

Article

Materialized Wishes: Long Banner Paintings from the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang

Yoonah Hwang

Department of Art History, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA 90007, USA;
yoonahhw@usc.edu

Abstract: This paper explores the religious function and meaning of long banner paintings from Cave 17 of the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, in conjunction with material culture in Northwestern China in the ninth and tenth centuries CE. The so-called forty-nine-*chi* banners have peculiar traits such as extremely long lengths, an optional triangular headpiece, and a paired or single strip of textile on which a series of standing bodhisattvas are painted. The author focuses on the large number of textiles used for such banners and questions how the extraordinary length and material used contributed to fulfilling the donor's wishes. By examining both the banners' physical characteristics, such as the type of textiles, pigments, and configurations, and the theological background based on the Buddhist and Daoist scriptures about longevity, repentance, and healing, the author suggests that the long banners are a materialized form of longevity and prosperity by physically lengthening the banner with multiple bolts of silk. This paper further argues that depicting multiple bodhisattvas in a pictorial form on a long strip of textile was regarded equally as a powerful means for obtaining good health, prolonging life, eliminating sins, and thus being reborn in the Pure Land.

Keywords: long banner; forty-nine-*chi* banner; votive offering; Mogao Caves; Library Cave; Cave 17; healing ritual; salvation ritual; Dunhuang



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1. Introduction

Pictorial materials discovered in the sealed-off Cave 17 or the Library Cave in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang have revealed not only information about the widespread religious trends, such as the Avalokiteśvara cult, across Central Asia and China in the ninth to the tenth century, but also the regional development of artistic and religious practices that flourished within the unique visual and material culture in the medieval Dunhuang region. In particular, the latter includes distinctive types of sacred images such as the itinerant monk and miraculous images of the Chinese monk Liu Sahe (劉薩河) and the Thousand-armed Mañjuśrī, all of which were developed locally in Northwestern China.¹ Long banners from the Library Cave represent another regional development in the Dunhuang region. This paper highlights this lesser-known type of Buddhist offering, the long banner, and demonstrates its regional characteristics by focusing on its idiosyncratic materiality, such as its extensive length and format. They are called “long banners” because they are extremely long—up to 915 cm—in contrast to most other banners that range from 30 cm to 120 cm in length. One example is The Long Banner of Bodhisattvas or Stein Painting 216 (SP 216), which, at 396 cm in length, is four to ten times longer than the conventional painted banners found in Cave 17 (Figure 1). This painting's configuration is also unconventional: Across the top of the banner, a small piece of silk with a written inscription is sewn horizontally, and the rest of the long silk is cut in half vertically starting from the right and below this inscription. On the left and right sections of the cut silk, five and four standing bodhisattvas are in columns, respectively. The name of each bodhisattva is written in a cartouche close to the corresponding figure, although not every identification is legible.



Figure 1. Long Banner of Bodhisattvas (Stein Painting 216), 956 CE, ink and colors on silk, H. 396.0 cm, W. 59.0 cm, 1919,0101,0.216, British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

Nearly thirty paintings belong to this group and share these stylistic and formalistic features.² First, their subject matter is multiple standing bodhisattvas arranged in a column, with some banners having Buddha figures.³ Second, there is a minimal application of color; the buddha or bodhisattva figures are drawn with lines that are not fully filled in with color. Where color is used, the shading scheme is simple and features red, yellow, and green. Third, the spontaneous brushstrokes are simple and inconsistent in terms of thickness. Each figure is delineated with bold lines and the painting style is not refined. Finally, the paint is applied to dyed silk, with red, yellow, and dark blue as the three main dye colors used in this type of long banner. In most cases, a dark paint such as black or cinnabar red was applied, especially on light-colored dyed silk such as yellow, but there are examples in which silver, gold, or similar pigments were used to create a contrast of light on a dark silk background.

In previous studies, these types of banners were referred to as the “forty-nine-*chi* (foot) banner,” 四十九尺幡, according to art historian Roderick Whitfield, referencing the *Consecration Sutra* (Guanding jing 灌頂經, T. 1331). One of the sections in the sutra explains and sermonizes about the benefits of having the banner, such as healing and being rescued

(Whitfield 1983). Because the sutra is the earliest *Bhaisajyaguru Sutra*, Whitfield argues that its function should be understood in relation to the Bhaisajyaguru Buddha cult. He briefly points out, quoting Alexander Soper's work, that the section of the *Consecration Sutra* mentions the forty-nine-*chi* banner, which was used in a healing ritual (Whitfield 1983; Soper 1959). His contribution to finding the long banner's liturgical source is still valid, but a few questions remain. First, the names of the bodhisattvas on the long banner cannot be located in the *Consecration Sutra*. Second, the term used for the banner was "spirit banner (*shenfan* 神幡)," according to a few inscriptions made on such banners, but neither its definition nor meaning has been identified. Third, the materiality of the banner, such as its length and "blood" for pigments, should be reconsidered in relation to its meaning. Therefore, this paper will focus on the context(s) in which a long banner was utilized and what values or donor's wishes were promoted by such a unique configuration.

Using Stein Painting 216 as a representative example of its kind, this paper will review the validity of the physical length, forty-nine *chi*, by attempting to reconstruct its possible original configuration with other long banners in a similar painting style. The terms used for indicating long banners will clarify such a unique object's expected function and efficacy. The examination of cultural encounters and borrowings between Daoism and Buddhism is inevitable regarding shared pictorial formats and ritualistic functions. The mutual influence between these two major religions has been discussed intensively in terms of overlapping and similar concepts and practices, especially in the two religions' visual cultures. In particular, Buddho–Daoist exchanges of materials, such as amulets and talisman writings found in Dunhuang, have been discussed in depth (Robson 2008; Mollier 2008). This paper will expand this argument by contending that the "forty-nine-*chi* banner" should be understood within the context of interactions between Daoist and Buddhist ritual practices.

The salvation and healing rituals and their implements in relation to the material characteristics of the banner as an offering will help us understand the ritualistic use of the long banner. Beginning with the inscription on the Long Banner of Bodhisattvas (Stein Painting 216), this paper ultimately argues that long banners were intentionally made as votive offerings according to the belief that their materiality could enhance the efficiency of a donor's wish, along with a bodhisattva's own auspicious abilities. Furthermore, the question of the ways in which material culture—textiles in particular—reinforced and enhanced the donor's accessibility to the votive offerings will be answered based on both practical and religious perspectives.

2. Long Banner of Bodhisattvas and Its Reconstruction

2.1. The Inscription

The Long Banner of Bodhisattvas (Stein Painting 216) is a key example in this study, not only because of the inscription on its top but also because of its configuration. This painted banner is drawn on the entire width of the silk (Stein 1921, p. 1026). The top portion, bearing an inscription, preserves the original full width of the silk, which was divided into two pieces below it, like streamers. Selvages—a term referring to the edges of woven textiles—on the sides of the cloth are clearly visible. Measuring between selvages is a convenient way to determine the original width of a piece of silk, which in China in the tenth century typically measured 60 cm.⁴ The edges of the trimmed silk were hemmed with a thick, coiled thread to prevent them from unraveling. Instead of attaching two pieces of silk together, Stein Painting 216 was conveniently cut up the middle.⁵ From the banner's current condition, one can find four standing bodhisattvas on the right strip, and four or five on the left, some of which are based on partial representations.

The inscription on the top, which should be read from left to right, presents the donor's name, the purpose of the banner's offering, and the date it was offered (Figure 2).⁶ The style of writing is erratic, but Waley suggests a possible reading as follows:

Controller of the Guiyi army . . . member of the Order of Silver-blue Luminous Salary, additional President of the Board of Works, Censor, Upper Pillar to the

State ... of Xihe jun, Ren Yanchao drawing blood respectfully (caused to be) painted this forty-nine-*chi* banner in one strip. This banner suspended on high from a dragon hook ... reach straight to ... twisting about and flapping in the wind like a bird in flight, like the coloured (hangings) in the Western Apartments of the Palace. May his Excellency's life be as that of the hills, his salary vast as the sea. May his Lady Wife long be spared; may her flower-like countenance forever bloom. Next, it is the object of this offering that his father and mother in the plain may long continue to announce themselves in health and security, and for them are desired the same blessings as for their son and his bride. The time being Da Zhou, third year of Xiande ... ⁷



Figure 2. Details of Figure 1, showing Stein Painting 216's inscription. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The first few sentences of the inscription contain valuable information regarding a donor, painting materials, and the type of offering he made. Part of the Guiyi army, Ren Yanchao 任延朝 is the name of the devotee. What is striking is that the inscription claims that he drew his own blood to be utilized as pigment for his painting, which will be discussed later in the paper. He specifies the type of painting he contributed, which is the "forty-nine-*chi* banner in one strip." The inscription vividly depicts the banner's motion that the wind creates and expounds the donor's detailed wishes, including longevity, good health, and the security of his parents and other family members. The seemingly plain inscription, which explains who the donor is, how the offering is made, what wishes the donor wants to be fulfilled, and when the banner was made, provides an important clue regarding the term "forty-nine-*chi* banner" because this is a rare inscription that is found in the long banner paintings group from Dunhuang.

2.2. The "Forty-Nine-Chi Banner"

Because its length characterizes the long banner, it is worthwhile to review a possible way to reconstruct it in relation to other banners that share a similar painting style to determine if the reconstructed one was ever close to the prescribed length, that is, approximately fifteen meters. Some may argue that it may not be possible to reconstruct the whole length of Stein Painting 216 because each banner could have been painted for different donors

by the same workshop. However, considering the fact that there are no overlapping bodhisattvas' names among other painted banners similar to those of Stein Painting 216, this makes a reconstruction worth trying. In addition, reconstruction would be beneficial in seeking to understand the dominant painting styles among the group of painted banners comparable to Stein Painting 216; as Whitfield argues, it could be a real measurement of the banner.

The number forty-nine is commonly found in Buddhist sutras, especially in relation to funerary rituals, where the number forty-nine is repeated in various stages of the funerary and memorial rituals. The number is symbolically associated with "the liminal passage" between one's death to another rebirth (Shi 2020, p. 93). For example, in Buddhist practice, memorial services are held every seven days for forty-nine days (*qiqi ri* 七七日) after a person's death. The number forty-nine can also refer to the seventh and final ceremony (*qiqi zhai* 七七齋) that marks the forty-ninth day after a person's death, at which time the deceased has been judged for their sins and good karma and has reached their destiny with the help of family members who have contributed offerings during a series of ceremonies over the forty-nine days. Given the fact that this is merely one of many common usages of this number in rituals and sutras within the Buddhist community, it is reasonable to argue that the "forty-nine" of the "forty-nine-*chi*" banner can simply symbolize its long length. The number's symbolic connotation provides reasonable support for an argument that the "forty-nine *chi*" length is merely a notional and rhetorical expression.⁸

However, reviewing how this long banner was documented in the inventory of its temple's assets indicates the actual way in which the object was perceived and named. In the "List of Permanent Objects (*changzhu shiwuli* 常住什物歷)" also discovered in Cave 17, not only is a "forty-nine-*chi* banner" listed but also a "forty-three-*chi*, large silk banner (*sishisan chi da juan fan* 肆拾參尺大絹幡)" and a "forty-five-*chi*, large silk banner (*sishi wuchi da juan fan* 肆拾伍尺大絹幡)." The fact that the lengths vary but are all close to forty-nine-*chi* underscores the idea that an accurate measurement was sought and applied to this type of painting. To be specific, Longxing Temple had thirty-one forty-nine-*chi* silk banners and eight forty-nine-*chi* hemp banners, as well as three forty-five-*chi* silk banners and four forty-three-*chi* silk banners (P. 2613). It is notable that the thirty-one silk banners identified as "forty-nine-*chi*" were found to actually be this physical length when measured. Based on this record, it is reasonable to suggest that the total length of the original painting to which Stein Painting 216 belongs was in fact close to forty-nine-*chi*. At least, there was a strong willingness to make the long banner close to the prescribed length.

2.3. Reconstruction of the Long Banner of Bodhisattvas

Within the group of long banners from Cave 17, there are a few that have painting styles, color palettes, sizes, and support materials similar to those of Stein Painting 216. Quoting Waley's description, Whitfield argued that Stein Painting 216 and Stein Painting 196 were "apparently painted by the same hand," and, therefore, originally belonged to the same single banner (Whitfield 1983, p. 33; Waley 1931, pp. 186–87 and no. 1). Agreeing with his hypothesis, I would add that a banner from the National Museum of Korea should be considered in this reconstruction. A proposal of an original construction cannot be relied upon based solely on evidence of shared artistic or iconographic features; one must also analyze physical elements, including pigments and weaving structure. However, it is still worthwhile to reconstruct a plausible original piece in order to confirm the shared painting techniques and to fully understand this lesser-known and unfamiliar format of painting.

Looking closely at Stein Painting 216, one can see that the outlines of its bodhisattvas are drawn in red, which is the dominant color in the painting. Between these outlines, red ink-washed strokes are used to form the bodhisattvas' flesh, garments, and draperies. Even though red is the major color, the painter added some subtle accents by using gray, yellow, and black ink. In terms of the overall artistic level of the painting, however, it is not comparable to other finer paintings such as *Preaching Shakyamuni* (Stein Painting 6);

the consistency of the figures' outlines and the wider range of colors in the latter point to it having been executed using more labor and with superior craftsmanship. In other words, Stein Painting 216 may have been drawn by an apprentice painter under less favorable conditions, such as an uneven surface, as proposed by Whitfield (1983, p. 32). The hasty mode of painting is evident in the bodhisattvas, through choices such as a single brushstroke delineating a figure's lips and facial expressions that are almost identical, despite the figures' postures, mudra gestures, and angles of faces being slightly different from each other. The anonymous painter or painters had to find efficient ways to complete such a long banner; the use of thin silk and paint-wash techniques would have expedited the process and saved time during production.

This painting style can also be found in Stein Painting 196 in the British Museum (Figure 3), indicating that Stein Paintings 216 and 196 could have been originally part of one single banner as Waley first asserted.⁹ The manner in which each bodhisattva in Stein Painting 196 was painted is almost identical to that of Stein Painting 216. The outlines and shading of the figures are rudimentary, as if the painter dashed them off with single brushstrokes. Two bodhisattvas and Ānanda, plus one fragmentary bodhisattva at the top of Stein Painting 196, are drawn with red outlines that are filled in with a watery reddish brown shade. The pupils of the figures' eyes and the figures' necklaces are filled with black ink. The only difference between the two is that with Stein Painting 196, one cannot find other hues, such as blue, green, or yellow, which may be because these colors have faded. The thickness of the brushstrokes is also consistently inconsistent in both. In Stein Painting 196, not only are the three lines of Ānanda's halo irregularly shaped as circles, but some parts of the lines are thick, while others are thin and faded.

A banner of similar measurements with a painting style identical to that of both Stein Painting 216 and Stein Painting 196 is Bon 4025 in the Ōtani Collection of the National Museum of Korea (Figure 4).¹⁰ In each banner, the figures' outlines are achieved mainly with red pigments, except for the eyelids, pupils, eyebrows, and lips, where additional brushstrokes in black were added in order to accentuate the shapes. The volume and contour of the faces were all achieved by a red ink wash in most areas except the highest part of the faces, such as the nose, cheeks, and chin. A light blue wash was applied to the figures' hair in all three paintings. The application of a light-yellow ink wash to the embellishment of the bodhisattvas is also evident in each banner, adding to the same way that halos are depicted by a red ink wash only. Comparing the bodhisattva faces in Stein Painting 216, Stein Painting 196, and Bon 4025, it is undeniable that they were painted by the same painter as a single piece (Figure 5).

In addition to the style and technique of Stein Painting 196, its measurements and the ways in which the edges of the silk were treated are additional clues indicating that it could have been part of Stein Painting 216. Stein Painting 196 measures 28.5 cm in width, exactly half the width of Stein Painting 216 (59.0 cm) and close to the width of a bolt of silk produced in the Tang period. Textile historians confirm that the standard size of a bolt of raw silk (*shengjuan*), according to the Tang Code (Tanglü 唐律), was approximately 12 m long by 54–56 cm wide (Feugère 2011, p. 18; Sheng 2013, p. 183). Another way to check the width of silk is to find selvages on the edges. As discussed earlier, Stein Painting 216 reveals clear selvages on the left side of the left banner and on the right side of the right banner, confirming that the silk support was originally one piece that was cut into two pieces. Bon 4025 at the National Museum of Korea measures 28.2 cm wide—almost the same width as the banner strips of Stein Paintings 196 and 216. While this comparable width measurement cannot prove that these three banners were originally part of the same painting, they are supportive evidence that allows us to create a hypothetical reconstruction (Figure 6).



Figure 3. *Long Banner with Bodhisattvas* (Stein Painting 196), 956 CE (?), ink and colors on silk, H. 341.0 cm, W. 28.5 cm, 1919,0101,0.196, British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 4. Long Banner of Bodhisattvas, 10th century CE, ink and colors on silk, H. 180.4 cm, W. 28.2 cm, Bon 4025, National Museum of Korea. Photograph licensed under Creative Commons, reproduced with permission from National Museum of Korea, Seoul.



Figure 5. Comparison of the painting styles: (a) details of Bon 4025 (Figure 4); (b) details of Stein Painting 196 (Figure 3); and (c) details of Stein Painting 216 (Figure 1).

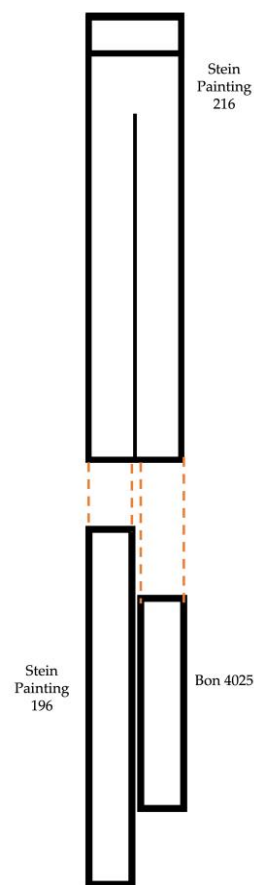


Figure 6. Schematic drawing of reconstructed Stein Paintings 216 with Stein Painting 196 and Bon 4025 (drawing by author).

As discussed earlier, Whitfield points out that the total length of the original long banner would have been close to the forty-nine-*chi* described in the inscription.¹¹ If we were to place Stein Painting 196, Stein Painting 216, and Bon 4025 end to end, the full length would be 917.4 cm, which is short of forty-nine-*chi*—about 14 m long. Considering that there must have been additional banner parts, the entire length could have been longer than the current reconstructed size and would likely be close to forty-nine-*chi*.

3. Healing Ritual Revisited

A survey of the vocabulary that has historically been used to describe the Buddhist long banner, both in sutras and historical documents, reveals its possible function. There are literal descriptive expressions of this type, such as “long banner (*changfan* 長幡)” and

“forty-nine-*chi* banner (*sishi jiu chi fan* 四十九尺幡).”¹² Other terms referring to this particular type of banner describe a function or purpose, and include “spirit banner (*shenfan* 神幡)” and “life-extending spirit banner (*xuming shenfan* 續命神幡).”¹³ That the long banner is sometimes called a “spirit” banner implies an auspicious functionality, possibly in conjunction with “life-extending” rituals as the latter term indicates.

Whitfield claims that the sutra that explains how to use the long banner is the *Consecration Sutra* (Whitfield 1983, p. 33). The specific passage relevant to the long banner also informs us of a specific target group who would benefit from having or making this type of banner. Specifically, in fascicle 12 of the *Consecration Sutra*, the Buddha preaches when and how the forty-nine-*chi* “spirit banner” is to be utilized:

The Bodhisattva Saving and Freeing said to the Buddha: “If there should be some man or woman, gently born, who is desperately ill and lies on his bed in pain and distress, without anyone to aid or to defend him; I now must urge and beg the priesthood to fast wholeheartedly for seven days and nights, keeping to the Eight Commandments, and carrying out ritual processions at the six hours of the day. Let this sutra be read in its entirety forty-nine times. I urge them to light a seven-tiered lamp, and to hang up parti-colored, life-lengthening spirit-banners ... These should be forty-nine feet long. The seven-tiered lamps should have seven lights per tier, following a form like a cartwheel. Again, should [such a person] fall into danger or be imprisoned, with fetters loading down his body, he should have parti-colored spirit-banners made and forty-nine lamps lit, and should release various kinds of living creatures, to the number of forty-nine ...”¹⁴

This passage, in fact, prescribes the entire ritual process used for those who are extremely ill and in distress as well as physically bound. The number forty-nine is repeated and emphasized throughout the recitation of the sutra as it is an auspicious number, gives the length of the banner, and enables living creatures to be released from danger. The cartwheel-shaped lamp mentioned in the text also has forty-nine lights, as each of its seven tiers is supposed to have seven lights. If we read the passage more closely, the number forty-nine is also given as a length, describing how long the “parti-colored, life-lengthening spirit banner” should be. That this particular length is prescribed for a sick person specifically designates it as a “life-lengthening spirit banner.”

Based on this terminology, I suggest that the length of the forty-nine-*chi* banner is associated with “life-lengthening,” longevity, and healing from desperate illness. More importantly, I argue that the wishes of the donor of Stein Painting 216—for the longevity of “His Excellency,” his “Lady Wife,” and his parents—are materialized in the extremely long length of the banner. Hence, the term defines the banner’s meaning.

In this context, a Buddhist religious practice in Dunhuang that is relevant to long banners such as Stein Painting 216 has been suggested as a healing ritual that utilizes a tiered lamp wheel along with a forty-nine-*chi* banner, as mentioned above.¹⁵ According to art historian Ning Qiang, a painted scene on the northern wall of Cave 220 from the early Tang period (618–712) represents a healing ritual scene with Bhaisajyaguru as a healing Buddha (Ning 2004, pp. 20–23). Revisiting the previously discussed *Consecration Sutra*, its phrase, “the seven-tiered lamps should have seven lights per tier, following a form like a cart-wheel,” is depicted pictorially on the northern wall. Ning also argues that a multibranch lamp tree traditionally represents longevity, as it implies the growth of life. This is why, he argues, the lamp fits into the function of the healing ritual, pertinent to the extension of life (Ning 2004, p. 128). Using the lamp tree, along with the forty-nine-*chi* banners in the healing ritual, is consequently rooted in longevity, healing, and salvation.¹⁶

This case study of Cave 220’s northern wall reflects the healing ritual from 7th century CE in the Dunhuang area. The significant features of the mural include seven buddhas, three tiered-lamp trees, and three colorful banners, each hung on a long staff.¹⁷ In particular, the banners are depicted in a dramatic way. A triangular hanger is attached to the tip

of the staff, from which a color-blocked banner with two extended streamers on the bottom is hung. The hanger allows the banner to move and to be flipped freely up in the air. In close-ups, the banner is comprised of multiple pieces of patterned or colored textiles sewn together with a triangular head at the top. The visual representation of the banner does not have any figurative images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, or guardian figures. Considering that similar examples with similarly patterned textiles were discovered in the Library Cave, the banners without figurative images were probably part of the essential ritual paraphernalia. The passage from the Bhaisajyaguru sutra does not mention imageries that should be depicted on the banner except for the specific length, which is forty-nine-*chi*. The absence of the imageries in a banner makes the long banner with bodhisattvas distinguished from nonfigurative banners. Moreover, the long banner (e.g., SP 216) has two strips instead of one, which makes the object's appearance different from what is depicted on the wall. Therefore, the added imageries of bodhisattvas show slightly different traditions that could have been affected by a long banner's unique structure and visual program.

Two factors should be considered: First, Cave 220 represents the early Tang period's ritual practice. However, the long banner with Stein Painting 216 is from the tenth century CE, which means that there is a 300-year gap between the two examples. This does not mean that healing rituals and the Bhaisajyaguru-related cult were no longer popular. On the contrary, the ritual and the buddha still appealed to devotees. Second, the length of the long banner reconstructed here closely conforms to what is prescribed. This signifies that the forty-nine-*chi* length was a crucial criterion in order for it to be perceived as a forty-nine-*chi* banner.

When it is compared to the passage from the Consecration Sutra, the current version of the reconstructed long banner deviates from the instruction. The "parti-colored, life-lengthening spirit-banner" from the passage above parallels directly with the color-blocked banner without any iconic figures necessarily represented because there is no such specific instruction made for the imageries.

Therefore, what other possible inspirations were considered in creating such a unique configuration for the long banner? The term "life-lengthening spirit-banner" might provide clues to answer this question.

4. Sharing the Form: A Comparison with Daoist Examples

Interestingly, the similar-titled banner with the same length as the Buddhist one is found in Daoist ritual paraphernalia and is called a "spirit-moving banner" (*qianshen fan* 遷神幡).¹⁸ The spirit-moving banner's specific length is indeed more commonly found in Daozang, the Daoist canon, than the Buddhist canon, especially within Daoist scriptures related to salvation rituals. The representative examples include the *Marvelous Scripture of Salvation from Life and Death in the Inferior Ways and the Five Sufferings* (*Taishang dongxuan lingbao santu wuku badu shengsi miaojing* 太上洞玄靈寶三塗五苦拔度生死妙經, DZ 371) and *Scripture for Saving [Deceased Parents] from Distress in Future Lives* (*Taishang dongguan lingbao wangsheng jiuku miaojing* 太上洞玄靈寶往生救苦妙經, DZ 373). These Daoist scriptures from the Tang dynasty repeatedly describe how to use the forty-nine-*chi* banner, as in the following:

Using colorful silk, make the "Spirit-Moving Precious banner," which measures forty-nine *chi* in height. Or one can make seven small-sized banners. Hang them on the long staff facing wind, so that all sins are blown away and extinguished.¹⁹

Comparing this with the passage from the *Consecration Sutra*, one finds more similarities than differences. While this Daoist prescription specifies the type of material for the banner (silk) and the alternative format, the name of the banner ("Spirit-Moving") and the length are identical. More importantly, the dynamic movement of the banner is what activates the efficacy and purpose of the banner: to remove all sins. In other words, the wind blowing and flipping the banner acts to eliminate the practitioner's sins and thus guarantees their salvation. The banner's efficacy is activated by hanging and letting it be blown,

which is the mechanism through which all sins are extinguished. This alludes to how the banner is expected to be hung, displayed, and animated at the tip of the “long staff.”

According to art historian Shih-shan Susan Huang, the main function of the “spirit moving” banner was to summon soul/“spirit”-saving/“moving” deities, and it was specifically utilized in the Daoist salvation ritual called the Yellow Register Purgation (*huangglu zhai* 黃錄齋) (Huang 2012, p. 218). The Daoist version of a spirit-moving banner in forty-nine-*chi* can be found in the chapter on the installation and arrangement of banners and canopies (*Golden book of salvation according to the numinous treasure tradition* (靈寶領教濟度金書 *Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*)) in Daozang. This book prescribes a few Daoist banners with forty-nine-*chi* to be made for various purposes. One of them is the spirit-moving banner (Figure 7).

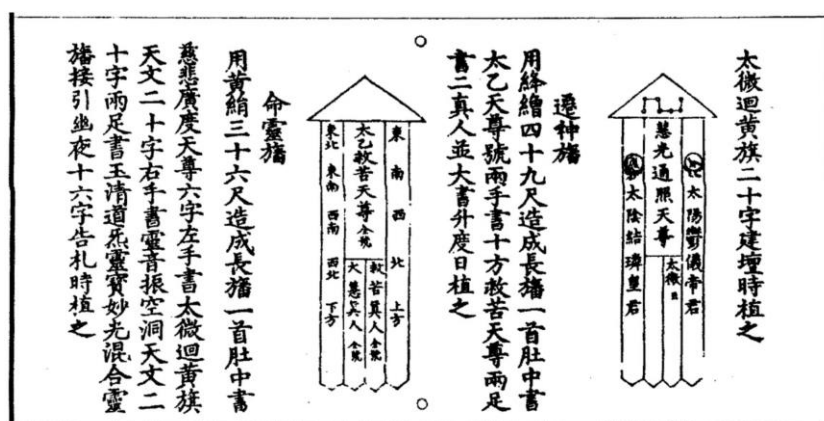


Figure 7. Daoist “Spirit-Moving Banner” (middle part), *Golden Book of Salvation According to the Numinous Treasure Tradition* (*Lingbao lingjiao jidu jinshu*), DZ 466, Daozang 8:577c.

A typical Daoist banner has a triangular head on the top and a rectangular body with two side streamers (arms) and another two on the bottom (legs). It is well known that the Buddhist counterpart has similar anthropomorphic names for each corresponding part (Yim 1991, p. 73; Wang 2007, p. 58) (Figure 8). The current version of the reconstructed long banner does not have a triangular head. However, it is not rare to observe a case of a long banner with a triangular head: For instance, a long banner with a similar width (68.10 cm) from the Stein Collection retains the original triangle head (Figure 9).²⁰ None of the extant long banners have the arms (the side streamers) and legs (the bottom streamers). However, this does not mean that the original design of a long banner is meant to be made with them because there is no single example of a “complete” condition of a banner without any missing parts. In other words, the possible anthropomorphic structure of a long banner can be confirmed by studying the textile fragments from the Library Cave, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

The major difference between the Buddhist and the Daoist banner is a pictorialized iconic figure. The former, in case of the reconstructed long banner, has nine standing bodhisattvas in addition to donor images at the bottom part. Each bodhisattva has a cartouche where the corresponding name is written. On the other hand, the latter has only scripted names and inscriptions as potent figures, instead of pictorial images. On each “body” part of the Daoist spirit-moving banner, the names of soul-saving deities are inscribed: the Heavenly Worthy Who Rescues from Suffering (*Taiyi jiuku tianzun* 太乙救苦天尊) on the main body; the Heavenly Worthies of the Ten Directions Who Save from Suffering (*Shifang jiuku tianzun* 十方救苦天尊) on the two arms; and two perfected men (*zhenren* 真人) on the two legs (DZ 466, Daozang 8:577c; Huang 2015, p. 230). This prioritization of writing and symbols over the imagery is the major difference between the Daoist and Buddhist banners (Huang 2012, pp. 218, 344–45).



Figure 8. A typical Buddhist Banner, 7th to 10th century, pattern and plain woven silk, wood, and paint, H. 131.0 cm, W. 34.0 cm, LOAN:STEIN.619, Victoria and Albert Museum. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 9. Long Banner (Stein Painting 217), 10th century CE, silver on woven damask red silk, H. 386.0 cm, W. 68.1 cm, 1919,0101,0.217, British Museum. © The Trustees of British Museum.

Moreover, the specific colors of red, yellow, and blue prescribed for the Buddhist salvation ritual banner share visual norms with Daoist practice (Huang 2015, p. 230). One of the main characteristics of the long banners in Cave 17 that differentiates them from the rest of the painted banners is that their silk supports are dyed with one primary color such as red, yellow, or dark blue. When bodhisattvas or Buddhas were painted on these dyed silk supports, rather simple color palettes—such as silver, orpiment (as a substitute for gold), and cinnabar or ocher for red—were used, all of which provide highly contrasting visual effects on the supports. Daoist examples can provide clues to the symbolism behind these color applications.

According to Huang, in Daoist salvation rituals, the banners used were “mostly yellow,” with some exceptions of blue–green, vermilion, and white (Huang 2015, p. 230). Huang adds that the spirit-moving banner is usually made with vermilion silk (Huang 2015, p. 230). Interestingly, the colors of the long banners found in the Library Cave resonate with these Daoist salvation banners; Stein Painting 216, for example, is painted on yellow-dyed silk. Other examples, including Stein Painting 217, EO 1137, EO 1418, and EO 3657, were drawn on vermilion/red silk. Another group of long banners, including Stein Painting 214, EO 3647, EO 3648, Bon 4019, and Bon 4043, are examples of long banners drawn on navy blue silk (Figure 10).

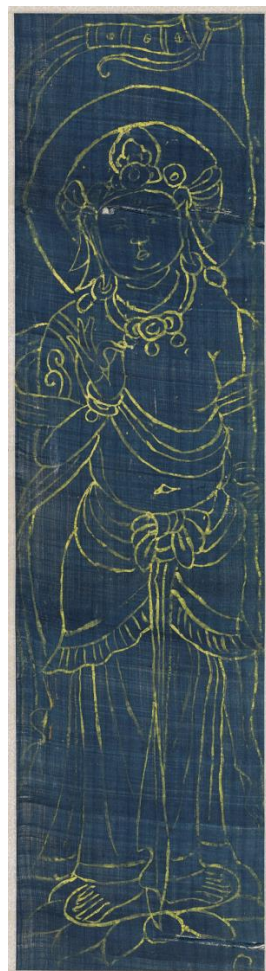


Figure 10. *Banner of Bodhisattva*, possibly part of a larger long banner, 10th century CE, color on silk, H. 165.0 cm, W. 36.8 cm, Bon 4019, National Museum of Korea. Photograph licensed under Creative Commons, reproduced with permission from National Museum of Korea, Seoul.

Based on the comparison, it can be tentatively concluded that Dunhuang’s forty-nine-*chi* banners shared a similar preliminary ritualistic function, which was to evoke the “spirit”

or souls of the deceased or Buddhist deities in salvation rituals, which include the healing ritual as it has features in common with its Daoist ritualistic counterpart.²¹ As previously mentioned, Ning states that the use of the light or lantern in the healing ritual possibly originated from the Lantern Festival. According to Huang, the Lantern Festival coincided with the Festival of the Upper Prime (*Shangyuan jie* 上圓節) during the Tang period (Huang 2012, p. 297). This echoes the Daoist salvation ritual, which aims to provide solace to deceased souls and eventually save them, as exemplified in the Daoist Yellow Register Purgation and the Buddhist healing ritual (Huang 2015, p. 230; Huang 2012, p. 218). The loosely defined association and interactions between the Buddhist and Daoist long banners can be reinforced by scrutinizing what is depicted on the long banner's surface: namely, identifying the nine bodhisattvas.

5. Buddhist Banners for Longevity and Soul Saving: Stein Painting 216

5.1. Textual Inspiration to the Long Banner

If the length and colors of the Buddhist long banners from Cave 17 such as Stein Painting 216 conform to what is prescribed in these Daoist sutras, the next question that must be answered is what types of figures were depicted and what were their roles in the ritual process. To answer this, it is critical to closely examine and identify the bodhisattvas depicted on these long banner paintings. Returning to Stein Painting 216, it has been mentioned that, besides the inscription on the top, there are (from the viewer's perspective) five bodhisattvas on the left banner and four on the right banner. Five of these nine bodhisattvas have legible names; on the left side top to bottom are Lighting Virtue Bodhisattva (*nanwu diande pusa* 南無電德菩薩), Store of Virtuous Signs Bodhisattva (*nanwu dexiangzang pusa* 南無德相藏菩薩), Heavenly King Bodhisattva (*nanwu tianwang pusa* 南無天王菩薩), and Sound of Thunder Bodhisattva (*nanwu leiyin pusa* 南無雷音菩薩). On the right side, only one bodhisattva, Precious Signs Bodhisattva (*nanwu baoxiang pusa* 南無寶相菩薩), is labeled.²² Stein Painting 196, which includes donor portraits at the bottom, depicts Ānanda and two bodhisattvas whose names can be found in a cartouche: Constant Tranquil Bodhisattva (*nanwu changqingjing pusa* 南無常清淨菩薩) and Flower Adorned Bodhisattva (*nanwu huayan pusa* 南無花嚴菩薩).²³ Bon 4025, the long banner at the National Museum of Korea, represents two bodhisattvas, of which only one can be identified: Never Resting Bodhisattva (*nanwu buxiuxi pusa* 南無不休息菩薩).²⁴

It is rather uncommon for the names of bodhisattvas to be depicted in painted banners from Cave 17, and there is no single Buddhist text which gives all these bodhisattvas' names together. In other words, no sutra includes the names of all fifteen bodhisattvas from the reconstructed banners with Stein Painting 216, Stein Painting 196, and Bon 4025. Although Waley identifies them as different manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, there is one sutra in which five out of these nine bodhisattvas' names appear: *Sutra on Solemn Attainment of Buddhahood by Means of Repentance to Extinguish Sins in a Great, Thorough, and Broad Way* (Datong fangguang chanhui miezui zhuangyan chengfo jing 大通方廣懺悔滅罪莊嚴成佛經, T. 2871) (Waley 1931, p. 186).²⁵ This apocryphal Chinese sutra celebrates all Buddhas and bodhisattvas through the recitation of their names as part of a confession ritual. By reciting the names, the practitioners can eliminate their sins, including the most inexpressible and heinous sins such as the five *ānantaryakarma* and the sins of the *icchantika* (Kuo 1994, p. 140).²⁶ This sutra is specifically credited for a rather long list of names of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.²⁷ The peculiarity and rarity of the bodhisattvas' names featured in Stein Painting 216, Stein Painting 196, and Bon 4025 can thus be possibly explained by or based on this sutra.

If the *Sutra on Solemn Attainment of Buddhahood* provides all the bodhisattvas' names, it may provide a clue to the identity of a mysterious cartouche of the bodhisattva in the upper section found on Bon 4025, the long banner at the National Museum of Korea (Figure 11). An inscription that follows the character *bai* 白 meaning "white" has not been positively identified because of the fragmentary condition of the letters. One possible reading, however, is *xiang xiang* or "fragrant elephant," which may be part of the name Bodhisattva of

White Fragrant Elephant (*nanwu bai xiang xiang pusa* 南無白香象菩薩), a name found in the *Sutra on Solemn Attainment of Buddhahood* (T. 2871, 1344:14a–15a).



Figure 11. Details of Figure 4, showing the inscription with missing letters, possibly Bodhisattva of White Fragrant Elephant (?). Photograph licensed under Creative Commons, reproduced with permission from National Museum of Korea, Seoul.

Another interesting aspect of the *Sutra on Solemn Attainment of Buddhahood* is that it was likely translated from Chinese to Tibetan and practiced or recited by Tibetan Buddhists for forty-nine days when their family members or relatives died.²⁸ Even though there is no direct reference in its current version to a Tibetan text, how this text was utilized in funerary rituals is worth noting in terms of how its Chinese counterpart functioned in a ritual setting. It is not surprising that this sutra had possible religious connections to funerary practices because reciting the names of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas guarantees the elimination of even the most egregious sins and, thus, appealed to dying individuals and their family members.

To sum up this point, the long banner form exemplifies reciprocal interactions between multiple cultures. The format and configuration of the Daoist spirit-moving banner were borrowed by Buddhists from what already existed in Daoist rituals, and its practice as a spirit-moving banner in forty-nine-*chi* was also adopted. The major difference is that the Daoist long banner is aniconic—only the names of the Heavenly Worthy Who Rescues from Suffering and Heavenly Worthies of the Ten Directions Who Save from Suffering appear and not their images.²⁹ The prescribed colors for the Daoist salvation banners provide further evidence for some long banners from Cave 17 through their supports being dyed unusual solid colors such as red, yellow, and navy.

The application of visual representations of bodhisattvas in this format does help link long banners with Buddhist ritualistic practices. The names of the bodhisattvas come from the sutra used in confession and funerary rituals and its prescribed recitation of a long list of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The intrinsic nature of the healing, confession, and salvation rituals in both Daoism and Buddhism are fundamentally indistinguishable, as the goals of both were to assure and help the family of the deceased—and their parents in particular—to be reborn in the Pure Land and save them from their sins from their previous and present

lives, thus salvaging their souls. They are also closely related to the wish for the longevity and wellbeing of family members as part of salvation.³⁰ This means that while the recitation of Buddha and bodhisattva names is the intangible form of ritualistic practice, painting the bodhisattvas is a way of materializing the form of the ritual and its offering.

Practitioners believed that complete salvation and healing could not be completed without acknowledging one's past sins. This mindset of practitioners is well illustrated in one colophon (P. 2805) to the Sutra of Mārīcī God (*Molizhitian jing* 摩利支天經):

On the 13th day of the 10th month of the 6th *xinchou* year of the Tianfu [941], the female disciple of pure faith, the young woman of the Cao family, commissioned the copying of the *Hrdāyaprajñā-pāramitāsūtra* in one roll, the Sutra on the Extension of the Span of Life (*Xuming jing* 續命經) in one roll, the Sutra on Longevity and the Span of Life (*Yanshou ming jing* 延壽命經) in one roll, and the Sutra of Mārīcī God in one roll, respectfully offered on behalf of herself, as she suffers from difficulties. Today she presents a number of scriptures, since the medicine dumplings that were bestowed again and again in the morning still have not made her well, and she now lies sick [in bed]. Beginning to realize her former misdeeds, she humbly begs the Great Holy Ones to relieve her hardships and lift her out of danger, and that the mirror will reflect the virtue of the copying of scriptures. She [therefore] hopes to be protected, that this troublesome danger will be eliminated, deceased family debtors will receive their capital [when] the merit is divided, and that they will [subsequently] go for rebirth in the Western [Pure Land]. With a mind full of prayer, she eternally supplies these [scriptures] as eternal offerings [. . .].³¹

After listing the titles of the four sutras that she copied (or commissioned to be copied), “the young woman of the Cao family” explains the reason why she is offering the sutras: she has taken medicine, but it has not helped her recover from a sickness. Copying the sutra was one of her last hopes, she states, and then she confesses her past sins. Ultimately, she was willing to share any merit she gained from copying the sutra with those who had been harmed by her. One of the copied manuscripts discovered in Cave 17 is the aforementioned *Sutra on Prolonging Lifespan* (P. 2171), which includes the list of seventeen divinities (*shen* 神) and the benefits of reciting their names.³² It is clear that these seemingly different rituals share an identical purpose: healing, eliminating sins, and thus being reborn in the Pure Land.

Returning to the inscription of Stein Painting 216, its donor, Ren Yanchao, delineates his wishes: longevity for His Excellency and Lady Wife, as well as his family members, including his parents, children, and wife. A wish for health and security follows. This type of wish is not unique to this painting.³³ Nevertheless, this inscription's sentiment echoes both one of the names of a long banner, “Life-Extending Banner,” and the content of the sutras discussed above.

5.2. Blood Painting?

Another notable element of the inscription of Stein Painting 216 is that it claims that the painting was made with blood drawn from the donor, Ren Yanchao. Unfortunately, there has been no conservation study conducted on either Stein Painting 216, so one wonders if this assertion is true. A scientific analysis of the pigments and textile materials of Bon 4025 was conducted by the National Museum of Korea in 2013. It revealed that the red pigment in Bon 4025 is cinnabar, not actual blood, as there were no traces of iron.³⁴ If we assume that Bon 4025 was painted by the same artist that painted Stein Painting 216, it is safe to conclude that the same type of pigment must have been applied to Stein Painting 216 and that actual blood from the donor was not used (Kieschnick 2000, pp. 177–94).

Even though the pigment used in the work does not contain actual blood, it is worthwhile to consider what the inscription's claim of using blood as an artistic medium connotes. There are several examples of Buddhist manuscripts with inscriptions that claim

that they are written in the donor's blood. Owing to a recent conservational study, one Tibetan Buddhist manuscript (IOL Tib J 308) was identified to have been written with actual blood: *Homage to Aparimitāyus Sutra* (*Aparimitāyurnāma-sūtra*) (van Schaik et al. 2015, p. 117).³⁵ This particular sutra was popularly copied due to the belief that doing so would bring longevity (see Note 35). An X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis of the light brown link of IOL Tib J 308 revealed that its ink contained iron (Fe), calcium (Ca), potassium (K), titanium (Ti), sulfur (S), and zinc (Zn), without any traces of mineral pigment.³⁶ This means it is highly probable that the main source of the light brown color was, in fact, blood.

It is known that the act of drawing blood as part of self-immolation was considered to be a devotional and compassionate behavior as well as a sign of filial piety to parents since the late fourth century in China.³⁷ A notable number of monks were known for writing and copying scriptures with their own blood.³⁸ For example, the tenth century monk Yongming Yanshou 永明延壽 (904–975) wrote a death verse in blood and the ninth century monk Dinglan 定蘭 (d. 852) copied sutras using blood (Benn 2007, pp. 123, 139). It was not exceptional for lay people to do this as well. Furthermore, it was believed that by doing so, the practitioners could transfer merit to their parents and thus repay them for their benevolence (Kieschnick 2000, p. 183; Benn 2007, p. 153; Yu 2012, pp. 38–47). In one of the earliest known examples of using blood as an artistic material in China, Yuan Dexiu 元德秀, an eighth century official, pricked himself to draw blood upon his mother's death, and he painted images and copied scriptures using this blood (Kieschnick 2000, p. 183). Daozhou 道舟 (864–941) used his own blood to paint an image of the Thousand-Armed and Thousand-Eyed Avalokiteśvara, in addition to removing part of his own ear (Kieschnick 2000, p. 187). In Tibet, a monk is said to have used the blood from his own nosebleed to make a painting of an eminent monk (Vitali 1990, p. 51). Thus, in its claim of using blood as paint, Stein Painting 216 is not an unusual case, but it represents one way of proclaiming religious devotion and even expectations of increasing religious efficacy. Cinnabar, one of the oldest pigments used in China, is traditionally understood and utilized as an alternative to blood or as a substance comparable to blood—thus, it has symbolic associations with death.³⁹ Moreover, cinnabar is also a critical material for alchemy in Daoist rituals, as it is thought to assist with obtaining immortality. Such rich symbolism means that the choice of cinnabar for Stein Painting 216 reflects the pigment's strong associations with blood. It is also highly plausible that actual blood could have been added to the cinnabar at a ratio too small to be detected in the scientific analysis that was conducted on some sample spots from Bon 4025.

To summarize, the artistic practice of drawing blood to be used as a painting pigment originated from blood-writing practices in Buddhism. Sacrificing one's blood would not only represent one's devotion and compassionate zeal in making an offering, but it was also thought to increase the offering's efficacy. In particular, during the ninth century of the Tibetan occupation period, the act of copying a sutra that was believed to guarantee one's longevity was evidently practiced by the Tibetan emperor, as thousands of copies of such sutras were discovered in Cave 17 (van Schaik 2014, p. 309). These sutras and images of Buddhist deities were written or painted in blood or its symbolic replacement, cinnabar. Considering that the format of the long banner was possibly adopted from Daoism, it is not surprising that cinnabar was chosen as the main pigment given its traditional materiality. Stein Painting 216's use of cinnabar and its long length were purposeful choices made to help this offered object achieve its purpose of extending the lives of a deceased person's parents, who would eventually be saved and reborn in the Western Pure Land.

5.3. Textile Offerings

A long banner's peculiar format and extensive length can be easily understood from the perspective of the material culture in Dunhuang. The hypothetically reconstructed long banner with Stein Painting 216 and the total length suggest that this type of long banner was actually based on a bolt of silk as a basic unit. The standardized measurement was consistent throughout the Tang Dynasty, allowing minor degree differences. The tem-

ples' inventory indicated "forty-three-*chi*" and "forty-five-*chi*," which can be converted to 12.9 m and 13.5 m, respectively. They are similar to the length of a standard bolt of silk, which is 12 m. This means that a bolt of silk was likely to be a simple yet efficient choice both for devotees and artisans to transform a plain bolt of silk into a votive offering with painted imageries. In other words, a complete bolt of silk was regarded as an object that was closest to the symbolic "forty-nine-*chi*" banner, thus becoming suitable materials for such offerings. The extant long banners do not have frames or mounting either, except for the optional triangular head. The minimized preparatory process for this specific offering format led to producing a substantial quantity of such offerings in the Dunhuang area.

The phrase from Stein Painting 216's inscription supports this: "banner in one strip 壹條其幡(幡)." It may sound contradictory when compared to the current configuration with two strips with standing bodhisattvas drawn on each one. Why does the inscription describe it as "one" strip rather than two? This part, in fact, is good evidence for reconstructing the painting process using a bolt of silk. The bodhisattvas were highly likely to be drawn originally in one full-width bolt of silk. At this stage, the banner was in one strip. Then, having the pictorial imagery painted, the inscription part was performed on a separate piece of silk and sewn onto the top of the silk later. After that, the whole strip was cut in half partially. In other words, one standardized sized bolt of silk in the Tang period was regarded as a readily available material, which required minimum preparatory work. Without making modifications to the bolt of silk, except for dyeing, it was regarded as a convenient and efficient choice for support.

6. Conclusions

Through an examination of similar painting styles seen in Chinese banners in museums throughout the world, this discussion attempted to reconstruct a long banner with Stein Painting 216, Stein Painting 196, and Bon 4025, which would have been longer than ten meters. Even though the estimated length does not literally match the description of the "forty-nine-*chi*" spirit banner, it indicates that there was an effort to offer a very long banner in order to follow scriptural prescriptions. Dominant depictions of bodhisattvas on the banners signal their roles in the rituals that the banners were used in; more in-depth research on Daoist and Buddhist salvation rituals is needed to expand on this argument. And the concept of soul saving, or soul carrying in the context of rescuing from calamity and death, should also be researched further, as many of the painted banners other than the long banners feature the Rescuing Bodhisattva (救苦菩薩) and the Bodhisattva as the Guide of the Soul (引路菩薩).

The style of the long banners is completely different from that of the rest of the painted banners in Cave 17. Only long banners have line-drawing paintings, a different genre from the "regular" painted banners in which outlines are filled with multiple layers of pigments. In addition, the dyed color of the long banners' supports replaces hand-done background coloring, which would save painters time and effort. This practice also suggests that artists would have wanted to emphasize the innate characteristics of the material such as the quality of the silk. Dyed silks were used as the main painting support, in contrast to "regular" painted banners on which the support was not normally dyed with pigments. Based on this observation, artistic intention and effect were one of the main considerations of the long banners' artists. Applying contrasting pigments to the bright or dark silk—such as gold, silver, black ink, and red—supports such an assumption.⁴⁰

The long banner paintings unpack multiple stories that enrich our understanding of artistic and religious practice in Dunhuang. Above all, a long banner should not be understood as a simple devotional offering; rather, it was a product of rich Buddhist and Daoist traditions meant for rituals practiced by the local communities. The most common wishes for ordinary lay people during the tenth century CE were to live long and well without having serious health issues—this is true of people today, as well. Sutras and rituals related to lengthening a donor's and his/her family members' lifespans gained significant popularity and attention. Stein Painting 216 is a product of this phenomenon. This so-called spirit

banner was prescribed to be at least forty-nine-*chi* in its length, and was destined to be used either in a healing ritual, at a Lantern Festival, or as part of a confession ritual before death, all of which require its donor to repent past sins. Moreover, with its extremely long length, which undoubtedly represents a long life span, the drawing of a donor's blood to be used as the artistic medium was one of the most significant aspects of the painted banner. Whether or not a few drops of blood were mixed with cinnabar, the characteristics of this particular pigment still signify the blood, life, and viability, which conforms precisely to the purpose of this long banner: the desire for longevity.

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Abbreviations

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

Notes

- ¹ For the new interpretation of the itinerant monk paintings from Dunhuang, see (Kim 2020); for the miraculous image of Liu Sahe (or Linagzhou) and the Thousand-Armed Mañjuśrī iconography, see (Wu 1996; Wang 2016).
- ² They are now in museums worldwide: the Stein Collection at the British Museum in England; the Pelliot Collection at the Musée Guimet in France; the Otani Collection at the National Museum in Korea; the Lüshun Museum and the Palace Museum at Beijing in China; and the State Hermitage Museum in Russia.
- ³ These exceptions are Stein Painting 195 at the British Museum and MG 17675, MG 17791, and EO 1165 at the Musée Guimet.
- ⁴ The width of silk or hemp was determined by a loom's width, which was 50–60 cm in most cases. See (Wang 2013, p. 279).
- ⁵ It provides a reference to an original configuration for similar paintings on which a single column of bodhisattvas is painted on a narrow width of silk, such as Stein Painting 205, MG 17675, and MG 17791.
- ⁶ The direction of reading the inscription opposes that of the traditional Chinese writing. Imre Galambos argued that the left-to-right reading direction was not a mistake but a common local phenomenon in the Dunhuang area in the ninth to tenth centuries. See (Galambos 2020, pp. 139–94).
- ⁷ The inscription was originally transcribed by Arthur Waley and adapted by Whitfield in 1983. The author has altered “forty-nine foot” to “forty-nine *chi*” for more accurate identification. Also, the order of the transcribed inscription, which should be read from left to right, is corrected by the author as the following: “... 歸義軍節度內... 使銀青光祿大夫檢校工部尚書兼御史大夫上柱國西河郡 任延朝刻血敬畫四十 九尺纛壹條其纛乃 龍鉤高曳直至於 宛轉飄飄似 飛鳩西口 綵口 願 令公壽同出嶽祿 比滄溟夫人延遐 花顏永茂次爲原中 父母長報安康在 比妻男同霑福祐于 時大週顯德三年.” See (Waley 1931, pp. 186–87; Whitfield 1983, p. 33).
- ⁸ Jacques Giès and Haewon Kim argue that it is not the actual length but a symbolic expression. See (Giès et al. 1994, p. 295; Kim 2013, p. 154).
- ⁹ This specific painting style is also found in Long Banner with Five Apsaras (EO 1166) at the Musée Guimet in Paris, France. In contrast to the preceding examples, it features flying five apsaras (female spirit of the clouds and waters in Hindu and Buddhist culture) on a piece of silk that is 19.6 cm wide. Even though the subject matter is different, there are some stylistic similarities: red outlines, red ink washes, and a spontaneous drawing style. However, its width is shorter than those of the three long banners such as Stein Paintings 196 and 217 and Bon 4025. In addition, there is no hint of the application of yellow and blue hues. Thus, it is safe to conclude that this painting must have been part of other painting. With the exception of the second apsara from the top, the four other apsaras face the right side of the viewer, which suggests that this banner might have been paired with another with flying apsaras facing the opposite direction. In my opinion, however, we cannot assume that EO 1166 was a piece from the left based on the apsaras' orientation. It could have been the far-right piece because of the location of its selvedge. Looking closely, one can find the selvedge on the right side, whereas the opposite side should have been cut and sewn. In instances where the silk was split for making streamers at the bottom, there are some cases in which the far right or left streamer keeps its original selvedge. See (Giès et al. 1994, p. 85 and Figure 50).

- 10 The Ōtani Collection refers to a group of objects from Central Asia that Ōtani Kozui (1876–1948), the twenty-second Abbot of the Nishi Honganji Temple, and his colleagues excavated and obtained during three expeditions to the region in 1902–1914. The collection is mostly comprised of mural paintings, banner paintings, and sculptures. Part of the original Ōtani Collection is now displayed in the National Museum of Korea. In the collection, there are more than fifteen paintings on paper or textile. See (Kim 2013, pp. 32–43).
- 11 His argument is based on the reconstruction of Stein Painting 214 (1, 2) with EO 3647 and EO 3648. See (Whitfield 1983, p. 35).
- 12 In the inscription of Stein Painting 216, “𑖦𑖩,” which has the same phonetic pronunciation (fan) as that of 幡, was used.
- 13 Some examples are *Bhaisajyaguru Sutra* (藥師琉璃光如來本願功德經), T. 450, 404:20c; *Consecration Sutra* (佛說灌頂經), T. 1331, 535:13b; and *The Liturgy for Cultivating Dharani for the Buddha Above the Leading General Atavaka* (阿吒薄俱元帥大將上佛陀羅尼經修行儀軌), T. 1239, 196:11–12a.
- 14 Fascicle 12 of the *Consecration Sutra* is *Consecration Sutra Spoken by the Buddha that Rescues from Sin and Enables Salvation from Birth and Death* (Fushuo guanding bachu guozui shengsi dedu jing 佛說灌頂拔除過罪生死得度經, T. 1331). See (Birnbbaum 1979, pp. 56–57). The passage’s translation is from (Soper 1959, p. 171).
- 15 Ning Qiang argues that the multitiered lamp wheel probably originated from the western region and was eventually incorporated to the Chinese Lantern Festival. For more information on the origin of the festival and its local adaptation, see (Ning 2004, pp. 122–33).
- 16 The close relationship between the lighting of lamps and the Bhasajyaguru cult is discussed intensively in Shi Zhiru’s recent publication. See Zhiru Shi, “Lighting Lamps to Prolong Life: Ritual Healing and the Bhaisajyaguru Cult in Fifth- and Sixth-Century China,” in *Buddhist Healing in Medieval China and Japan* University of Hawaii Press, 2020), pp. 91–117.
- 17 High resolution photograph can be assessed at <https://www.e-dunhuang.com/cave/10.0001/0001.0001.0220> (Accessed on 1 March 2021).
- 18 Sometimes it is translated as a “spirit-removing banner.”
- 19 DZ 371:7 the original text is: “又以繒綵造遷神寶旛長四十九尺或作小旛七首懸於長竿任風飛颺禹罪皆滅” (DZ 371: 7).
- 20 Stein Painting 217 (1919,0101,0.217) is painted on a full width silk support, which shows selvages at both ends.
- 21 For the rest of the types of painted banners from Cave 17 (i.e., not long banners), Xie Shengbao and Xie Jing propose that a large group of Buddhist paintings from the Library Cave could have been used for the Water Land Ritual even though during this time period the paintings were not called “Water Land Paintings.” I believe it is a worth reviewing their argument but further discussions are also needed on how the paintings can be grouped and where the paintings were actually used. See (Xie and Xie 2006a, 2006b).
- 22 Waley reads this inscription as “Many Precious Signs 多寶相.” However, when I examined the inscription in person, I was not able to find the character 多. I believe he misread 無(无) as 多. See (Waley 1931, p. 186).
- 23 The character of the Flower Adorned Bodhisattva written on Stein Painting 196 is read not as huá 華 but as huā 花.
- 24 The other one can be read partially as follows: 南無白香(?) 象(?) 菩薩.
- 25 This sutra, previously lost, was reconstructed with the manuscripts found in Cave 17 of the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang. See (Chou 2009).
- 26 The five ānantaryakarma includes “patricide, matricide, killing an arhat, spilling the blood of a buddha, and causing schism in the monastic order.” The icchantika means “incorrigible” in Sanskrit, referring to people “who have lost all potential to achieve enlightenment.” See (Buswell and Lopez 2014, pp. 40–41, 370).
- 27 According to Dorothy C. Wong, another example of this sutra being the textual foundation of a Buddhist sculpture is a stele called Chen Hailong zaoxiang bei 陳海龍造像碑 from Shanxi, dated 562. This stele, in contrast to Stein Painting 216 and its bodhisattvas, displays twenty-four small buddhas with legible inscriptions of their names. Their visual representations are not distinguishable, a situation similar to the bodhisattvas from the group of the long banners. For this stele and its textual resource, see (Wong 2007, pp. 266–70).
- 28 The name of the sutra in the Tibetan canon is *hphags-pa thar-pa chen-po phyogs-suryas-pa hgyod-tshans-kyis sdig-sbyans te sans-rgyas-su grub-par rnam-par-bkod-pa shes-bya-ba theg-pa chen-pohimdo* (vol. 37, no. 930), which can be translated as “Sheng da jietuo fang-guang chanhui miezui chengfo zhuangyan dacheng jing 聖大解脫方廣懺悔滅罪成佛莊嚴大乘經.” See (Chou 2009, pp. 8–9).
- 29 The names of the Daoist deities are resonant with the aforementioned “jiuku pusa” or Savior Bodhisattva from Suffering, who was one of the popular bodhisattvas featured in painted banners. This is only one example of many cases of Buddhist–Daoist borrowings in visual materials.
- 30 Among the manuscripts from Cave 17, several apocryphal sutras related to lengthening one’s life span were discovered. One example is *Sutra on Prolonging Lifespan* (fo shuo yan shouming jing 佛說延壽命經, T2888). P. 2171 is the case in point. The practice of copying this type of text was popular in the tenth century. A colophon to P. 2805 (*the Sutra of Goddess Marici*) tells that a daughter from the Cao 曹 family clan copied four sutras, including *Sutra on the Heart of Prajñā-pāramitā* (Bore [boluomiduo] xin jing 般若[波羅蜜多]心經), *Sutra on Extending Lifespan* (Xuming jing 續命經), *Sutra on Prolonging Lifespan* (Yanshouming jing

延壽命經), and *Sutra of Goddess Marīcī* (*Molizhitian jing* 摩利支天經), in order to aid her sickness. For the full translation of the colophon, see (Hao 2020, pp. 87–88; Sørensen 2020, pp. 21–22).

- 31 The translation is slightly modified from (Sørensen 2020, pp. 21–22, no. 34). The original inscription is “天福六年 [(941)] 辛丑歲 十月十三日清信女弟子小娘子曹氏敬寫般若心經一卷, 續命經一卷, 延壽命經一卷, 摩利支天經一卷, 奉為己躬患難, 今經數晨, 藥餌頻施不蒙抽; 今遭卧疾, 始悟前非, 伏乞大聖濟難拔危, 鑒照寫經功德, 望仗危難消除, 死家債主領資福分, 往生西方, 滿其心願, [...].”
- 32 P. 2171 is entitled *Sutra on Prolonging Lifespan*, but its content is different from S. 2428 (T2888), which has the same title.
- 33 Stein Painting 217 bears a similar inscription: “May the land be peaceful and its people prosperous; May the rural shrines continually flourish. May the whole house be clean and happy; May the lives (of the inhabitants) be long extended.” See (Waley 1931, p. 188).
- 34 Before this result, Whitfield speculated that “the red pigment used was probably a local red earth, tuhong 土紅 for the washes and cinnabar, zhu 朱 for the brighter outlines.” (Whitfield 1983, p. 32; Kim 2013, p. 237).
- 35 This sutra was copied numerous times, especially for the Tibetan emperor during the 830s–840s. See (van Schaik et al. 2015, pp. 117–18).
- 36 No indication of mineral pigment was based on the result of VIS spectroscopy (van Schaik et al. 2015, p. 118).
- 37 In early Buddhism in India, this idea is deeply rooted in jātaṅka tales, which are tales of previous lives of the Buddha. They describe how the Buddha was compassionate enough to cut his own body parts to save other sentient beings. For the history of self-immolation, see (Benn 2007, pp. 7–18).
- 38 For the practice’s scriptural basis, see (Kieschnick 2000, pp. 178–81). According to Jimmy Yu’s publication on blood writing, the most popular sutras that preached the benefits of self-sacrifice were written in blood. Such texts include the *Lotus Sūtra*, *Brahma Net Sūtra*, *Flower Garland Sūtra*, and *Diamond Sūtra*. See (Yu 2012, p. 41).
- 39 For the materiality of the colorant cinnabar in early Chinese visual history, see (Lai 2015).
- 40 This painting method is reminiscent of an illuminated manuscript in which the first page is the painting of a sermon scene. Sutras were often copied on paper that was dyed dark blue and then written and painted on using gold foil and gold or silver pigments with hints of colors, much like the techniques used with the painted long banners. Moreover, by using gold to accentuate the outlines of the figures and architecture, the illuminated painting is in sharp contrast with its dark background and the bright line drawings.

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T. 1331 *Guanding jing* 灌頂經.

T. 2871 *Datong fangguang chanhui miezui zhuangyan chengfo jing* 大通方廣懺悔滅罪莊嚴成佛經.

T. 2888 *Fo shuo yan shouming jing* 佛說延壽命經.

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