

AN IMAGE OF NIGHTTIME MUSIC AND DANCE
IN TANG CHANG'AN:
NOTES ON THE LIGHTING DEVICES IN THE MEDICINE
BUDDHA TRANSFORMATION TABLEAU IN MOGAO CAVE 220,
DUNHUANG

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Preface

Dunhuang murals provide us with a history of images, and as visual documents, the Dunhuang Caves have become primary sources for the study of medieval history. Although the painting of the Seven Medicine Buddhas in Cave 220 at the Mogao Grottoes depicts a Buddhist Pure Land, it is also deeply connected to scenes of daily life in Tang society. The three large lighting devices included in this mural are actually representations of a lantern festival that frequently took place in the Tang capital of Chang'an. I argue that although these combinations of music, dance and extravagant lighting devices were portrayed in a Buddhist Pure Land, they more specifically reflect spectacles of lantern festivals that were enjoyed by the emperor and his subjects at court, or privately in the homes of urban elites during various nighttime banquets. Such Dunhuang murals, as critical visual documents that survived through time, help us reconstruct the social context of daily life in the two capitals of the Tang Empire, Chang'an and Luoyang. This is also an important method for the studying of Dunhuang visual materials.

Mural paintings at Dunhuang contain incredibly rich imagery of music and dance, and one could say that it is a treasured resource for the study of performance in medieval China. With such a unique repository of visual materials, we are able to trace the long history and complex development of dance and music in the medieval period. In the course of the century-long development of "Dunhuang Studies" on an international scale, the study of Dunhuang dance and music has steadily progressed, thanks to contributions by generations of scholars, such as Jao Tsung-I, Xi Zhen-guan, Chen Yingshi, Ye Dong, Niu Longfei, Zheng Ruzhong, Zhuang Zhuang, and Wang Kefen. They

have constructed the general contours of this field, and have also thoroughly identified the iconography of important images.¹ However, compared to other fields, the study of Dunhuang music and art lacks a more comprehensive and deeper research agenda. The mural paintings are treated as documents of historical phenomena, and interpretations are usually limited to evidential scholarship that is interested in the identification, typology, gestures, origins and development of isolated instruments or dance types, or the ensemble of orchestras or organization of dance troupes. Few studies address the rich contexts of such imagery, such as their historical background, their relationship to social customs and contemporary fashions, or how they reflect cultural and artistic exchange (Qiu 2006). Furthermore, there are even fewer iconographic studies that investigate how such imagery developed into its own distinct genre separate from Buddhist icons, preaching scenes, and *bianxiang* 變相 (transformation tableaux), or how they acquired symbolic meaning in their social and artistic contexts (Panofsky 1955/1996). These aforementioned issues suggest new directions that we should actively pursue in the future study of Dunhuang music and dance imagery (Wu 2003).

As a representative example of Dunhuang music and dance imagery, the two large transformation tableaux on the northern and southern walls of Cave 220 at the Mogao grottoes have always attracted much scholarly attention. Most agree that the images depict the "Whirling Dance of the Hu" (*huxuanwu* 胡旋舞), which was immensely popular during the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties.² Elsewhere, I have already discussed the social context, artistic background, and artistic trends that these paintings reflect and their specific relationship with lantern festivals in the prosperous capital of Chang'an during the Tang (Ning 2004; Sha 2013).³ Based on my previous stud-

ies, through close analysis, I have come to a new understanding of these paintings by combining insights from the research fields of music studies, dance studies, and Chang'an (and Luoyang) studies. Although I am not a specialist on music or dance, I hope to use the images of Cave 220 to bring to light a picture of the experiences of urban life in Tang Chang'an.

Methodology

In the research of Dunhuang mural paintings, iconographic studies are crucial, but it is much more important and meaningful to be able to trace and interpret the broader history of such images. Such studies must not be limited to the use of canonical textual sources to decipher images themselves, nor should they be confined to the study of religious contexts. Furthermore, in line with the critique recently put forward by the Taiwanese scholar Yen Chuan-ying (Yen 1998), such studies should not be a mere tracing of the history of images – as with rigid archaeological typologies of form and style.

I propose, instead, to study the historical context of images, and approach Dunhuang mural paintings through the lens of their social and material contexts, bringing them into a more concrete historical framework. By employing contemporaneous sources on social life we may put these mural paintings back into their original context (Ge 2012⁴). This will allow us to

adopt a creative sociological and historical approach to the transformation tableaux of music and dance in Cave 220 and to the visual culture of Dunhuang more broadly.

This paper focuses on the interpretation of the lighting devices within the music and dance scenes in the tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas on the north wall of the main chamber of Cave 220 [Fig. 1; Color Pl. II]. Between the two sections of dancing, three large lamps are being lit [Fig. 2]. They consist of two types of devices: in the middle is a rectangular nine-story lamp frame (a “lantern tower” *denglou* 燈樓) [Fig. 3], and on each side a four-story lamp tree (or “lantern wheel” *denglun* 燈輪) [Fig. 4a,b,c]. These two types of lighting devices are in fact, the luxurious lantern structures used during the Lantern Festival (*shangyuan jie* 上元節) (the fifteenth day of the first month) by the imperial family in the capital Chang'an for their nighttime festivities. The famous prime minister and poet Zhang Yue 張說 (667-731) once described such an extravaganza in a poem “Stomping Song Texts Orally Composed Before His Majesty on the Night of the Fifteenth 十五日夜樂前口号踏歌詞二首”:

Fig. 1. Tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas, main chamber, north wall, Mogao Cave 220, Early Tang (mid-7th century). Dunhuang. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.





Fig. 2 (above). Music and dance scenes from the Tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas, main chamber, north wall, Mogao Cave 220. Replica painted by Shi Weixiang. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.



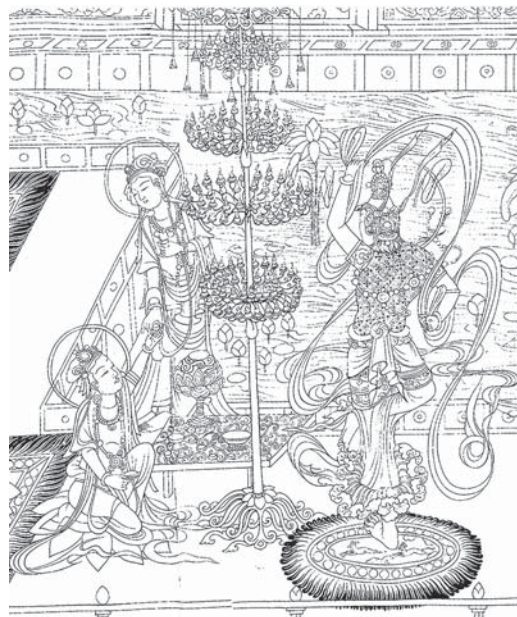
Fig. 3 (right). Lantern tower, Tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas, main chamber, north wall, Mogao Cave 220. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

Before the Blossom and Calyx Tower new rain and dew,
 In the city of Chang'an, the people enjoy peace.
 Dragon mouths hold "fire trees," a thousand lanterns flame;
 Cocks tread on lotus blossoms, a myriad years of spring.
 At the Imperial Palace on the 15th, we so enjoy the Spring Terrace
 That coming rains and moving winds do not envy us.
 Western region lantern wheels, a thousand shadows converge;
 The Eastern Flower Golden Portal opens ten thousand times.

花萼樓前雨露新，長安城裏太平人。
 龍銜火樹千重焰，雞踏蓮花萬歲春。
 帝宮三五戲春臺，行雨流風莫妬來。
 西域燈輪千影合，東華金闕萬重開。

[Cao and Peng 1960, p. 982; Engl. tr., Hartman 1995, pp. 14-15]

Fig. 4 a,b,c. (below). Lantern wheels, Tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas, main chamber, north wall, Cave 220. Replica (Fig. 4b) painted by He Zhizhao and Wan Gengyu, 1960. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.



The poem describes the spectacle of “stomping songs” (*tage* 踏歌) during the lantern festival held in the city of Chang’an on the fifteenth day of the first month. The poem mentions two types of lighting devices: one is the “lantern wheel” from the Western Regions, and the other is the “golden que tower” from China. It is clear from the poem that the former is round, and the latter is rectangular. These are exactly the two different types of lanterns that can be found in the mural painting of Cave 220.



Fig. 5. A typical music and dance scene in a Dunhuang tableau, from the Medicine Buddha tableau of the south wall of Mogao Cave 112, Mid-Tang, Late 8th – mid-9th century. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

In any case, the appearance of such luxurious lighting devices in the Early Tang Pure Land tableaux of Dunhuang caves is remarkable, and provides us with a different perspective on contemporary history. The lantern festivals held in the two Tang capitals of Chang’an and Luoyang during the fifteenth night of the first month were indeed glorious and magnificent.⁵ It became a recreational entertainment that was favored not only by the imperial family, officials and nobles, but also by common urban dwellers. Crowds of city-dwellers enthusiastically flocked to such festivities. These spectacles became major public events in urban life of Chang’an and Luoyang. A passage in the “Miscellaneous Records of Emperor Ming 明皇雜錄” describes such an occasion:

The emperor was at the Eastern Capital (Luoyang), and it was the night of the full moon of the first month. He moved to the Palace of Ascending Yang, and displayed many decorated lanterns, and installed court lighting devices. Candles and torches were placed from the inner keep to the palace halls, and they followed each other without end. There was a craftsman named Mao Shun, who was skilled in creating temporary structures decorated with colorful fabrics. [He] made thirty multistory pavilions, whose height reached one hundred and fifty *chi*. Pearls, jade, gold and silver were suspended upon them, and when a breeze arrived, they tinkled and made resonating sounds. [Mao Shun] made the lanterns in the form of leaping dragons, phoenixes, tigers and leopards. They seemed like they were not made by human effort.

上在東都，遇正月望夜，移仗上陽宮，大陳影燈，設庭燎，自禁中至於殿庭，皆設蠟炬，連屬不絕。時有匠毛順，巧思結創繒彩，為樓三十間，高一百五十尺，懸珠玉金銀，微風一至，鏘然成韻。乃以燈為龍鳳虎豹騰躍之狀，似非人力。

[Zheng and Tian 1994, p. 55]

This type of large tower-like lantern with movable compartments that could change shape was immensely popular in the Tang period, and can be related to the lantern tower depicted in Cave 220. We can also assume that the mural possibly depicts the early phases or the general contours of the large lantern towers that were made in Luoyang by craftsmen such as Mao Shun. Our analysis of the three lighting devices in Cave 220’s large dancing and music scenes – the lantern wheels and lantern tower – can help us reconstruct the lively lantern festival activities and more broadly the history of nighttime dance in Tang Chang’an.

The Historical Context of the Music and Dance Scene in the Medicine Buddha Tableau of Cave 220

For those familiar with Dunhuang mural paintings, it is commonly known that music and dance scenes appear in almost every single cave at Dunhuang. Images such as those in Cave 220, which include dance scenes and an accompanying orchestra, are integral components for all kinds of large tableau paintings, except for the tableaux of the *Flower Garland Sutra*, the *Thousand Buddhas*, the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, the *Uṣṇiṣa Vijaya Dharāṇi Sutra*, and Tibetan Buddhist mandalas. Their numbers are abundant, and their features are similar, usually occupying the space directly below the preaching scene of the main icon. It is common for there to be one or two people dancing, and there are conventionally two rows of musicians of varying numbers beside the dancers, forming a full music and dance scene [Fig. 5]. The time frame of these images



Fig. 6. *Music and dance in the Tableau of the Western Pure Land, main chamber, south wall, Mogao Cave 220, Early Tang (mid-7th century).* Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

ranges from the early Tang to the Uighur and Tangut periods, but the main composition is similar to that of the music and dance scene in the *Amitayurdhyana Sutra* tableau on the south wall of Cave 220 [Fig. 6]. A thorough investigation of all this material reveals that, despite the large number of music and dance scenes at Dunhuang, the Medicine Buddha tableau on the north wall of Cave 220 contains the only one that includes lighting devices. Therefore, from this perspective, we come to realize that the appearance of such large and elaborate lighting devices — in the form of a foreign lantern wheel and a Chinese lantern tower — is a unique case in tableau painting, and it must have been a result of particular historical circumstances.

Although the images of music and dance in Cave 220 appear within Buddhist grottoes at Dunhuang, we must also take into consideration Dunhuang's strategic position within the geo-politics of the Silk Road. These images were intimately connected to transportation and commerce during the early phases of the Tang Empire, as well as the rich and elaborate temple wall paintings in the two capitals of Chang'an and Luoyang. More specifically, we may take a closer look at the critical historical moment when, during the fourteenth year of the Zhen'guan era (640 CE), Emperor Taizong (598–649) dispatched the army of Hou Junji (?–643) to conquer the Kingdom of Gaochang (present-day Turfan region) (Sima Quang 1956, pp. 6267–6269). The construction of Cave 220 was finished during the sixteenth year of the Zhen'guan period

(642 CE) by the Zhai family, which had deep ties with foreign culture in Central Asia, but was also enthusiastic about obtaining a new Chinese identity (Chen 2008; Luo and Rong 2014; Ning 2004, esp. pp. 59–61). The Zhai family's deep interest in Chang'an culture helps explain the entirely new imagery found in Cave 220 (He 1986, p. 201; Duan 2007), and suggests that the origins of the new style of tableau paintings and the employment of new *fenben* 粉本 (a Chinese term that denotes sketches and stencils used in painter workshops) in Cave 220 can be

traced to the traditions in Chang'an (Sha 2013; Ma Hualong 1996). Furthermore, if we consider other important imagery in Cave 220, such as the "Zhen'guan New Style" of the Vimalakirti tableau proposed by Wang Zhongxu (2012), then it will also support our claim that such innovative painting styles and *fenben* in Cave 220 come from the capital.

Considering Lighting Devices: The Uniqueness of the Music and Dance Image in the Medicine Buddha Tableau in Cave 220

The following section explores the relationship between the music and dance imagery in Cave 220 and everyday life in Tang Chang'an. As previously mentioned, a major issue to address is the reason why lighting devices were depicted in the music and dance scenes in a transformation tableau.

At Dunhuang, only Medicine Buddha tableaux contain images of lamps. This phenomenon is based on the text of the sutra itself. There are in total five translations of the Medicine Buddha Sutra: 1) *The Consecration Sutra Spoken by the Buddha that Rescues from Sin and Enables Salvation from Birth and Death* 佛說灌頂拔除過罪生死得度經 (one scroll) translated by the Kuchean Monk Śrīmitra 帛尸梨蜜多羅 during the Eastern Jin (265–420 CE); 2) *The Sutra of The Medicine Master Lapis Lazuli Light* 佛說藥師琉璃光經 (one scroll) translated by Huijian 慧簡 during the Song of the Southern Dynasties (420–479 CE); 3) *Sutra of the Vows of the Medicine Buddha* 佛說藥師如來本願經 (one scroll), translated by Dharmagupta 達摩笈多 (d. 619 CE) in the Sui Dynasty (581–618 CE); 4) *Sutra of the Vows of the Medicine Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Crystal Radiance* 藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經 (one scroll), translated by Xuanzang 玄奘 (601–664 CE); 5) *Sutra of the Vows of the Medicine*

Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Crystal Radiance and Seven Past Buddha 藥師琉璃光七佛本願功德經 (two scrolls), translated by Yijing 義淨 (635–713 CE) (Luo 1989). All of the above texts mention various activities that would reduce the danger of ill fate and disaster, such as “reading the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* or reciting his name,” “burning lights of seven stories,” “suspending five-colored longevity banners,” “liberate all types of living beings,” “feeding monks,” etc. Therefore, the act of lighting lanterns could be considered one of the major activities of accumulating merit that was promoted by the *Medicine Buddha Sutra*. And because of this, we understand why lantern wheels were depicted in the tableau paintings.

Many scholars have written about the Medicine Buddha tableau in Cave 220, such as Matsumoto Eiichi (1937), Luo Huaqing (1989), Shi Pingting (1998), Li Yumin (1989), Wang Huimin (n.d., 2000), and Ning Qiang (2004, esp. pp. 20–22). They believe the tableau was specifically based on Dharmagupta’s translation of the *Sutra of the Vows of the Medicine Buddha* in 615 CE. This version contains vivid descriptions of the lighting of lamps to eradicate disaster and pray for blessings:

The Bodhisattva Salvation replied: “Virtuous Ananda! In order to help the patient recover, you should adhere to the Eight Precepts for seven days and seven nights, make offerings of food, drink and other necessities to a [group of] monks and nuns in accordance with your means, pay homage and respectfully make offerings to the World-Honored Medicine Buddha six times a day and recite this sutra forty-nine times. You should light forty-nine lamps, make seven images of the Medicine Buddha and place seven lamps, each as large as a cart-wheel, before each image, letting them burn continuously for forty-nine days and nights. You should also make multi-colored banners, forty-nine hand-lengths long.



Fig. 7. A *Medicine Buddha* tableau that includes lantern wheels, Mogao Cave 433, Sui Dynasty. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

救脫菩薩言：大德阿難！若有患人欲脫重病，當為此入七日七夜受八分齋，當以飲食，及種種眾具，隨力所辦，供養比丘僧，晝夜六時，禮拜供養彼世尊藥師琉璃光如來，四十九遍讀誦此經，然四十九燈，應造七軀彼如來像，一一像前各置七燈，一一燈量大如車輪，或復乃至四十九日光明不絕，當造五色綵幡長四十九尺。

[T14n0449_p0404a03(02) - 10(02) 《大正藏》第14冊，第404頁；tr. based on *Sutra* 2001, pp. 40–51]

This section is frequently cited by scholars as the textual source for the large lantern tower and two lantern wheels in the tableau of Cave 220. However, with closer scrutiny, we realize that, although the images might symbolically represent the text, the placement of the lamps is still very different from the description above. According to the sutra, the burning of lamps is mostly to venerate the “World-Honored Medicine Buddha,” namely the seven Buddha figures mentioned in the text, but in the cave painting, the lighting devices are placed within the music and dance scenes instead. The intentional combination of the devotional lighting devices and dance scenes shows that the painter was very careful with the lighting effect of the dance environment. By transplanting devotional lamps into the music and dance scenes in the Eastern Pure Land of the Medicine Buddha, the painting actively reflects upon the realities of daily life. As Luo Huaqing (1989) has correctly pointed out: “The luminous lamps, vibrant dance scenes and luxurious settings depicted in the Medicine Buddha tableau in Cave 220, effectively create the blissful atmosphere of the Pure Land of the Medicine Buddha. The tableau is of high quality: it not only provides us a glimpse of contemporary society, but is also a result of the popularity of the cult of the Medicine Buddha.”

Scenes of lighting lanterns could already be found in Medicine Buddha tableaux from the Sui dynasty. For example, at Dunhuang in Cave 417 and Cave 433, there are also large lantern wheels depicted in the paintings, and the latter cave contains two large ones [Fig. 7]. This shows that by the Sui dynasty, lantern wheels had already become an integral part of the Medicine Buddha tableaux. However, music and dance scenes were never included in Sui dynasty caves. The lanterns were usually depicted on the two sides of the main icon, which is closer to the description in the sutra, showing how they were lit as devotional objects



for the Medicine Buddha for good luck and warding off disaster. By the Tang and Five Dynasties periods, the lanterns were complemented with images of the Twelve Yaksa Generals, Nine Forms of Ultimate Death, Twelve Great Vows, suspending banners, liberating living beings, and the feeding of monks, which consisted the main iconography of the Medicine Buddha tableau (Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 2001-2002, [Vol. 6], p. 128; Shi 1998). Music and dance scenes appear in such tableau paintings throughout the Early Tang to the Guiyijun Period (848-1036). However, the lantern scenes are usually found separate from the music and dance scenes, and were usually placed adjacent to passages of feeding monks and liberating animals. In tableau compositions that include two long strips of images on both sides, the lanterns are usually depicted under the passages for the Nine Forms of Ultimate Death, as in the High Tang Cave 148 [Fig. 8]. They also appear in the screen sections of tableaux that are organized as painted screens, such as the Middle Tang Cave 231 and the Late Tang Cave 12 [Fig. 9]. In other cases, the lanterns are included on the bottom section of the composition, e.g., in the Five Dynasties Cave 146 [Fig. 10]. They are also depicted in the preparatory drawings of the Medicine Buddha tableau P.2868v from Cave 17 [Fig.

Fig. 8 (above). The composition of the Nine Deaths and lantern scenes in the Medicine Buddha tableau in Mogao Cave 148, High Tang, 8th century, Dunhuang. After: Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 2001-2002, [Vol. 6], p. 191, Pl. 155.

Fig. 9 (left). Lantern scene in painted screens under the Medicine Buddha tableau, Mogao Cave 12, Late Tang. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

Fig. 10 (below). Lantern scene in the Medicine Buddha tableau of Mogao Cave 146, Five Dynasties. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.



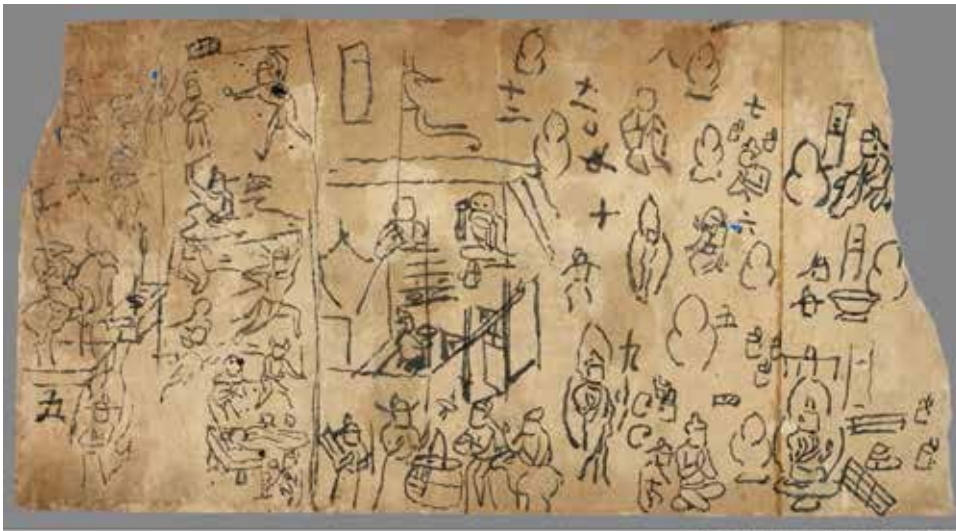


Fig. 11. Monochrome drawing of the Medicine Buddha tableau, MS P.2868v from Mogao Cave 17 (now in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

11] (Sha 2007, pp. 53-66), where the placement of the lanterns is as in the other examples, not in the music and dance scenes. This more comprehensive picture of Medicine Buddha tableaux at Dunhuang emphasizes the uniqueness of the depiction in Cave 220 where the lanterns are an integral part of the music and dance scenes.

As the large Medicine Buddha tableau in Cave 220 is known to be the earliest of its kind, we can argue that this is the first instance in which music and dance scenes are included in Medicine Buddha tableaux. In the Sui dynasty, such tableaux did not contain any images of music and dance, and by the Tang the Medicine Buddha tableau adapted a “Western Pure Land” style of presentation. As Wang Huimin pointed out, “It is because of the contemporary interpretations of the Medicine Buddha Sutra, that the world of the Medicine Buddha was conceived as an ideal Buddhist Pure Land. At Dunhuang, the realm of the Medicine Buddha was depicted as a Buddhist Pure Land, and this reflects the beliefs of religion and society” (Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 2001-2002, [Vol. 6], p. 148). The understanding of the realm of the Medicine Buddha as a Pure Land can be traced in religious texts related to the cult. In the *Sutra of the Vows of the Medicine Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Crystal Radiance* 佛说药师如来本愿经:

This Buddha-land is utterly pure. There are no forms of women and it is distant from all temptations and evil. There are neither Evil Paths nor cries of suffering. The ground is made of lapis lazuli. The cities, walls, doors and windows, halls and beams, brackets and surrounding draperies and ornaments are all made of the Seven Treasures. The adornments of the Realm of Lapis Lazuli are like that of the Land of Bliss.

彼佛國土一向清淨，無女人形，離諸欲惡，亦無一切惡道苦聲，琉璃為地，城闕、垣牆、門窗、堂閣柱樑、斗拱、

周匝羅網，皆七寶成，如極樂國，淨琉璃界莊嚴如是。

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《大正藏》第14册，第402頁]

The descriptions of the realm of the Medicine Buddha in the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* are very similar to those of the Western Pure Land of the Amitabha Buddha. In the *Amitabha Sutra* 佛说阿弥陀经, Kumārajīva’s (344-413) translation reads:

[In] the Land of Utmost Bliss there are seven- jeweled ponds filled with water possessing the eight excellent qualities. The beds of the

ponds are covered solely with gold sand, and from the four sides of each bed rise stairs of gold, silver, beryl, and crystal. Above these stand pavilions adorned with gold, silver, beryl, crystal, sapphire, rosy pearls, and cornelian. In the ponds are lotuses as large as chariot wheels—the blue ones radiating a blue light, the yellow a yellow light, the red a red light, and the white a white light. They are marvelous and beautiful, fragrant and pure. Śāriputra, the Land of Utmost Bliss is filled with such splendid adornments.

極樂國土有七寶池，八功德水充滿其中，池底純以金沙布地。四邊階道，金、銀、琉璃、頗梨合成。上有樓閣，亦以金、銀、琉璃、頗梨、車璫、赤珠、馬瑙而嚴飾之。池中蓮花，大如車輪，青色青光，黃色黃光，赤色赤光，白色白光，微妙香潔。舍利弗，極樂國土成就如是功德莊嚴！

[T12n0366_001 [0346c16] 《大正藏》第12册，第346頁；
in English, *Pure Land*, 2003, p. 91]

Music and dance are fundamental activities enjoyed by all human civilizations, reflecting the spiritual pursuits of the people, and evolving throughout history. In many cases, music and dance are intimately related to the interest of the ruling class in different time periods. As Yang Jianhong argues (1997, pp. 461-62), “In China, every feudal dynasty was invested in music and dance. They believed that it was deeply related to the rise and fall of states or good governance. At the founding of each dynasty, rituals and music were created accordingly. Ritual was the binding force of etiquette and conduct in the class based feudal system in China. The investment in music and dance can be seen as methods for inner cultivation and also the regulation of aesthetic taste and social customs of the people. Ritual and music complement each other.” The “Records on Ritual” in the *New Book of the Tang* 新唐書·禮樂誌 specifically provide the definition of music and dance:

[Music and Ritual] is to be used at the ancestor temple and at court, in order to connect the happiness of humans



Fig. 12. Music and dance scene in the Western Paradise tableau, Yulin Cave 25. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

[In] that Buddha land heavenly music is played continually. The ground is made of gold. Six times during the day and night mândārava flowers rain down from the sky.

彼佛國土，常作天樂，黃金為地，晝夜六時天雨曼陀羅華。

[T12n0366_001 0347a07 《大正藏》第12冊，第347頁；
in English, *Pure Land*, 2003, p. 91]

Apparently, the *Medicine Buddha Sutra* borrowed the imagery of music and dance from Western Pure Land paintings to show that the lapis lazuli realm of the Medicine Buddha was also a similar “Land of Bliss”.

and gods. The sound of metal and stone, and the form of song and dance, each come from their ability to subdue disorder, but the root of them come from local customs.

至其所以用於郊廟、朝廷，以接人神之歡，其金石之響，歌舞之容，則各因其功業治亂之所起，而本其風俗之所由。

[Ouyang and Song 1975, p. 460]

Therefore, music and dance became indicators of an ideal world in the imagination of the people.

Buddhist sutras also used music and dance as means of signifying a Buddhist Pure Land, as in the *Amitabha Sutra*:

Fig. 13a (right), b (below). Music and dance scenes in the Western Pure Land tableaux, Mogao Caves 321 and 341, Early Tang, 7th century. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.



However, in the copious Western Paradise imagery at Dunhuang, lanterns are rarely included in music and dance scenes [Figs. 12, 13a,b].

A “Pure Land” (Chn: *jintu* 淨土, Skt: Sukhavati), or “Land of Utmost Bliss (*jile shijie* 極樂世界),” in Buddhist belief denotes an ideal realm without suffering, in contrast to the “impure lands (*huitu* 穢土)” where sentient beings dwell. In a Buddhist cosmos, time and space are limitless. Buddha lands or worlds are also limitless, and within each Buddha Land there is a Buddha that preaches to his subjects. The “Land of Bliss” is one of these limitless realms. As mentioned above in the *Amitabha Sutra*, this land contains of endless merits and

adornment, and countless Savaka and bodhisattvas. Its lecture halls, temples, palaces, towers, jeweled trees and ponds are all made of the Seven Treasures, miraculous and pure. Food and drinks of a hundred flavors arrive at will, and tens of thousands kinds of music are played, all expounding the dharma. Citizens of such a realm are imbued with great wisdom: their appearances are elegant and solemn. Enjoying all types of music, they experience no pain or suffering, and are able to follow the “true way” of Buddhism. As described in the *Sutra of the Vows of the Medicine Buddha*, the Eastern Lapis Lazuli Realm of the Medicine Buddha is also an ideal world desired by many followers of Buddhism. In this realm, the ground is made of lapis lazuli and the body of the Medicine Buddha also glows like the same substance – thus being called the “World of Lapis Lazuli”. According to the sutras, this world is similar to the “Land of Bliss” in the west, and contains endless wonders. There is no differentiation between the sexes, nor is there any of the Five Desires. The ground is made of lapis lazuli, and divided into pathways by threads of gold. Cities and palaces are all made of the Seven Treasures. As long as one upholds and recites the *Medicine Buddha Sutra*, chants the name of the Medicine Buddha, and cultivates kindness to others, one will be reborn in the Lapis Lazuli World. And since the Pure Land of the Medicine Buddha was understood as a utopian world, which is eternal, and beyond time and space, without day and night, then rarely are lanterns depicted as actual lighting devices that provide visibility in darkness. They should be seen as devotional objects for the worshipping of the Buddha, and were offered for good fortune and warding off evil.

However, the large lantern wheel and lantern towers are clearly depicted as lighting devices for music and dance activities that occurred during the night. Therefore, as the *fenben* of the paintings in Cave 220 are from Chang’an, the lanterns in the music and dance scenes must reflect actual nighttime music and dance in the capital. By including such elaborate and wondrous imagery of actual festivals from Chang’an into scenes that depict the Pure Land of the Medicine Buddha, the painters and patrons of the cave were evoking their memories of such events.

Notes on Lanterns: Nighttime Dance and Music in the Tang Dynasty

From the arrangement of the unique depiction in Cave 220 of the three large lighting devices, we can infer that it represents a nighttime dance. Previous scholars have already connected these scenes with the lantern festivals that were popular in Chang’an. For example, the *Forgotten Matters of the Kaiyuan and Tianbao Era* 開元天寶遺事, records the Lady of Han’s lavish lantern

trees in her private residences, which were as tall as eighty *chi*, and were lit on the night of the lantern festival. The lantern tree had a hundred branches, and could be seen from a hundred *li* away (Wang Renyu 2006, p. 55). The *Draft Notes from the Court and the Country* 朝野僉載 also records an event that took place in the second year of the Xiantian period (713 CE). On the night of the fifteenth day of the first month, during the lantern festival, a large lantern tree was erected outside the Gate of Peace and Prosperity, which was twenty *zhang* high, and carried fifty-thousand lamps (Zhang Wu 1979, p. 69). These are all scenes from historical texts that have impressed modern readers. The depictions in Cave 220 enable us to visualize what is described in such texts.

Night banquets that combine descriptions of lamps with those of music and dance are relatively abundant in historical records and archaeological findings. One poem by the Tang poet Liu Yanshi 劉言史 (?-812) describes a phenomenon similar to what we see in the “Hu Whirling Dance” scenes in Cave 220:

*Night Viewing of the Hu Leaping Dance at the
Palace Assistant Secretary Mr. Wang’s Residence*
王中丞宅夜觀舞胡騰

People rarely see a barbarian of the Shi State;
Dancing in front of the banquet, [his movement] is as swift as a bird.
The woven barbarian hat is of a pointed top;
The barbarian jacket, made of refined cotton, has two narrow sleeves.
His hand drops the wine cup;
He looks into the west, suddenly thinks of the distanced road to his hometown.
He jumps like a rolling wheel and his precious belt sounds;
His feet move vivaciously and his boots are soft.
Audiences in all four directions sit in silence with goggling eyes;
A bamboo flute and a *pipa* with a tilted head,
He jumps energetically on the new carpet of snowy and crimson fur;
He whisks light flowers under red candles.
When the banquet nearly ends, the dance stops, and the music become silent;
On the west of the hibiscus I see a waning moon.

石國胡兒人見少，蹲舞尊前急如鳥。
織成蕃帽虛頂尖，細氎胡衫雙袖小。
手中拋下蒲萄盞，西顧忽思鄉路遠。
跳身轉轂寶帶鳴，弄腳繽紛錦靴軟。
四座無言皆瞪目，橫笛琵琶徧頭促。
亂騰新毯雪朱毛，傍拂輕花下紅燭。
酒闌舞罷絲管絕，木槿花西見殘月。

[Cao and Peng 1960, p. 5324]

What is described in this poem is a *huteng* dance or “Hu Leaping Dance 胡騰舞” performed by Central Asian foreigners from the state of Shi 石國 during the night, hence the references to imagery of “red can-

dles” and the “waning moon.” He writes that “audiences in all four directions sit in silence with goggling eyes,” and “When the banquet nearly ends, the dance stops, and the music becomes silent.” Indeed the poem describes not a regular dance event, but a lavish night banquet that took place in the private residences of Palace Assistant Secretary Mr. Wang, which included exotic entertainments such as the “Hu Leaping Dance.” The poet Liu Yanshi was among the guests that night, and recounts a typical private night banquet during the Tang dynasty. The poem includes basic elements that are similar to those depicted in Cave 220: dances, musicians and red candles. The Buddhas in the Pure Land scenes of Cave 220 have been substituted for the audiences of drinking scenes. The famous Southern Tang (937–975) painting *The Night Revels of Han Xizai* by Gu Hongzhong (active 10th century) provides some idea of a night banquet that took place in the private residences of elites during the Five Dynasties (907–979) [Fig. 14] (for details see Li 1979; Wu 2009; Zhang 2014). In the lush setting of Han Xizai’s mansion, there are hosts, guests, servants, music, dance and wine. Only one candle is shown in the painting, and it economically indicates that the banquet happened at night.

The combination of music, dance and lighting devices is frequently mentioned in descriptions of private night banquets during the Tang. In his poem “Banquet of Palace Attendant Mr. Tian 田侍中宴席,” Wang Jian 王建 writes:

Incense burns inside silk curtains, warm and hazy;
Torch lights the courtyard, candles [shine] all over the banquet.
[The performers] get their dancing clothes ready, showing their jade wrists;
They move their fans [when they sing], the golden frames [of the fans] are exposed.
Beauties sit aside, they play traditional flutes;
Colorful phoenixes obliquely fly over the five strings.

香熏羅幕暖成煙，火照中庭燭滿筵。
整頓舞衣呈玉腕，動搖歌扇露金鈿。
青蛾側座調雙管，彩鳳斜飛入五弦。

[Cao and Peng 1960, p. 3415]



The party held at Palace Attendant Mr. Tian’s home was extremely lively and there were several candles and lamps placed amongst the guests.

Cen Shen’s 岑參 (705–770) poem, “Flute Songs at the Residence of General Pei 裴將軍宅蘆管歌,” describes a banquet at General Pei’s home:

The mansion in Chang’an is of the General of Liaodong;
A beauty plays flute when the distinguished guests are received.

In the midnight, at the main hall, the guests have not yet returned;

Only [the sound of] flute accompanies their drinking.

All guests enjoy listening [the flute] endlessly;

Pearl curtain hangs high, and a row of red candles is lit.

The general, gets drunk, dances and does not want to stop;

He asks the beauty to play another tune.

遼東將軍長安宅，美人蘆管會佳客。
夜半高堂客未回，祇將蘆管送君杯。
諸客愛之聽未足，高捲珠簾列紅燭。

[Ibid., p. 2058]

Red candles were arranged in several rows during this gathering, and created a warm and charming atmosphere at the general’s mansion.

Many foreign Hu dances are also recorded as nighttime activities with lighting effects. In his poem “The Leaping Hu 胡騰儿,” Li Duan 李端 (743–782) writes:

The dancer of *Huteng* is a boy from Liangzhou;
His body is [as pale] as jade, and his nose is [as sharp] as an awl.

Wearing a white-color light robe, the front and back [of the robe] is rolled up;

Wearing a purple-color long belt, one end [of the belt] is hanging.

He kneels in front of the tent and speaks in his home accent;

He tidies up the front of his robe, stirs his sleeves, and dances for you.

The old governor of the Tang Protectorate of the Pacified West stops his tear and watches [the dance];

A poet from the capital transcribes the tune and passes it [to others].

He lifts his eyebrows, moves his eyes, and steps on the flowery carpet;

He sweats heavily and his pearl hat inclines aside.

He [seems to be] drunk, teetering towards the east and then the west;

His boots are softly [wandering] in front of the lamps.
He walks in a circle or treads fast, all conforming to the beat;

He puts his hands reversely on his waist, like a semicircular moon.

Suddenly, the zither plays to an end;

Tooting, bugle starts to sound on the city walls.

Fig. 14. *Night Banquet of Han Xizai*, attributed to Gu Hongzhong, Five Dynasties. Palace Museum, Beijing <<http://www.sbk88.cn/renwensheke/wudairenwuhuashangxi/326695.html>>.

The boy of *Huteng*, The boy of *Huteng*,
Do you know that the road to your hometown has been
cut off?

胡騰身是涼州兒，肌膚如玉鼻如錐。
桐布輕衫前後卷，葡萄長帶一邊垂。
帳前跪作本音語，拾襟攪袖為君舞。
安西舊牧收淚看，洛下詞人抄曲興。
揚眉動目踏花氈，紅汗交流珠帽偏。
醉卻東傾又西倒，雙靴柔弱滿燈前。
環行急蹴皆因節，反手叉腰如卻月。
絲桐忽奏一曲終，鳴鳴畫角城頭髮。
胡騰兒，胡騰兒，胡鄉路斷知不知？

[Ibid., p. 3238]

The line “His boots are softly [wandering] in front of the lamp” undeniably refers to a “Hu Leaping Dance” taking place at night. The poem is ambiguous about the actual location of the event, which provides the reader with a sense of imagination, but there is still dance, music, lighting, and an audience, which is similar to that displayed in the mural in Cave 220.

Whether a “Hu Leaping Dance” or a “Hu Whirling Dance,” they are all seen as exotic performances by people from Central Asia. The popularity under the Tang of these dances, the Zhezhi Dance, and the water splashing festivities have been thoroughly studied by previous scholars, and are not the central concerns of this present discussion. Rather, we would emphasize that in Tang society, it was believed that the best performances happened during the night under artificial lighting. This is perhaps similar to how modern people choose to enjoy performances during the night

Fig. 15. Banquet scene of the tomb owner on the relief carvings of screen panels of the stone outer coffin of the Tomb of Yu Hong, Taiyuan, Sui dynasty (now in the collection of the Archaeological Institute of Shanxi Province). After: Shanxisheng et al. 2005, Pls. 145-46.



where the atmosphere of such performances is enhanced under dramatic lighting effects.

The requirement of lighting for Central Asian Hu dances can be further understood through various archaeological finds in Sogdian tombs. In the Sui dynasty tomb of Yu Hong 虞弘 in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, banquet scenes of the tomb owner are depicted on the stone outer coffin. In the section showing a “Hu Leaping Dance” is a small lamp [Fig. 15] (Shanxisheng et al. 2001, 2005). Another tomb, at Shimaping, Tianshui, Gansu province, which also contains a stone funerary couch, contained a group of five musician figurines, all in the form of Hu foreigners from the west, each of them holding a different instrument [Fig. 16]. The same tomb also contained a lamp stand and a chicken-head pitcher (Tianshui 1982). In the Northern Zhou (557–581) tomb of An Jia 安伽 in Xi’an (Shaanxi 2003), the excavated stone screens depict lamps in the music and dance scene which Shen Ruiwen has identified as a night banquet [Fig. 17; Color Pl. III] (Shen 2001, pp. 518-19). Most of these tombs of foreigners who settled

Fig. 16. Five seated musicians from the Western Regions, Stone Couch Tomb, Shimaping, Tianshui, Gansu Province (collection of the Museum of the City of Tianshui). Courtesy of the Museum of the City of Tianshui.





Fig. 17. Music and dance, stone screen on funeral couch, Tomb of An Jia, Northern Zhou (collection of the Shaanxi History Museum). Courtesy of the Shaanxi Archaeology Institute.

in China which depict night banquets involving Hu dancing also include images of lighting devices, suggesting that there is a close connection between these two elements.

As the poetry quoted above and other textual sources suggest, under the Tang, banquets were commonly held at court and in the private quarters of high officials and aristocrats. Musicians and dancers played an important role in the daily life of the elite (Kishibe 1973; Fu 1991; Xiu and Jian 1993; Zeng 2004). The textual evidence is reinforced by images of music and dance found in murals of Tang tombs (Li 2005; Cheng 2012). Su Sixu's 蘇思勳 tomb contains images

of the "Hu Leaping Dance" [Fig. 18] (Shaanxi 1960; Li 1994; for an image, Su Bai, *Zhongguo meishu* 1989, Pl. 130). The newly discovered tomb of Han Xiu 韓休, the prime minister during the reign of Emperor Xuanzong (685–762, r. 712–756), includes a large scene of a man and woman performing foreign and Chinese dances with accompanying musicians [Fig. 19; Color Pl. III] (Cheng 2015). While these two examples depict realistically and in considerable detail dance scenes, they do not specify the occasion for the performance. This sense of ambiguity raises questions for further study.

However, the "Palace Concert 宮樂圖," presumably a Song Dynasty (960–1297) copy of a Tang painting now

Fig. 18. Music and dance, mural painting, Tomb of Su Sixu, Tang dynasty (collection of the Shaanxi History Museum). Courtesy of the Shaanxi History Museum.





Fig. 19. Music and dance, mural painting, Tomb of Han Xiu, Tang dynasty (collection of the Shaanxi History Museum). Courtesy of the Shaanxi History Museum.

in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, clearly depicts a Tang dynasty court music scene, as suggested by the costumes of the ladies, the table utensils, and the pet dogs [Fig. 20] (Shen 2002, p. 350; Li 2005, p. 301). In their poetry, the emperors themselves invoked the pleasures of such events. In his poem, "Preface to the Banquet for Bestowing Wine in the Xingqing Palace in Middle Spring 春中興慶宮酺宴並序," Emperor Xuanzong writes, "To sing a sound and one drinks a cup of wine; To dance a tune and one gets drunk" (歌一声而酒一杯，舞一曲而人一醉) (Cao and Peng 1960, p. 38). Another example is in Emperor Taizong's poem,

Fig. 20. Anonymous, A Palace Concert, Song dynasty, National Palace Museum, Taipei
<http://www.woaihuahua.com/guohua/renwu/234.html>.



"Banquet of Ministers at the Xuanwu Gate during Spring 春日玄武門宴群臣":

The beautiful springtime initiates a fine festival;
 The warm air stirs a fine year.
 I stop my carriage besides the Hualin Garden;
 I hold a great banquet at the Bailiang Palace.
 At the purple hall, it is full of decorated jade-ornaments;
 On the red stairs, and robes and ribbons are allied.
 People from nine eastern foreign areas are gathered at
 the lavished feast;
 Fine kinds of northern barbarians attend the magnificent
 banquet.
 To entertain the guests, "Heavy Dew" is sung;
 To spread out the music, a heavenly tune is played.
 In a clear cup, nice wine floats;
 An elegant tune resonates on red strings.
 Alas, I rule ten thousand counties;
 I am still afraid of pacifying eight directions.
 I shall be maintaining uprightness and the firmness,
 never to be self-opinionated, and vigorously seek for
 the virtuous.

韶光開令序，淑氣動芳年。駐輦華林側，高宴柏梁前。
 紫庭文珮滿，丹墀袞絨連。九夷簞瑤席，五狄列瓊筵。
 娛賓歌湛露，廣樂奏鈞天。清尊浮綠醕，雅曲韻朱弦。
 粵余君萬國，還慚撫八埏。庶幾保貞固，虛己厲求賢。

[Ibid., p. 6]

What is involved here is not simply amusement for the imperial family, but a great state banquet created to instantiate the high status of Emperor Taizong as the "Son of Heaven." "People from nine eastern foreign areas are gathered at the lavished feast; Fine kinds of northern barbarians attend the magnificent banquet." Subjects of several ethnicities, or "foreign

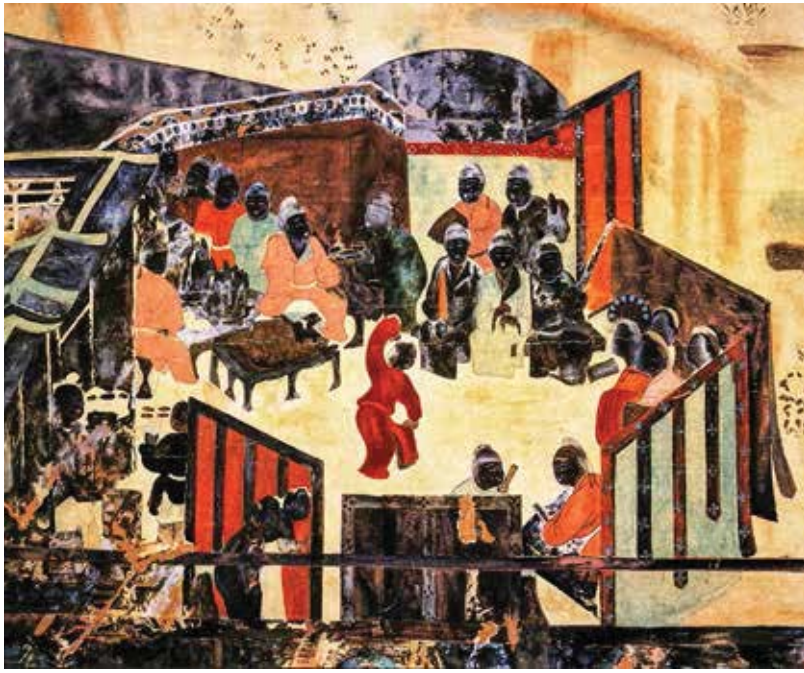


Fig. 21. Marriage scene, Maitreya tableau, Mogao Cave 445, High Tang. Replica painting by Li Qiqiong. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

generals (*fanjiang* 番將) were serving under Emperor Taizong during this time, such as Turkic Shi Dana 史大奈, Ashina Simo 阿史那思摩 (?–655), Ashina She'er 阿史那社爾 (609–655), the Khotanese Yuchi Jingde 尉迟敬德 (585–658), and the Sogdians An Xinggui 安興貴 (active 6th–7th century) and An Yuanshou 安元壽 (607–683) (Zhang 1986). The early Tang notion of representing “Ten Thousand Countries Coming to Court” during such ceremonies remained highly popular (Zhou 2009). The exotic performances that had started to gain currency since the Northern Dynasties, such as the “Hu Leaping Dance” and “Hu Whirling Dance” now were incorporated into the courtly entertainments, were performed usually into the night and thus would have required complex lighting devices to ensure visibility. Although the Emperor’s poem does not provide details of the lighting, the Cave 220 mural, completed in the sixteenth year of the Zhen’guan era (642 CE) on the basis of a *fenben* from Chang’an, allows us to visualize the scene and another of the imperial banquets evoked by poet Wang Jian 王建 (767–830) in his “Palace Poem 宮詞”:

A banquet is held in the inner palace in early autumn, it is the second watch;
In front of the palace hall, lamps light as in bright day-time.
A eunuch delivers the imperial command, his voice widely spreads;
Doors of all institutions open, [people] are walking everywhere.

內宴初秋入二更，殿前燈火一天明。
中宮傳旨音聲散，諸院門開觸處行。

[Cao and Peng 1960, p. 3443]

The lighting in front of the hall was as supposedly as bright as daylight, and so this must have been a highly extravagant lighting device.

The passion for music and dance was not limited to the elites: common people of the Tang also enjoyed such performances, a fact attested to by evidence found in Dunhuang murals. For example, Tang dynasty Maitreya-related tableaux usually included music and dance and are reflections of daily life. In the High Tang Cave 445, the wedding scene in the Maitreya tableau also includes extensive banquet imagery [Fig. 21]. Among the guests are some dressed in foreign clothing with large folding collars. The musicians are dressed in foreign clothing from the western regions, and there may also be intimations of Hu dancing. According to tradition, Tang weddings were supposed to take place at sunset. The *Old Book of Tang* 舊唐書, Scroll 45, “Records on Clothing 輿服志,” states, “The wedding ceremony of nobles and commoners must all prepare for the Six Rituals of Marriage, to uphold the ancestor shrines and attend to the in-laws. [The ceremony] must be scheduled during the time of sunset (*hun*), and [the couple] should visit the parents the next morning.” This means that the ritual harks back to the actual meaning of the Chinese term for a wedding “*hun* 婚,” which also indicates “*hun* 昏” – the time when the sun sets.⁶ Although no lamps are shown in the painting (because the passage represents a scene in Maitreya’s Pure Land), we can still assume that the banquet is taking place during the night. In other Mid- to Late Tang examples (Cave 360 [Fig. 22];



Fig. 22. Banquet scene, Vimalakirti tableau, Mogao Cave 360, Mid-Tang. Replica painting by Wu Manying. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.



Fig. 23. Banquet scene, Vimalakirti tableau, Mogao Cave 9, Late Tang. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

Cave 9 [Fig. 23]), Vimalakirti tableaux frequently depict him entering various wine houses to preach the dharma, the occasion represented as a banquet. Even though the context for such banquets is religious sutra texts, the scenes borrow from daily life. These paintings do not show lamps and thus do not reveal whether the events took place during the day or at night.

That commoners might witness the elaborate lantern ceremonies being staged in the capital can be seen from various texts, e.g., the “Biography of Emperor Ruizong 睿宗本纪 (662–617, r. 710–712)” in the *Old Book of the Tang* 舊唐書:

During the night of the lantern festival, the emperor directed the viewing of the lanterns at the Gate of Peace and Prosperity. He caused the palace girls to come out and had them link sleeves and stomp songs. He also allowed the hundred officials to watch, and this continued for one night.... At the beginning, there was a monk named Potuo that was invited to open the gates at night and light

up hundreds and thousands of lamps, which went on for three days and three nights. The Emperor watched the lamps and enjoyed merrymaking at the Gate of Prolonged Happiness (*Yanximen*) for three days and three nights.

上元日夜，上皇禦安福門觀燈，出內人連袂踏歌，從百僚觀之，一夜方罷.....初，有僧婆陀請夜開門然燈百千炬，三日三夜。皇帝禦延喜門觀燈縱樂，凡三日夜。

[Liu Xu 1975, p. 161; English tr. based on Hartman 1995, p. 16]

The monk Potuo 婆陀 from the Western Regions hosted the lamp lighting ceremony. This device might have been a foreign lantern wheel, which could hold up to hundreds and thousands of torches, that would burn for up to three days and three nights. It was a wondrous sight, and the emperor attended the spectacle.

A passage in “Draft Notes from the Court and the Country 朝野僉載” records:

[The Emperor] Ruizong on the evenings of the fifteenth and sixteenth of the first month of the second year of Xiantian [14, 15 February 713] had constructed a lantern wheel, two hundred feet (*zhang*) high outside the Gate of Peace and Prosperity in the capital. It was covered with brocade and twill, decorated with gold and jade, and burned 50,000 lamps clustered together on it so that it seemed like a flowering tree. There were a thousand palace ladies, each clothed in a dress with a train of silk and twill embroidered with shining pearls, made up with halcyon and fragrant rouge. A single flower headdress or a single mantel cost 10,000 cash. To outfit one singing girl cost 300,000 cash. One also selected over one thousand of the most beautiful young girls of Chang’an and Wannian sub-prefectures. Their garments, hair clasps, and coiffures all matched. They then performed stomping songs for three days and nights underneath the lantern wheel. Never before had there been such a high point of merriment.

睿宗先天二年正月十五、十六夜，於京師安福門外作燈輪，高二十丈，衣以錦綺，飾以金玉，燃五萬盞燈，簇之如花樹。宮女千數，衣羅綺，曳錦繡，耀珠翠，施香粉。一花冠、一巾被皆萬錢，裝束一妓女皆至三百貫。妙筒長安、萬年少女千余人，衣服、花釵、媚子亦稱是，於燈輪下踏歌三日夜，歡樂之極，未始有之。

[Zhang Wu 1979, p. 69; Eng. tr., Hartman 1995, p. 15]

The lantern wheel mentioned above must have been very similar to that in the mural of Cave 220, which shows that such devices were already popular in the capital.

Indeed, the lantern festival in Chang'an, which included lantern ceremonies, music, dance, and *baixi* 百戏 variety shows, became a major public entertainment event during the Tang, enjoyed not only by the royal families and elites, but also by common city dwellers. The festival became a locus for the collective memory of Chang'an as a cosmopolitan metropolis, and was frequently mentioned in historical texts such as the "Old Book of the Tang, Section One on Music 舊唐書·音樂一":

On the first night of the full moon of the year, the emperor would be at the Pavilion of Diligent Exertion (*qinzhenglou*) to enjoy seeing the lanterns. The nobles and ministers saw them from a viewing pavilion. At midnight, motley music played by the Music Bureau of Ministry of Ceremonies came to an end, and then palace ladies were sent to the front of the pavilion. They were tied to stilts to see further, and they danced and sang to entertain the emperor. They looked as if they were tightrope walking with bamboo poles, and it was strange and marvelous beyond comparison.

每初年望夜，又禦勤政樓，觀燈作樂，貴臣戚裏，借看樓觀望。夜闌，太常樂府懸散樂畢，即遣宮女於樓前縛架出眺，歌舞以娛之。若繩戲竿木，詭異巧妙，固無其比。

[Liu Xu 1975, p. 1052]

Similarly, we find in the "New Anecdotes of the Tang Dynasty 大唐新語":

During the Shenlong period, extravagant lanterns festivals were held on the night of the full moon of the first month in the capital. Security of the capital was relaxed, and people were specially allowed to promenade during the night. Nobles, their relatives and craftsmen and merchants under them all came out during the night. Carts and horses bustled, and there were too many people to see. Princes and masters rode on horses for fun, and competed with each other. Men of letters all wrote poetry to record such happenings. The number of writers reached to the amount of several hundred. The best ones of among them were the Vice Director of the Legislative Bureau of Government Su Weidao, Ministerial Vice Director of the Ministry of Personnel Guo Lizhan, and Palace Censor of the Palace Bureau Cui Ye.

神龍之際，京城正月望日，盛飾燈影之會，金吾弛禁，特許夜行。貴族戚屬及下隸工賈，無不夜遊。車馬喧闐，人不得顧。王、主之家，馬上作樂，以相競誇。文士皆賦詩一章，以記其事，作者數百人，唯中書侍郎蘇味道、吏部員外郎郭利貞、殿中侍御史崔液為絕唱。

[Liu Su 1984, pp. 127-28]

This event was most vividly captured by a set of poems written by Cui Ye (active 8th century), "Six Poems on the Night of the Lantern Festival 上元夜六首," which describe the lantern festival in detail:

The jade water-clock with a silver pot, there is no need for urging us;
The iron bar and the golden lock are opened until next morning.
Who can sit in idle while seeing a bright moon?

People from wherever will come once they hear that the lanterns [are in display].

The holy lamps, the Buddha's fire, are displayed in a hundred wheels;

The carved figures, the painted images, adorned with a hundred treasures.

If from the shadows one hears the golden mouth speak,
It seems the radiance of the jade hair was spread across the sky.

The spring scenery of this year is better than earlier years;
The view of this night is especially lovely.

In front of the Vermilion Bird Pavilion, there is a new full-moon;

On the Phoenix Platform, precious lanterns are lit.

A golden bridle and a silver saddle, one controls a fine horse;
[A pair of] jade wheels and pearl curtains, one drives a black ox [cart].

Running and running, they disappear at the corner of the eastern city;

Suddenly, they return to the southern road.

The ambition of those princes from noble households is prideful;

Even those who are not acquaintances, they invite each other.

They especially enjoy those [dancing girls with] long sleeves which are soft in the wind;

They even more appreciated those who silently play new tunes.

When the stars move and the Milky Way turns, the moonlight is fading;

Dew has been dropped and mist has been blowing away, lamps became few.

People still love those places for singing and dancing on the side of the road;

They hesitate, look at each other, and cannot return home.

玉漏銀壺且莫催，鐵關金鎖徹明開。
誰家見月能閒坐，何處聞燈不看來。
神燈佛火百輪張，刻像圖形七寶裝。
影裡如聞金口說，空中似散玉毫光。
今年春色勝常年，此夜風光最可憐。
鳩鵲樓前新月滿，鳳凰台上寶燈燃。
金勒銀鞍控紫驄，玉輪珠轡駕青牛。
驂驪始散東城曲，倏忽還來南陌頭。
公子王孫意氣驕，不論相識也相邀。
最憐長袖風前弱，更賞新弦暗裡調。
星移漢轉月將微，露灑煙飄燈漸稀。
猶惜路傍歌舞處，躊躇相顧不能歸。

[Cao and Peng 1960, pp. 667-68;
partial Engl. tr., Hartman, p. 16]

Cui Ye speaks of the "hundreds of wheels of divine lights and Buddhist flames", an elaborate scene that must have been similar to the lantern wheel in Cave 220. As for the "precious lamps" on the "Phoenix Terrace," although we do not know their exact form, the poet compares them with a crescent moon, which suggests they had a novel shape, suspended high up and emitting a bright light. During lantern festivals in the Shenlong period (705-707), lighting spectacles could be found everywhere in Chang'an from the "eastern quarters" to the "southern alleys." Dance and music were everywhere, and it became a favorite topic for

men of letters in Chang'an. The night was dark, and lanterns were dimmed, but people remained on the streets, unwilling to return home. This is truly a scene of peace and prosperity, which is not unlike a Buddhist Pure Land vividly illustrated in the large dance and music scenes in Cave 220 with its three large lighting devices.

Conclusion

Dunhuang is located on the western tip of the Hexi corridor and is an important oasis on the Silk Road. It was a place where Chinese and foreign cultures mingled. Under the influence of the Tang Empire, trade on the Silk Road was lively and prosperous, and many monks travelled along these trade routes. As Chen Yinke (1890–1969) wrote (1976, p. 189), “During the period of the Tang, China and foreigners came into more contact with each other, and it was a period of glory.” The political power of the Tang Empire enabled its culture to be far-reaching. The Taiwanese scholar Lin Guanqun once proposed (2011, pp. 713–17) that the cosmopolitan culture during the Tang dynasty took form as a type of “cultural Sinosphere,” which came into being during the Zhen'guan years under the reign of the Emperor Taizong. Against this backdrop, we should not limit our study of Early Tang murals of Dunhuang to that of stylistic traditions and *fenben* transmission. The prosperity of Chang'an, Luoyang and the Central Plains of China under the new regime of the Tang, introduced to Dunhuang new trends and mentalities. The new paintings during the Early Tang symbolize this new art form. Therefore, the *fenben* of new images generated from temples in Chang'an and Luoyang, such as Western Pure Land tableaux, Medicine Buddha tableaux, and Vimalakirti tableau paintings traveled on the Silk Road with merchants, monks and mercenaries and arrived at Dunhuang, a nexus of cross-cultural exchange. The Zhai family, which had a rich background with foreign ancestry, was the first to take up these new images, and their family shrine of Cave 220, became a cornerstone of Dunhuang art in this new era.

In this paper, I have taken a closer look at the three large lighting devices in the Medicine Buddha tableau in Cave 220, and traced how they relate to scenes and descriptions of nighttime revels that were popular in Chang'an during the Tang dynasty. I argue that although the combination of music, dance, and extravagant lighting devices took place in an image of a Buddhist Pure Land, it more specifically reflects spectacles of lantern festivals that were enjoyed by the emperor and his subjects at court, or privately in the homes of urban elites during various nighttime banquets. These occasions of great prosperity and happiness come close to the ideal state of living in Buddhist realms.

As a key site on the Hexi corridor, Dunhuang was also flourishing during this time, and scenes from cave murals could also be found in the Hexi region. Liangzhou was also a thriving center of Hexi politics, economics and culture. A passage in the *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* 資治通鑑 states:

During that time (753 C.E.), the Central Kingdom was thriving and strong. The distance from the Gate of Far-reaching Peace to the western end of Tang territory covered twelve thousand *li*. Villages were in view of each other, while mulberry trees and hemp covered the fields. Of all the richest under heaven there was none other than the Longyou region (Hexi Corridor). Every time the Han sent in envoys to report, they often rode on white camels that could advance five hundred *li* in a day.

是时(唐天宝十二年)中国盛强, 自安远门西尽唐境凡万二千里, 阡陌相望, 桑麻翳野, 天下称富庶者无如陇右。翰每遣使入奏, 常乘白橐驼, 日驰五百里。

[Sima Guang 1956, p. 6919]

Liangzhou was so wealthy that even Emperor Xuanzong desired to visit it, as we learn from the *Miscellaneous Records of Emperor Minghuang* 明皇雜錄:

During the full moon night of the first month of the year, the emperor and Ye Fashan visited Liangzhou. Candles and lanterns were lit for tens of *li*, and when they returned after a while, the song and dance downstairs still continued. The Emperor Minghuang used the magic of Ye Fashan to set out from the Palace of Ascending Yang and visit Liangzhou to see the lanterns during the lantern festival. He put an iron *ruyi* scepter in his wine [at Liangzhou], and then dispatched an envoy [from Chang'an] to retrieve it. This is not a lie.

正月望夜, 上與葉法善遊西涼州, 燭燈十數裏, 俄傾還, 而樓下之歌舞未終。明皇用葉法善術, 上元夜, 自上陽宮往西涼州觀燈, 以鐵如意質酒而還, 遣使取之, 不誣。

[Zheng and Tian 1994, pp. 55, 59]

Although the details of this tale initially appear to be rather outlandish, we can still catch a glimpse of the large lantern festival that took place in Liangzhou. The lantern gathering continued for “more than ten *li*,” its scale and quality a source of wonder among contemporaries, perhaps rivaling the splendors of Chang'an.⁷ Furthermore, as Liangzhou was an important settlement for foreigners on the Silk Road (Rong 2001), and many Sogdian families of the An clan became culturally influential in the area (Wu 1990, 1997), “Hu Whirling Dances” and “Hu Leaping Dances” must have also been popular locally, and assumed a place during the lantern festivals. Such festivities were frequently held along the Hexi Corridor, and the scenes depicted in Cave 220 may have also been inspired by local practices. In any case, the capital of Chang'an was undeniably the epicenter of such lantern spectacles.

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NOTES

1. For more on this topic, see: Jao 2009; “Yinyue wudaobufen 音乐舞蹈部分 [Section on Music and Dance]”, in *Dunhuangxu dacidian* 1998; Zhuang 1984; Niu 1991; Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 2001-2002, Vols. 6, 15-17; Zheng 2002.

2. For a survey of the different views on the dance scenes in Cave 220, see Hu and Wang 2011.

3. An important book which I had not been able to consult prior to completing the present study is Ning Qiang’s monograph on Cave 220 (Ning 2004). In it, as will be noted below, he takes up a number of the issues of concern to me here, including the relationship between the music and dance scenes and the culture of Tang Chang’an, which I examine in greater depth. In a major point of disagreement with my interpretation of the tableau of the Medicine Buddha as a paradise scene (the view of a majority of scholars), he emphasizes (p. 20) that it depicts primarily a Healing Ritual.

4. Here, citing Cai Hongsheng 蔡鸿生, a specialist on Tang history and cultural history at Zhongshan University.

5. In addition to Sha 2013, see Ning 2004, esp. pp. 122-32.

6. “士庶亲迎之仪，备诸六礼，所以承宗庙，事舅姑，当须昏以为期，诘朝谒见。” (Li 1998, p. 260).

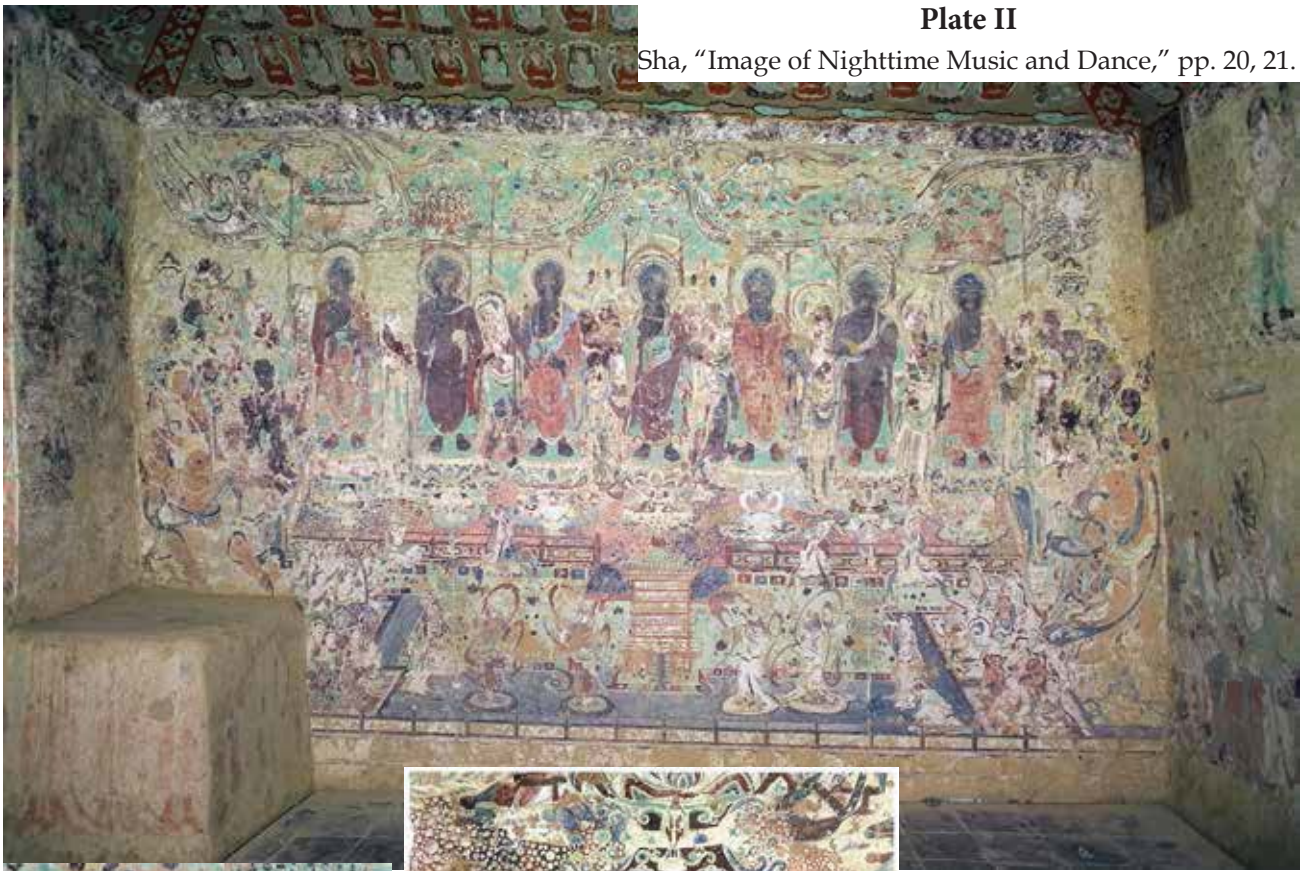
7. Wang Qi 王荣, “Yuan zongxing xi liang fu deng fu 元宗幸西凉府观灯赋 [A poem about *Yuanzong* watch the Lantern Festival in Xiliang mansion], in: Dong Gao n.d., Vol. 769.

[Ed. note: This article is a revised translation of the author’s “Yi fu zhengui de Tang Chang’an yejian yuewu tu--yi Mogaoku yaoshi jing bian le yuewu tu zhong deng wei zhongxin de jiedu” 一幅珍贵的唐长安夜间乐舞图 - 以莫高窟第220窟药师经变乐乐舞图中灯为中心的解读 (A Valuable Picture of an Evening Music and Dancing Scene in Chang’an – An Interpretation Focusing on the Lamps in the Music and Dancing Scene of the Bhaiṣajyaguru Sutra Illustration in Mogao Cave 220). *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 [Dunhuang Research] 2015/5: 34-44.]

– Translated by Anne Ning Feng 馮安寧

Plate II

Sha, "Image of Nighttime Music and Dance," pp. 20, 21.



(above and left) Tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas, main chamber, north wall, Mogao Cave 220, Early Tang (mid-7th century). Dunhuang.

Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.

(below) Music and dance scenes from the Tableau of the Seven Medicine Buddhas, main chamber, north wall, Mogao Cave 220. Replica painted by Shi Weixiang. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy.



Plate III

Sha, "Image of Nighttime Music and Dance," pp. 31, 32.



(above) Music and dance, stone screen on funeral couch, Tomb of An Jia, Northern Zhou (collection of the Shaanxi History Museum). Courtesy of the Shaanxi Archaeology Institute.

(below) Music and dance, mural painting, Tomb of Han Xiu, Tang dynasty (collection of the Shaanxi History Museum). Courtesy of the Shaanxi History Museum.

