation" tale consists of two loosely connected parts. The first part concerns finding the Buddhist holy site of Jetavana Garden 祇園. In his travels to the kingdom of Rājagṛha 王舍城 to arrange his son's marriage, Sudatta 須達, a minister of the kingdom of Śrāvastī 舍衛城, heard that the Buddha was an enlightened man. He paid tribute to the Buddha, and upon receiving the Buddha's instruction he immediately became a devoted Buddhist. He hoped to invite the Buddha to preach in his native kingdom, but for this he first had to build a monastery in a perfect location. Thereupon the Buddha sent his disciple, Śāriputra, to accompany and guide Sudatta in his search for a site for the monastery. After some time they found a garden that belonged to the Crown Prince of Śrāvastī. Sudatta covered the garden's ground with gold—the price for the site—and dedicated the place to Buddhism.

The second part of the story begins with an abrupt turn: it has a new theme—the magical contest between Buddhists and heretics—and new central characters—the two competitors Śāriputra and Raurakṣa. The news that Sudatta was going to build a Buddhist monastery in Jetavana Garden had reached the ears of the heretics. Confident of their magical power, they proposed to the king that before a monastery could be established, the Buddhists would have to compete with them. The contest was witnessed by the king and

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80 It should be pointed out, however, that in their article on the "Subjugation" pictures, Li Yongning and Cai Weitang have noted many differences between these murals and the bianwen story. But as I have shown earlier, their identification of these pictures still follows the literary narrative and neglects the paintings' own structure.
all his officials, and six times in a row Śāriputra demonstrated his superior power over Raurakṣa, the chief magician of the heretics. The story ends with the surrender and conversion of the heretics and, upon the Buddha’s arrival, the whole kingdom embraced Buddhism as the only truth.

This summary is based on an early version of the “Subjugation” story, entitled “Sudatta builds a monastery”. 須達起精舍 in the Xianyu jing, a collection of Buddhist tales recorded by eight Chinese monks at a Buddhist convention in Yudian. After being assembled in Turfan, the book was taken in 435 to Liangzhou in Gansu, where a monk named Huilang 惠朗 assigned it the present title. Evidence suggests that the far more elaborate Dunhuang “Subjugation” bianwen written three centuries later was based on this sûtra. Most tellingly, the bianwen version follows the bipartite narrative structure of the Xianyu jing story, while other pre-Tang versions of the tale contain only the first part of the tale.

Interestingly, the earliest depiction of the “Subjugation” tale at Dunhuang is also based on the Xianyu jing. This picture (Fig. 3) is found in Cave 12 in the Western Caves of a Thousand Buddhas 西千佛洞 and has been dated to the Northern Zhou. The composition is roughly divided into two registers each containing a number of inscribed scenes of unequal width. The narrative proceeds from left to right on the upper register, and then turns back on the lower register. Although partially blackened by smoke, its twelve scenes and accompanying inscriptions are still generally comprehensible.

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81 T 202.418–22.
82 A detail in the bianwen gives the text a definite date: in the “prelude” Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 is referred to by a lengthy title—“Emperor of Kaiyuan and Tianbao who is a Sage in Civil Affairs and Divine in Military Matters and who Responds to the True Way” 開元天寶聖文神武應道皇帝. Zheng Zhenduo first noticed that Xuanzong assumed this royal title in 748 but soon changed it in 749. See Kenneth K. S. Ch’en, Buddhism in China: a Historical Survey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), p. 289; Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, p.169.
83 These sûtras include Tanguo 曼果 (2nd century), Zhongbenqi jing: Xuda pin 中本起經 須達品; Tan Wuchan 竇無識 (385–433), Daban niepan jing: Shizhou pusapin 大般涅槃經 異子吼菩薩品; Tan Wuchan, Fosuoxingsean: Huagei Gudupin 佛所行贊 化給孤獨品; and Huiyan 慧嚴 (5th century): Daban niepan jing: Shizhou pusapin 大般涅槃經 異子吼菩薩品.
84 This cave is assigned the no. 10 in old catalogues. The most up-to-date introduction to this cave is in Dunhuang yanjiu yuan, ed., Chūgoku sokkutsu: Ansei yurinkutsu 中國石窟 安西榆林窟 (Heibonsha, 1990), pp. 291–93.
Fig. 3. The “Subjugation” bianxiang in Cave 12, Western Caves of a Thousand Buddhas, Northern Zhou dynasty. Drawing by Wu Hung.
(Upper register):

Scene 1. In this largest scene in the painting, the Buddha sits in front of a building surrounded by trees. Śāriputra stands beside the Buddha while Sudatta is bowing to them. The cartouche reads: "Before Elder Sudatta returns to Śrāvastī to build the monastery he bids farewell to the Buddha. The Buddha and Śāriputra together [commission] the construction of the monastery. [This is] the moment when [Sudatta] says good-by to the Buddha."

Scene 2. Separated by a tall tree from the previous scene, two figures walking toward the right are identified in an inscription: "Elder Sudatta and Śāriputra go to Śrāvastī to build the monastery for the Buddha . . . [the rest of the inscription is blurred]."

Scene 3. Śāriputra sits inside a building. The rest of the picture and the inscription are unclear.

Scene 4. Sudatta and Śāriputra converse among lush trees. Although the cartouche is illegible, the picture may represent their finding Jetavana Garden. 85

(Lower register):

Scene 5. A large tiger devours a water-buffalo. The cartouche states, "[This is] the moment when Raudrākṣa transforms himself into a water-buffalo, and Śāriputra transforms himself into a lion."

Scene 6. The picture and inscription are completely blackened.

Scene 7. Śāriputra receives homage from a kneeling figure, probably a demon. This and the previous scene may together represent one of the six magical contests between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa, in which the holy monk transforms himself into a white elephant which dries up a pond conjured up by the heretic. The inscription is completely blackened.

Scene 8. A large bird catches a dragon. The inscription explains, "Raudrākṣa transforms himself into a dragon, and Śāriputra transforms himself into a gold-winged bird."

Scene 9. An image of a leaning tree. The inscription reads, "[This is] the moment when Raudrākṣa transforms himself into a big tree, and Śāriputra transforms himself into a whirlwind to blow it down."

85 Jin Weinuo has suggested that this scene depicts the episode in which Sudatta informs Śāriputra about the forthcoming contest (LWL 1:344). But this episode is not included in the Xianyu jing version and is only found in later bianwen.
Scene 10. Although the accompanying cartouche is blurred, the scene clearly depicts the contest in which Śāriputra transforms himself into the Diamond Warrior to destroy Raudrākṣa’s mountain.

Scene 11. This scene is placed to the left of the first scene on the upper register. The inscription explains, “[This is] the moment when Raudrākṣa transforms himself into a monster and Śāriputra transforms himself into Vaiśravana Mahārāja 毗沙門天王, who [then] burns the monster with fire.”

Scene 12. Raudrākṣa throws himself on the ground in front of Śāriputra. This scene at the lower left corner of the composition ends the pictorial narrative.

These are solid grounds for identifying the source of this mural as the Xianyu jing story. As just mentioned, this sūtra was the only sixth-century text to include both Sudatta’s search for Jetavana Garden and the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa. On closer examination, it also appears that some episodes illustrated in the mural are recorded in the sūtra but not in the later bianwen. Most obviously, the contest between King Vaiśravana and the monster is described differently in the sūtra and the bianwen, and the mural closely illustrates the following passage in the sūtra:

Again, he (i.e., Raudrākṣa) transformed his body into a yakṣa demon. His size was enormous; fire shot from his head. His eyes were as red as blood; his four teeth were long and sharp. With flames issuing from his mouth, he bounded forward. Then Śāriputra changed himself into the Vaiśravana Mahārāja. The yakṣa was terrified and wanted to retreat at once. Fire sprang up on all four sides so there was

86 The rather confusing position of this scene has led Jin Weinuo to identify it as the first scene of the whole pictorial narrative (LWL 1:344–45). In my opinion, however, the irregular placement of this scene was very likely accidental: the painter did not first sketch out the whole composition, but rather painted scene by scene as he went along. Toward the middle of the lower register he would have already realized that there might not be enough space left for the whole narrative. So scenes are increasingly squeezed together and cartouches written on increasingly narrower spaces. Even then, not enough space remained on the lower register for the last two scenes. The artist therefore raised the contest scene to an empty space left on the upper register (where he actually painted this scene over the trees surrounding the building behind the Buddha), so he could still paint the last scene representing Śāriputra’s final victory at the lower left corner to conclude the whole composition.

87 In his article on the Dunhuang “Subjugation” paintings Akiyama misread Jin Weinuo’s article and quoted the textual reference from the Xianyu jing as the inscription of this scene.
no place to escape. Only on Śāriputra’s side it was cool and there was no fire. The yakṣa submitted right away by throwing himself on the ground in an attitude of profound reverence and begging plaintively that his life be spared. As soon as he felt shame, the fire disappeared. The crowd cried out in unison, “Śāriputra is the winner! Raudrākṣa is no match for him!”

The bianwen offers a very different account of what happened when the heretic conjured up two monsters: “Śāriputra hesitated while he considered what to do. Before long, Vaiśravaṇa appeared in front of the King with a leap. His awe-inspiring majesty was splendiferous, and his armour and weapons were bright and shiny. Earth deities supported his feet; and a precious sword hung at his waist. This is where the two monsters, after taking one look at him, incessantly begged for their lives.”

Two major differences between the sūtra and the bianwen are related to the iconography of the Cave 12 mural. First, in the sūtra the monster surrenders because he is burned by fire and finds no way to escape, but in the bianwen the two monsters are instantly defeated “after taking one look at” the heavenly king. Second, in the sūtra Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa “transform themselves” into the divine king and the monster, respectively; in the bianwen the heretic “conjured up” the two monsters while King Vaiśravaṇa offered his own service to the holy monk. The mural inscription (which specifies, “Raudrākṣa transforms himself into a monster and Śāriputra transforms himself into Vaiśravaṇa Mahārāja who burns the monster with fire”) is apparently based on the sūtra. Moreover, the last two scenes in the painting actually follow the narrative sequence of the sūtra: in Scene 11 the monster is burned by fire, and in Scene 12 Raudrākṣa throws himself on the ground before the victorious Śāriputra.

Although the plot of the story is somewhat rearranged in the mural, an important parallel between the pictorial and literary representations is found in their overall narrative structure. The

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89 Mair, *Popular Narratives*, pp. 80–81, trans. slightly modified. To save space I have placed Mair’s translation of the prose section into a continuous paragraph.
90 Some important iconographic discrepancies can be found between the mural and the text. For example, the pictorial narrative of the six contests follows an order different from that in the text:
composition of the picture mirrors the “bipartite” division of the text: all scenes on the upper register are related to Sudatta’s search for the holy site, while those on the lower register focus on the magical contests. The painting thus closely follows the literary, temporal narrative; and because many details of the story are omitted, the layout of the mural brings the basic structure of the text into a sharper focus.

Some researchers have proposed that the painting’s “sequential” format originated in Han dynasty pictorial carvings, which were delineated in horizontal bands. But to my knowledge all known Han narrative paintings (including bas-reliefs) are “episodic,” meaning that a story is always represented by a single scene. It has also been suggested that the narrative scheme of this mural was derived from a type of Chinese narrative hand-scroll painting that emerged during the Wei-Jin period, represented by Gu Kaizhi’s 魏晉名賢圖 “Nymph of the Luo River” 洛神賦圖. It is true that often in a hand-scroll painting various episodes of a story are presented in a linear fashion and accompanied by paragraphs of a text. But a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Xianyu jing</th>
<th>Cave 10 mural</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) tree—whirlwind</td>
<td>(1) buffalo—lion</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2) pond—white elephant</td>
<td>(2) pond—white elephant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) mountain—Diamond Warrior</td>
<td>(3) dragon—gold-winged bird</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4) tree—whirlwind</td>
<td>(4) dragon—gold-winged bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) mountain—Diamond Warrior</td>
<td>(5) buffalo—lion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) monster—King Vaiśravaṇa</td>
<td>(6) monster—King Vaiśravaṇa</td>
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Jin Weinuo, who first studied this mural, proposed that this iconographic inconsistency “clearly demonstrates the beginning stage of the narrative representation of the story, which had not achieved its maturity” (LWL 1:345). It seems to me, however, that the simplest method to illustrate a text is to follow its original sequence, not to alter it, and that the painter of the mural knew the story quite well, for the scenes on the upper register obediently follow the narrative of the text. Thus the irregular sequence of the contest scenes on the lower register may have resulted from a deliberate effort to increase the dramatic effect of the story by rearranging the events. The new pictorial sequence seems to reflect the painter’s concern with the gradual heightening of the drama: during the contest Śāriputra assumes increasingly powerful forms (in the Buddhist hierarchy) from a lion to a white elephant to the gold-winged bird (garuda) to a whirlwind (Wind God) to the Diamond Warrior (vajrapāṇi) and finally to the divine king Vaiśravaṇa. In fact, as I will discuss later, in the development of the “Subjugation” tale and its visual representations the contest sequence was subject to constant changes.

91 Jin Weinuo, in LWL 1:345.
92 See Wu Hung, pp. 133-34.
93 Ibid.
hand-scroll must be read from right to left and the story presented must proceed in the same direction. This sequence differs from the Cave 12 mural, in which the story develops from left to right on the upper register and then reverses direction on the lower register. More likely, this format originated in Indian Buddhist art—such as Gandhāra relief carvings, in which individual scenes of a story are sometimes arranged from left to right.94 When this structure was introduced to China, it was enriched by pictorial devices developed there. In the “Subjugation” mural, not only are the figurative types, buildings, and trees clearly derived from Chinese pictorial vocabulary, but landscape elements are used here to divide the composition into individual compartments, just as they are in the Eastern Jin brick reliefs portraying the Seven Worthies in the Bamboo Grove 竹林七賢 and the Northern Wei sarcophagus carvings representing the lives of filial sons.95

If this earliest “Subjugation” mural mimics literature in narrative structure, the second earliest depiction of the tale at Dunhuang (Fig. 4) rebels against literature by reconstructing the story into a new framework. The early Tang date (686) of this mural in Cave 335 is obtained from an inscription on the north wall of the cave. The west, or back, wall of the cave is occupied by a large rectangular niche, in which a statue of the Buddha was originally flanked by his disciples and bodhisattvas. Rising from the rear wall of the niche to the ceiling are painted cloud patterns, and above the clouds appears the “jeweled pagoda” in which the Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna 多寶 Buddhas reside. The two side walls of the niche are painted with a “Subjugation” bianxiang, a representation that differs entirely from the one discussed above.

The most radical change made by the early Tang artist is that he has completely omitted the first part of the story about Sudatta’s search for Jetavana Garden. The mural is entirely devoted to the

94 I am indebted to Higashiyama Kengo 東山健吾 who makes this point in his paper on illustrations of the Śyamā jātaka presented to the International Conference on Dunhuangology, Dunhuang, 1990.

magical contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa. Therefore, it can no longer be called “Sudatta builds a monastery,” after the title of the story in the original Xianyu jing. More appropriate titles would be the “Subjugation of demons” or “Raudrākṣa’s contest with the sage”—the labels of murals recorded in Tang painting catalogues and the titles of the eighth-century bianwen. Because all existing texts, both sūtras and the bianwen, include the first part of the story, we can reasonably assume that the new focus on the magical competition was established in the domain of visual art.

This new focus is closely related to the pictorial mode of the Cave 335 mural, which I call an “oppositional composition.” Unlike most “sūtra bianxiang,” which are centered on a single Buddha or bodhisattva, paintings in this category show two juxtaposed figures, left and right. While these two main figures are engaged in a particular event—a contest or a debate between them—other events from the same story are often depicted as secondary elements to fill in the picture. With such a structure, the mural of Cave 335 divorces itself from the linear, temporal mode essential to the Northern Zhou work. Images are now isolated into two separate groups: on the north wall of the niche Śāriputra sits on a platform under a canopy and is accompanied by Buddhist monks; on the opposite south wall Raudrākṣa appears in the midst of male and female heretics. Scenes representing five of the six contests are illustrated between these two rival groups: close to Śāriputra are the Diamond Warrior destroying the mountain and the white elephant drying up the pond; and close to Raudrākṣa are the gold-winged bird defeating the poisonous dragon, the lion devouring the water buffalo, and a Wind God blowing down the tree. It is unclear why the contest between King Vaiśravana and Raudrākṣa’s monster is omitted. Perhaps an image of a monster was considered improper for the central niche containing holy icons of worship, or perhaps the composition achieved its balance with an additional scene in the right group representing Raudrākṣa surrendering before Śāriputra.

It is impossible to read such an assemblage of images as a continuous narrative, since the representation entirely ignores tem-

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96 Guo Ruoxu twice mentions a mural by Li Yongji and Li Xiangkun, called the bianxiang of “Raudrākṣa’s contest with the sage.” See Soper, Kuo Jao-hsiū, pp. 52, 98.
poral sequence. What the mural presents, first of all, is an "abstraction" or "condensation" of the repetitive contests between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa. To achieve this effect, the artist followed a logic fundamentally different from that of the earlier mural. No matter how innovative the Northern Zhou painter was, he tried to render the literary narrative into a series of scenes following a linear pattern. The early Tang artist, in contrast, began his design with the two competing figures: he extracted them from their narrative context, placed them in direct opposition, and then, working within this basic scheme, he filled it in with the individual contest scenes.

Thus, if the Northern Zhou painting is "temporal," the early Tang painting is "spatial." The two paintings are organized so differently that the later painting probably could not have developed from the earlier one. More likely, it derived its structure from another source: pictures of the famous debate between the lay Buddhist gentleman Vimalakīrti and the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the only Dunhuang murals of pre-Tang and early Tang dates showing the distinctive oppositional style.

Altogether fifty-eight Vimalakīrti bianxiang are preserved in Dunhuang caves and illuminate the long development of this type of painting from the Northern Dynasties to the Song. According to the Vimalakīrti sūtra which these murals illustrate, after all the Buddha's disciples declined the Buddha's request to visit Vimalakīrti, Mañjuśrī finally carried out the mission. But as soon as this great bodhisattva arrived at Vimalakīrti's house, he fell into a lengthy theoretical debate with the famous rhetorician; his power and wisdom were also challenged by various miracles and illusions that Vimalakīrti produced. It is not difficult to recognize the many parallels between this "debate" and the magical contest in the "Subjugation" tale: both stories have a pair of opposing characters, a central theme of competition, and abundant magical manifestations. Such parallels must also explain the many similarities between the Vimalakīrti bianxiang and the "Subjugation" bianxiang. From the early Tang on they were painted in similar or juxtaposed

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positions in Dunhuang caves; they shared identical compositional styles; and they developed together over the next four hundred years.

Although later Vimalakīrti bianxiang would become extremely complex and elaborate (a development also shared by later “Subjugation” murals), its early depictions are simple, portraying the two debaters and their followers in two opposing groups. This formula was probably invented during the sixth century and first appeared on the ceiling of a cave, but from the Sui dynasty on it became associated with the central niche, first painted on the facade with the two figures flanking the opening of the niche and then moved to the inside of the niche, where each debater occupied a side. At the same time images of Vimalakīrti’s magical manifestations were increasingly integrated into this structure by being illustrated between the two central figures.

The early-Tang “Subjugation” painting in Cave 335 was executed according to the format of the contemporary Vimalakīrti bianxiang: Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa occupy the two sides of the niche and are accompanied by their followers. Four monks have joined Śāriputra’s camp, and, to balance the composition, male and female heretics escort Raudrākṣa. These figures are absent in the Xianyu jing story and must have been added by the painter. In the Vimalakīrti bianxiang leafy trees grow behind the dwellings of the two debaters. Similar tree images appear in the early Tang “Subjugation” mural, but there, instead of simply indicating an environment, one tree image has been transformed into a magical manifestation of Raudrākṣa being attacked by Śāriputra’s whirlwind.

98 Sui dynasty Vimalakīrti bianxiang composed in this style are found in Caves 206, 276, 314, 380, 417, 419, 420. Some early Tang examples, including those in Caves 203 and 322, continued this style.

99 Early Tang Vimalakīrti bianxiang composed in this style are found in Caves 68, 242, 334, 341, and 342.

100 While the artist was inspired by Vimalakīrti bianxiang to create these attendants, he derived their iconography from a variety of sources. The monks at Śāriputra’s side were apparently borrowed from the Vimalakīrti bianxiang, but the models of the sensual female heretics were found in Dunhuang pictures depicting Śākyamuni’s “subjugation of demons.” It is said that before attaining Buddhahood, Śākyamuni remained under the demon Māra’s attack and temptation, including Māra’s beautiful daughters who danced around him while exhibiting their voluptuous female bodies. The association between Māra’s daughters and Raudrākṣa’s heretic maidens becomes explicit in later “Subjugation” murals, where inscriptions accompanying such figures specify that these “elegant and beautifully dressed heretic girls are trying to seduce Śāriputra.”
In both the Xianyu jing story and the Northern Zhou mural the contest between the tree and the wind is relatively unimportant and far less dramatic than the other five contests. In the early-Tang mural it assumes a prominent position while other contest scenes are half hidden behind free-standing statues. The shift in emphasis again seems to be related to the mural’s overall structure. When Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa are portrayed on the two detached side walls, the whirlwind episode alone establishes a direct link between them: though invisible, the wind could cross a distance to attack the villains. Thus, the wind in the mural is not only about to destroy the tree but also attacks Raudrākṣa and his followers. The artist painstakingly illustrated how this attack threw the heretics into confusion: Raudrākṣa can no longer open his eyes while his followers cover their faces with their hands. In fact, the sharp contrast between the calm, confident Śāriputra and the frantic heretics has become the focus. The whirlwind is also anthropomorphized to emphasize further the importance of this episode: a God of Wind is invented who is pressing a leather bag to release the powerful wind.

This early-Tang mural is important for two reasons: its composition became the blueprint of all later “Subjugation” bianxiang; and its new imagery became a source of storytelling. To demonstrate the second point first, we may compare how the struggle between the tree and the whirlwind is described in the old Xianyu jing and in the Dunhuang “Subjugation” bianwen that appeared after the painting was completed. In the Xianyu jing version this episode introduces the contest sequence and is described briefly:

[Raudrākṣa] was well-versed in the techniques of illusion. With an incantation, he created before the great crowd a tree that, of itself, grew to a large size. Its shade covered the assembly, its branches and leaves were luxuriant, and its flowers and fruits were extraordinary. Everyone in the crowd shouted, “This transformation was created by Raudrākṣa!” Then Śāriputra used his supernatural power to create a whirlwind that blew so hard that it uprooted the tree. The tree toppled to the ground and smashed into tiny pieces of dust.101

In the bianwen, this episode is moved to the end of the contest sequence to culminate the drama.102 After Raudrākṣa conjured up the tree whose image dazzled the eye,

102 Jin Weino has noted that the renewed contest sequence in the bianwen is probably influenced by the early Tang mural (LWL 1:347–48).
Suddenly, Śāriputra conjured up a God of Wind in the midst of the assembly. Crossing his fingers in greeting, he came forward and addressed Sixth Master Monk [i.e., Raudrākṣa]: “Even a great chilicosm of worlds could be blown away on a moment’s notice without difficulty; how much less should this little wisp of a tree dare to stand in the path of my wind!” After completing this declaration, he opened up his bag of wind and let it blow. Thereupon, the earth rolled up like a carpet, rocks were pulverized into dust, the limbs and branches [of the tree] were scattered in every direction, and nothing of the trunk was left. This is the place where the heretics could not hide and where all those assembled readily shouted their approval.\textsuperscript{103}

The God of Wind, originally absent in the \textit{Xianyu jing} story and first seen in the Cave 335 painting, thus became a central character around whom new plots and speeches were invented. Moreover, the verses following the prose narrative in the \textit{bianwen} seem to describe the mural directly: “[Raudrākṣa] was blown upon so hard that his feet left the ground, / His censer and thurible were sent flying by the wind; / His gem-encrusted platform leaned so precariously that it nearly toppled, / The heretics, frightened and anxious, together held it up.”\textsuperscript{104}

We can observe the relationship between the early-Tang mural and the mid-Tang \textit{bianwen} on an even deeper level. In five of the six contests described in the \textit{Xianyu jing}, Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa “transform themselves” into various forms; the terms used in these instances are \textit{huazuo} 化作 (transformed into), \textit{fubianqishen} 複變其身 (again changed his shape), or \textit{zihuaqishen} 自化其身 (he himself transformed his shape). Correspondingly, the Northern Zhou painter represented the contests as pairs of struggling images—the two chief competitors are absent because they have transformed into these images. In the \textit{bianwen}, however, both Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa have ceased to change their shapes. Instead they “produce” various images in front of themselves, and the verb uniformly used here is \textit{huachu} 化出 (to conjure up). The reason for this alteration can be traced to the early-Tang painting: when the whole contest sequence is condensed into a single picture, the depiction of contests between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa appear as being “conjured up” by them. What the viewer perceives from this painting

\textsuperscript{103} Mair, \textit{Popular Narratives}, pp. 81–83, trans. slightly modified.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., p. 83.
can only be that Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa are fighting each other through their various agents.

During the mid-eighth century, there existed at Dunhuang at least two literary versions of the tale (the Xiányu jìng and the bianwen) and two modes of pictorial representation (the Northern Zhou and early Tang murals). The subsequent development of the “Subjugation” paintings followed two separate lines. On the one hand, there appeared a kind of picture scroll directly used in the recitation of the bianwen; the illustrations in such a scroll reflected a revival of the earlier sequential narrative representation. On the other hand, a large group of at least eighteen bianxiang murals continued the oppositional mode established in the early-Tang painting. Each tradition, however, was by no means independent and free from the influence of the other: the bianwen scroll employed the oppositional composition as a standard visual vocabulary in a temporal narrative, while the bianxiang murals integrated and enriched episodes from the newly written bianwen.

Few words are needed to introduce the illustrated scroll of the “Subjugation” tale (Fig. 5), for it has been repeatedly discussed in articles and books over the past forty years. The scroll has been dated to the eighth to ninth century, and the inscriptions on its back have been proven to be excerpts from the verses of the bianwen. Instead of focusing on its date and content, I shall deal with its narrative structure and its use in a bianwen performance.

Found in the “secret library” at Dunhuang, this scroll, though damaged at the beginning and the end, is still 571.3 cm long. The six contests between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa are illustrated one after another on the long scroll made of twelve pieces of paper. The first half of the story, about Sudatta’s search for a site for the monastery, is not included. This work thus seems to combine features from the two previous illustrations of the “Subjugation” tale: in format it resembles the Northern Zhou mural, whose scenes are confined in horizontal bands; and in content it resembles the early-Tang mural, which depicts exclusively the magical competition.

105 See works by Vandier-Nicolas, Akiyama Terukazu, Jin Weinuo, and Luo Zongtao listed in n. 79.
Fig. 5. A section of the "Subjugation" bianwen scroll from Dunhuang, middle to late Tang. Collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. Drawing by Wu Hung.
The composite nature of this scroll becomes even more evident when we study its composition. Like the Northern Zhou mural, its design reflects a conscious concern about the internal division of an overly long picture: the whole painting had to be divided into a number of "frames," so that it could be viewed and displayed paragraph by paragraph while being gradually unrolled. The painter also employed similar landscape elements to create "frames": a number of trees, rather schematically executed, divide the painting into six sections, in which the six contests are illustrated. Moreover, some features of this scroll reveal a further advance in visual thinking: close to the end of each section there are always one or two figures turning their heads towards the next scene. We must keep in mind that when the picture was being displayed the "next scene" would still be rolled up, and that these figures would lead the viewer to anticipate the forthcoming section.\footnote{In this way, this work anticipated more sophisticated hand-scroll paintings represented by the tenth century masterpiece, the "Night Entertainment of Han Xizai" 韓熙載夜宴圖 by Gu Hongzhong 馮熙載中, Gu ingeniously used a series of large screens to create a number of spaces within the scroll, in which various activities of the night revels take place. He also linked these spaces into a continuum; most tellingly, between the last two sections a young women is talking to a gentleman crossing a free-standing screen and seems to be inviting him into the back chamber. See Gugong bowuyuan 故宮博物院, in Zhongguo lidai hihua: Gugong bowuyuan canghuaji 中國歷代繪畫. 故宮博物院藏畫集 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1978), pp. 84–85.}

While this scroll presents various events in a temporal, linear order and thus resembles the Northern Zhou mural, its individual "frames" are structured according to the early-Tang oppositional mode. Each "frame" is a symmetrical composition, with Buddhists at the right and heretics at the left attentively watching a magical contest taking place between them.\footnote{A major difference between the Cave 335 mural and this scroll is that a third group of figures is added to the latter work toward the end of each section: the king sits on a low square platform, accompanied by attendants and foreign princes in exotic clothes and headresses. This addition seems to accord with the setting of the arena described in the bianwen: "When King Prasenajit 波斯匿王 saw Śāriputra, he at once decreed to his assembled courtiers: 'Each of you must be attentive! The Buddhists are to sit on the east side, the Sixth Masters on the western edge; we shall sit at the northern rim, the officials and commoners on the south side.' " See Mair, Popular Narratives, p. 73.} As in the early-Tang work, this symmetrical pattern encourages formal contrasts between the two rival camps: the Buddhists have their heads shaved clean and wear monastic robes; the barbaric heretics are heavily bearded and
half naked; or Śāriputra sits on a round platform in the shape of a lotus flower, while the heretics crowd under a tent sometimes decorated with birds of prey. In each scene there are also a bell and a drum, whose iconography is found in the King’s opening remark to the competition in the bianwen: “Regarding the two possibilities of victory and defeat, each must be clearly recorded. If Sixth Master Monk wins, beat the golden drum and lay down a golden tally; if the Buddhists are the stronger, strike the golden bell and mark up a score for them.”¹⁰⁹ Not incidentally, these two sharply contradictory images are selected from hundreds of items described in the bianwen to reinforce the compositional symmetry. In fact, except for the King, who is the judge and thus “neutral,” all images in the scroll appear as pairs: the Buddhists oppose the heretics, their magical manifestations struggle among themselves, and the drum is matched with the bell. When such a single oppositional composition is repeated six times in the long scroll, what has been condensed in the Cave 335 mural is again diffused and multiplied.

Scholars agree that this scroll was used in bianwen performances, but a question remains concerning the manner of its presentation. Bai Huawen has suggested that “the bianwen [verses] copied on the back of this bianxiang scroll are brief written records for the [storyteller’s] reference.”¹¹⁰ His explanation is not convincing, because these inscriptions are not brief notes but faithful copies of verses related to the six magical contests. Another hypothesis is offered by Wang Zhongmin

This picture scroll has narrative illustrations on the front, while verses about each event are copied in the corresponding positions on the back. This demonstrates that the picture and the prose narrative of a bianwen could supplement each other (the picture could substitute for the prose). When telling the story the storyteller would point at the picture, and in this way the audience could better comprehend the events. This was then followed by singing the verses to let the audience grasp the main points of the story while enjoying the beauty of the songs.¹¹¹

Wang’s hypothesis may be supported by Mair’s observation that: “if anything were to be written on a performance scroll, it is understandable that it would be the verses. This we already know

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 73–74, trans. slightly modified.
¹¹⁰ Bai Huawen, in LWL 1:435.
from the whole prosimetric tradition in India where the verses are relatively fixed and the prose passages tend to be improved anew with each session.”

It seems that these scholars all believe that one person performed the “Subjugation” bianwen: he told the story and sang the verses while constantly unrolling the painting. We may, however, also consider the possibility that two storytellers were engaged in a single performance. In the Dunhuang “Subjugation” bianwen, the question “How is it?” (“ruowei” 若為) always ends a prose section and introduces the song that is to follow. A similar structure is found in the Dunhuang “popular lectures” (suijiang 俗講) of Buddhist sutras, but in these cases we do know that two persons are involved. The question, “How is it?” (heru 何如), is posed by the Dharma Master (fashi 法師) to the Lecturer (dujiang 都講), who would then chant passages from a Buddhist sutra. Scholars have demonstrated that suijiang were extremely popular during the Tang. They were supported by the royal house, welcomed by the common people, and described by more than one famous Tang poet. According to one such poet, Yao He 姚合, when a sutra lecture was held in a town, not only were the wineshops and markets empty, but all fishing boats also disappeared from nearby lakes. It is plausible to assume that such a popular art form would influence other types of performance, and if we make this assumption, then the recitation of the “Subjugation” bianwen can be more precisely reconstructed as follows. Two storytellers would collaborate: a “narrator” would tell the story in prose, and a “singer” would chant the verses while displaying the picture scroll. After each song (which is copied on the back of the scroll), the “singer” would unroll the picture to expose the next scene, and the “narrator” would move on to tell the episode.

112 Mair, T’ang Transformation Texts, p. 100.
113 References to this way of presentation may be found in the two poems by Ji Shilao and Li He which describe the performance of the Wang Zhaojun bianwen.
114 In most sutra-lecture texts the Dharma Master asks the Lecturer to “sing” 唱 such passages, while the word “heru” appears sometimes as an alternative interrogatory formula. See “Jingang banruo bolomijing jiangjingwen” 金剛般若波羅蜜經講經文, in Wang Zhongmin, et. al., Dunhuang bianwen ji 敦煌變文集, 2 vols. (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984), 2:426.
115 For the popularity of suijiang, see Xiang Da, “Tangdai suijiang kao” 唐代俗講考, originally published in Wenshi zazhi 文史雜誌 3.9/10 (1944): 40–60, rpt. in LWL 1:41–69; Fu Yunzi, pp. 147–56.
illustrated. The "singer" would remain silent until the "narrator" asks him, "How is it?" Then he would again sing, after which he would again unroll the picture. The "singer" would know when to stop unrolling the picture without looking at the front. Because a paragraph of verses is always inscribed on the back of the scroll towards the end of a pictorial section in the front, he would open the painting to the point of exposing an inscription. He would always see the verses; and the audience would see the pictures.\textsuperscript{116}

After Zhang Yichao recovered the Dunhuang area from Tibetan occupation in 848, there appeared a new wave of constructing large caves, which were often decorated with "Subjugation" bianxiang. It is possible that the "Subjugation" story was understood in light of a political event: Buddhism’s victory over heretics mirrored the Chinese conquest of the Tibetans.\textsuperscript{117} This may explain why in all these "Subjugation" bianxiang the Buddhists are portrayed as Chinese and the heretics as "barbarians."

From this boom in cave construction emerged the largest group of "Subjugation" paintings. Even though some of the paintings have undoubtedly been destroyed during the past millennium, at least eighteen murals dating from the late Tang to the Song are still preserved in the Dunhuang area.\textsuperscript{118} Compared to the earlier examples, these are huge, monumental compositions. The largest one, in Cave 98, is 12.4 meters wide and 3.45 meters tall; others, in Caves 9, 55, 85, 108, 146, 196, and 454, range between 8 to 11 meters

\textsuperscript{116} Evidence for this reconstruction can also be found in other storytelling traditions. For example, Mair writes: "In the Pabj\text{"} tradition the pair are normally a man and wife, called bhopa and bhop\text{"}; in the Devn\text{"}r\text{"}yan tradition there are two or more men. Both of these traditions utilize song (g\text{"}a) alternating with declamatory speech (ar\text{"}h\text{"}v; cf. ar\text{"}ha ['meaning'], hence 'explanation [of the song]' ). The latter is not prose but instead a more or less modified version of the metrical lines of the song. Some of the g\text{"}a lines are quoted almost verbatim in the ar\text{"}h\text{"}v section. The last word or last few words in sentences of the ar\text{"}h\text{"}v are frequently spoken by the assistant" (Painting and Performance, p. 96). Mair also compares these traditions with the Chinese bianxiang performance (ibid., pp. 97-109).

\textsuperscript{117} See Shi Weixiang, p. 194.

\textsuperscript{118} The most recent inventory of these murals was conducted by Li Yongning and Cai Weitang. These two authors also suggested that a "Subjugation" mural originally painted on the west wall in Cave 94 has been completely destroyed. Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, pp. 170-71. A fragment of a painted banner illustrating the "Subjugation" tale is found in the Dunhuang "secret" library and now is housed in the British Museum. Judging from its iconography the original composition may resemble the murals. See Whitfield, no. 21.
in width. Their designs are extremely complex. Often as many as fifty episodes are depicted in a mural (Fig. 6), each explained by a cartouche written in a rectangular frame beside the scene. That these inscriptions often copy or summarize the bianwen has led scholars to propose that these murals must have been also used in bianwen performances. But this suggestion can be rejected because the cave-chapels were prepared for solemn religious rites such as meditation and circumambulation; the position and physical condition of the paintings make any actual performance impossible; the structure of the paintings does not follow the bianwen’s narrative; and because their inscriptions, in fact, do not always accord with the bianwen but are in many cases the painters’ own creations. The last two points, which are intimately related to the problem of the relationship between Dunhuang literature and art, will be the focus of the following discussion. I will explore how these murals were composed and viewed, and will also offer a method of analyzing other Dunhuang bianxiang.

Previous studies of these late “Subjugation” murals have addressed the task of identifying individual scenes. But, as I have pointed out, the result of such inquiries has been to raise a new problem: identifying and numbering the scenes according to the bianwen narrative (Fig. 2) has failed to illuminate any narrative “sequence” or “order” linking the scenes of the painting into a whole. In other words, all individual images have been made understandable, but the painting as a whole seems to have no meaning. To solve the problem I first tried to find some “hidden” order in the pictorial narrative: could these paintings be read according to a sequence which, though popular at the time, has been forgotten? This supposition led me to seek the key in the Hetu河圖 (the River Chart), the Luoshu洛書 (the Luo Writing), and the Daoist jiugong九宮 diagram, but all efforts were in vain. Finally I concluded that the problem lies in our basic premise and research method. In assigning any kind of serial numbers to the painted scenes, the researcher has adopted the logic of a temporal reading and has forgotten the essential differences between literary and pictorial creations. The appearance of illogicality of the pictures stems from the failure of his own method. The paintings may not be illogical at all, but simply denote a logic of a visual, spatial kind.
To explore this visual logic we need a different method, which can be summarized as follows: each of these murals is designed as a whole and should be studied as a whole. Instead of beginning our reading from any individual episode (as in a literary reading), our first task is to determine the basic compositional structure of the entire painting. In other words, rather than hypothesizing that the painter passively followed the bianwen text to depict the story from the first episode to the last, we should assume that he must have had an overall scheme for the picture, according to which he would then fill in the details. Our focus then shifts from tracing the literary references of the work to investigating its creative process.

If we keep this assumption in mind when reviewing the murals, a visual logic crystallizes before our eyes: the late “Subjugation” murals all share a standard structure determined by five pictorial elements. The king is in the center, along the picture’s vertical axis and near its upper edge (Fig. 6.1). Flanking the king are two pairs of images: Raudrākṣa and the drum on the right (Fig. 6.2b, 3b), and Śāriputra and the bell on the left (Fig. 6.2a, 3a). In fact, this structure follows the oppositional composition established in the early-Tang mural in Cave 335, while some images in the mid-Tang bianwen scroll, including the bell, drum, and king, are now integrated into the symmetrical layout.

As the earlier illustrators had done, the late-Tang painter “sorted” images from the bianwen into “pairs” that could be easily added to the symmetrical composition to reinforce the painting’s central theme, competition. If he could not find an exact pair in the text, he would invent one. Thus, in his painting he placed beside Śāriputra a group of four “prominent monks” (Fig. 7.4a) and beside Raudrākṣa, four “heretic maidens” (Fig. 7.4b). Raudrākṣa’s camp includes the Six Heretics (Fig. 7.5b), so a group of six monks are added to the Buddhist camp (Fig. 7.5a). The God of Wind is portrayed at the lower left corner (Fig. 7.6a), so a “heretic God of Wind” is added to the lower right corner for balance (Fig. 7.6b). There are also two “great bodhisattvas” to help Śāriputra to conquer the demons (Fig. 7.7a), and two “heretic

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119 The positions of these two pairs are reversed in Cave 72 and some other caves, but the basic structure of the composition remains the same.
Fig. 6. The basic compositional elements of the Cave 9 "Subjugation" bianxiang at Dunhuang, late Tang. Drawing by Wu Hung.
Fig. 7. "Counter images" in the Cave 9 "Subjugation" bianxiang. Drawing by Wu Hung.
Fig. 8. The compositional structure of the Cave 9 “Subjugation” bianxiang. Drawing by Wu Hung.
goddesses’” to assist Raudrākṣa in his defense (Fig. 7. 7b). If we include the two chief rivals, the bell and the drum, and the six contest scenes, over half the total number of images illustrated in the painting are such “counter-images.”

The symmetry of the painting is enhanced, but the composition is still static. To represent the temporal literary narrative spatially the painter employed another method. Once the basic structure was set up, he divided the pictorial plane into five sections—four along the four sides of the painting and the fifth in the middle (Fig. 8). The significance of these sections, or spaces, was understood in accordance with the prevailing cosmology. The space at the bottom was perceived as the “earth” or “this world”; thus in this section we find the great cities of Śrāvastī and Rājagrha, as well as scenes illustrating Sudatta’s search for the monastery’s site. The space along the upper edge was understood as the “sky,” “Heaven,” or the “Buddha land,” where Śāriputra flew while changing his shape, and beside him, at the upper left corner of the painting, the Śākyamuni Buddha was shown in all his glory in his heavenly kingdom on Vulture Peak. The spatial symbolism extends to Jetavana Garden, which, though physically located on earth, was placed at the upper right corners of several paintings because it had become a holy site where the Buddha preached the Law.

The sections along the two vertical sides of the composition then naturally connect Heaven and Earth. To the left, Śāriputra is meditating under a tree; in his meditation he ascends Vulture Peak to seek the Buddha’s help before the contest begins. We also find that he is returning to earth along the same vertical path, but now he is followed by a whole troop of Buddhist divinities including the eight spirit realms, titans holding the sun and moon, the elephant king from the Himalayas, and the lion with the golden mane. The painter, however, seems to have had some difficulty in finding suitable images for linking Jetavana Garden and the Śrāvastī city portrayed at the upper and lower right corners. Interestingly, the artist who painted Cave 196 found a reference from the old Xianyu jing tale, which states that after Śāriputra subdued the heretics: “The Tathāgata, surrounded by his followers in four realms, suddenly shone brightly, and a thunderclap shook heaven and earth.
He then arrived at Śrāvastī. The painter then depicted this episode along the right edge.

Between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa is the central section and, logically, the arena of their magical competition. In this space, a big crowd of more than fifty figures is portrayed fighting, struggling, crying, and escaping in a seemingly chaotic fashion. Upon closer examination, all these figures are engaged in three major events in three distinct areas. Roughly along the central axis are scattered scenes representing various magical contests. From the bottom, the Diamond Warrior is destroying the mountain; the white elephant is drying up the pond; King Vaiśravaṇa stands beside the burning ghost; and the lion is devouring the water-buffalo. Close to the top, the struggle between the poisonous dragon and the gold-winged bird is portrayed, perhaps because these two creatures were associated with the sky or Heaven. This section also includes many contests that are absent in the bianwen and any written versions of the tale: Śāriputra hands his turban to the heretics, who fail to bend it; scripts that the heretics put on an altar are immediately burned by Śāriputra’s fire; the heretics try to fight with the fire but end up floating in the ocean or falling asleep in exhaustion; and the heretic immortals chant prayers to move a Fangliang tablet up and down, but Śāriputra freezes it in the sky.

Around Raudrākṣa there appears the second group of figures, who are all fighting against the whirlwind. The canopy covering the chief heretic’s throne is about to collapse and his followers are desperately trying to fix it: some are climbing onto a ladder to repair it, while others try to secure the tent by hammering stakes into the ground. Some heretics simply give up: under the powerful wind they can only cover their faces with their hands. In retrospect we realize that the heavy emphasis placed upon this single contest had been introduced in the early-Tang mural and further played up in the mid-Tang bianwen, but now it has developed into a major theme independent from other magical contests.

To create a balance in this central section, another group of surrendering heretics are added to the left. The rather brief description

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of the episode in the bianwen is here inflated into more than ten dramatic scenes: Raudrākṣa is being led by a certain Master Niqian 尼乾子 to Śāriputra’s lotus-throne to pay his respect, and heretic maidens are presenting oil lanterns to the holy monk. Some heretics are still confused by the doctrine of Buddhism, but others, being redeemed, are receiving baptism and are having their heads washed, hair and beards shaved, teeth brushed, and mouth rinsed. All these scenes were created by the painters, who also inscribed explanatory texts alongside each image. A new narrative sequence thus supplements the original tale.

These and many other additions will be documented in detail in the appendix to this paper. What is important here is that the pictorial story I have described, though comprehensible, does not follow the plot of the bianwen. The story has been given a new form. The painter has broken the story into fragments—individual images, events, and sub-sequences—which he has then reassembled into a new form with abundant enrichment. Once these images and events were painted in their assigned positions, their spatial relationships inspired the painter to create new narrative links. Consider, for example, how the painter interprets the bianwen ending, where, after winning the contest, Śāriputra demonstrates his supernatural ability by leaping into the sky while constantly changing his shape. In the painting, this episode is illustrated along the upper edge (Fig. 9). There Śāriputra is at one place a tiny figure and at another extraordinarily big, with fire issuing from the top of his head and water from the bottom of his feet. While this sequence rather faithfully follows the bianwen, the painter made one change. Finding that at the end of this aerial journey Śāriputra was flying over the heretic Raudrākṣa, the painter was enticed to link these two images. He showed Śāriputra holding a bottle from which water pours down. Afraid that this image could not be properly understood, he added a cartouche: “The flying Śāriputra pours water of wisdom onto Raudrākṣa’s head and the latter is enlightened and surrenders.”

This then led to the invention of more narrative links. We see that Raudrākṣa, after being enlightened by Śāriputra’s wisdom-

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121 See Mair, *Popular Narratives*, p. 84.
water, descends from his throne, walks towards the Buddhist camp, is presented to Śāriputra, and kneels before the holy monk. These new episodes complete a sequence that is circular, without beginning or end (Fig. 9): Śāriputra demonstrates his supernatural manifestations after his victory, yet his supernatural manifestations lead to his victory. This sequence makes no sense in any literary narrative, but in the picture it integrates fragmentary images into a visual continuum.

To summarize this section, what the painter first presents to us, through laying down an overall symmetrical composition, is the topic of the story: “Raudrākṣa’s contest with the sage” or the “Subjugation of demons.” This topic is explained, reinforced, and enriched by numerous secondary images painted in different spatial blocks. While within each block a limited narrative sequence may be established based on the original text, the links between these blocks must be invented according to their new spatial relationships. Although such a mural could not have been used in bianwen performances, it does tell the story, but in a different way. It is not a literary narrative created by writers or storytellers, but a pictorial narrative created by painters.

This formative process of the pictorial narrative is also illuminated by my investigation of the inscriptions in the late Dunhuang “Subjugation” murals. The appendix to this essay demonstrates that the continuous elaborations of inscriptions were guided—encouraged and restricted—by the pictorial spatial system of the murals that had been established in the late-Tang. Within this system, the central section dominates the whole picture, while the four sections along the borders are secondary. Thus few new inscriptions (and thus few new images) appear in the border sections but the central part is greatly enriched. Some of the additions may have been based on written texts,¹²² but a majority of new inscriptions

¹²² For example, we find that in a cartouche in the Cave 9 mural Raudrākṣa is called the “Red-eyed” demon. This designation is not mentioned in the Xianyu jing and the bianwen, but can be found in the Genshenshou yiye youyu pinaiye posengshi (T 1450) 根本說一切有部毗奈耶破僧事 and the Zhongxu Mokedi jing (T 191) 中許毘誨帝經. Again, in an inscription in the Cave 98 mural Raudrākṣa transforms himself into a lotus flower in a pond, and in an inscription in Cave 55 Śāriputra’s white elephant is referred to by the word Xiangzi 象子. These details are only included in the Youyu pinaiye posengshi. See Vandier-Nicolas, pp. 1–5; Li Yongning and Gai Weitang, pp. 167–68.
Fig. 9. The scenes of “Śāriputra’s supernatural manifestations” and “Raudrākṣa’s paying homage to the monk” in the Cave 9 “Subjugation” bianxiang. Drawing by Wu Hung.
seem to reflect each painter’s personal reading and interpretation of images. Consequently, many figures, though similar in form and position, are explained differently by various painters or inscribers. The two great bodhisattvas (Mañjusrī and Samantabhadra) and the Four Vipāka Immortals 四果仙人, for example, are sometimes vaguely labeled as deities who are “helping” Śāriputra to subdue the heretics, and at other times are given more specific roles. More important, many inscriptions signify the painter’s effort to establish narrative links between isolated scenes, as in the above-mentioned case where the flying Śāriputra is depicted as pouring the water of wisdom onto Raudrākṣa’s head. To this episode, which first appeared in Cave 9 of the late Tang, later murals added more narrative: Śāriputra’s flying images are also connected with the Buddha portrayed at the upper left corner and Jetavana Garden at the upper right corner. This pictorial link inspired the painter of the Cave 454 to write on his mural: “Riding on clouds Śāriputra sends an invitation to the Buddha” to preach the Law. The creation of the pictorial narrative was thus intimately related to the invention of textual narrative, which would in turn influence later Chinese literature.

CONCLUSION

Let us now return to our initial question: What is bianxiang? An examination of textual sources has revealed that, from the High Tang on, this artistic genre was understood in a stricter sense. A bianxiang painting, on the one hand, had a religious, primarily Buddhist, subject matter and, on the other hand, a complex, two-dimensional composition. A closer study of existing bianxiang murals at Dunhuang has further enabled us to speculate on their functions. As integral parts of cave chapels, these paintings were created for devotional purposes rather than for popular entertainment. Bianxiang murals in Dunhuang caves were not “visual aids” for oral performances. However, they did have a relationship with literature, a relationship that may have been very strong. The question, then, is: How should one explore and characterize this relationship? Like Dunhuang literature, which consists of both bianwen and many other genres such as “sūtra lectures” and “seat-setting
texts’ (yazuowen 押座文), so, too, various types of bianxiang embrace divergent ways of representation. Generally speaking, Dunhuang bianxiang can be divided into two groups: jingbian, or “sūtra bianxiang”; and paintings intimately related to bianwen. While numerous “sūtra bianxiàng” allow us to see how Buddhist canons are condensed into iconic compositions, paintings on the “Subjugation of demons” provide invaluable material for studying the relationship between Dunhuang art and popular literature. As I have shown, both the “Subjugation” bianxiang and bianwen originated from a Buddhist sūtra, but the former predated the appearance of the latter. The Northern Zhou illustration of the story mirrors the sūtra’s narrative structure, while a new form emerged in the early Tang and transformed the text into a spatial representation with its own logic. Once such images appeared, they stirred up people’s imagination and influenced bianwen writing, which in turn became an important source for both portable picture-scrolls used in bianwen performances and large bianxiang murals in cave chapels. The cross-influence between Dunhuang art and literature continued into later centuries, and through this process they developed in tandem into increasingly complex and rich forms.

Appendix

A TEXTUAL STUDY OF LATE DUNHUANG “SUBJUGATION” MURALS

The inscriptions in late Dunhuang “Subjugation” murals are invaluable for the study of both Dunhuang art and literature. In this appendix I will examine three main aspects of these inscriptions: their adoption of the Dunhuang “Subjugation” bianwen, their elaboration on the bianwen, and their possible influence on later Chinese literature. While providing translations of these inscriptions for future research, this appendix will explore the impulse to create new episodes and will demonstrate that Dunhuang painters actively participated in the development of the tale.
WHAT IS BIANXIANG?

BIANWEN “EXCERPTS”

Inscriptions related to the Dunhuang “Subjugation” bianwen fall into two categories, which I call “excerpts” and “indices.” “Excerpts” are passages directly copied from the bianwen. “Indices,” which may or may not be based on the bianwen, summarize longer descriptions into short and formulaic sentences to label certain episodes. Among the nine murals whose inscriptions have been transcribed, five bear bianwen “excerpts” and are found in Cave 9 (late Tang; 890–91), Cave 98 (Five Dynasties; 923–25), Cave 53 (Five Dynasties; after 953), Cave 146 (Five Dynasties; after 957), and Cave 25 (Song; 947–74). None of these five murals, however, are inscribed with the full bianwen text. Since these paintings (and their inscriptions) are to various degrees damaged, it is difficult to determine each painter’s specific criteria for selecting bianwen passages. Nonetheless, the “excerpts” may be compared collectively with the bianwen text. To save space I will summarize the bianwen story into sixty-two episodes and indicate with an asterisk those episodes that were copied (partially or entirely) in the murals. The numbers following an episode identify the cave where the inscriptions appear:

Part 1: Sudatta builds a monastery
   (1) Introduction to the city of Śrāvastī.
   (2) Sudatta goes to Rājagṛha to find a wife for his son.
   (3) Sudatta meets Ānanda and also sees a beautiful maiden.
   (4) Sudatta asks the neighbor about the girl’s family.
   (5) Sudatta goes to see Humi 胡密, who is preparing rooms for visiting monks.
   (6) Humi tells Sudatta about the Buddha.
   (7) Thinking about the Buddha, Sudatta sees a divine light at night.
   (8) The city gate opens itself; the light guides Sudatta to the Buddha.
   (9) Sudatta pays tribute to the Buddha and is converted to Buddhism.
   (10) The Buddha instructs Sudatta to build a monastery and sends Sāriputra as his guide.
*(11) Sudatta returns to Śrāvastī and begins to search for a site. (98)
*(12) Sudatta finds the first site to the east of the city, and asks Śāriputra for his approval. (98)
*(13) But Śāriputra denies it. (9)
*(14) Sudatta finds the second site to the west of the city, and asks Śāriputra for his approval. (98)
(15) But Śāriputra again denies it.
(16) Sudatta finds the third site to the north of the city, and asks Śāriputra for his approval.
(17) But Śāriputra once again rejects it.
*(18) Sudatta find the fourth site to the south of the city, and asks for the monk’s opinion. (53)
(19) Śāriputra observes the garden and decides that it is the most auspicious site.
(20) Sudatta learns from the guard that the garden belongs to the Crown Prince.
(21) Sudatta goes to see the Crown Prince, deceives him into thinking that the garden is haunted, and persuades him to sell the garden. The prince advertises the garden and Sudatta wants to buy it.
*(22) The Prince observes the garden; he discovers Sudatta’s trick and reprimands him. (Paraphrased in 146)
*(23) Heavenly King Sūdra 首陀天王 appears as an elderly man. (Paraphrased in 146)
*(24) The elder demands to know the argument and pretends to blame Sudatta. (Paraphrased in 146)
(25) He then advises the prince to sell the garden; the prince finally agrees.
(26) Sudatta spreads gold to cover the garden grounds.
(27) Sudatta tells the prince the purpose of his buying the garden; the prince is moved and converts to Buddhism.
*(28) Śāriputra sees ants in the garden. (9, 53)
*(29) And he explains the idea of karma. (9)

Part 2: Contests between Śāriputra and Raurākṣa
(30) On the road, Sudatta, Śāriputra, and the prince meet Sixth
Master, who demands to know the purpose of the prince’s private trip.

(31) The Prince tells him the truth; Sixth Master becomes furious.

(32) Sixth Master goes to the king and accuses Sudatta and the prince.

(33) The king arrests Sudatta and the prince and questions them.

(34) Sudatta tells the king about the Buddha’s great deeds.

(35) Half believing and half doubting, the king suggests a contest between Sixth Master and the Buddha.

(36) Sudatta agrees and claims that even Sāriputra, the Buddha’s youngest disciple, could defeat Sixth Master.

(37) Sudatta, however, is worried about Sāriputra’s ability; returning home, he tells the latter about the contest.

*(38) Sāriputra tells Sudatta there is no need to worry so long as he can have eight days to prepare. The king agrees. (9)

*(39) Sudatta, unable to find Sāriputra, is alarmed. (9, 98)

*(40) Sudatta, in his search for Sāriputra, sees a cowherd, who tells him that he saw a “hairless boy” sleeping under a tree. (9, 98, 146)

*(41) Sudatta finds Sāriputra and scolds him. (9, 98, 146)

*(42) In his meditation, Sāriputra goes to see the Buddha on the top of Gr̥dharaṁṭa Mountain 烏鉢鉢山, 善悪崛山. The Buddha gives Sāriputra his magic robe. (98)

*(43) Because of the Buddha’s robe, Sāriputra is protected and followed by all sorts of deities. (Paraphrased in 9, 98, 146)

*(44) The contest begins; the king assigns places to various groups. (146)

*(45) Sāriputra and Raudrākṣa take their seats. (9)

*(46) The first contest: mountain and diamond warrior. (9)

*(47) The second contest: water buffalo and lion (9)

*(48) The third contest: pond and elephant (9, 146)

*(49) The fourth contest: dragon and gold-winged bird (9?)

*(50) The fifth contest: monsters and the heavenly king (146)

*(50) The sixth contest: tree and wind (9, 146)

*(61) The king announces the victory of Buddhism. (9)

*(62) Sāriputra demonstrates his supernatural power by leaping into the sky while changing his shape. (9)
A number of phenomena may be deduced from this survey. First, painters or inscribers selected passages from limited sections of the bianwen. The detailed narrative about Sudatta’s travel to the city of Rājagṛha, his meeting with Ānanda, Humi, and the Buddha, and his conversion to Buddhism are largely (if not entirely) omitted. The inscribed bianwen “excerpts” from the first part of the story only focus on three events: Sudatta’s search for the site, his purchasing the site from the Crown Prince, and Śāriputra’s lecture on “antecedent causes” in Jetavana Garden. This last event, in which Śāriputra sees ants in the garden and gives his lecture, emphasizes the religious significance of the site. Thus the verses related to this last episode in the bianwen are faithfully copied in Cave 9. The inscriptions concerning the second part of the story focus on the magical contest. All bianwen “excerpts” either describe events before the contest (Śāriputra’s preparation for the contest), during the contest, or after the contest (Śāriputra’s supernatural manifestation). The beginning section of this part, where Sudatta is the central character, is left out.

A second point made clear by the survey is that, while the bianwen “excerpts” in different caves are similar in their focus, they differ in content. A later painter seems to have avoided repeating bianwen passages selected for an earlier painting. The following comparison serves as an excellent example. The three paragraphs cited below are originally connected in the bianwen to describe Sudatta’s finding the first two sites:

At once, they selected two stout elephants, on top of which were mounted roofed boxes. Before many days had passed, they arrived at the city of Śrāvasti. Whereupon Sudatta followed along with the saintly one, and methodically went about selecting a site for the monastery garden; first they went outside the city wall to the east. In the distance they saw a park, in which there were ever so many flowers and trees, and exceedingly fine ponds and pavilions. Sudatta took hold of his whip and went forward, inquiring of the monk, Śāriputra, “Is this park suitable or not?”

Śāriputra replied to the elder, “Although the park is quite nice, there is far too much onion and garlic; the vile stench reeks to high heaven, the holy and the wise could not bear to dwell here.”

Sudatta turned his elephants around, and went back to the west of the city wall. He raised his eyes and suddenly saw a park with woods that were twice as fine as those of the previous one. Sudatta took on a serious expression, crossed his fingers,
and then asked the monk, Śāriputra, “‘Since you said that the last one was not good enough, I wonder whether this park will be suitable for dwelling?’”\(^{123}\)

The second paragraph is copied in the late Tang mural in Cave 9, but some thirty years later, when another “Subjugation” mural was executed in Cave 98, the painter (or inscriber) copied only the first and the third paragraphs, deliberately omitting the second. We find the same phenomenon of omission in the “excerpts” about Śāriputra’s lecture on the ants. The Cave 9 mural bears fourteen lines of verses from the bianwen, but the painter of the Cave 53 mural of the Five Dynasties, instead of repeating the previous selections, copied the prose part before the verses.

Thirdly, the survey shows that some passages may have been copied from a lost version of the “Subjugation” bianwen. The most striking cases are the long descriptions of the contests found in Cave 9. Though composed in a typical bianwen style, some of them differ from the extant bianwen version. One example concerns the treatment of the episode about the tree and the wind. In the extant “‘Subjugation’ bianwen” it is described as follows:

[The tree’s] leafy limbs were so dense, they blocked out the sun and reached to the clouds. The soaring trunk and spreading branches were a full ten and thousand fathoms in height. Auspicious fowl and birds sang harmoniously everywhere on the leafy limbs. The green leaves and fragrant flowers suddenly made it dark for several miles around. [The wind blew,] the earth rolled up like a carpet, rocks were pulverized into dust, and limbs and branches were scattered in every direction. Nothing was left of the trunk.\(^{124}\)

The inscriptions in the mural are different from and more elaborate than the bianwen:

The roots of the tree penetrate into the Yellow Spring; the top branches were emerald green; [inscription damaged] . . . were ten thousand zhang high; and the soaring trunk was a thousand xun tall. The tree blocked out the sun and reached to the clouds and covered the whole Universe . . . [inscription damaged]. The sun and moon lost track of their movement. The heretics jumped up and all cheered at how divine and strange this manifestation was. The wind originated from beyond heaven and earth; [and when it came] it filled the whole Universe. It moved towering mountains, drained rivers, and dried up oceans. The great roc flew backwards;


\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 82, trans. modified.
whales and salamanders leaped from torrents. The earth [rolled up] like a carpet; rocks were pulverized into dust. Even though the big tree was a thousand ren high, in a flash it was pulled down to the ground; although the giant wood was ten thou-
sand xun tall, in the blink of an eye it was destroyed. Its blossoms flew into the sky and scattered, its roots were pulled up, and its branches fell into pieces.

Sometimes, passages from two different bianwen versions of the "Subjugation" tale were inscribed in a single mural. For example, in Cave 9 the Diamond Warrior is described twice; at one place the description is virtually identical with that in the extant bianwen (the words in the parentheses are in the bianwen but are damaged in the painting):

[Śāriputra’s] Diamond Deity had a head that was round like the heavens, and only the circling skies themselves would do for a canopy. His feet were ten thousand miles square, and only the great earth itself could serve as a pedestal. His eyebrows were (as bushy as the twin summits) of a wooded mountain. (His mouth opened wide as the broad rivers and oceans.) In his hand he held a jewelled mace; from the top of the mace (flames leaped to the sky; and as soon as) he pointed the mace at the mountain of evil, the mountain instantaneously broke into pieces.\(^{125}\)

The second description, which is severely damaged, can be roughly reconstructed as follows:

The Diamond Warrior: he had high eyebrows and a broad forehead, a narrow wasp-like waist and a bulging shoulder wide as a field. His arms were . . . ; his eyes resembled a pair of round copper bells. [When he was in motion] the peaks of the five sacred mountains collapsed and . . . waved and shook. Holding a diamond mace in his hand, . . . he appeared like . . . dignified . . . in his form, raising his eyebrows and blinking his eyes. When he pointed the mace at the mountain, the mountain instantaneously turned into dust.

Similarly, the description of Raudrākṣa’s monsters in the same mural differs from the extant Dunhuang bianwen. It seems that the painter or inscriber was equipped with more than one version of the "Subjugation" bianwen and selected passages from at least two texts.

A fourth point suggested by the survey is that bianwen "excerpts," whether from the extant or lost versions, were most extensively copied in Cave 9, the earliest among this group of "Subjugation" bianxiang. In this painting, all images based on the bianwen are accompanied by bianwen "excerpts," and only those episodes not in-

\(^{125}\) Ibid., pp. 74–75, trans. slightly modified.
cluded in the bianwen are labeled with short "indices." Some caves created during the Five Dynasties, including Caves 149, 98, and 25, continued this method of inscription. But in these later caves, all events related to the magical contest, whether included in the bianwen or not, are summarized in "indices." The tendency to simplify the inscriptions culminated during the Song: all inscriptions in the two Song murals in Cave 55 (around 962) and Cave 454 (974–80) belong to the "index" type. Several factors may have contributed to this change. It is possible that once people had become familiar with the content of such pictures, the practice of adding lengthy inscriptions became unnecessary. It is also possible, however, that people's interest had gradually shifted to pictorial images, and as new episodes were increasingly invented and added to the pictures it became impossible to find corresponding descriptions from the bianwen texts.

"INDICES"

The "indices" are short inscriptions labeling certain episodes and follow a standard pattern: "the moment (shi 時) when such-and-such an event takes place." Cheng Yizhong and Mair interpret the word shi as a "mark of narrative moment," and take it to indicate "that the painted scene represents an episode within the whole narrative movement."126 But we should note that this is not always true for Dunhuang paintings and their inscriptions. For example, the portraits of worshipers are explained by one inscription as "the moment when the novice . . . Zhen 真 is holding flowers and worshipping the Buddha," and "the moment when the upāsīkō of pure faith, Madame Meng 孟氏, is holding incense and . . . worshipping the Buddha."127 These individual images do not form any narrative sequence.

As mentioned above, in the Cave 9 mural such "indices" denote only those new episodes not included in the bianwen. Their simple sentence pattern and flexible wording indicate that these passages were not derived from formulated texts, and this further suggests that the related episodes may have been invented by painters. This

126 Cheng Yizhong, p. 388; Mair, T'ang Transformation Texts, p. 81.
127 See Waley, Catalogue, p. 25.
understanding leads us to explore the relationship between these new episodes and the original tale as well as the impulse to create them. To show this, I shall first focus on the early Cave 9 mural (ca. 890), and then discuss later murals, in which "indices" have become the dominant form of inscription.

"Indices" and new episodes in Cave 9 mural:

Part 1: Sudatta Builds a Monastery
   No "indices" (and thus no new episodes) are added.

Part 2: Contests between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa
   (A) The magical contests
      (1) The moment when [evil] immortals help the heretics to transform themselves into . . .
      (2) The moment when the two great bodhisattvas watch Śāriputra subduing the heretics.
      (3) [The moment when] . . . a heretic turns into fire. . .
   (B) The wind attacks the heretics
      (4) The moment when . . . the heretics are blown by the wind.
      (5) The moment when the heretics, blown by the wind, cover their faces.
      (6) The moment when the heretics beat their gold drum but the wind breaks the drum’s skin.
      (7) The moment when the heretics’ tent is about to be blown down by the wind; alarmed, the [heretics] hurriedly draw strings and hammer stakes.
      (8) The moment when the wind breaks the tent’s string and the heretics try to connect the string.
      (9) [The moment when] . . . the string is broken.
      (10) The moment when the wind breaks the tent’s poles; when the heretics try to repair it the wind blows sand into their eyes, but they still try hard to chant their prayer.

Part 3: The heretics surrender and become Buddhist monks
   (11) The moment when the flying Śāriputra pours the wisdom-water onto Raudrākṣa’s head and the latter is enlightened and surrenders.
   (12) The moment when the Red-eyed [demon] comes to surrender and kneels down.
(13) The moment when the heretics have just become monks.
(14) The moment when the heretics are just converted to Buddhism and received Baptism.
(15) [The moment when] the heretics have their heads shaved.
(16) [The moment when] the newly converted heretics do not understand Buddhist ritual.
(17) [The moment when] the heretics purify themselves after their conversion.
(18) The moment when all converted heretics are amazed by the transformation of Śāriputra.

The painter of this mural added nothing to the first part of the original story and very little to the sequence of the six magical contests. The new elements are chiefly about the heretics' struggle against the wind and their conversion to Buddhism. All these additions appear in the central section of the painting, not along the borders, and as we have observed, within this section these two themes balance each other on the right and left. Encouraged by the symmetrical pictorial composition, these two themes have become two narrative cores, around which new images were invented and explained in words. A direct consequence is that the narrative no longer consists of the two traditional sections, but of three or four loosely connected parts corresponding to the internal divisions of the picture.

The basic composition of the Cave 9 mural would be elaborated by later artists. The growth of the pictorial narrative during the next one hundred years is demonstrated by the rapid proliferation of inscriptions (and thus of related images). These written passages are extraordinarily important not only for iconography, but also in that they, with their simple literary form but everchanging content, provide us with a rare chance to observe the development of a literary and artistic theme in a popular context.

Since all these inscriptions explain images that are designed according to the spatial divisions of a painting, it would be both difficult and misguided to render the passages into a coherent literary narrative. Instead, I group them into sections according to their thematic relationship and their position in a painting.
"Indices" of new episodes in Dunhuang "Subjugation" murals (870s–970s)\textsuperscript{28}

Part 1: Sudatta’s search for the monastery’s site

This part of the story is always illustrated at the bottom of a composition and, generally, develops from right to left to connect with the next narrative sequence along the left border. No new episodes are found and all inscriptions copy or summarize the bianwen. The artists apparently had no interest in elaborating this part of the tale.

Part 2: Śāriputra and Sudatta prepare for the contest

After Sudatta promised the king to take on the contest he could not find Śāriputra, who, in fact, had gone to Vulture Peak to seek help from the Buddha. These events are depicted along the left edge. Only two cartouches are not based on the bianwen, and the second one results from the inscriber’s misunderstanding of the painted images: he explains the scene as representing Śāriputra and Buddhist deities on clouds as they ascend to heaven rather than as they descend to earth.

(1) The moment when Sudatta and the prince burn incense to invoke Śāriputra. (55, 454)

(2) The moment when Śāriputra, together with the eight sections of the dragon-heavens and the four heavenly kings, are on their way to the assembly on Vulture Peak. (55)

Part 3: Contests between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa

In the central section of a mural, "counter figures" continue to proliferate with more and more deities joining the two rival camps. Other new images and inscriptions elaborate traditional episodes. We find, for example, that inside Raudrākṣa’s mountain "deities are playing a game of chess" and that when the mountain is destroyed they "have no place to hide themselves." Again some inscriptions describe newly invented contest scenes. In fact, in these paintings the magical competition consists not of six but of nine or ten contests. We cannot always find the exact textual sources of these additions, but it seems that artists sometimes returned to the

\footnote{Sometimes inscriptions in different caves share a similar content but vary in wording; to save space I will only translate one inscription in this summary, while indicating the locations of this and similar inscriptions (i.e., their cave numbers) after the passage.}
older *Xiányu jìng* tale. For example, following this text, in the Cave 98 mural Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa are said "to transform" themselves into animals and supernatural beings, whereas the *bianwen* has them "conjure up" such creatures.

(A) "Counter images"

1. The moment when the heretics experiment with their magic and beat their gold drum to report to the king. (25)
2. [The moment when] Śāriputra and the heretics all hear the sage striking the gold bell. (25)
3. Immortals help Raudrākṣa. (9, 25?)
4. The Four Vipāka Immortals help Śāriputra. (25)
5. The moment when Mañjuśrī and Samantabhadra help Śāriputra. (25)
6. The moment when Heavenly Maidens watch the competition. (454)
7. The moment when the heretic Heavenly Maidens try to subdue Śāriputra (55)
8. The moment when elegant and beautifully dressed heretic girls try to seduce Śāriputra (98)
9. The moment when heretic girls want to seduce Śāriputra with illusions. (98)

(B) The six contests

1. The moment when Śāriputra transforms his body into a Diamond Warrior who hits the mountain with his [diamond] mace, smashing the mountain into dust. (98)
2. The moment when . . . the mountain is gold in color (?) and is forty *xun* 鈔 high. (98)
3. [The moment when] the heretics suddenly conjure up a mountain in the midst of the assembly . . . , in which spirited deities are playing a game of chess, and when all people shout their approval . . . the Diamond Warrior holds the "demon-subduing" mace. . . . (454)
4. The moment when the mountain is destroyed and the heretics try to hide themselves in great hurry. (98)
5. The moment when Śāriputra transforms into a lion which devours the big water buffalo. (98)
6. The moment when the water buffalo struggles with the lion and when blood comes from all its apertures. (146)
(7) The moment when Raudrākṣa transforms his body into a lotus flower while Śāriputra transforms into a big elephant which steps into the pond and destroys [the flower]. (98)
(8) [The moment when] Raudrākṣa transforms into a dragon while Śāriputra. . . . (98)
(9) The moment when Śāriputra transforms into a gold-winged bird which devours the dragon. (98)
(10) Raudrākṣa suddenly conjures up in the midst of the assembly a great river, in which a magnificent poisonous dragon appears; Śāriputra suddenly conjures up a gold-winged bird king, who pecks the poisonous dragon . . . till it dies. (454)
(11) Raudrākṣa suddenly conjures up two yellow-headed monsters in the midst of the assembly. . . . King Vaiśravaṇa comes himself with a pagoda standing on his palm. . . . (454)
(12) The moment when the heretic Fire God tries to hurt Śāriputra with fire. (85, 98)
(13) The moment when the heretic Fire God is burned and escapes. (9)
(14) The moment when Raudrākṣa conjures up a big tree and asks our Śāriputra . . . about how deep its roots penetrate. (98, 146, 55)]
(15) The moment when Śāriputra, having answered Raudrākṣa’s question, transforms into a big serpent to uproot the tree. (98, 55, 146)
(16) The moment when the heretics in the midst of the assembly conjure up a tree that has dense limbs and leafy branches; Śāriputra conjures up a serpent that twists around and uproots the tree, and he also lets wind blow down the tree as heaven’s punishment. (454)

(C) Additional magical contests
(1) The moment when the heretic warriors, who boast that they can shake mountains and valleys, cannot pull Śāriputra’s turban open. (146, 55)
(2) The heretics have the strength to uproot a mountain but they cannot pull open the turban; they thus realize that they cannot . . . compete with the power of Buddhist Dharma. (25)
(3) The moment when Śāriputra hands his turban to Raudrākṣa but the latter cannot bend it. (454, 85, 98)
(4) [The heretics] conjure up a sūtra-altar and light fire to test [their magic]. (25)
(5) The heretics put their scripts on an altar and hold a ritual but Śāriputra conjures up raging fire, burning the scripts until nothing is left. (454)
(6) The moment when heavenly maidens chant a prayer to help Śāriputra to conjure up fire. (55)
(7) The moment when the heretics fail to fight (with the fire) and are exhausted. (55)
(8) The moment when the heretics are exhausted and fall asleep. (98)]
(9) The moment when two heretics try to fight with the fire and end up floating in the ocean. (98, 146)
(10) The moment when heretic immortals chant prayers to move a Fangliang tablet up and down; Śāriputra freezes the tablet in the sky. (98, 85, 72, 146)

Part 4: The wind attacks the heretics

The God of Wind is portrayed at the lower left corner (while a "counter" heretic God of Wind is added to the lower right corner). A large crowd of heretics surrounding Raudrākṣa are badly battered by the powerful wind. While this general layout had been formulated in the Cave 9 mural, abundant new images are added and are explained by cartouches.

(1) The moment when the God of Wind becomes angry and blows upon Raudrākṣa. (98)
(2) The moment when the God of Earth emerges and helps to blow wind upon the heretics. (85, 98)
(3) The moment when the heretics also set up a "wind bag" but there is no wind coming out of it so they can only blow air with their own mouths. (146)]
(4) The moment when the heretics’ Wind God has no wind to help. (25, 454)]
(5) The moment when the heretic’s Wind God unties his "wind bag," but his power . . . has disappeared. (454)
(6) The moment when the heretics, being blown by the wind,
hurriedly try to chant their prayer to stop the wind. (85, 98)

(7) The moment when the heretics’ big tree is dense and leafy; blown by the wind its branches and leaves remain undamaged. (72)

(8) The moment when . . . the heretics are blown by the wind. (9, 454)

(9) The moment when the heretics are attacked by the wind and they hurriedly cover their heads and try to hide. (146, 55, 454, 9)

(10) The moment when the heretics are blown by the wind and try to cover their face with their hands. (9, 98, 454)

(11) The moment when the heretics are blown by the wind; they hurriedly cover their faces with hands and retreat. (146)

(12) The moment when the heretics are blown by the wind and they are seated on the ground worrying while covering their faces. (98)

(13) The moment when [the heretics] are blown by the wind and all their effort came to nought. . . . (98)

(14) The moment when the heretics are blown by the wind and they hurriedly want to [stop?] the wind. (146)

(15) The moment when the heretics [or heretic Heavenly Maidens] are heavily blown by the wind; they cannot stand straight and subsequently retreat. (146, 55)

(16) The moment when the heretic Heavenly Maidens are heavily blown by the wind; they cannot stand straight and subsequently retreat. (55)

(17) The moment when the heretics are heavily blown by the wind and they lean on one another. (55)

(18) The moment when the heretics are heavily blown by the wind and they hold one another. (55)

(19) The moment when the heretics want to beat [their drum] but the wind blows the drum over to the ground. (55)

(20) The moment when the heretics beat their gold drum but the wind breaks the drum’s skin and blows it over. (9, 146, 72)

(21) The moment when the heretics, thinking that they have won the battle, want to beat their golden drum to announce their victory, but before their T-shaped drumstick reaches
the drum, the skin breaks to form an X-shaped crack and can no longer produce sound. (454)

(22) The moment when the heretics’ tent is about to be blown over by the wind; alarmed, they draw strings and hammer stakes in a great hurry. (9, 55, 146, 454)

(23) The moment when the wind breaks the tent’s string and the heretics try to connect the string. (9, 98, 454)

(24) The moment when the wind is about to blow over the heretics’ tent; the heretics draw the strings; the strings break, and the heretics fall on the ground dying. (146)

(25) [The moment when] the wind breaks the tent’s poles. . . . (85)

(26) The moment when the wind blows sand into the heretics’ eyes and they are worrying. (98)

(27) The moment when the wind blows sand into the heretics’ eyes and they ask their comrades to blow the sand out. (72, 85)

(28) The moment when the heretics hurriedly climb onto a ladder to hold the precious tent. (25, 454, 98)

(29) The moment when the heretics are scared and hurriedly try to hold the ladder and straighten it. (146)

(30) The moment when several tens of heretic beauties try to seduce Śāriputra who, however, already knows their intention from a distance and blows them with wind so they are ashamed and try to cover their faces with their hands and to retreat. (146, 98)

Part 5: The heretics surrender and become Buddhist monks

This part of the story, depicted close to Śāriputra’s lotus throne, is almost entirely absent in the bianwen. What we find here is that following the proliferation of new images, inscriptions gradually formed a coherent narrative. A noticeable addition is a certain heretic Master Niqian, who first surrenders and then presents the defeated Raudrākṣa to Śāriputra. The heretics then pay homage to the holy monk and practice various Buddhist rituals of initiation.

(1) The moment when the heretic Raudrākṣa retreats. (146)

(2) Śāriputra and the four monks subdue Raudrākṣa. (85)

(3) The moment when the two great bodhisattvas watch Śāriputra subduing the heretics. (146, 9, 72, 98, 55)
(4) The moment when the Four Vipāka Immortals witness Śāriputra subduing Raudrākṣa. (55)
(5) The moment when Śāriputra strikes the bell and its sound shakes heaven and earth and destroys the heretics. (55, 146)
(6) The moment when Śāriputra defeats Raudrākṣa and strikes the bell to announce his victory. (98)
(7) The Buddhists win the contest and strike the golden bell with a golden hammer. A single sound of the bell shakes the three thousand universes. (454)
(8) The moment when King Prasenajit informs Raudrākṣa that he must surrender to Śāriputra. (55)
(9) The moment when the heretic Master Niqian surrenders to Śāriputra. (55)
(10) The moment when the heretic Master Niqian leads Raudrākṣa to see (or surrender to) Śāriputra. (55, 85, 98, 25? 454?)
(11) The moment when Raudrākṣa [returns to] the virtuous religion and surrenders to Śāriputra. (98)
(12) [The moment when] Raudrākṣa has just surrendered. . . . (98)
(13) The moment when the heretic followers abandon evil and obey orthodoxy, and when they beg to become Buddhist monks. (454)
(14) The moment when the heretics abandon evil and return to orthodoxy, and when they pay respect to the [holy] monks. (454)
(15) The moment when the heretics abandon evil and return to orthodoxy, and when they cover their faces with hands while being blown by the wind. (454)
(16) The moment when the heretics lead heavenly immortals to present flowers to Śāriputra to honor him. (454)
(17) The moment when the heretic followers worship Śāriputra. (454)
(18) [The moment when] the heretics are converted to Buddhism and. . . . (25)
(19) The moment when the newly converted heretics do not understand Buddhist rituals. (9, 85, 25, 55)
(20) The moment when some newly converted heretics do not
understand [Buddhist rituals] and when other heretics laugh at them heartily. (98)
(21) The moment when the heretics are enlightened and drink the water of wisdom. (98)
(22) The moment when the heretics are converted to Buddhism and receive Baptism. (9, 98, 55, 454)
(23) The moment when Raudrākṣa . . . receives Baptism from Śāriputra to become a monk. (454, 146, 85)
(24) The moment when the heretics, having surrendered, wash their hair to become monks. (98, 55)
(25) The moment when the heretics have their heads shaved. (9, 85, 72, 25, 55, 454)
(26) The moment when the heretics, having had their heads shaved, are contemplating. (72, 98)
(27) The moment when the heretics, having shaved their hair, have their beards shaved. (146, 454)
(28) The moment when the heretic Raudrākṣa, having had his hair and beard shaved, washes his head after shaving. (146)
(29) The moment when the heretics, having been converted to Buddhism, brush their teeth and rinse their mouths. (98, 454)
(30) The moment when the heretics, having become Buddhist monks, are ashamed to see one another and cover their faces with their hands. (454, 85?)

Part 6: Śāriputra’s supernatural manifestations
Images and inscriptions related to this episode regularly appear along a painting’s upper edge. An interesting phenomenon is that similar images are explained differently in each painting.
(1) The moment when Śāriputra has subdued Raudrākṣa and five-colored light radiates from his body. (454)
(2) Śāriputra’s light illuminates the thirty-three heavens. (98)
(3) The moment when Śāriputra is floating on water and walking on fire. (98)
(4) While walking above the ocean, water comes out from Śāriputra’s head and fire comes out from his feet. (454)
(5) The moment when Śāriputra walks on water and ascends to the height of some forty xun. (98)
(6) Śāriputra is traveling in the ten directions and water comes out from his head. (146, 72]
(7) The moment when Śāriputra’s divine power reduces his size and he ascends to the Yanmo Heaven 炎摩天. (98)
(8) Śāriputra leaps into the sky as high as that of seven Duolu trees 七多羅樹... and riding on clouds he sends an invitation to the Buddha. (454).
(9) The moment when the two great bodhisattvas watch Śāriputra manifesting his supernatural transformation. (454)
(10) The moment when the Four Vipāka Immortals watch Śāriputra manipulating his supernatural transformation. (454)
(11) The moment when King Prasenajit and the heretic Raudrākṣa watch (?) Śāriputra’s supernatural manifestation. (55)
(12) Heretic immortals watch Śāriputra burn fire and ascend to the sky. (146, 98)
(13) The moment when Śāriputra pours water of wisdom onto (Raudrākṣa’s) head. (72, 454)
(14) The moment when Śāriputra travels to the ten directions and when he pours down water of wisdom to subdue the heretics. (55)

As mentioned earlier, these findings support my assumption about the formative process of the pictorial narrative. Most new inscriptions appeared in the central section of the mural, which was also the focus of the painting. These new inscriptions reflected each painter’s reading and interpretation of images and were often created to link scenes in separated spatial blocks. Because individual artists constantly reinterpreted images, none of these murals bear identical inscriptions. The pluralism in inscriptions implies that the painters could freely explain the images and translate them into written texts, which in turn may have become the basis for new versions of the “Subjugation” story. Although we do not know whether such a version existed after the Tang or Song, we do have evidence indicating the impact of these “Subjugation” murals on later Chinese literature. The inscriptions in these murals were
first copied into manuscripts. One such document, now housed in the British Library (S. 4257), records the following passages.\footnote{This text has been recently transcribed by Li Yongning and Cai Weitang (pp. 190–91) and by Bai Huawen in “Bianwen he bangti” 變文和榜題, in Danhuang yuyan wenxue yanjiu 敦煌語言文學研究, ed., Zhou Shaoliang, et. al. (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1988), pp. 146–47. In the same paper Bai Huawen also discusses two other Dunhuang manuscripts in the Beijing Library (Jing: hong, 62) and the British Library (S. 2702), which transcribe inscriptions in a jātaka painting and in the story of “Tiandi jie Axiulu nü” 天帝劫阿修羅女 (S. 2702).}

The moment when the wind breaks the tent’s string and the heretics try to connect it. / The moment when the tent is about to be blown over by the wind and the heretics are climbing onto a ladder to hold it. / The moment when the heretic maidens, beautifully dressed and decorated, want to seduce Śāriputra. / The moment when the six heretics and Raudrākṣa want to compete with Śāriputra with their supernatural strength. / The moment when the wind breaks the tent’s poles and the heretics want to set up it again. / The moment when the heretics chant their prayer to move the Fanliang tablet up and down and when Śāriputra stops it and freezes it in the sky. / The moment when the heretics are attacked by the wind and they in a great hurry try to cover themselves with curtains. / The moment when the heretics are burned by fire and in a great hurry try to escape. / The moment when the heretics are attacked by the wind and they in a great hurry cover their faces and sit worrying. / The moment when the heretics want to beat their drum but the drum is broken and blown over by the wind. / The moment when Śāriputra pours the water of wisdom onto Radrākṣa’s head.

The record apparently does not include all inscriptions in a painting. But because it ends with Śāriputra’s victory over Raudrākṣa, the events are ordered into a narrative sequence. Moreover, the copier began his copying from the far right of the painting and proceeded gradually to the left. He thus read the painting in the manner of reading a traditional text, and this also rules out the possibility that this document would have been a painter’s guide as some scholars have argued.\footnote{Yao Tsong-yi believes that a set of line-drawings from Dunhuang (P. Tib. 1293) was a painter’s sketches for a “Subjugation” mural: the painter first grouped images into smaller units (as shown in the drawings) and would then piece these units together into a complete composition (Yao Tsong-yi, 2:71). These drawings do not follow the sequence of inscriptions in the S. 4257 manuscript.}

The copied inscriptions became independent from painted scenes. Perhaps through such manuscripts, the enriched “Subjugation” tale in the murals became a source for later writing. Scholars
have noted a number of texts dating from Tang to Ming showing the definite influence of this tale; one such work is Feng Meng-long's 馮夢龍 short story, "Zhang Daoling’s seven tests of Zhao Sheng" 張道陵七試趙昇. Here the Buddhist Śāriputra has been replaced by a Daoist master. Nonetheless, as the following description of the magical contest between Zhang Daoling and demons shows, the story closely parallels the "Subjugation" tale illustrated in the murals.

A crowd of demons arrived with thousands of torches in their hands, intending to burn the Spiritual Man to death. But the Spiritual Man flicked his sleeve slightly, and the flames instantly ran back devouring the demons. . . . The head demon still refused to accept defeat. The next day he gathered six great monsters; leading an army of one million ghosts, they set up camps, intending to attack the Spiritual Man. Hoping to defeat their spirit, the Spiritual Man suggested a magical contest, and when the six monsters acknowledged his request he ordered [his disciple] Wang Chang 王長 to gather firewood to light a fire. When the flames became violent, the Spiritual Man jumped in—but suddenly there emerged two blue lotus flowers under his feet to raise him out of the fire. The six monsters laughed heartily, saying, "To play this trick is just too easy!" Pushing flames apart they also jumped in the fire, but the two monsters who tried first burned their beard and eyebrows and ran back in unbearable pain. The other four did not even dare to make their move. The Spiritual Man then jumped into a river and immediately emerged with his clothes all dry on the back of a yellow dragon. The six monsters again laughed, saying, "Fire may be dangerous; how harmful could water be?" In unison all six monsters leaped into the river. Before they could stand up they had turned several somersaults and drunk a bellyful of plain water. Once more the Master threw his body onto a rock, which, however, instantly split open to let him walk through. The six monsters laughed again, saying, "Our strength is so great that we can even penetrate a mountain, let alone a small stone!!" Thrusting their shoulders forward they slowly drove into the rock, but when the Spiritual Man chanted a prayer, they could never move again, and crying in pain they were on the verge of death. The chieftains of the eight demon armies became furious. They transformed themselves into eight tigers with slanting eyes, and baring their fangs and brandishing their claws, they leaped forward to catch the Spiritual Man. The latter,

131 These works include "Han Xianzong kai fohua faben neizhuan" 漢顯宗開佛化法本內傳 and "Xu Qi Gaozu feidao fashi" 叙齊高祖銜道法事, both in Guang hongming ji 廣弘明集; and "Tangmo chanzong zaji fashi" 唐末禪宗筆記附法事 found at Dunhuang (Jing: xian, 29 in the Beijng Library). See Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, p. 195, n. 8.
however, just shook his body, and in his place there appeared a lion who ran after the tigers in hot pursuit. The demon chieftains again changed their shape into eight giant dragons, pouncing back to capture the lion, but the Spiritual Man instantly turned into a gold-winged roc, which, opening its huge beak, was about to peck the dragons’ eyes.\textsuperscript{133}

As in the late Dunhuang "Subjugation" murals and their inscriptions, here too we find repeated magical contests and "transformations," the images of the lion, dragon, and gold-winged bird, and the episode in which the demons who tried to burn the Daoist Master hurt themselves instead. This last parallel is particularly worth noting, because the event is absent in the bianwen and only appears in the paintings. I have mentioned earlier that the \textit{Xianyu jing} story briefly describes that when competing with King Vaiśravaṇa, Raudrākṣa’s monster found himself surrounded by fire and surrendered. But in the later Dunhuang "Subjugation" murals, not only is the monster destroyed by fire, but a heretic God of Fire is also invented. The inscriptions in Caves 9, 85, and 98 read: "The moment when the heretic Fire God tries to hurt Śāriputra with fire," and "The moment when the heretic Fire God is burned and escapes." The first inscription is also copied in the S4257 manuscript.

Other events in Feng Menglong’s story may likewise be traced to the Dunhuang murals. One scene in the paintings depicts heretic immortals dwelling inside a rocky mountain, and another scene represents heretics struggling in an ocean. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Feng Menglong also described the monsters being trapped in a rock and drowned in a river. Feng’s story also includes an episode in which the Daoist Master punished twelve evil fairies,\textsuperscript{134} whose prototypes may be traced to the "heretic maidens" in the Dunhuang paintings. Feng concluded his contest sequence with a storm scene: "In a second, the Lord of Wind blew out air, the Master of Rain poured down water, the Duke of Thunder displayed his power, and the Mother of Lightning blew over the sky—heavenly generals and divine soldiers were all there holding their weapons. Under their attack the demons vanished without trace,

\textsuperscript{133} Feng Menglong, 1:191–92.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 1:199–200.
and only then did the Spiritual Man stop displaying his magical power. He turned to Wang Chang and told him: ‘Now the people of Sichuan can sleep in peace.’ \(^{135}\) We know very well that in the Dunhuang murals it is the powerful whirlwind that finally destroys the heretic camp and clinches the Buddhists’ victory.

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 1:192–93.