Images of Monks with the U•×•a from the Kucha and Turfan Regions

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According to the scriptures, kyamuni is supposed to have been born with thirty-two mah puruṣa laṅkā las (characteristics/body-marks of the Great Person) and eighty aunavīya jana (minor marks). The u•×•a, “the protrusion on top of the head,” is one of the thirty-two mah puruṣa laṅkā las. In standard Buddhist iconography, the u•×•a is almost an exclusive attribute of the Buddha image. However, some monk images are clearly shown with the cranial protuberance. They are mainly found in Buddhist caves and temple sites in the Kucha and Turfan regions in Central Asia and a few in the Ajaïc caves in India. These images have long been overlooked until recently when Monika Zin conducted research on this unusual iconography. Based on an extensive study of Ajaić paintings and a survey of the rest of the Buddhist world, she proposes that the u•×•a on monk figures was meant to indicate either that they were members of the kya clan (Nanda and Nanda) or that they were future Buddhas. However, in Kucha paintings, monk figures with the u•×•a are not restricted to these two categories. They include kyamini’s principle disciples who are out of the kya clan. Yet, the question of why this iconography only appears in the limited areas and is absent in the Theravada/Paśupati tradition in South India and Southeast Asia and in the Mahayana tradition in East Asia is still unanswered. This paper attempts to search for the possible connection among the regions where this iconography appears and how it may relate to the Saṃvatīvada/Hayāna school which is believed to have dominated Kucha and also existed at the sites of Turfan and Ajaić. The purpose of the paper is to study the significance of endowing the u•×•a on the non-Buddha figures in Buddhist theory and practice. Since the Kucha caves yield the most intensive depictions of such images and the images at Turfan bear inscriptions that are crucial for interpreting the meaning of the iconography, I will focus on the images from these two areas, which have not been previously examined at length.

**Images**

**Kucha region: Kizil caves**

The ancient state of Kucha was located on the Northern part of the trade route in Central Asia, which is now part of present-day China. A number of Buddhist cave sites have been found in Kucha including the renowned Kizil. It is one of the earliest and also the largest Buddhist cave sites in Central Asia. Images of monks with the uṣṇīṣa can frequently be found in the central-pillar type of caves at Kucha and appear in virtually all the themes of the iconographic program of the caves (Fig. 1): the Buddha’s assemblies on the side walls of the main hall, the depictions of avadana on the vaulted ceiling, the parinirvāna and related episodes in the back chamber, the First Council in the left corridor, and among the devotee and monk figures on the side wall of the central pillar. A monk bearing an uṣṇīṣa can either be the key figure of the narrative or just as a member of the audience. As the discussion below will show, they are either kyamuni in his past incarnation or one of the Buddha’s principle disciples, but they are not necessarily from the kya clan. Only a limited number of these depictions at this cave site have been identified while most of them still remain undetermined. The following are examples of each theme.

**Group I. Buddha’s teaching assemblies**

Monks with uṣṇīṣa can frequently be found in paintings of the Buddha’s preaching assemblies. Among these monks, Purna Maitryaniputra has been identified, and can be seen in Kizil Cave 14 (Fig.2a) and 181 (Fig.2b).

According to the *Buddha Pṛvacaryā-saṃgraha Sūtra* (*Fo benxing ji jing*), Purna Maitryaniputra was born in a Brahman family of the imperial priesthood, the same day that kyamuni was born. The night when kyamuni renounces worldly life, Purna Maitryaniputra also secretly leaves his family to begin his

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1 Since only Kizil caves are relatively well published, examples in this paper are mainly from Kizil.
2 This subject in Cave 181 is identified in Duan Wenjie, *Zhongguo meishu fenlei quanji—Zhongguo Xinjiang bihua quangji III—Kizil* (Tianjing: Tianjing meishu sheying chubanshe & Tianjing renmin chubanshe, 1995: 30, 32,) fig.66.
ascetic life in the Snow Mountains. Through his practice, he reaches the Four Dhyāna Heavens⁴ and obtains the Five Supernatural Powers. After kyamuni has achieved enlightenment, Purna Maitr yaniputra comes to follow the Buddha. Just as depicted in the paintings, when the two meet, Purna Maitr yaniputra prostrates himself with his head at the feet of the Buddha. He holds the Buddha’s feet with both hands and kisses the teacher’s feet. Then, Purna Maitr yaniputra kneels down on one knee and praises the Buddha. In the paintings of Cave 14 and 181, Purna Maitr yaniputra is shown twice: first prostrating and then kneeling by the Buddha. Purna Maitr yaniputra is one of the ten chief disciples of Śkyamuni. He appears as one of the interlocutors in the Śrāngama-sūtra. According to the same sūtra, Purna Maitr yaniputra is said to be born with the maṃśa marks, which explains why he is depicted with the uṣṇikṣṇa in the Kizil paintings.⁵

Other unidentified monk figures possessing the uṣṇikṣṇa also seem to be close disciples of the Buddha. For example, in Kizil Cave 227, one such figure attends the Buddha of the main niche (Fig.2c). In Cave 123 (Fig. 2d), a similar figure stands to the Buddha’s immediate top left. The close position of these figures to the Buddha speaks to their importance. These figures clearly represent the monks, not the Buddhas. Unlike the Buddha images in Kizil paintings that are shown with a high, round protuberance, the uṣṇikṣṇa on the monk figures are small and low. In addition, the Buddha figure’s hairline is round and smooth; while the hairlines on the images on the monks with the uṣṇikṣṇa recess in sharp zigzag angles. Further, in contrast to kyamuni, these monk figures usually do not have halos around them.

**Group II. The avadnas**

Among the avadnas on the ceiling, two scenes with images of monks possessing the uṣṇikṣṇa have been identified: the “poor woman offering a lamp” and “Buddha

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⁴ The eighteen Brahmalokas are divided into four levels and are reached through the four stages of dhyāna (meditation) practice.

⁵ Taishō 3: 190.824a-825a.
Fu•ya painting a self-portrait.”\(^6\) However, the उ•ख• on the attendants in these paintings has not been recognized and remains unexplained.

According to the \(Ś\)\textit{tra of the Wise and the Foolish} (\textit{Xianyu jing}), a poor woman, Nanda, gives all that she has collected in order to buy oil to offer an oil-lamp to the Buddha. Her lamp shines throughout the night when all the other lamps die out. Even Maudgalyāyana, one of \(Ś\)\textit{kyamuni}’s top disciples, who is on duty the next day, is not able to extinguish the light.\(^7\) The depiction of this story in Kizil Cave 196 (Fig. 3a) shows an image of a monk with an उ•ख• besides Nanda. Scholars have been using the \(Ś\)\textit{tra of the Wise and the Foolish} to identify the story.\(^8\) Based on this text, the monk figure in the painting could be Maudgalyāyana. This story is also seen in the Sanskrit \textit{Divyavadana} and \textit{Mahāsarasīvadana Vinaya}\(^9\), in which the woman then makes a vow in front of the Buddha, “May I become a Buddha just like you in the future.” Afterwards, the Buddha predicts her enlightenment.

The scene of Buddha Fu•ya painting a self-portrait appears in Kizil Cave 34 (Fig. 3b) and 38 (Fig. 3c). This event is also explained in the \(Ś\)\textit{tra of the Wise and the Foolish}. At the time of Buddha Fu•ya in the remote past, the presiding ruler, King Boseqi (V\(Ś\)\textit{ki?}), wanted to make images of the Buddha for his people to venerate. All the court painters fail to capture the auspicious marks of the Buddha. Finally, Fu•ya picks up the brush and paints a self-portrait for the court painters. When \(Ś\)\textit{kyamuni} at a future time relates the story of Fu•ya as an \textit{avatāra}, he explains that King Boseqi was himself in one of his previous lives. The merit accrued by Boseqi for making images of the Buddha, insured that he

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\(^7\) \(Ś\)\textit{tra of the Wise and the Foolish}, Taishi 4:202.370c-371c. Its Tibetan version also exists: \textit{Mdsa}′\textit{buun} \textit{shes bya ba l mdo.} Tohoku Cat. No.341. The Sanskrit original is lost. According to Hajime Nakamura, the Sanskrit title may be \textit{Dama-m\(Ś\)\textit{ka-m\(Ś\)\textit{tra}.} Nakamura, \textit{Indian Buddhism}, p.140.

\(^8\) Xinjiang Uighur zizhiqiu wenwu guanli weiyuanhui et al., \textit{Zhongguo shiku— Kizil shiku III} (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997: 221). fig.102. For identification of the theme in general, see Ma Shichang, “Kizil zhongxinzhu ku zhushi quanding yu houshi de bihua,” pp. 174-226, fig. 27; and Emmanulle Lesbre, “An Attempt to Identify and Classify Scenes with a Central Buddha Depicted on Ceilings of the Kizil Caves,” \textit{Artibus Asiae} vol.XLI, (2001: 305-354). This subject is also depicted in the Kizil Caves 38, 188, 193, and 244, in which, however, only the woman is shown.


\(^10\) N. Dutt, \textit{Gilgit Manuscripts} (Srinagar, 1947), vol.3,i, 123.15-159.16.
would always be reborn as a king with the *mah puru la* as and eventually became a Buddha.\(^{11}\) The Kizil paintings show the Buddha seated painting on a piece of cloth held by a monk with a low *u*\(\times\)*. This monk is presumably King Boseqi who commissioned the painting. Interestingly, even though he is a king here, he is shown as a Buddha-to-be, already possessing the body marks like the Buddha.

**Group III. The parinirv\(\times\)** and related scenes

In the parinirv\(\times\) and related scenes located in the back corridors of the caves, every so often, images of monks with *u*\(\times\)s are portrayed among the mourning crowds. In Kizil Cave 38 (Fig. 4a), a monk with an *u*\(\times\) kneels down holding the feet of the Buddha.\(^{12}\) In Cave 224, a similar figure stands with K. *\(\times\)*yapa in the cremation scene (Fig.4b). In the parinirv\(\times\) scene of Cave 161, three monks are endowed with the *u*\(\times\) (Fig.4c). One stands near the Buddha’s head, and the other two near the feet. In Cave 171 (Fig.4d), a monk with an *u*\(\times\) stands under a tree, frowning, seemingly contemplating the Buddha’s final passing. Similar images appear in Caves 7, 163, and 205 (cremation) as well. Since *\(\times\)*nanda plays an important role in the various textual accounts of the Buddha’s last days, it is possible that one of these figures is meant to represent him.

**Group IV. The First Council**

In a number of caves at Kizil, the First Council is depicted in the left corridor. The First Council was held shortly after kyamuni's nirv\(\times\) in order to settle debates over doctrine. *\(\times\)*nanda is said to have recited the *tras*,\(^{13}\) and Up li, another disciple of the Buddha, recited the vinayas.\(^{14}\) The central monk in the Council scene in Kizil Cave 178 and 224 (Fig. 5) bears the *u*\(\times\). Given the importance of *\(\times\)*nanda to this event, the central monk is likely depicting him.

\(^{11}\) Taish 4:202.368c-369a.

\(^{12}\) The position at the feet of the Buddha in the parinirv\(\times\) scene is usually reserved for K. *\(\times\)*yapa. However K. *\(\times\)*yapa is shown as an elder wearing patch-robe at Kizil. Therefore, this figure (in Cave 38) is unlikely to be K. *\(\times\)*yapa. For the iconography of K. *\(\times\)*yapa in parinirv\(\times\) depictions, see Jorinde Ebert, *Parinirv\(\times\): untersuchungen zur ikonographischen Entwicklung von den indischen Anfängen bis nach China* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GmbH, 1985: 77-87).

\(^{13}\) Lidai sanbao ji (歷代三寶記), Taish 49: 2034.95b.

Group V. Monks and devotees

One of the motifs on the side wall of the central pillars in a number of caves shows rows of monks and lay devotees. At least two images of monks with \( u \times \times \text{as} \) can be found in this subject. In Kizil Cave 175, a row of eight standing monks and a row of gods were depicted on the upper and lower part of the right side wall of the central pillar respectively (Fig. 6b). The second monk in the line possesses an \( u \times \times \text{as} \) (Fig. 6a). Since the monks are lined up with and are even higher than the gods, they are likely to have very high status, possibly the most important disciples of \( \text{kyamuni} \). The third monk, old and wearing a patchrobe, seems to be \( \text{K} \text{yapa} \). The second monk is then probably also a disciple of the Buddha of no less importance. The status of the row of monk figures which appears on the side wall of the central pillar can be supported by another example in Kizil 7 (“Cave of the Frescoed Floor”). In this case, the monk images were originally inscribed in Br hm x in the strip over their heads. In Cave 205 (Fig. 6c), a cave patronized by the royal family, a monk with an \( u \times \times \text{as} \) is shown leading the prince’s family. The prince and his wife are depicted with halos, which indicate that they are otherworldly figures. Hence, the guiding monk is probably also a figure in the celestial realm and not a local priest from Kizil.

The image of a monk with a protuberance on his head is a quite common iconographic feature at Kizil. It seems germane to certain subjects and certain figures. Images of monks with \( u \times \times \text{as} \) are clearly distinguishable from the Buddha figures and other ordinary monks in terms of the shape of the \( u \times \times \text{as} \) and the hairline. Regarding the date of the Kizil caves, German scholars dated them to the sixth to seventh centuries and their opinion has been largely followed in the field. Based on a more comprehensive typological analysis of the structure

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16 In the past, the subject of the monk figures on the side wall of the central pillar of Caves 175 and 205 has been identified as donors. For example, Jia Yingyi, *Xinjiang bihua xianmiao hingpin* (Urumqi: Xinjiang meishu shuying chubanshe, 1993: 131), fig. 183. It is doubtful that a Kizil monk would have a protrusion on top of his head or dare to endow himself with an \( u \times \times \text{as} \).

of the caves and the decorations with reference to carbon fourteen testing, Su Bai establishes a new chronology and dates the caves to the fourth through the seventh centuries. This early date has become very influential.

**Turfan: Bezeklik and Sengin**

In Central Asia, the convention of depicting the uṣṇīṣa on certain monk-like figures extends into the Turfan region, and is seen mainly at the Bezeklik cave site and Sengin temple site. The Bezeklik Cave was active from the ninth through the twelfth centuries during the Gaochang period (848-1283) and was under imperial patronage. Sengin is located twenty miles north of the capital, Gaochang. A royal temple is built at the site. As will be discussed below, in this area, images of monk figures bearing uṣṇīṣa usually represent Buddh-ato-be. They appear primarily in two subjects, the *prāṇidhāna* (" vow") paintings, and the *parinirvāṇa* scenes.

The *prāṇidhāna* paintings record kyamuni’s long journey of making offerings to the Buddh-ato-be and receiving their prediction of enlightenment. Typical *prāṇidhāna* paintings appear on the side walls of more than fourteen caves at Bezeklik.

Some of these *prāṇidhāna* paintings are inscribed with Brhm, which quotes from a *vinaya* of the Mulasarvastivāda school, the *Mulasarvastivāda* chronology of Kizil caves, see A. Howard, “In support of a new chronology for the Kizil mural paintings,” Archives of Asian Art XLVI (1991: 68-83).

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19 For the chronology of the site, see Jia Yingyi, “Bezeklik shiku chutan (A Study of Bezeklik Caves),” in Xinjiang shiku----Turfan Bezeklik shiku, (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe & Xinjiang Uighur zizhiqu bowuguan); For the C14 testing of the Bezeklik caves, see Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan kaogu yanjiusuo shiyanshi, “Xinjiang Turfan he nanjiang diqu bufen shiku niandai ceding baogao (Test Report of the Dates of Some of the Caves at Turfan and Southern Region in Xinjian),” Kaogu (1991.11: 1039-1045).

20 In the early twentieth century, Albert von Le Coq found inscribed wooden pillars on which royal families were listed as donors. F. W. K. Müller, “Zwei pfahlinschriften aus den Trufanfunden,” Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1915:18); Meng Fanren, Zhao Yixiong and Di Yukun ed., Gaochang bitua ji yi (Mural Paintings of Gaochang) (Urumuqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 1995: 9).

21 The typical *prāṇidhāna* paintings are depicted in Bezeklik Caves 15, 18, 20, 22, 24, 31, 33, 37, 38, 42, 47, 48, 50 and 55 (or Cave 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 19, 20, 24, 25, 29, 36, 37, and 39 in Grünwedel’s numbering).
Bhai •nigavastu, These inscriptions help identify the subject of the painting. Fifteen themes, each recording one particular previous life of kyamuni, have been identified. Images of a monk with the u•kṣa only appear in one scene of these stories. It is the time when kyamuni was born as a Brahmacin named Uttara. Having heard the preaching by Buddha K •yapa, he renounces his worldly life to seek enlightenment. Shown in Cave 20 (Fig. 7a) and Cave 31 (Fig. 7b), dressed in monastic robes, Uttara kneels beside the Buddha K •yapa on the right side. A protuberance appears on Uttara’s head and, in Cave 31, his hairline recedes in zigzag shape.

In addition to the typical pra idhāna paintings, my research shows that there is another simplified form of these paintings. They appear on the ceilings in Bezeklik Caves 16 and 17 and Sengin Temple I. A series of forty-eight similar representations are depicted on the vault in Bezeklik Cave 16 (Fig. 8a, 8b) and the main hall of Temple I at Sengin (Fig. 8c). The composition is centered on a seated Buddha, who is commonly accompanied by only four other figures: a monk with an u•kṣa, Vajrapā, a celestial being, and a devotee. The monk bearing the u•kṣa generally sits next to the Buddha’s shoulder, holding a fan and a water jar in his hands. One section (Fig. 8b) survives in good condition and bears a clear inscription: during the kalpa (aeon) of Buddha ikhin, those who donated jewels for the Buddha’s garden received the prophecy that they would attain Enlightenment. Buddha ikhin also appears on the ceiling in Bezeklik Cave 17 (Fig. 8d). A monk figure with an u•kṣa sits to the Buddha’s right. Unfortunately, this painting is too damaged to identify the attributes of the monk and read fully the Chinese inscription. Both Cave 16 and Cave 17 have been dated to the tenth-eleventh centuries, the third phase of the site.

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23 The painting with the monk with the u•kṣa was named Scene Ten in Cave 20 and Scene Four in Cave 15.
24 “吾UEL《般若四行經》由聞喜護法所說語，乃得出家修行意。” Taishō 24:1448.75b.
25 Rajeshwari Ghose, In the Footsteps of the Buddha – An Iconic Journey from India to China (Hong Kong: University Museum and art Gallery, 1998: 263).
26 Jia Yingyi, “Bezeklik shiku chutan,” (no page number in the book.)
The *parinirvāṇa* scenes are depicted on the back walls at Bezeklik, such as in Cave 33 (Fig. 9a) and 31 (Fig. 9b). The figures with the *u-ṣṇīs* in these two paintings are almost identical: They stand in the same position holding a long-necked water vase and a fan above their heads. In both the *pra idhāna* painting on the ceiling and in the *parinirvāṇa* scene, the monk who possesses the *u-ṣṇī* carries a vase, the typical attribute of the future Buddha in Gandhara and Central Asia. It is likely that these images are intended to represent Buddhas-to-be.

The images of monks with *u-ṣṇīs* discussed above represent only a small number of those depicted at the sites in Kucha and Turfan. These images indicate the popularity of the motif and call attention to the significance of the subject of showing monks with *u-ṣṇīs*. In summary, among those that can be identified, the figures at Kucha are mostly the Buddha’s chief disciples and occasionally the Buddha-to-be. While at Turfan, they usually represent the Buddha-to-be. However the question remains, why do these individuals appear with the *u-ṣṇī*? In addition, why does only one episode of the fifteen *pra idhāna* paintings show this iconography? My research suggests that the reasons for this type of depiction can be found in the doctrinal meaning of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*.

**U-ṣṇī: The meaning in doctrine and paintings**

There are two aspects of the notion of the *mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. First, the *lakṣaṇa* are caused by good deeds, especially worshiping the Buddhas in one’s previous incarnations. The second aspect is that they are a sign of the promise of future Buddhahood.

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27 Cave 31 is Cave 19 in Grünwedel’s numbering system.

28 In addition, by recognizing the characteristics of the iconography of the monks with *u-ṣṇīs*, we can identify more of such depiction, even in sculptures, such as a head of a monk excavated from a temple site at Yanqi (Fig. 10). See Huang Wenbi, *Xinjiang kaogu fajue baogao* (1957-1958) (Report of the Archaeological Excavations at Xinjiang 1957-1958) (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1983: 39). Same as in the paintings, the *u-ṣṇī* on this sculpture is raised smooth and low, and the hairline recedes in notable angles. Another almost identical example is found in the ruins of Temple N at Tumshuq, now in the Musée Guimet (Giès, Jacques and Monique Cohen, *Sérinde, Terre de Bouddha—Dix siècles d’art sur la Route de la Soie* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1995: 119, fig. 69.). Tumshuq is at the west end and Yanqi is at the east end of the Northern Route. The Northern Route is known dominated by a Hrṇay na school: Sarvāstivādins. It seems that the iconography of non-Buddha figures bearing the *u-ṣṇī* present along the Northern Route.
In the Brahmanic tradition, whoever is born with the *mah puruṣa* marks will become either a *cakravartin* (wheel-turning king) or a Buddha. Over a hundred sūtras have listed the thirty-two lakṣas and about half of them further explain the causes of the *mah puruṣa* marks. These textual sources basically all agree that each of the thirty-two auspicious body marks are the result of a particular type of good deed performed in a previous life. Most of the good deeds are performed within the context of lay practice. For example the Pali text the *Dāgaha Nik ya*, records that the *u* lakṣa is achieved by making donations, supporting parents, and friends and by making offerings to Buddhists and Brahmans. In the *Lalitavistara*, a Sarvastivadin biography of the Buddha, the *u* lakṣa is caused by staying away from wrong speech; always praising *vakas*, *pratyekas*, Bodhisattvas, Tathāgatas and all other Dharma masters; holding on to the Buddha’s teachings, reciting and copying the sūtras, explaining them to other people; and practicing according to the Dharma.

The identity of the figures with *u* lakṣas can be divided into two groups: kyamuni’s disciples and Buddhas-to-be, both of which can be analyzed according to the two aspects of the notion of the *mah puruṣa* discussed above.

**kyamuni’s Disciples:**

When non-Buddha figures with the *u* lakṣas are shown accompanying kyamuni, they are most likely to be his chief disciples except in the *avadana* depictions on the ceiling. Some of these figures have been identified, such as Purna Maitrṇyaniputra at Kizil.

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31 "於長夜遠離一切語過。恒常讚歎賢賢妙善業如來及諸法師。受持讀誦書寫經典。為人解說如法修行。名肉髻無能見頂。” *Taishō 3*:3187. 610b.

32 Usually the figures that accompany kyamuni teaching form his assembly. However, in the Kizil *avadanas* depiction on the ceilings the figures are characters in stories. They are from the distant past and not the audience in the same time frame with the Buddha.
In the *Buddha pūrva-caryā sa-grahastra*, Purna Maitr yaniputra is said to have seen all the past Buddhas and established good karma by making offerings to them, which clarifies why he is born with the thirty-two marks.33 Besides Maitr yaniputra, a variety of texts identify other Buddha’s disciples that also possess the *mahā puruṣa lakṣaṇa*, including Nanda,34 Aniruddha,35 and Kyō yana.36 They all possess the *lakṣaṇa* by virtue of the good deeds they performed in their previous lives. The attendants of the Buddha in the Kizil paintings could therefore be depictions of Nanda, Aniruddha, and/or Kyō yana. Regardless of their identity, the reasons for the monks acquiring the marks are related to their good deeds. The idea of merit-making leading to a future enlightenment is enhanced in the depictions of the next category, the Buddha-to-be.

The Buddha-to-be:

At Kizil, a monk-like figure with the uṣṇīṣa appears as the Buddha-to-be in the *avāna* stories depicted on the ceiling. In the story of Boseqi and the Buddha Fu-ya, the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* in particular claimed that it is from the merit of making images of Buddha *Fu-ya* (Chinese: Fusha) that King Boseqi will be reborn with the thirty-two marks and eighty minor marks and will eventually become a Buddha.37 In the story of the oil-lamp offering, the *Divyavadāna* is more likely to have been circulated at Kucha, not the *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish.*38 According to the *Divyavadāna*, the monk-like figure in the painting would then probably represent the poor woman as a future Buddha since that was the vow she had made and that was also what the Buddha had predicted her to become. This accomplishment would be made possible all by the virtue of her merit that was gained from the offer of the lamp oil.

Most of the identified monk images with the uṣṇīṣa representing the Buddha-to-be are from the Turfan area. Making offerings to the Buddhas, gaining merit, and

33 “往昔已曾見諸佛來。彼諸佛邊。種諸善根。” Taishō 3:190.824a
34 For the literary review on the appearance of Nanda, see Zin, “The *Uṣṇīṣa* as a Physical Characteristic,” pp.113-114; and Correspondence, Taishō 45:1856.127b.
35 Correspondence, Taishō 45:1856.127b.
37 “‘是功德，……所受生處，端正殊妙，三十二相，八十種好；’是功德，自致成佛。” Taishō 4:202.369a.
38 The *Divyavadāna* belongs to the Sarvāstivāda, a school that dominated at Kucha and the Northern Route for most of its Buddhist history.
receiving the prediction of Buddhahood are all essential to the theme of the vow paintings. Such actions also constitute part of the Bodhisattva’s path and are accepted in Mahāyāna beliefs. The inscription on the “vow” paintings at Bezeklik came out of the Mulasārva stīva Bhaiṣajyavastu. This vinaya and some other texts of the Mulasārva stīva school claim that it takes three-asa[khyas] to gain enough merit for acquiring the mahā puruṣa lakṣṇa. The direct relationship between making offerings to the past Buddhas for three asa[khyas] and the lakṣṇa is also recorded in the Mahāprajāpatisūtra (Da zhi du lun) written by Nāgārjuna:

…If (he can make offering to the past Buddhas) for three asa[khyas], [then] at that time, the Bodhisattva [refers to kyāmuni] will gain the karmic causation of the thirty-two marks.

In the story of Uttara and the Buddha Kotiyapa at Bezeklik, the Mulasārva stīva Bhaiṣajyavastu text explains that Kotiyapa is the last Buddha of the third asa[khya] and that this episode marks the end of kyāmuni’s three-asa[khya]-long effort. The inscription of this scene on the painting bears an additional line clearly declaring, “The third asa[khya] is at an end.” Therefore, only in the depiction of this episode, Uttara appears with the lakṣṇa.

The inscriptions on the ceiling praṣiddhāna paintings from Bezeklik Cave 16 have the same theme: that making offerings to Buddha īkṣin will gain one a promise of future Buddhahood. Presumably, the more than forty similar praṣiddhāna paintings on the ceiling vault are of the same theme but make offerings to different Buddhas of the past.

Mahā puruṣa lakṣṇa): The history and the association with Sarva stīva da

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39 An asa[khya]/asa[kheyya] (Pali asa[kheyya], ‘an incalculable,’ is used both for one of the four periods making up a kalpa, and a large number of kalpas. The Abhidharmakośabhāṣya (III.93d–94a) explains that it takes a bodhisattva three asa[kheyya] to become a perfect Buddha, and that each of these consists of one thousand million million kalpas.

40 The Abhidharma mahaviśuddha [traj], Taishō 27:1545.891b-892c, the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, Taishō 29:1558.29a, the Abhidharmakośabhāṣya, Taishō 29:1559.249bc, and the Abhidharma Nyūnstra, Taishō 29:1562.591a.

41 "…為過三阿僧祇劫。是時菩提種三十二相業因","Taishō 25:1509.87a.

42 Taishō 24:1448.74c-75a.
Although the images of non-Buddha figures bearing the \( U \times \) \( \times \) \( a \) find support in Buddhist doctrines, such depictions are absent or rare in East Asia, which predominately follows Mah\( y \) na, and South India and Southeast Asia, where, mostly, the Theravada tradition is followed.\(^{43}\) So what could possibly be the common link in the Buddhist practice among these limited regions, especially between Kizil and Bezeklik, where this iconography frequently appears? And also, is there any additional significance of possessing the \( m ah \) \( p u r a \) \( \times \) \( \times \) \( a k \) \( \times \) \( h \) to the Buddhist followers of these areas that is missing in the Mah\( y \) na and Theravada traditions?

**The relation between Buddhist sites in Kucha and Turfan and Sarv\( stiv\) da**

In terms of Buddhist practice, scholars have generally accepted that Buddhist sites along the northern route of the Silk Road, especially Kucha, belong to the Sarv\( stiv\) din sect.\(^{44}\) The Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang observed that the Sarv\( stiv\) din school was the dominant school at Kucha in the seventh century.\(^{45}\) Various Sarv\( stiv\) din texts excavated in Central Asia also prove that this particular Mah\( n a \) school was active in this region.\(^{46}\) A major corpse of these manuscripts was, actually, yielded from a Kizil cave, the “Red Dome Cave” (Cave 66 and 67).\(^{47}\) Although, the Dharmaguptaka school and Mah\( y \) na Buddhism were also present at Kucha (the former was more active in the early phase and the latter mainly in the late period after the eighth century), these different traditions in Buddhism used different scripts. Dharmaguptakas used Kharo\( \times \) \( c h \) script with the G\( h d h \) language, Sarv\( stiv\) dins used various types of Br\( h m x \) with the Sanskrit and Tocharian language, and Mah\( y \) nists

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\(^{43}\) Zin, “The \( U \times \) \( \times \) \( a \) as a Physical Characteristic,” pp. 107-130.

\(^{44}\) The original non-K\( m x \) Sarv\( stiv\) dins renamed themselves as M\( lasarv\) \( stiv\) \( da \) and became popular after the seventh century. The two terms will not be distinguished in this paper.


used Chinese. Different types of scripts are all found at Buddhist sites and with different type of caves or different subjects of the paintings. The inscriptions inscribed in the central-pillar caves with the iconographic plan in which images of the monks with \( \text{hymns} \) occur are in the Brhmś script, the same to the Sarvāstivādin manuscripts excavated from the Red Dome Cave at Kizil. Therefore, the central-pillar caves with the aforementioned iconographic program at Kucha are probably associated with the Sarvāstivādin communities, even if some small communities of other Buddhist traditions, e.g. Dharmaguptaka and Mahāyāna, may have also been present at Kucha.48

Regarding the pra ṭidhāna paintings in Turfan, as mentioned above, they are inscribed with a Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya text. Mūlasarvāstivāda is a Hinayāna school, and is generally considered to be a sub-sector of the Sarvāstivāda school or an old branch of the Sthaviravāda. The Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda are closely intertwined on doctrinal matters. The relationship of the two and whether or not they are in fact the same school are hotly debated among scholars, which I shall not discuss further here. As observed by Bart Dessein, the name Mūlasarvāstivāda actually did not appear anywhere before the seventh century. Even in the first half of the seventh century, the Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (600-664), in the record of his travels in India, only mentioned Sarvāstivāda, not Mūlasarvāstivāda. It was fifty years later when Yijing (635-713), who also traveled in India, mentioned Mūlasarvāstivāda for the first time.49 It is remarkable that Mūlasarvāstivāda only appears to be a vinaya school.50 The Mūlasarvāstivādin vinayas differ from those of the Sarvāstivāda mainly at the inclusion of the jātaka and avadāna.51 Although the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinayapi aṣa is old, the legends in them are elaborate and might have been


50 Charles Willemen et. al., Buddhist Scholasticism, 125.

inserted later. No extant manuscripts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda vinayas can be dated before the seventh century. Those in the Chinese and Tibetan canon were all translated in eighth and ninth centuries. Many manuscripts of the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinayas in Sanskrit were found at Gilgit and they cannot be dated earlier than the seventh century. It is possible that the section relating to pra īdhāna paintings was inserted into Mūlasarvāstivādin vinayas at a later time after the text was first compiled, something shared in common between the fifth-eighth centuries Sarvāstivāda school in Kucha and the Mūlasarvāstivādin vinaya texts in the versions can be dated to the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries.

The composition and format of these Turfan pra īdhāna paintings resemble the Buddha’s assemblies depicted at Kizil. Scholars have therefore suggested that Kizil might have influenced Bezeklik. Both the ceiling pra īdhāna paintings and the parinirvānas scenes at Bezeklik are new themes that appeared during the third phase (middle tenth–middle eleventh centuries). This was the period when the Gaochang Kingdom was most prosperous and occupied the Kucha region. In addition, the layout of the forty-eight pra īdhāna paintings on the ceiling visually resembles the avadānas at Kucha. Depicting the parinirvāna at the back of the cave is also a convention in Kucha. Therefore, the appearance of the two themes at Bezeklik has also been speculated as an influence from Kucha. The forms of Buddhism practiced at Bezeklik display influences that come from both east and west. It is possible that ideas and texts associated with the Sarvāstivāda school, as well as iconographies related to the Kucha cave paintings reached here as well.

Sarvāstivāda and the mahāpuṇa lakṣaṇa

The Sarvāstivāda played an important role in the development of the mahāpuṇa lakṣaṇa concept. They further created new theories on the Buddha’s auspicious body marks. As I will discuss below, their keen interest in the mahāpuṇa lakṣaṇa is also evident in their meditation practice and literature.

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54 Jia Yingyi, “Bezeklik shiku chutan,” *Xinjiang shiku—Turfan Bezeklik shiku.*
The concept of the mah puruṣa lakṣṇas was rooted in the Brāhmaṇical tradition and later adopted into Buddhism. The mah puruṣa lakṣṇas are listed in early Pali scriptures and most works of Northern Buddhism. These appear most prominently in the narrative of the life of the Buddha. In the Dāghanikāya, Majjhimanikāya, and Mahavastu, the word “uṣṭaka” originally refers to the “turban like head” and was not understood as a protuberance of the skull or flesh as in the later Buddhist texts. In Buddhist art, the protrusion on the top of the head on early Buddha images merely resembles a natural bump of hair.

In his study of the evolution of the theory on the Buddha’s bodies, Guang Xing points out that the Sarvāstivādin synthesized the attributes and qualities of the Buddha as described in the early sūtras. The Sarvāstivādins brought about a tri-fold system to define the mah puruṣa lakṣṇa, and further developed new schemes explaining how the thirty-two marks take shape.

Even though all Buddhist schools accept the idea of the Buddha possessing the thirty-two marks, it is in the Abhidharma texts of the Sarvāstivādin school that we find the most sophisticated analysis of the mah puruṣa lakṣṇa. Each lakṣṇa is said to have three aspects: lakṣṇa-body (xiangti), lakṣṇa-karma (xiangye), and lakṣṇa-fruit (xiangguo). For example, the uṣṭaka, as recorded in the Daśabhūmikavibhūsana sūtra, is the bodily protuberance on top of the head that represents the lakṣṇa-body of the uṣṭaka. Donating a garden, fruits, bridge, trees, ponds, wells, food, flowers, incense jewels or houses denote the lakṣṇa-karma. In addition, building a stupa, and being able to offer more in collected donation also fall under this

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56 Davids, Dāghanikāya, Mahapada Sutta II, p.19; III, pp.1, 145; IV, pp.137-139.
60 E.g. Krisha pointed out the Gandhara Buddha image’s uṣṭaka looks just a hair bun, “The Hair on the Buddha’s Head and Uṣṭaka,” pp.275-289.
61 Guang Xing, The Evolution of the Concept of the Buddha from Early Buddhism to the Formulation of the Trikāya Theory, University of London, Ph.D. dissertation, 2002: 30-50.)
category. Finally, being honorable and free signifies the lak 果-fruit. The lak 果-karma is the cause of the lak 果-body while the lak 果-fruit is the result.\textsuperscript{62}

According to the Sarv stiv din text, the Abhidharmamah vibh ạstra,\textsuperscript{63} the group also was very concerned over how to obtain the thirty-two body marks. They developed complicated theories that added to earlier beliefs in which the mah pura 果- were only obtainable through accumulating merits in past lives. For the Sarv stiv dins, the mah pura 果 became acquirable by one’s will or thought. The body marks are initiated either by “one thought” or “thirty-two thoughts” in accordance with the different opinions among the Sarv stiv dins. According to one opinion, “the mah pura 果 is initiated by one thought and is later consummated by multi-thoughts.” According to a different opinion, “the thirty-two thoughts lead to the thirty-two marks [respectively]; while each mark has to be completed by various karmas.”\textsuperscript{64} The full discussion of these theories was not available in Chinese until the seventh century when Xuanzang translated the s:n Abhidharmamah vibh ạ for the third time in much greater length. However, N g rjuna mentioned these ideas in the Mah -praj ạramitode, which was brought to China in the early fifth century. “The thirty-two thoughts generate the thirty-two lak 果; each thought generates each lak 果.”\textsuperscript{65} It must have been confusing to the Chinese Buddhist community at that time. In Huiyuan’s letters to Kum raj\textsuperscript{va}, one of the questions is asking about the “thirty-two thoughts.” Kum raj\textsuperscript{va}, thereupon, elucidated that this theory was created by K\textsuperscript{ty}ya and his followers, not the Buddha.\textsuperscript{66} K\textsuperscript{ty}ya was a Sarv stiv din theorist.\textsuperscript{67}

In addition to the metaphysical approach, the concept of the Buddha’s body marks also became significant in the meditation practice of Sarv stiv dins. In addition to the biographies of the Buddha, the meditation manuals on how to visualize the Buddha are another place that provide rich descriptions of the mah pura 果. According to Yamata Meiji’s study, the idea of the Buddha’s

\textsuperscript{62} Taish ạ 26:1521. 64c-65c.
\textsuperscript{63} Taish ạ 27:1545.887c-888a.
\textsuperscript{64} “以一思策引，後以多思策滿” “三十二思策引三十二大丈夫相，一一復以多業策滿。” Taish ạ 27:1545.887c.
\textsuperscript{65} “三十二思策三十二相，一一思策一一相。” Taish ạ 25:1509.87b.
\textsuperscript{66} Taish ạ 45:1856.127b.
\textsuperscript{67} Lai Penjue, Silu fojiao de tuxiang yu chanfa (The Buddhist Images and Meditation Methods on the Silk Road) (Xinzhu: Yuanguang foxue yanjiusuo, 2002: 17-18).
thirty-two body marks did not become important until the early Mahayana movement and image-making first began, which are shown in the development of the Buddhist meditation practice of *buddhānusmṛti*. This means “calling the Buddha to mind.” has been a form of Buddhist practice since the earliest times. However, in Pi li texts the practice of *buddhānusmṛti* only refers to reciting the formula of the “ten epithets” (*adhipacana*) of the Buddha. Moreover, it is only one of a sequence of *anusmṛtis* (“calling to mind”), including the *anusmṛti* of the Dharma (Law), the *sāṅgha* (community), and the *deva* (divinities). A new form of *buddhānusmṛti* practice involving visualization of the physical body of the Buddha through the thirty-two *mahāpurūṣa* has come to be popular at least by the second century CE. By this time, *buddhānusmṛti* had become an independent and essential form of Buddhist meditation. Seeing the Buddha with one’s very eyes is equivalent to hearing the Dharma preached by the Buddhas and understanding the nature of Buddha. It can eliminate one’s bad karma, and eventually lead one to awakening. Practitioners were encouraged to use images as aids for visualization and even as objects for contemplation.

This new form of *buddhānusmṛti* involving envisioning the Buddha’s body is strongly associated with Mahayana practice. The best-known example of *buddhānusmṛti* is the visualization of Amitabha. However, as demonstrated in Hxayna texts such as the Ekottar gama and the *Mahāvastu*, *buddhānusmṛti* in some of the late Hxayna schools also involved envisioning the Buddha’s body. Most importantly, it is one part of a series of meditation exercises preserved in a meditation manual found at Kizil in the third German “Turfan”

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70 The existence of this type of *buddhānusmṛti* is attested in *Sūtras* such as the *Pratyutpanna Sūtra* (T417, Vol. 15), which was translated into Chinese by Lokakṣema in 179 CE.
71 Paul M. Harrison, “Commemoration and Identification in *Buddhānusmṛti*,” 220-225.
Images of Monks with the U•×•a from the Kucha and Turfan Regions

The manuscript was written in Central Asian Br hmx on birch barks. The buddh nasmiti is listed on top of a group of five anusmiti contemplations. Both the “ten epithets” and the Buddha’s body are included in the practice. In the extant fragments of the text, the mah puru lak ka occurs a number of times. To envision the Buddha, the practitioner visualizes the lak ka come forth from the pores of the Buddhas in three places. In three separate instances in this manuscript, the practitioner is even instructed to envision the Buddha’s lak ka as appearing on his own body.

In addition to Sarv stiv din’s theoretical study and their meditations, their literature also provides more details regarding to the mah puru lak ka, such as who obtained these body marks. The following are two examples comparing different texts when they describe the same episode associated with the mah puru lak ka.

From the Mulasara stiv da Vinayatudradavastu, a vinaya text of the Mulasara stiv din school, and the Mah parinirv asatra in the Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese versions, there is an interesting vignette. It states that on his deathbed, right before he entered his nirv akyamuni took off his garment, revealing his body marks to his disciples and asked them to look carefully. However this version does not appear in the P li edition of the Dghanik ya. Apparently, the mah puru lak ka was not significant enough to the Buddhists of the P li canon and they did not see it as the Buddha’s last teaching.

According to Zin’s study, it is also the Sarv stiv din texts that say more about the mah puru lak ka on Nanda and Devadatta than the P li texts. For example, in one episode, the P li text the Suttavibhaṣa (V.92.1) says that Nanda

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75 Schlingloff, Ein Buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, pp.101 (133R2), 109 (136R1), and 120 (140V6).
76 Schlingloff, Ein Buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, pp92 (130 R6), 142 (150R3), and 172 (163V2).
77 萬帰行現其身相，告諸苾芻汝等今者可觀佛身。汝等今者可觀佛身，何以故，如來應正等覺。難不可遇如鳥鳥共羅華。” Taish °24: 1451.399a.
79 Zin, “The U•×•a as a Physical Characteristic,” pp. 113, 114.
resembled Kyamuni so much that other monks often mistook him for the Buddha. A fragment of the Vinayabibhāṣa, a vinaya of the Sarv stīv din school, found in the Kizil region and written in the local language, further adds that Nanda had no less than thirty body marks on his body.80

The mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa in Mahāyāna

The above demonstrates how the notion of mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa became more significant in the Sarv stīv din school than in the Pāli tradition. Later on in the Mahāyāna context, new philosophies were developed regarding the Buddha’s bodies and Buddhist meditation practices changed, therefore the significance of the mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa appears to have faded away.

I. Mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa in Mahāyāna Theory

Guang Xing proposes that it is the Sarv stīv din who first stabilized a twofold body theory of the Buddha.81 In any case, both the Sarv stīv din texts and the early Mahāyāna sūtras advocate that the Buddha has two bodies, the dharma-kṣaṇa (Dharma-body) and the rūpa-kṣaṇa (Physical-body). The rūpa-kṣaṇa is the Buddha as a human being with physical form. The dharma-kṣaṇa is the Buddha as seen through the Buddha’s Dharma nature. The Dharma refers to the Buddhist teachings. It is the absolute “essence” and the eternal “law” of everything. The dharma-kṣaṇa cannot be seen by the naked eye. Most of the sūtras mentioned in this paper use the two-body system. In this system, the Buddha’s lakṣaṇas are on his form body.

81 Guang Xing, The Evolution of the Concept of the Buddha from Early Buddhism to the Formulation of the Trīkāya Theory, p.30.
However, in general, Mahāyāna holds to the trika (three-body) system. In short, dharmakāya becomes the essential core, | kyamuni who once lived in this world is merely a manifestation of the dharmakāya called the nirmanakāya. The additional body is the sādhaka (reward-body) and it is not in the saṃsāra (transmigration) world. It is only visible in certain stages of meditation or dreams, such as the Buddha Amitabha who appears in the sādhaka form. In the trika system, the mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa is attributed to the sādhaka. Therefore, under this categorization, the Buddha’s body marks become totally invisible to humans.

In addition, the concept of the wujian dingxiang, or the “invisible-umākṣaṇa” (anavalokitāvibhūṣya, rdhat ) makes the issue of the umākṣaṇa even more intricate. The doctrine of the invisible-umākṣaṇa holds that regardless of the conventions of Buddha image-making, living beings are unable to see the umākṣaṇa of the Buddha. In the legend of the Mahābodhi image (one of the first Buddha images), there was an old lady who was the only one who had seen the Buddha in person and was still alive at the time. She came to examine the resemblance of the sculpture and one of her criticisms was addressed to the umākṣaṇa. “The umākṣaṇa (of the Buddha) was not visible, (but) it is visible (on the image).” In this story, a lay devotee recognized something that did not belong to the living Buddha which humans are able to see. If the mahāpuruṣa lakṣaṇa is supposed to be on the sādhaka and the umākṣaṇa becomes invisible, then an ordinary human would not be seen bearing an umākṣaṇa on top of the head.

I further suggest that the lack of interest in the umākṣaṇa among Mahāyānaists is also associated with their belief in dharmasatya, which emphasizes voidness as the

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ultimate truth. The Buddha’s form body or the lakṣṇa on the form body is not what Mahāyānists pursue. According to Mahāyānist doctrine, if all phenomena are essentially empty, possessing a protrusion would not be very meaningful. Consequently, it is not surprising that the iconography of monks with the uṣṇīśa did not gain much popularity in areas dominated by Mahāyāna thought and therefore becomes almost absent in East Asia.

II. Mahāpuruṣa lakṣṇa in Mahāyāna meditation

Visualization practices, as represented in the visualization on Amitābha Buddha, underwent fundamental changes in fully developed Mahāyāna meditation. The differences between how to meditate on Amitābha, as taught in The Sūtra on Contemplation of Amitāyus, and how to meditate on Śākyamuni, as revealed in the Sarvastivadin text, may shed light on the mahāpuruṣa lakṣṇa issue under discussion.

In the afore mentioned Kizil manuscript, the practitioner envisions his own body radiating with the mahāpuruṣa lakṣṇa just like a Buddha (“śravako lakṣṇa” - nuvya jan vir jita utpadyate”). Among the three perfections of the Buddha (the Body, Speech and Mind), the mahāpuruṣa lakṣṇas signify the perfection of the Buddha’s body. These body marks go beyond anthropomorphic limits. They mark the special quality of the Buddha. The meditation of visualizing the Buddha’s body and evoking one’s own body to possess the same qualities symbolizes a path of achieving salvation by self-effort just like what Śākyamuni did, a method generally attributed to Hnayana path—one aims at attaining a perfect body like that of the Buddha, and ultimately the Buddhahood by making one’s own effort.

In Buddhist art, the mahāpuruṣa lakṣṇas and in particular the uṣṇīśa, became a symbol that emphasized the Buddhahood of Śākyamuni, which is considered the highest attainment of all beings. By possessing uṣṇīśa, these figures of monks in the paintings under discussion exemplify a certain ideal for the Hnayana nists. As the Buddha’s disciples, they are shown following the Buddha, listening to his preaching, performing miracles (e.g. flying in the sky), and leading the Buddhist

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86 D. Schlingloff, Ein Buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch, pp.92, 123, 172 (lines:130R6, 144R1 and 163V2).
Images of Monks with the *U*[i•]*t* from the Kucha and Turfan Regions

community after the Buddha’s *nirv*ā. As the Buddha-to-be, they are shown as already having reached a certain stage of attainment with the promise of enlightenment.

On the contrary, the most important difference in the typical Mahāyāna Buddhist practice is to place oneself in the Buddha’s Pure Land. Salvation in Mahāyana Buddhism can be achieved through rebirth in one of the Buddha lands. Consequently, the focus of meditation in Mahāyana practice was shifted from envisioning the Buddha’s intricate body to the rich details of the Buddha’s land. In his commentary when comparing the difference between the visualization of *kyamuni and Maitreya*, the Korean monk Wŏnhyo pointed out that the key point of the Maitreya visualization sūtra was not Maitreya, but the visualization of the practitioner amidst all the splendors of Tusita Heaven. The goal of this meditation was to place oneself in the Heaven.88 This is even more true in the visualization of Amit bha/Amit yus in the *Sūtra on Visualizing Amit yus*. Among the Sixteen-Visions in the meditation exercises on Amit bha only Vision Nine is about visualizing Amit bha’s body. However, it provides no actual details of his body. In Mahāyana Buddhist art, the interest was consequently switched to depicting the grand paradises of various Bodhisattvas occupying the place immediately besides the Buddha. However, the importance of possessing the *mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa* was not completely forgotten. The essential relationship between the *mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa* and Buddhahood left a subtle trace in Mahāyana practice.

One of Amit yus’ vows is that he will not obtain his own enlightenment until all human beings and gods in his future land have attained the thirty-two marks of a *mah puruṣa*.89 The first of the twelve vows of Bhaisajyaguru, the medicine Buddha, aims at possessing the thirty-two *mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa* and the eighty *anuvya-jana* and in addition he wishes that all sentient beings are able to possess the same marks.90 However, the details discussed above are very minor and they are not the main content of the Mahāyana buddha-niṣṭhā practice.

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89 “設我得佛，國中人天，不悉成滿三十二大丈夫者，不取正覺” *Sukhvatva-sūtra* (Fo shuo Wuliangshou jing 佛說無量壽經) Taishō 12:360.268b.

90 The *Consecration Sūtra* (Fu shuo guanding jing 佛說灌頂經) Taishō 21:1331.532c; “第一大願，願我來世得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提時，自身光明熾然，照曜無量無數無邊世界，以三十二大丈夫相八十—

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Even though the *mah ṁpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is a very old notion accepted by all Buddhist sectarian groups, it did not come to be important until the phase of the late Hinayana and early Mahāyana. Above all, the Sarvastivādins of the Hinayana showed the most interest in the Buddha’s body. They systematized the quality of the Buddha’s body, formulated the two-fold *kṣaṭṭha* theory and included envisioning the Buddha’s body into their *buddhinasmiti* meditation. The issue of the Buddha’s body is associated with the questions of what makes the Buddha a Buddha and how one should practice. Both the Buddha’s *kṣaṭṭha* theory and the *buddhinasmiti* practice were further developed in Mahāyana. The focus of Mahayana was shifted to realize the empty nature of all phenomena. The interest of possessing the *mah ṁpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* on one’s own body was replaced by the desire to be reborn in the Buddha’s Pure Land. The art of the Sarvastivādins and the Mahāyana also show a visible difference regarding the depiction of *uṇja* on non-Buddha figures. In the Sarvastivādin related sites, images of monks bearing *uṇja* are abundantly present. In contrast, such an iconographic convention is conspicuously missing from the sites of the Pañcāla and Mahayana traditions.

III. In Tantrayana

If the *mah ṁpuruṣa lakṣaṇa* is subject to karmic retribution, then it is simply not obtainable through meditation in this lifetime.91 Nevertheless, this did not stop later Tantric masters from raising new theories and methods to accomplish the *mah ṁpuruṣa lakṣaṇa*. To complete the history of the notion of the Buddha’s body mark, I will end with the Tantric method shown in Dipakarabhadra’s *Guhyaśamāja śālavidhi*. Quoted by Tsong-kha-pa in his *ṣaṅgśrī rīm chen mo*, “the [sixteen] vowels are the source of the Lakṣaṇa; the [thirty-four] consonants radiate the anuvyaa janas.”92 Each of the sixteen vowels are divided into two parts: *prajña* (wisdom) and *upāya* (means). This makes thirty-two, which is the number of the Buddha’s Lakṣaṇa. In a typical Tantric manner, the concept of the Buddha’s

91 Huiyuan, once, raised this puzzle in his letter to Kumārajiva. Taishō 42:1856.127a.
Images of Monks with the \textit{\textbullet}×\textbullet\text{\textit{i}} from the Kucha and Turfan Regions

body marks becomes more complex. The vowels and consonants, \textit{pra} \textit{j} \textit{a} and \textit{up} \textit{ya}, and more symbolisms are involved.

Other Regions with Similar Iconography

Within India and nearby regions, the cave site at Ajà€, Maharastra, in particular, has yielded copious images of monks with the \textit{u}×\textbullet\text{i}. In addition, the Gandhara region, in present day Pakistan, is an area where examples of this iconography are occasionally found. Figures possessing the \textit{u}×\textbullet\text{i} at these sites bear the same iconographic features as kyamuni, but are usually represented smaller in size. This contrasts with the monk images found in the Kucha and Turfan areas, where they appear with a zigzag hairline. Zin, in her study on Ajà€ paintings identifies the monks \textit{nanda} and Nanda based on the narratives of the “taming the wild elephant,” and the “conversion of Nanda.” These narratives are found mainly in the wall paintings in Ajà€ Cave 16 and 17. Since \textit{nanda} is kyamuni’s cousin and Nanda is his half-brother, Zin deduces that the \textit{u}×\textbullet\text{i} is to be understood as indicating membership of the \textit{kya} clan.\textsuperscript{93}

The paintings at Ajà€ are considered to be a product of the Vakataka dynasty and a group of later so-called “intrusive” donors. They are generally dated to the late fifth century.\textsuperscript{94} In the inscriptions, the intrusive donors identified themselves as \textit{kyabhik\textbullet\text{\textus}} or \textit{kya-up sakas}.\textsuperscript{95} “\textit{kya}” stands for the clan of kyamuni; the term “Bhik\textbullet\text{\textus}” means monks; while “up sakas” refers to lay devotees. Therefore, the term “\textit{kya}\textbullet\text{i}” and “\textit{kya-up sakas}” indicate that the monks and laity that belonged to the \textit{kya} clan. The adoption of the epithet \textit{kya} and the emergence of \textit{kyabhik\textbullet\text{\textus}} as a distinct group seemed to come out of a trend aimed at emphasizing the importance of the \textit{kya} family.\textsuperscript{96} From this perspective, Zin’s conclusion might be true at Ajà€. However, as discussed in this paper, people outside the \textit{kya} clan also possess the \textit{mah puru\textbullet\text{i}}. Moreover, even for members from the \textit{kya} family, there is a karmic reason for why they can possess the \textit{mah puru\textbullet\text{i}}.

\textsuperscript{93} Zin, “The \textit{U}×\textbullet\text{i} as a Physical Characteristic,” p.115.
Actually, Ajaśi shows a strong relationship with Sarvāstivāda school. In his dissertation, Richard Cohen discussed the donor-ship and the yonic nature at the Ajaśi site. He points out that there was a close association of the kyabhikus with the Mulasārva stiv din school, and the Mulasārva stiv da vinaya played an important role in reconstruction of Buddhism at the site. The narrative paintings of Ajaśi Cave 16 and 17, where the iconography of the monks with the uṣṇisa is depicted, in particular, indicates a direct connection with the Mulasārva stiv da nik ya.97

The title kyabhikus is rare in Buddhist literary sources. Yet, four out of five dedications dated to the intrusive period at Ajaśi employ this term.98 A sudden explosion of monks calling themselves kyabhikus in central and southern India can be tied to the movement of Buddhist monks of kya origin from the subcontinent’s western and northern borders—in the regions of Sarvāstivāda stronghold.99

The Sarvāstivāda school developed and gained popularity in Kaśmīr and went to Gandhāra during the Kuṇa period.100 However, in Gandhāra, it was one among a number of Buddhist schools. For instance, just two of the potshards Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions found in Gandhāra (first century) were dedicated to Sarvāstivāda teachers, in contrast to nine dedicated to Dharmaguptakins and one to Mahāsākākas.101 According to Xuanzang, Sarvāstivāda was still only one of the five sects in Gandhāra in the early seventh century.102 This might explain, at least partially, why images of monk with the uṣṇisa do occasionally occur in Gandhāra. Sites or regions where the iconography of monks bearing the uṣṇisa is found seem to be related to the practice of the Sarvāstivādins.

Concluding Remarks

The question of how to conceive the mahāpurukṣaka lakṣaṇas touches upon the idea of how to perceive the concept of “Buddha” and the Buddha-body. This concept has

97 Cohen, Setting the Three Jewels, pp.192, 202, 316.
98 Cohen, Setting the Three Jewels, p.192.
99 Cohen, Setting the Three Jewels, pp.221-245.
100 For the history and doctrine of the school, see Willemen, Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism, (1998).
102 The other four schools are the Dharmaguptaka, Mahāsākāka, Kapinya, and Mahāsāgghika.
been a fundamental discourse among Buddhist followers and has undergone various developments from school to school. For a time, the mah puruša lakṣaṇa seemed to have been especially important to the Sarvāstivādins. Among the thirty-two lakṣaṇas, the understanding of the uṣṇīsa in particular, went through a long history of twists and turns among various schools. It transformed from a turbaned head, to a cranial or fleshy bump, and subsequently to the idea of “invisible” protubérance. As discussed in this paper, the uṣṇīsa appeared on many images of monks and became a unique iconography at some Buddhist sites, such as Kizil, Bezeklik and Ajaŋ. These locations arose as more or less Sarvāstivādin or Mulārṣarvāstivādin related sites. And Sarvāstivādin texts show more interests in Buddha’s body marks.

The understanding of the depictions of monks with a cranial protuberance supplement our knowledge of the Buddhist practice at these sites, the development of the mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa concept, and the history of the buddha nusmiṭti meditation. In the past, the study of Buddhist art at Kizil, Bezeklik or Ajaŋ focused primarily on the Buddha images or the narratives and therefore failed to notice this iconography until recently. The study of this iconography reveals a picture of how the Hsinayānists were arduously striving on a self-powered path (instead of the other-powered liberation in Mahāyāna) to obtain the qualities like that of the Buddha. In the study of the mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa, some scholars have tended to attribute the full development of the notion of the Buddha’s body marks to the early Mahāyāna movement.103 This study shows that the Sarvāstivādin school played an important role in the conceptualization of the mah puruṣa lakṣaṇa. Scholarship on the buddha nusmiṭti meditation has hitherto focused mainly on the Mahāyāna phase. By searching and revealing the potential relationship between the lakṣaṇa and the Sarvāstivādin’s meditation practice, this study highlights the significance of an alternative facet of the buddha nusmiṭti practice within the Hsinayāna tradition.

Sarvāstivāda was one of the major schools in Buddhism and was influential in large areas of northwest India and parts of Central Asia. There are probably more images of this iconography than what has been identified to date. As a convention of Buddhist image making, it is possible that this iconography also

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reached East Asia as rare instances in Mahāyāna territory. Further investigation will perhaps allow recognition of more images showing this iconography.

**Chinese Characters in the Text:**

Boseqi 波塞奇

Da zhi du lun 大智度論

Fo benxing ji jing 佛本行集經

Fusha 弗沙

Gaochang 高昌

Huiyuan 慧遠

Nianfo 念佛

Wujiandingxiang 無見頂相

Xian yu jing 賢愚經

Xiangguo 相果

Xiangti 相體

Xiangye 相業

Xuanzang 玄奘
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By John C. Huntington

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