

CHAPTER TWO

FILIAL RESPONSIBILITIES : OWING MOTHER, REPAYING FATHER

I have chosen to proceed through the works at Great Buddha Bend as one does today, beginning with the first narrative tableau one encounters, the depiction of scenes from the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents and moving onto The Buddha Preaches the Mahayana Scripture on the Skillful Means for Repaying Kindness.¹ In keeping with ritual *pradakshina* of holy objects, this places the narratives off the right shoulder, moving counterclockwise in a circumambulatory fashion. Because there is no longer a central pillar, icon, or relic pagoda present within the lush green at the center of the grotto, and there is no indication that there ever was one, viewing the Great Buddha Bend works in this manner is a case of expedient means rather than one of prescribed ritual activity. There is in fact every reason to believe that monks entering from the temple complex above and visitors coming up from the river below would have proceeded in either direction.

¹Hereafter referred to as the Repayment of Kindness Scripture. The Buddha Preaches the Mahayana Scripture on the Skillful Means for Repaying Kindness (*Da fang bian bao en jing*) is the title inscribed at Baodingshan, and is found within the *Da fang bian fo bao en jing*, volume 3, fascicle 156 of the Taisho shinshu daizokyo, 59 vols. (Tokyo: Taisho shinshu daizokyo kankokai, 1988-). The Scripture on the Kindness of Parents or *Fu mu en zhong jing* can be found in Taisho volume 85, fascicle 2887. *Da fang bian fo bao en jing* is sometimes translated as the "Returning Favors Sutra". See Hu Wenhe, "Dazu Baoding he Dunhuang de *Da fang bian (Fo) bao en jing zhi bi jiao yan jiu*" ("A Comparative Study of Returning Favors Sutra Stories in the Baoding Shan of the Dazu Grottoes and the Dunhuang Grottoes"), *Dunhuang yan jiu* no. 1 (1996): 35.

The first two narrative tableaux, related to the Kindness of Parents and the Repayment of Kindness scriptures, present distinct challenges with regard to applicable theoretical approaches. Both contain large-scale iconic imagery, yet the primary focus of the works is the narrative elements (figs. 21 and 22). Where this combination of narrative and iconic imagery arises from, and how such works were viewed and utilized, are questions that will be considered in the following pages, beginning first with detailed descriptions of the two tableaux. A discussion of appropriate theoretical narrative models along with issues concerning the function of text and image within the tableaux can only take place after a comprehensive understanding of both the images and the accompanying texts.

The mother figure is central to the imagery in the tableau depicting the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents; therefore, I have entitled this section “Owing Mother”, with the inscriptions as well as the imagery making clear that the job of raising and nurturing the young child to adulthood fell largely to the mother. The tableau immediately adjacent to the “Owing Mother” work highlights the historical Buddha’s debt to his own father, and various filial acts he undertook in both his present and past incarnations in order to repay his filial dues. This being the case, the second section is entitled “Repaying Father”.

Owing Mother

Tableau number fifteen, a depiction of a miscellany of scriptural selections, the majority from the apocryphal Scripture on the Kindness of Parents, can best be described as two-tiered, with a lower ground-level tier never having been heavily carved, and now largely eroded away.² The two dominant horizontal levels reaching to a height of 6.9 meters above the pathway are divided quite plainly between the enlightened versus earthly worlds. The enlightened world features seven looming Buddha figures, six with halos behind their heads, referring to each Buddha's enlightened state, while the seventh figure, clothed in priestly garb and furthest to the right, has no nimbus. Scholars have postulated that this grouping represents the seven Buddhas of the past and present periods, the last unadorned Buddha figure to the right meant to demarcate the Buddha of the present kalpa, Shakyamuni.³

²The Scripture on the Kindness of Parents as depicted and inscribed at Baodingshan is not solely from any one extant work, but rather appears to be a composite of several works, the works most commonly cited being the aforementioned *Fu mu en zhong jing* (Taisho vol. 85 fascicle 2887) as well as *Fo shuo fu mu en zhong nan bao jing* (The Buddha Preaches the Sutra on the Weightiness of One's Parents' Kindness and the Difficulty in Repaying It), *Fo shuo qi fo jing* (The Buddha Preaches the Sutra on the Seven Buddhas) (Taisho vol. 16 fascicle 684) and *Shi en de* (The Ten Kindnesses and Virtues), a non-canonical listing found also within the Dunhuang cache. For thorough comparisons of these scriptures and the components of each found within the tableau at Great Buddha Bend, see Hu Liangxue, "Baoding Dafowan di 15 hao kan keshi zhi guanjian" ("My Opinion on the Rockcarvings of Baoding's Great Buddha Bend Niche Number 15"), *Dunhuang yan jiu* no. 4 (1998): 38-46, and Sun Xinshen, "Dazu Baoding yu Dunhuang Mogao ku Fo shou fu mu en zhong jing bianxiang de bi jiao yan jiu" ("A Comparative Study of the Buddha Expounds the Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents Transformation Tableaux in the Mogao Caves and Baodingshan"), *Dunhuang yan jiu* no. 1 (1997): 57-68.

³ The seven include: Vipasyin, Sikhin, Visvabhu, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kasyapa Buddha, and the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. DZSKYJ, 476. According to Jan Nattier, this series of seven Buddhas of the Past appears in Chinese translations of a Pali text, the *Dirghagama* (T. 1 fascicle 1) and the *Ekkotarikagama* (T. 125 fascicle 48). See Nattier's work

Beneath this realm lies a world familiar to all – the world of the family and the demands of childrearing. The central section of this tier focuses the worshipper’s attention on a man and a woman in the act of making an incense offering (figs. 23a and b). Clad in the attire of a well-to-do Song couple, they solemnly lean towards each other, as the woman places the incense into the censer stretched forward by the man. Beneath them is an extensive inscription entitled “Praying to the Buddha for a Child”:

Great Master Cijue,⁴ who received the imperial bestowal of the purple robe, X (spoke) Zongze(‘s) verse saying:

Before the Buddha of old had yet taken birth, seemingly there (had always been) the perfect totality of a single mark;⁵ (but) if Shakyamuni had (not) yet convened (the holy) assembly (to actually teach the Dharma), how could Kasyapa ever receive transmission of the Dharma?

The father and mother together offer fragrant incense, praying to give birth to a filial and agreeable child in order to take precaution against their old age, when their rising and sitting will require (a child’s) support. (His) father and mother all will attain Buddhahood bound (to one

Once Upon a Future Time: Studies in a Buddhist Prophecy of Decline (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1991): 19, footnote 17. The following translations of the inscribed passages from the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents are based on various elements found in the transcriptions provided by these three texts: DZSKYJ, 476, Hu Wenhe, Sichuan Dao jiao Fo jiao shi ke yi shu (hereafter SDJFJSKYS) (Chengdu: Sichuan Ren min chu ban she, 1994): 284, and Li Fangyin, Dazu shi ke yi shu (Chongqing: Chongqing chu ban she, 1990): 72.

⁴Master Cijue, whose name and honorific appear connected to at least seven of the eleven vignettes represented in The Scripture on the Kindness of Parents tableau, was a Song dynasty monk from Sichuan province. Cijue studied within the Linzhi school of Chan under Wolung Po’an Zuxian, a Sichuanese monk who died in 1211 CE (Xu zang jing (Hong Kong: Longmen shu tian, 1968): vol. 142, 768a). For a brief biography of Master Cijue, see Zengaku daijiten (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1978): 417.

⁵An allusion to the transcendent reality of ‘suchness’. I thank Dan Stevenson for helping me with editing the following translations. See Appendix B for complete translations of the texts discussed here and in the following chapters.

another) through the suchness of the Dharmadhatu. At that time their heart's prayer will be fulfilled, and only then will they realize the final nirvana of no-remainder. If there is (a notion of something to) attain, then it is not (true) attainment. Only when there is no (idea of personal) merit (to be sought) can it begin to be considered (true) merit. Originally this is the style of our old house.⁶

Flanking this scene on the right and left and stretching over an area of 14.5 meters are depictions of the *Shi en de* or Ten Kindnesses and Virtues, an indigenous Chinese text whose central theme highlights the heavy debt which children owe to their parents.⁷ Rather than reading the tableau's main components from right to left as would have been the correct textual order in Song dynasty China, the ten kindnesses fan out from the central image of the parents' supplicating the Buddha for a child, moving first to the right, then left, continuing in such a fashion so as to be symmetrical in overall design. In order to avoid any confusion on the part of the worshipper as to the proper sequence, the inscriptions accompanying the ten vignettes are titled and numbered one through ten.⁸

⁶This line would seem to allude back to the "Chan-style" reading of "merit as no merit", and the possible references of transmission between Shakyamuni and Kasyapa. Stevenson, personal correspondence, 4/8/01.

⁷Cole, 132, and Ma Shizhang, "<Fu mu en zhong jing> xie ben yu bian xiang" ("Paintings and Transformation Tableaux of the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents") in Dunhuang shi ku yan jiu guo ji tao lun hui wen ji: Shi ku kao gu bian, 314-335, vol. 2 (Liaoning: Liaoning mei shu chu ban she, 1987): 333.

⁸The question may arise as to how we know that the numbers attached to the inscriptions are contemporaneous and not later additions. My response would be to say that what remains legible of the numbering appears to be in a similar *kai shu* calligraphic style to that of the accompanying inscription, and that the fact that all of the inscriptions appear to have suffered a similar degree of erosion and environmental degradation to that of the tableau as a whole would seem to indicate a comparable age.

The first of the Ten Kindnesses is entitled “The First Kindness - The Kindness of Caring during Pregnancy”.

The honorable Buddhist monk spoke thus in praise:

The kind mother, from the beginning of her pregnancy, her entire body feels as heavy as if leaden, and her face is sallow as if she is ill. She moves only with great difficulty.⁹

In the accompanying image, the mother is shown seated, legs somewhat splayed as her robe hangs heavily over her stout body (fig. 24). She gestures to a small serving girl who holds forth a bowl, presumably containing nourishment. The mother-to-be’s face is fuller, her hair quite plainly arranged.

“The Second Kindness - The Kindness of Suffering the Pains of Childbirth” is found immediately to the left of the central image, balancing the first kindness to the right. The inscription reads,

Master Cijue spoke thus in praise:

The tribulations of father and mother bring tears to one’s eyes. (You) will know the weightiness of (your obligations to) their kindness when a child is born from (your own) womb. The loving father hears the birth taking place and, filled with anxiety, he is unable to control himself. (He realizes that his own) birth (on the part of his parents) is impossible to repay. His two eyebrows crease (in worry) from head to ear.¹⁰

⁹DZSKYJ, 476, Hu, 285, and Li, 73.

¹⁰Ibid.

Standing supported by another female figure who grabs her under the arms, the expectant mother is depicted as clearly having reached the moment of delivering the child, her hand resting on her full, round belly as if to accentuate this fact (fig. 25). Before the mother kneels another woman who rolls up her right sleeve with her left hand; she looks up at the mother-in-labor in anticipation. Behind the kneeling woman stands the father, clutching an ancestral tablet. Some scholars have noted that this vignette represents rare documentary evidence for the practice of standing parturition.¹¹

Returning once again to the right side of the tableau, the worshipper sees the third kindness, that of “Selfless Care for the Child”.

Master Cijue spoke thus in praise:

When first they see their infant’s face, both parents smile a little. Before there were feelings of worry and anxiety; now there has arrived a moment of rest.¹²

Standing again facing one another, the husband and wife share a tender moment with their son, the husband reaching out to touch his wife’s arm as she holds up the child (fig. 26). She has lost weight, her garments hanging loosely at her sides, and the boy sits upright on his own, signifying

¹¹Zhang Hua, “A Survey of Dazu Stone Carvings” in *Ming ren yu Dazu shi ke*, ed. Tong Dengjin and Li Chuanshou (Chengdu: Sichuan mei shu chu ban she, 1999): 103. Earlier printed Buddhist works also show women in labor, such as the image found in a 9th-century illustrated copy of the Lotus Sutra recovered from Dunhuang of a seated woman in labor being attended to by her maidservant. See Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *Cambridge Illustrated History of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996): 124.

¹²DZSKYJ, 476, Hu, 285, and Li, 74.

that time has passed. The background is a simple, curling blue-gray cloud motif, which will remain constant for most of this second tier.¹³

Balancing this scene on the left side of the tableau are two of the ten kindnesses carved in such a way that at first glance they appear to be one vignette rather than two (fig. 27). Immediately adjacent to the father figure present at the birthing is a frontally-seated woman holding a child on her lap. Gazing up at his mother, the child clutches a round item, perhaps a steamed bun or a piece of fruit. This mother-son duo represents the fourth kindness, the “Kindness of Swallowing the Bitter while Spitting Out the Sweet”.

Master Cijue spoke thus in praise:

(The kind mother) gives the sweet to the child to eat, the bitter keeping to herself to eat. If in this life one’s sense of the kindness (of parents) is superficial or meager, at other times, it will be difficult to repay such virtues.¹⁴

Next to the seated woman with child sits another woman who is in actuality the same woman being represented at a different time. This illustration of a mother’s sixth kindness, that of feeding and rearing the child, depicts the mother with her hair up, blouse open to reveal her full breasts, allowing a son of walking age to suckle. The mother’s left hand gestures toward the earlier fourth kindness, her head inclined in that direction as well. The son climbs on her, his mouth to her left breast as he squeezes the nipple

¹³Similar treatment of this motif is also seen in Song-dynasty woodblock print works, and occurs in a somewhat less stylized manner in Song religious paintings.

¹⁴DZSKYJ, 477, Hu, 285, and Li, 74. The second sentence is based on the premise that the transcribers have mistaken the character *bu*, for *ci*, making for a more plausible

of her right. The sixth kindness, “The Kindness of Being Fed and Reared” reads,

The verses of Zongze, the Chan master Cijue spoke:

(The kind mother) breast feeds without ceasing; in the cherished thoughts of her breast, how could she ever feel a moment of separation? Never worrying should the fat and flesh (of her body) be used up, fearing instead that her small child should be hungry.¹⁵

Parallel to these two kindnesses over on the right side of the tableau is the intimate portrait of a mother and child lounging on a raised, carved wooden bed (fig. 28). This is a depiction of the fifth kindness, that of a mother who gives the dry place on the bed to her child.

Master Cijue spoke thus in praise:

The dry place (she) gives to the child to sleep in, her own body sleeping in the damp. Reverently extrapolate from the loving mothers’ unconditional and selfless love the larger idea of the Buddha’s perfect compassion. What self-centered preference could the Buddhas possibly show?¹⁶

Lying on her side, her left knee pulled up slightly, the mother in all of her kindness gazes fondly down at her bare-bottomed son, whose exposed genitals signal what has occurred.

reading of this line. I thank Dan Stevenson for bringing this orthographic error to my attention.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

At the end of the bed is what remains of the seventh kindness, the Kindness of Endless Washing and Cleaning.

The Great Master Cijue praised thus:

The small child incessantly soils his swaddling clothes, and the child's bodily organs are also soiled. (The kind mother) washes and cleans without end.¹⁷

The now heavily-eroded torso of a woman can still be made out as she reaches her hand down into a bucket of washing (fig. 29). Next to her stands a young child holding a toy aloft, behind her another greatly-eroded figure appears to be that of a woman, most likely a repetition of the same woman as was seen in vignettes four and six, holding a struggling child with one hand while her free hand attempts to wash him.

Even though kindness number eight, the "Kindness of Creating the Best Opportunity for the Child", would seem to speak to a joint parental concern, the carved rendition at Great Buddha Bend's once again highlights the mother's actions over those of the father (fig. 30).

The verse of an ancient worthy says:¹⁸

Once the child that one is raising finally grows up, it is natural to marry him off. At the wedding banquet, many animals are slaughtered, yet to whom will this evil (karma) redound?¹⁹

¹⁷DZSKYJ, 477, and Hu, 285.

¹⁸Ibid. Stevenson, personal correspondence, notes that the term *gu de* - "ancient worthy" - is one frequently used in Chan texts.

¹⁹DZSKYJ, 477, Hu, 285-6, and Li, 75.

The son stands central behind a feasting table, the front of which has been inscribed with the text of the eighth kindness. He is flanked by two male figures, most likely his father and future father-in-law, and the table is set with plates and bowls. To the right of this scene, the worshipper sees the true kindness of a mother towards her son. She stands behind a boiling pot, a pig at the ready, with the butcher, club in hand, aiming to do the deed. Rather than allow her son to be sullied with evil karma, she accepts it unto herself on his behalf.

In the vignettes depicting kindnesses nine and ten, time continues to march on, and the worshipper is reminded of the fact that a child's debt to his parents is never-ending, just as the parents' kindness to him will extend across time and place. Kindness number nine, that of "Missing the Child When He is Gone on a Long Journey", shows the father now leaning on a bamboo staff, clutching his wife's arm (fig. 31). The mother looks over her shoulder back at him. Below and in front of them stands a young man dressed in traveling attire, feet planted squarely forward, his belongings bundled up and slung over his shoulder.²⁰ The inscription reads,

(X)(X) (Master Cijue) spoke thus in praise:

X (The parents) think of the child daily, even after being apart for three years. (Although) as much as 1000 *li* distant, (they) put forth great mindfulness to tell the son to be careful when he is away."²¹

²⁰It is clear from available photographs that there have been repairs done to this vignette, having broken up possibly as a result of an earthquake, or some other large-scale shifting of the earth. Similar damage is seen in nearby works of the hell tableau.

On the far left side of the tableau, the last of the ten kindnesses is inscribed and depicted, that of “Having Empathy for Whatever Outcome”. The son, now older, kneels before his aged mother and father (fig. 32). Both are seated, the mother’s hair now covered. She sits smiling slightly as the father instructs the son, finger raised to make his point. He is now rendered with a beard, and both husband and wife show the more chiseled features of old age. As the Chinese saying goes, “As long as his parents are alive a son is always a boy”.²² The accompanying inscription reads as follows,

Spoken in praise:

100 years old and still they only think of (their) 80-year-old son; unable to let him go, they become ghosts and still they yearn for him. A son should pay attention to his parents' moods, be they happy or angry, and try not to offend them. It is not easy, and that is why we call all phenomena troublesome.²³

Having passed through the ten kindnesses of the worshipper’s earthly existence, one cannot neglect the lowest level, no matter how minimal its treatment, since its import to the narrative of the entire tableau is quite considerable. Little remains of the lowest tier, a backdrop of swirling clouds or smoke still evident. Placed within this smoky background, two carved figures greet the worshipper at eye-level. One is a man dressed in robes and placed directly beneath the first vignette showing the burdens of pregnancy

²¹DZSKYJ, 477, Hu, 286, and Li, 75.

²²Wu Hung, “Private Love and Public Duty: Images of Children in Early Chinese Art “ in Chinese Views of Childhood, 79-110, Anne Behnke Kinney, ed. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995): 99.

²³DZSKYJ, 477, Hu, 286, and Li, 75-6.

(fig. 33).²⁴ The other is a ghoulish figure found lounging beneath the mother and butcher figures seen in the eighth kindness, a figure similar in bearing and attire to those denizens of hell so visible in the nearby Hell tableau (fig. 34). Between these two, and directly beneath the central pairing making their offerings to the Buddha, is the following inscription:

The Buddha spoke regarding (X) children and how it could be that after attaining manhood (they should) overturn (the order of things) becoming unfilial, insulting their father's brothers, hitting and cursing their own brothers, and bringing shame upon their parents. No longer carrying out the rites, (they) do not honor their teacher's example. Those who do not follow the Law in the end will certainly fall into Avici Hell.²⁵

Based on this inscription, one can surmise that Avici Hell, the lowest and most feared of all the hells, once reserved for the likes of murderers, had now been opened up to accommodate the unfilial child. The presentation of such a powerful statement to the passing worshipper inscribed at eye-level reinforces the filial message present throughout the tableau's carved imagery. A mother's milk can never be replenished; therefore, the debt incurred was enormous indeed.

²⁴I am uncertain as to exactly how many images were originally placed in hell. A recently encountered photo shows a number of free-standing sculptures, all apparently men, with one possible headless female standing amongst the six male figures. During my two most recent visits to Baodingshan, these works were not in this position at the site. Regardless of the actual original number of images, such a preponderance of sons represented as sentenced to hell for their unfilial behavior does not weaken my argument, but would appear to reinforce it. See figures 21 and 33 for comparison.

²⁵DZSKYJ, 6, Hu, SCDIFISKYS, 286, and Li, 76. There are actually seven inscriptions found on this lowest level of hell, all reiterating the sentiments of the one I have translated. For the complete series, see Hu Liangxue, "*Baoding Dafowan di 15 hao kan ke shi zhi guan jian*" ("My Opinion on the Rockcarvings of Baoding's Great Buddha Bend Niche

One feature of the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents tableau touched upon by Alan Cole in his work Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism is the underlying erotic aspect of many of the early Buddhist scriptures formulated in China.²⁶ Seldom mentioned in the recent Chinese literature on Great Buddha Bend, the imagery presented in the sixth kindness is clearly meant to highlight the literal connection between mother and son, a filial piety played up, as Cole notes, to reinforce the maternal links of succession over the traditional Chinese paternal lines.²⁷ The father is physically present in only half of the ten vignettes, and then only in a perfunctory fashion, as the mother tends to the child.²⁸

The entire tableau is dedicated to representing a mother's pain in both childbirth and childrearing, yet only in the image of the mother providing for her son her breastmilk, is the viewer given a realistic depiction of the female anatomy. Only in rare depictions of Hariti, the demon mother forced to acquiesce to the power of Buddhism when the Buddha traps one of her children under his begging bowl, do we see similar examples of bare-breasted women.²⁹ Despite the fact that a woman's breasts should be swollen during

Number 15"), *Dunhuang yan jiu* no. 4 (1998): 42. Hu is the only author to discuss all of the texts in their entirety.

²⁶Alan Cole, Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

²⁷Cole, 2, writes, "Buddhist writers challenged this arrangement (the son's adherence to the Confucian standard of patrilineal descent) by redefining filial piety so that it reflected the importance of the mother-son relationship."

²⁸It is interesting to note that images of the father are also conspicuously absent in Han funerary monuments with regard to rearing sons. See Wu Hung, "Private Love and Public Duty: Images of Children in Early Chinese Art", 96.

²⁹Bare-breasted women do appear on occasion in the secular arts; for example, in the Song-dynasty work entitled Knickknack Peddler, the artist Li Sung depicts a woman with a baby at her breast as her other children scramble for the peddler's toys. All of the Buddhist

the final stages of pregnancy, the image presented in this vignette remains largely unchanged from that of the woman praying for a child to the aged mother watching her son leave home. Emphasizing the importance of the transaction taking place, the depictions of the breasts themselves become markers for a debt that could not be repaid.

The Buddha, however, was a filial son successful in his quest to repay both of his parents. The adjacent work, which depicts stories from the Repayment of Kindness scripture, demonstrates the various ways, both mundane and extraordinary, by which such a daunting task can be accomplished.

Repaying Father

Just past the small tableau representing the indigenous gods of cloud, wind, thunder and lightning,³⁰ the worshipper encounters a large tableau depicting another Chinese sutra compilation, The Buddha Preaches the

examples I am aware of showing Hariti in this fashion were seen in Sichuan province, at various sites around Dazu. Recent Han tomb excavations at Deyang in Sichuan province have also yielded a ceramic figure of a woman breast-feeding her child. See Robert Bagley, ed., Ancient Sichuan: Treasures from a Lost Civilization (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001): 328. These examples may indicate a local willingness to depict frontal female nudity. Female nudity is also encountered within the Hell tableau at Great Buddha Bend, and, although I have already touched upon the implications of nudity as a form of punishment within Song society in my article (Kucera, 92), I will be considering it at a later date in conjunction with the imagery seen in the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents tableau as well as the erotic imagery seen in several other areas of Great Buddha Bend.

³⁰One could question whether or not these nature deities lie solely within the realm of indigenous gods of China. One need only look at the famous Buddhist debate between the monk Sariputra and the heretic Raudraksa in which Sariputra brings in the 'god of wind' to help clear out the competition.

Mahayana Scripture on Repaying Kindness.³¹ Reaching to 7.1 meters above the pathway, the various groupings of figures at first glance appear scattered over the 14.7 meters area around a central Buddha icon, who stands with his left hand palm up in front of his chest balancing a begging bowl, his right hand held up in a gesture of admonishment.³² Rays of light emanate from his *urna* as he opens his mouth to preach (figs. 35a and b). Carved at eye-level on the front of the Buddha icon is a lengthy tract related to three previous emperors, the sides of which are flanked by the statement “There are only the golden bones of our master that survive, and (although) having been refined by fire 100 times, the colors are still fresh.”³³

Unlike the earlier narrative work in which the ten kindnesses of a mother were clearly numbered, the large textual inscriptions found within the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau are not. This lack of direction on the part of the artist or the conceptual director, Zhao Zhifeng,

³¹I use the title given to the work within the context of the Buddha's discussion with Ananda, located in the inscription carved on the central Buddha's left flank. Alan Cole's translation of the title of this work is Mahayana Scripture on the Skillful Means of the Buddha's Repayment of Kindness. Chinese scholars tend to prefer the translation “Mahopaya Buddha” for *Da fang bian fo*, and “Requital of Kindness Scripture” for *bao en jing*. Hu in his article “*Dazu Baoding he Dunhuang de Da fang bian (Fo) bao en jing zhi bi jiao yan jiu*” (“A Comparative Study of Returning Favors Sutra Stories in the Baoding Shan of the Dazu Grottoes and the Dunhuang Grottoes”), 41, argues for inclusion of the *bian wen* text Shuang en ji (Record of Double Kindness) as one of the sources for the imagery found at Great Buddha Bend.

³²The closest iconographic similarity traceable for this gesture is to the *tarjani* gesture, not specifically classified as a mudra, in which the hand makes a “threatening gesture”. See Robert Beer, The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs (Boston: Shambala Press, 1999): 156.

³³DZSKYJ, 274-275. “Golden bones” is a reference to *sarira*, or Buddhist relics. Local legend has it that Zhao Zhifeng under the auspices of Emperor Ningzong (r. 1195-1225 CE) brought famous relics to Baodingshan, and constructed a pagoda for their placement. What eventually happened to the relics is unknown because the temple complex burned down during the Mongol occupation, but reference to the relics is made in an inscription found on

may well have been intentional; by leaving the vignettes unnumbered, the artist gives more freedom to the viewer, who in turn does not feel compelled to read and absorb each of the twelve stories relating Shakyamuni's filial acts in both his present and previous incarnations.

The scholar Ning Qiang has arranged the narratives in this tableau in order beginning with the lower right and circling around to the lower left, noting that "to put them in order with regard to the stories' placement within the sutra, some of which are not to be found therein, is to put them into confusion."³⁴ In order to make some sense of the rationale behind such a large work, it is imperative that a brief survey be made of the critical components. For complete translations of the inscriptions accompanying the individual vignettes, please see Appendix B.

Following the order set out by Ning Qiang, the first vignette is by far the most dynamic, and sets the tone for the entire tableau (fig. 36). The inscription, easily viewed by the worshipper since it fills the entire lower left flank of the central Buddha image, is entitled "The Buddha of the Great Repository Preaches the Mahayana Sutra for Repaying Kindness."³⁵ Beginning with the incontrovertible phrase, "Thus I have heard", the inscription tells the story of Ananda's encounter with a filial man caring for

the back of the *daochang* in Little Buddha Bend. See DZSKYJ, 275-276. Chapter three will include further discussion of the content of the central inscription found here.

³⁴Ning Qiang, "Dazu shi ke zhong de hui hua xing yin su shi xi" ("The Pictorial Elements in the Dazu Stone Carvings"), *Dunhuang yan jiu* no. 1 (1987): 23.

³⁵"Da zang fo shuo *Da fang bian bao en jing*." For the translations provided here, the transcriptions can be found in Hu Wenhe's work, SDJFJSKYS (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin chu ban she, 1994): 297-301; the compilers of DZSKYJ did not provide more than an introductory sentence for each.

his parents, and their subsequent meeting with six heretics, who deride the Buddha Shakyamuni as being unfilial, having abandoned his parents in the city in order to preach in the mountains. The doubt raised within Ananda causes him to raise the issue of filial piety upon his return to the Buddha, who at the time is preaching to an assembly of his followers. The Buddha's response to Ananda reaches out to all, including the Buddhas of the Ten Directions, in the form of rays. He then preaches the need to be filial and to care for one's parents, citing the notion that in the past all the myriad beings were parents, and without them no being could exist.³⁶

Clearly unable to depict all of the various moments and venues of this narrative, the artist chose to highlight the encounter between Ananda and the filial son, who the worshipper sees at ground level carrying his weak, old parents in baskets suspended from a pole straddling his shoulders, and the six heretics. The heretics are shown joyfully prancing by, pointing and laughing at them, slandering the Buddha while a solemn Ananda listens (fig. 37). Directly adjacent to the carved inscription stands Ananda, his head bowed slightly, hands clasped together as he prays on behalf of the filial son and his parents. Next to Ananda, the worshipper sees the son shouldering his father and mother, leaning forward slightly from the burden (fig. 38a). The parents are depicted as small and wizened seated in the baskets, the

³⁶Hu, *SDJFJSKYS*, 299.

father's mouth open as his hand clutches what might possibly be the 'better' food given to him by his son, as is noted in the inscription.³⁷

Immediately to the right of this grouping stands the first of the six "Masters of the Other Law", who points toward Ananda and the familial grouping while looking back over his shoulder to his five compatriots (fig. 38b).³⁸ Above the six heretics is an inscribed caption that reads, "The Six Masters of the Other Law Vilify the Buddha as Unfilial".³⁹ The first two heretics, Purana-Kasyapa and Maskarin, are rather straight-laced depictions of non-Han men, while the last four "barbarian" heretics are shown as if in a festive mood.⁴⁰ The third heretic, Ajita-Kesa Kambalin, keeps time on a set of clappers, his right foot raised up to tap out the beat, displaying a curl-toed Persian-slipper style shoe. He looks back over his shoulder, mouth open as if to shout encouragement to the fourth heretic, Sanjayin, who is in full singing and dancing mode. Sleeves swirling about him, bearded mouth wide open, the downward curve of his head echoes the raised movement of his left leg as he dances. Above him is the sole female heretic, Cinca-Manaviki, depicted as a woman bent over her flute, and behind Sanjayin is the last of the six

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Hu Wenhe, *Anyue Dazu Fo diao* (Taipei: Mei shu chu ban she, 1999): 96-97.

³⁹"Other Law" or "Outside Law" (*wai dao*) here clearly a reference to heterodox, heretical or non-Buddhist law.

⁴⁰The list of the six heretics as seen at Baodingshan is not entirely accurate, and since the heretics are not named in the accompanying inscription, open to some conjecture. The sutra itself also leaves out specific identification of the heretics, only stating that "six heretics" vilified the Buddha Shakyamuni. The female heretic, Cinca-Manaviki, is not one of any original list of the six. See *Fo xue da ci dian* vol. 1 (Taipei: Tian hua chu ban she, 1984): 649. The correct sixth heretic should be Nirgantha, as stated by Soothill, 134b. Cinca-Manaviki is instead the woman who falsely accused the Buddha of adultery with her. See Soothill, 326a. Further information on the six heretics can be found in *The Teachings of the Six Heretics* by Claus Vogel (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Morgenlandische Gesellschaft, 1970).

heretics, Kakuda-Katyayana, a figure now largely eroded, but apparently carrying yet another musical instrument, and wearing yet another unusual foreign hat.⁴¹

Integral to the vignette and the tableau as a whole is the central Buddha figure - the image of Ananda being positioned in such a way as to connect the two seemingly disparate elements of an "iconic" Buddha image with the nearby narrative protagonists. Faced toward the inscription, Ananda appears to listen as he pays homage to the Buddha. The Buddha, in turn, raises his hand to preach, his lips slightly parted to speak, a ray of light emanating up and outward. These rays represent his words reaching up to the Buddhas in the heavens, along with all the myriad beings dispersed around the Buddha figure's head like so many flames in a nimbus - a hungry ghost being fed by a monk, domesticated animals, humans, asuras, and a denizen of hell with his vat of boiling oil (fig. 39). The inscription reads:

The World-Honored One let out a little smile,
emitting a five-colored light which reached all of
the Buddhas of the Ten Directions. The
bodhisattvas of that land together intoned, "What
causes this radiance?" The Buddhas of those lands
replied,

⁴¹The female heretic is identified specifically as Cinca-Manaviki by Hu, *Anyue Dazu Fo diao*, 97. It is interesting that for many Chinese authors the female heretic playing her flute has been idealized; this stems from a gross misunderstanding of her role at the site, and a common trend within modern Chinese scholarship to romanticize the pastoral lifestyle. See for example the statement in *Dazu Grottoes*, Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1984): 8, where the figure is described as "an attractive girl playing an instrument which looks like a flute." Flute playing as an erotic image can be traced back to folk stories from the latter Han dynasty. See "chui di" as discussed within the *Pei wen yun fu* vol. 5 fascicle 101 (Seoul: Han guo xue zheng xing yuan, 1985): 4022.

“In the Saha realm there is a Buddha named Shakyamuni who to the multitude expounds The Mahayana Sutra for Repaying Kindness, desiring to cause all creatures to be filial and caring for their fathers and mothers; as such he releases this radiance....”⁴²

The worshipper is thus drawn into the other eleven vignettes as stories that the Buddha preached to all beings across time and place in order to demonstrate his own filial piety.⁴³

Set up in an almost perfect call-and-response style, and the last of the twelve vignettes as arranged by Ning Qiang, the grouping viewed to the left of the central Buddha figure at ground level seems to answer to the heretics' allegations, whose images mirror them on the right side of the tableau. A processional of six figures stretches out as it marches away from the central Buddha figure, on whose right flank is inscribed the accompanying inscription (fig. 40). Immediately recognizable to the worshipper is the Buddha Shakyamuni, clad in monk's robe, hair shorn to close snail-shell curls, rays emanating from his forehead. As seen in the six heretics' vignette, the key features are captioned; between the rays of light emanating from the Buddha we read “The Great Filial Shakyamuni Buddha Respectfully Shoulders His Father the King's Coffin”. His father's coffin is inscribed with the characters *wang guan yu* - “Sedan Bearing the Coffin of the King” - and

⁴²Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 299.

⁴³Most of the vignettes within this tableau can be seen as examples of the bodhisattva cultivation of perfection (*paramita*), specifically the perfection of generosity (*dana*). Reiko Ohnuma has discussed the connection between the gift of the body as a form of *dana* and the Buddha's gift of the *dharma* in an article based on her dissertation entitled “The Gift of the Body and the Gift of Dharma” in History of Religions vol. 37 no. 4 (May 1998): 323-359.

his final resting place labeled “The Relic Pagoda of the Great King Suddhodhana.”⁴⁴

Leading the processional is Sundarananda, the younger brother of Shakyamuni.⁴⁵ Head covered and bowed, he looks back over his shoulder to his brother, who leads the group of pallbearers. As is written in the inscription, Sundarananda waves a censer, waiting for Shakyamuni to take it from him when they reach the coffin’s final resting place. Two strong men, perhaps meant to represent the heavenly kings also mentioned in the inscription who honor the Buddha by transforming themselves into human form so as to assist him, stand with their backs to the worshipper. A pole connects these three figures to the coffin perched above. Behind the coffin, two figures stand face forward, hands clasped in reverence; they are Ananda, Shakyamuni’s cousin, and Rahula, Shakyamuni’s son.⁴⁶ Their presence is explained in the inscription by their repeated request to Shakyamuni that they be allowed to bear the king’s coffin.⁴⁷

This representation of the Buddha’s response to his critics is extremely dramatic. Shakyamuni has returned to attend to worldly concerns as the inscription notes since “it would not be filial for the multitude to arrange for the cremation of the king.” With this act, Shakyamuni himself highlights Buddhism’s flexible nature with regard to societal mores - there is no need to

⁴⁴Suddhodhana, “The Great King of the Pure Rice”, refers to Shakyamuni’s father in this, his last, incarnation.

⁴⁵DZSKYJ, 479, and Hu, *Anyue Dazu Fo diao*, 37.

⁴⁶Ibid., and Soothill, 294a and 472a respectively.

⁴⁷Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 301.

wholly abandon the family and tradition on behalf of one's beliefs. Further on in the inscription the heavenly kings lament that the Buddha respectfully shoulders this burden "for those children in the future who are not filial".⁴⁸ Thus, besides effectively silencing his critics with regard to his own filial duties, this depiction of the Buddha expands Buddhist righteousness vis-à-vis the protagonist heretics by using his own actions as an example for future generations to emulate, thereby demonstrating how the Buddha cares not only for those of the present, but for future generations as well.

These stage-setting episodes of the Repayment of Kindness narrative have been consciously placed closest to the viewer; from this lowest tier, the eyes then can move up, around, inward and outward, perusing the various displays of the Buddha's filial piety as time allowed and as need warranted. As Ning Qiang noted, there is no apparent order to the chaos, so perhaps we should consider alternate possibilities - that in fact, more relevant or popular imagery was kept closer to the worshipper while more fantastic, less realistic stories were placed further away. This theory being posited, it is necessary to look more closely at the second tier of the tableau. It is interesting to note at this point the once-again symmetrical quality of the tableau as a whole, the central Buddha icon flanked by six vignettes on each side, arranged in inverted pyramidal fashion with each side having one episode on the lowest tier, two episodes each in the second tier, and three in the third tier.

⁴⁸Ibid.

The vignettes on the second tier of the tableau bear out this hypothesis. Placed directly above the two eaves outlining the relic pagoda of Shakyamuni's father Suddhodhana is a narrative depiction of Shakyamuni attending to his dying father (fig. 41). The rays emanating from the pallbearer figure of Shakyamuni on the first tier aid the viewer in making the connection between these two episodes as they waft upwards to underline the father-son scene. The story itself is quite simple - the dying king has but one regret, that he has not seen his son one last time before he dies. The omniscient Buddha, a true filial son, informs Ananda that he will go to see his father as "it is befitting that I call on him who raised and nurtured me to pay my debt of gratitude".⁴⁹ The Buddha's radiance soothes the dying man, and he asks his son to lay his hands upon him in order that he be at peace and all pain and regret will be eliminated.

What is depicted at Great Buddha Bend are the final moments of the dying king's life, where as the inscription relates,

The Buddha then with his hand touched his father the king on the forehead, 'King, you should be joyful, you should not be vexed or worried, as you have always attentively contemplated the methods and significance of the scriptures.' When the king heard this, the happiness he himself could not bear, so he grasped the Buddha's hand and touched it to his heart. Whereupon as the king lay, he joined his palms together in reverence, and his life ended, his last breath cut off.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Ibid.

On the left, leaning gently over his father, stands Shakyamuni, his right hand resting on his father's forehead, his left being pressed to his father's heart as his father puts his palms together in prayer. Behind him stands a praying monk figure, perhaps Ananda, to whom the Buddha had earlier explained his need to be present at his father's bedside. The father's body emits a wafting form of a curled lotus leaf opening, a visual representation of the escape of the king's life breath, and the transformation of the king's being from the mundane world to his rebirth into the "Five Heavens of Purity".⁵¹ At the foot of the king's bed stands another attentive male figure; dressed in worldly garb, he is possibly meant to represent one of the many doctors whose various treatments who were unable to cure the king.

To the right of this touching scene is another vignette, which at first glance has very little to do with anything filial. A caption in the middle of the scene reads "The Great Youth of the Himalayas casts off his whole body for half of a verse: Birth and death do not cease. With cessation, there is Happiness"(fig. 42).⁵² The inscription itself, found immediately off the central Buddha's right shoulder, is entitled "Shakyamuni while in the Causal Stages

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Soothill, 357b. It is interesting to note that within the context of the entire tableau the "Five Heavens of Purity" shows up twice – once as captioned in the image of the heavens above the head of the Buddha, to whom the Buddha preaches his sermon along with the other realms of existence, and then again in the inscription related to the death of the Buddha's father. In a sense, the viewer could literally envision the soul of the Buddha's father rising up to the palaces of the Five Heavens of Purity as depicted above the central Buddha icon's head.

⁵²This is sometimes referred to as the "Sacrifice for a Stanza" parable.

(of Bodhisattva-hood) Cultivates the Act of Abandoning One's Body in Search of the Law".⁵³

The gist of this narrative is quite straight-forward - the Buddha is confronted by a hungry *raksa* demon while trying to achieve the perfected bodhi mind.⁵⁴ The demon is "hungry and vexed", and responds to the Buddha's query regarding demon cuisine, saying, "I eat the warm meat and hot blood of people." The young Shakyamuni in a previous incarnation, having just come to the realization that the cycle of endless life and death can be stopped, and that joy will result from this extinguishing, is quick to offer up his own body in exchange for a chant known to the *raksa* demon which will bring him bodhi knowledge because "as a bodhisattva, I cast off this unfirm body for *bodhi*, and will obtain an adamantine body. The demon then utters the chant, "Life and death is extinguished; only such extinguishing brings joy." Having achieved his purpose and owing his body to the demon, Shakyamuni then proceeds to undertake his own extinguishing by climbing a tall tree and jumping off of it. However, before he hits the ground, the demon is transformed back into its true form, the god Indra, who catches the plummeting Shakyamuni. Indra, Brahma and all the heavens prostrate themselves in praise of Shakyamuni, recognizing him as the Thus-Come-One.

⁵³Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 300.

⁵⁴Berling, 65, points out that the formula of a bodhisattva being tested by the gods or by an evil adversary is used to demonstrate his devotion to the Buddhist path, and becomes a pretext for teaching the Dharma. The *raksa* demon in this case is simply the god Indra in disguise.

Depicting such a complex scene in a worthwhile fashion given such limited space required the artist to use one singular image of Shakyamuni as the pivot point for the various moments within the storyline, thereby conflating the scene.⁵⁵ To the left of the caption the worshipper sees what can easily be identified as the *raksa* demon, hair standing on end in flame-like fashion, ears long and pointed, face a grotesque cluster of lumps and bulging eyes. The demon speaks with mouth open, looking down and gesturing to the kneeling figure below him. The kneeling figure is clearly the “Great Youth of the Himalayas”, who is shown with his back turned toward his antagonist. He gestures with his right hand upward toward the figure furthest to the right. Badly damaged, the larger size and swirling clothes implicate this figure as that of the transformed *raksa* demon in his new identity as Indra. It is difficult to say with great certainty due to the poor condition of the cliff-face, but there appears to be a small sprig of branch carved directly above the kneeling figure’s head hinting at this as being a representation of the moment when Indra transforms himself in order to catch the falling Shakyamuni.

How does a story replete with demons and miraculous events fulfill the requirements of an hypothesis based on relevance and popularity? Given the context of the vignettes in the immediate vicinity, this narrative depiction of an appropriate method to achieve the end of all the pains of life and death was clearly pertinent and desirable. Although the story overtly appears to be

⁵⁵Murray, “What is Chinese Narrative Illustration?”, 608, notes that the use of

quite dramatic, the opening lines inform us that the young Shakyamuni is passing his time in meditation and study of the scriptures; his daring attempt to actually physically extinguish his life is thwarted, as the heavenly beings acknowledge the depth of his understanding when witnessing the sincerity of his actions. The message conveyed is that to aid not only one's self, but also to ease the pains of all those around you, the most expedient method is to take up meditation and study, i.e., follow in the footsteps of the Buddha himself, and become a monk or nun. Placed next to the image of the sage Shakyamuni comforting his father's beleaguered soul, and aiding in his achievement of heaven, this vignette highlights the redeeming qualities of a son renouncing this world for a monastic existence. As such, this small grouping can be seen as vindicating a vocation long cited by the Confucianists as being anti-family and anti-Chinese.

On the second tier of the right side of the central Buddha figure are two vignettes which echo this sentiment of self-sacrifice on behalf of one's parents - the well-known tale of the Buddha in a previous incarnation sacrificing himself to aid a tigress, and the lesser-known story of the Buddha cutting his own flesh in a previous life to nourish his father and mother (fig. 43). Although the tigress vignette would appear at first glance to be related to self-sacrifice on behalf of the salvation of all beings, the portion inscribed and depicted at Great Buddha Bend concerns itself with the effect of such a

conflated imagery in Chinese narrative depiction is rare.

sacrifice on the Buddha's then-parents, not on the more dramatic earlier self-sacrifice episode.

Parallel to the scene of the Buddha Shakyamuni providing solace to his dying father, the tigress narrative provides a perfect symmetrical counterpart (fig. 44). The parents are shown grieving over the body of their deceased son, now nothing more than a skeleton. To the right the father strokes his head; to the left his mother touches his feet. As the inscription states,

With his divine eye, (the prince) saw before him his former parents grieving, unduly weeping and wailing, perhaps even to the point of losing their own lives!...Forthwith, he came down from heaven, floating in the air, uttering various statements of explanation as well as a remonstrance to his father and mother.⁵⁶

Depicted standing between the parental pair is the Prince Mahasattva, now a bodhisattva, swirling clouds of blue and his diminutive size connotating the distance between the earth and the void. Mahasattva informs the parents that "you should know that whatever is (composed of) existents must cease to exist", thereby explaining his self-sacrifice and subsequent transformation into a bodhisattva. Having come to understand this, he notes, they too shall be awakened. The parents then praise him, after which Mahasattva chanted verses "declaring his thanks to his parents, thus enabling them in obtaining enlightenment". Should any of the worshippers have difficulty identifying this story from the images of father, mother, bodhisattva and skeletal remains alone, the artist has included a life-size, albeit somewhat

⁵⁶Hu, *SDJFJSKYS*, 298.

cartoonish, image of the tale's ultimate protagonist, the tigress, crouching just off to the right side of the father.⁵⁷

Next to this scene, and adjacent to the central Buddha figure is the narrative entitled "Shakyamuni, while in the Causal Stages (of Bodhisattvahood), Cuts His Own Flesh to Nourish His Father and Mother" (fig. 45).⁵⁸ This seemingly fantastic vignette depicting the feeding of the Buddha's parents with his own flesh in fact has a more concrete filial value when considered in conjunction with its accompanying inscription.

The story goes that the Buddha in a previous life was a young prince named "Jati".⁵⁹ Due to betrayal, the king and his wife are forced to flee their homeland with nothing other than their young son. Noticing that his parents are starving, the young Jati encourages his father to make "one hundred cuts" on his princely body in order to feed himself and his wife.⁶⁰ Jati then goes on to proclaim that "in the event that a fiery iron wheel rotated on the top of my head, it would not be painful, and thereby retreat from the Way.," noting that

⁵⁷It is interesting to note that of the images juxtaposed on this second tier, two of them are also found in proximity on another Buddhist work located in Japan. The Tamamushi shrine, located in the Treasure House of Horyu-ji, Nara, Japan, has both the 'Sacrifice to the Hungry Tigress' scene and the 'Sacrifice for a Stanza' scene.

⁵⁸Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 298. This work is similar to parable number two in the *Za bao zang jing*, first dated to 472 CE, and compiled by the Northern Wei monk Tanyao comprised of 121 *avadana*. *Taisho* vol. 4, no. 203. See Charles Willemen, *The Storehouse of Sundry Valuables*, BDK English Tripitaka series 10-I (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1994): 9-11, for a translation. The Baodingshan inscriptions would appear to be a variation on this *avadana*.

⁵⁹Soothill, 463b.

⁶⁰Stories relating the virtues of flesh cutting on behalf of sickly parents are in no short supply within the Buddhist canon; several relate specifically to Avalokitesvara. See Chun-fang Yu's translation of both *Guan yin jing zhou ling gan hui yao*, 424, and *Gu jin tu shu ji cheng*, 398:10b, in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, ed. DeBary and Irene Bloom, 532-534 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

his body “will be healed as good as new” would be twice as strong from such an event.

What the artist has chosen to depict from the story is the scene in which the father offers a slice of the son’s flesh to his wife, Jati’s mother. The mother stands to the left of the trio, hair piled high behind a royal tiara; to her left stands the king, holding the young prince Jati cradled in his left arm. The king’s right hand holds forth the piece of flesh toward the queen. To clarify the situation for the viewer, the artist has purposely carved a deep gash in the bare upper arm of the youth as well as another gash in his lower forearm. Between the two adults leans a long sword, which the worshipper comes to identify as the blade used to commit the gruesome deed.

The inscription notes that the young prince’s sores will heal because he does not falter in his belief in the Way; however, if he “took advantage with lies and falsehoods, (his) bodily sores would not close.” Hence, he is only able to provide for his parents because of his strong Buddhist beliefs, once again affirming filial deeds as well as extolling the virtues of the Buddhist way of life. The two central flanking images, “Sacrifice for a Stanza” and “Cutting His Own Flesh to Nourish His Father and Mother”, can both be seen as being related to affirming beliefs in Buddhism, while simultaneously demonstrating how such beliefs can be viewed as filial acts not only to one’s immediate ancestors but to all generations.

Also important with regard to this vignette is the phrase, “Even if a red-hot iron wheel rotated on the top of my head, I would not because of this

suffering, consider it painful and thereby retreat from the Way". This phrase is carved at various places throughout the Baodingshan complex: once on the stone Sutra List Pagoda in Little Buddha Bend, and five times within the Great Buddha Bend itself. It appears twice within the tableau under discussion here illustrating the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness, as well as within the Hell tableau, on a pagoda next to the Parinirvana image, and lastly, as the second to last inscription found in the Taming of the Wild Buffalo tableau.⁶¹

This vignette is therefore the source of what will be a series of repetitions of the phrase throughout the Baodingshan complex extolling the virtues of perseverance and the Buddhist ideal of self-sacrifice. Worshippers would have identified this chant with a tableau in which the Buddha admonishes his critics by proffering at least twelve instances in this and past lives in which his filial piety knew no bounds as well as with a vignette depicting a child saving his parents' lives by utilizing the most dire means. As if to reinforce the link between the two, the phrase has been inscribed not only in the text immediately adjacent to the "Cutting His Own Flesh to Nourish His Father and Mother" vignette, but also in oversized carved characters, which hang above the entire tableau on either side of the central

⁶¹Li Zhengxin, "Baodingshan you Zhao Zhifeng zi zao xiang ma?" ("Did Zhao Zhifeng Create Portraits of Himself at Baodingshan?") *Chongqing she hui ke xue* no. 2 (1988): 98-100, notes seven places within Great Buddha Bend and three within Little Buddha Bend where this inscription is found. Although he mentions specific tableaux, I have not been able to verify his claims, and thereby presently maintain that there are only six places rather than ten where the phrase appears. Given the preponderance of the number ten at the site, and the ritual usage of such a number, it is highly likely that the phrase does exist in ten different places within the site.

Buddha figure's head like a banner proclaiming the connection between the two (fig. 46).

The top tier of the tableau continues the symmetrical aspect seen in the lower two tiers, with three vignettes off each side of the central Buddha figure's shoulders. They are also somewhat balanced in content, with the furthest vignette to the right on both sides relating a story with a bird as the protagonist, while the central groupings involve extraordinary physical feats, one to gain enlightenment, the other a cure. All of the episodes again relate to the Buddha's past demonstrations of appropriate filial conduct.

As hypothesized earlier, the higher one looks within the tableau, the more fantastic or miraculous the narratives become. The third tier episodes largely bear this theory out. Two involve magical birds, two involve bodhisattvas, one of whom transforms himself into human form, and two involve stories of cutting and gouging far beyond the scope of what was seen in the lower two levels. Blindness also figures prominently in this top tier, blind parents being involved in three of the six vignettes, while a fourth depiction involves self-inflicted blindness on the father's behalf. It is also interesting to note that this highest tier appears to broaden the scope of filial duty.

The least overtly demonstrative with regard to filial acts is the vignette numbered six by Ning Qiang, and located directly to the right of the main Buddha figure on the top tier. Entitled "Shakyamuni, while in the Causal Stages (of Bodhisattvahood), Cultivates Filial Piety and Realizes the 32 Marks

(of a Great Being)”, this narrative relates the story of the Buddha explaining to Manjusri how he achieved his special 32 minor marks and 80 auspicious signs through the “virtue of filial piety”.⁶² The artist executes this scene in a rather interesting fashion (fig. 47). Kneeling before two figures, one dressed in scholarly attire, the other a monk in meditation, is Manjusri, depicted as a youth also dressed in scholarly clothing.⁶³ Behind him sits a bodhisattva as is described in the inscription.

What makes this depiction fascinating is the inclusion of the extra scholarly figure who gestures with his right hand, as if to point out the Buddha’s 32 minor marks one by one. Manjusri gazes up at the speaker with rapt attention, as the Buddha sits smilingly facing forward. Some scholars have identified this Buddha image as being a portrait of Zhao Zhifeng, the founder of the Baodingshan complex, based on visual comparisons with other purported Zhao Zhifeng images at Baodingshan.⁶⁴ Although the image may have been based upon a portrait of the site’s founder, according to the inscription, the seated monk figure is meant to represent the enlightened Shakyamuni.

Shakyamuni concludes his speech to Manjusri by extolling him to “look upon all the myriad creatures as (you would) your father or king”, noting that “unexcelled complete enlightenment” can be acquired “by being

⁶²Hu, *SDJFJSKYS*, 297.

⁶³Soothill, 153b, notes that one of Manjusri’s common representations is that of an eternal youth.

⁶⁴Yang Jialuo, “*Dazu Baoding qu shi ke ji lu*” in *DZSKYJ*, 26-27, and Wu Xianqi, “*Jie shao Dazu shi ke ji qi wen hua ping jia*” in *DZSKYJ*, 33, among others. Further discussion of

filial and virtuous". Once again highlighting the need to be filial, this episode expands the practice of filial piety outward, extending it to include both father and king. Two of the other narratives depicted on this third tier include in their inscriptions ways in which kings can repay such filial acts; a third shows how a king can himself find enlightenment. Clearly the emphasis in these works has turned away from the "giver" toward the "receiver", and the responsibilities incumbent upon those who are the recipients of filial good deeds.

The first of the two vignettes to deal with kingly repayments of filial acts is found immediately to the right of the seated Buddha figure depicted in the narrative relating the Buddha's 32 minor marks. On the left we see the king, hampered by a serious illness according to the inscription, who reaches out to a doctor who kneels before him feeling for his pulse (fig. 48). This is the vignette depicting Shakyamuni, while in the Causal Stages (of Bodhisattvahood), Performed the Filial Act of Gouging Out His Eyes and Marrow for the Sake of a Cure. When asked what manner of medicine will cure him, the king replies, "It is the eyes and marrow of a person who does not anger." Immediately to the right of this, we see the sequel, that of his virtuous and filial son, seated, offering up his eyes and marrow. The artist has chosen to depict this precious gift of the son's bodily parts as a gelatinous, amorphous shape, being placed in a serving dish held aloft by a kneeling servant; the individual responsible for the cutting stands behind the pair of

Zhao Zhifeng being represented at Baodingshan can be found in the analysis of Chapter

smaller figures. Because of this act, “the prince’s life was at an end”; in order to acknowledge this supreme act of filial sacrifice, “they raised a pagoda for his bones and made an offering.” Hence, one appropriate method of repayment for filial piety is building Buddhist monuments in offering and remembrance.

The other method of repayment is for the king to extol the virtues of the Buddhist faith to his people. This is the penance given to the king by the bodhisattva-turned-man Samaka, in the “Shakyamuni, while in the Causal Stages (of Bodhisattvahood), Practices Filial Piety as Prince Samaka” vignette.⁶⁵ In this story, Samaka is accidentally slain by the king while filially seeking food for his blind parents (fig. 49). The cries of the parents that their son was ‘extremely filial’, and therefore did not deserve to die, are heard by the god Indra, who comes down to earth to revive the dead Samaka. The artist depicts this aspect of the narrative in a manner echoing components of both the scene of the Buddha Shakyamuni comforting his dying father, and that of the parents grieving for their dead son in the tigress vignette. Here we see Samaka lain out, his mother cradling his head in her hands, his father clutching the arrow protruding from his chest. It is the moment when Indra has appeared, and he is shown standing behind the prone figure of Samaka. To the immediate right of the inscription and Indra stands the guilt-ridden

Four.

⁶⁵Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 299. Interestingly enough the story of Samaka is also seen in the *Za bao zang jing*, as the second half of the story relating the filial act of slicing one’s own body to feed one’s parents (Willemen, 11-13). However, at Baodingshan, these works are not positioned near each other as one might expect if the artist were working from that text.

king, dressed in hunting attire, a quiver at his left side, his bow clutched to his right side as he holds his hands together in reverence.

Upon being brought back to life, Samaka enjoins the king to be “One who desires blessings comforts his people. You should lead them to achieve perfection.” Samaka’s filial indebtedness therefore is not only being repaid to his parents by his own actions – his parents are subsequently enlightened by his near-death experience - but also by the king, who must atone for having slain Samaka in the first place. Since he did not intentionally kill Samaka, and regretted his act almost immediately, the king’s penance must be seen as recompense for, and recognition of, Samaka’s filialness, not solely as repayment of a karmic wrong.

The third vignette in the tableau which can be seen to relate to kingly duties is entitled “Shakyamuni, while in the Causal Stages (of Bodhisattvahood), Cuts His Own Flesh”, and is placed to the right of the last vignette described, that of Prince Samaka’s death and miraculous recovery (fig. 50).⁶⁶ In the inscription, the worshipper is told the story of a king who sought to understand the Buddha’s law. Upon at last finding a master who would expound the law to him, the king invites him to sit in his palace and instruct him in the Way. However, the master will only do so with the provision that the king “make 1000 cuts” upon his body, and “burn lanterns in offering”. The king therefore begins to search among his family and court for someone to aid him in making the 1000 cuts on his body, but there are no

⁶⁶Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 299-300.

takers for this rather unusual offer. At last, a man named Candala steps forward agreeing to the task.⁶⁷ The king is overjoyed, and once the 1000 cuts have been made, he pours oil into them, inserting coarse fabric wicks and lighting them, thereby making his own body serve as the necessary offering of lanterns. The king is thus able to achieve enlightenment, rejoining his people to “remember to uphold the law”. The king is declared a *chakravartin* king, and is noted to have been the Buddha Shakyamuni in a previous life.⁶⁸

The depiction of this narrative is conflated around the central image of the king. To his left and behind him, the worshipper sees Candala, bent over with arm raised to strike one of the 1000 blows. In front of him and to his right is the seated figure of the Buddhist master, right hand raised in instruction, left hand posed on his knee. The king is depicted as nude to the waist, kneeling before his seated teacher, hands folded in prayer. Behind him are the remains of his flaming mandorla, representing his kingly body being used as an offering lamp as well as a signal of his release from this worldly existence.

There is nothing overtly filial about this work, unless one takes into account that the inscription ends with “Of the gathering of the multitudes, all aroused the aspiration for the Way, and left happily”, in which case the king is reaching out to all past and present, his living as well as deceased

⁶⁷Soothill, 326a, translates Candala as “an outcast, a man of the lowest and most despised of the mixed class”, and further notes that converts from this class were admitted to Buddhist ordination.

⁶⁸“Wheel turning” king. Soothill, 445a, defines *chakravartin* as “a ruler the wheels of whose chariot roll everywhere without obstruction; an emperor, a sovereign of the world, a supreme ruler”.

ancestors. Rather than take the filial aspect to an extreme, it is perhaps better to view this vignette in the context of the whole tableau, as simply demonstrating what extraordinary reverence for the Buddhist faith implies when seen in a king - that such a king is enlightened, and knows how to take care of his people even at his own expense. Such a king is clearly no ordinary ruler, but a *chakravartin* king, a model of what true sovereign should be.

The last two narratives depicted within this tableau both have birds as important components to their storylines; they both, therefore, fit well into the hypothesis that less-worldly and more fantastic imagery was placed further away from the viewer. The first vignette to be discussed is carved between the narrative of the *chakravartin* king and the main central Buddha icon; it is entitled "Shakyamuni and the Goose (upon which) One Writes and Notifies the Prince".⁶⁹ This is the story of the goose who notifies the prince, the Buddha in a previous life, that his parents have so worried in his absence that they have lost their eyesight (fig. 51). Upon receiving this news, the prince returns with the only "treasure" he has gathered on his expedition, a cintamani pearl, emblematic of Buddhist enlightenment. With this pearl, the prince restores his parents' eyesight, a clear demonstration of his desire to rectify his unfilial behavior in which he abandoned his parents.

The artist shows the king and queen seated rather stiffly behind a table on whose front is carved the text of the inscription. Both mother and father are solemn and withdrawn as their son kneels before them making his wish

⁶⁹Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 300.

while holding up the cintamani pearl. It is the moment before their visual enlightenment, as they are not yet demonstrating unbounded joy. Faintly visible still above and to the left of the king's head is the outline of a wing in flight, the remnants of the white goose messenger sent to notify the prince of his parents' ill-health.

Finally, the last vignette of the third tier concerns a filial parrot, and differs from all of the other vignettes in that it demonstrates animals having human-like capacities and qualities. It is also interesting in that it shows how the benevolence of one individual, in this case a landowner, can benefit many. The scene depicted is quite minimal - a man holding a bird in his left hand while apparently scolding it with his right (fig. 52). The accompanying inscription reads "Shakyamuni, while in the Causal Stages (of Bodhisattvahood), as a Parrot Performed Filial Acts".⁷⁰

The story is highly reminiscent of that of Prince Samaka, which is depicted in a parallel position on the opposite side of the tableau creating a bookend effect. Like Prince Samaka, who was shot to death with an arrow while in search of food for his blind parents, the parrot is in the field gathering grain when he is seized by the angry landowner. The artist has chosen to depict the penultimate moment within the narrative, when the landowner has grabbed the bird. The parrot reminds him of a pledge he once made that "Whatever crop I plant, I will give to the myriad creatures in charitable offering" and queries "Why is it that today upon seeing me you

⁷⁰Hu, SDJFJSKYS, 298.

seize me?" The landowner explains his anger at the parrot gathering his hard-earned grain, but is delighted when he hears the rationale for it: "My parents are blind; I desire to offer this food to them." The landowner then releases the parrot, and the inscription ends with Shakyamuni extolling the filial qualities of the parrot, appointing all to emulate him and "provide for your two parents".⁷¹

This Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau presents the repayment of one's parents as a variety of processes: feeding them, taking care of them when they are ill and old, revering them when they die. Underlying many of these filial acts, however, is the ultimate device for complete requital of one's filial dues: leading your parents to enlightenment. Shakyamuni assists his father in this manner, making certain that he is reborn in the Pure Land, the devas and men do so on behalf of the parents of the deceased Mahasattva in the tigress jataka tale, and Samaka does likewise in the deer-hunting jataka vignette. More importantly, many of the inscriptions accompanying the vignettes note that it is by being filial that one can achieve eventual Buddhahood. The Buddha in previous lives was practicing filial piety during the causal stages of the bodhisattva path. Self-sacrifice is noted more than once as an acceptable form of filial behavior, thus reinforcing the idea that abandoning the family, or even this life, is preferable, and in the end more successful, as a means to honor and repay one's parents and ancestors. In this way, filial deeds are presented as being beneficial to all concerned.

⁷¹This parable is also in the *Za bao zang jing*, Willemen, 13-14.

Owing Mother, Repaying Father: A Conceptual Approach

Having at last attained a visual understanding of the layouts of the two tableaux, a clearer conceptual framework for this pairing can be created. From this an underlying rationale can be broached as to why Zhao Zhifeng, the conceptual director of *Great Buddha Bend*, chose to present them as such.⁷²

As noted earlier, these two tableaux differ in content as well as in format. Does the mode of representation reflect the content in some way? Both are symmetrical in overall arrangement, and one could argue that the tripartite layering of the tableau devoted to a mother's kindness is also an element in the tableau devoted to filial repayment. In the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau, the first level is this-worldly, the historical Buddha's actions in his last incarnation as Siddhartha being presented. The second and third move away from the present to previous incarnations of the historical Buddha, showing prior deeds performed on his way down the bodhisattva path. Similarly, the works depicted in the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents move from the hellish to the mundane to the enlightened realms. They also move the viewer chronologically - downward from past as represented in the Buddhas of the past six generations, to present as

⁷²Further evidence to support my contention that these two works were always meant to be paired exists in *Little Buddha Bend*. Here the two scriptures are depicted one above the other on one wall of a small cave. See *Dazu shi ke diao su quan ji* (The Complete Collection of Dazu Stone Sculptures) vol. 2. (Chongqing: Chongqing chu ban she, 1999): 75, for a recently published image of this cave tableau. This cave is not open to public viewing, and as such, was not made available to this scholar for further study.

represented by the mother caring for her child, to possible future, a hellish fate for those who are unfilial.

Where the two differ is in their use of captioning and their positioning of the iconic imagery within the tableau framework. But is this really as clear as it first appears to be? Using the terminology presented by Vidya Dehejia, the two would both appear to be narratives presented in the 'continuous' mode, meaning "successive episodes of a story within a single frame, repeating the figure of the protagonist in the course of the narrative."⁷³ Some may argue that in neither of the two works under discussion is this the case; however, I believe this to be the most effective definition of the two, given a broader interpretation of the terms 'story' and 'protagonist'.

Let us consider first the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents. One must accept that the story is a universal one, the protagonists every mother and every son. Does this fact lessen the narrative element of the story? I would argue that it does not; mundane day-to-day events are the stuff that many stories are made of. Murray would argue that the expository nature of the text excludes such a work from being afforded a truly narrative label.⁷⁴ Again, I would argue that exposition is largely narrative in style, using the anecdote or the parable to teach by example. They are in fact now symbols, not icons, but symbols, as Wu Hung states with regard to imagery found on

⁷³Dehejia, 385.

⁷⁴Murray, 612, vacillates somewhat on this point, noting that some embedded narratives within an expository text may fit her definition of narrative illustration, even though the work as a whole does not.

Han funerary monuments, “a particular that represents the more general”.⁷⁵ What the Kindness of Parents tableau presents to the worshipper is a coming-of-age story of one unidentified woman and her son, consciously made anonymous so as to easily afford worshippers the ability to identify and empathize with either or both.

The tableau depicting the requital of the Buddha’s kindness is also a continuous narrative in the sense that it shows various episodes related to the Buddha. What makes it harder to read, and perhaps explains the use of captions with each inscription, is the changing face and reality of the main protagonist, i.e., the Buddha in his various prior incarnations as a bodhisattva. Almost all of the vignettes end with variations on the statement uttered by the historical Buddha, “That was I in a previous life”, or clearly show Shakyamuni engaging in filial acts, such as burying his father.⁷⁶

Each vignette does indeed depict successive episodes from one extremely long and complex story; however, since the story is the result of an amalgamation of many, one could also argue that it is necessary to consider most of the twelve vignettes as being monoscenic in narrative quality rather than continuous. Within the larger framework of the whole, this theory works quite well. Dehejia defines monoscenic as being static (“being in a state versus being in action”), and “generally present(ing) a single,

⁷⁵Wu Hung, 105.

⁷⁶Only four vignettes do not adhere to this formula. Three are related to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni performing filial acts, and therefore do not require a clarifying statement on behalf of the protagonist. The fourth has as its protagonist a parrot, the Buddha in a previous life as seen in the translation by Willemen, 11-13. For reasons one

culminating episode of a story and focus(ing) thematically on the wisdom and presence of the Buddha."⁷⁷ Each vignette is a story unto itself as well as belonging to the larger narrative, and within each, the artist has chosen to highlight a critical moment within the narrative scenario when the issue of filial piety is being raised - Ananda being harangued by the heretics, Shakyamuni comforting his dying father, Indra comforting the bereaved parents of Samaka, the landlord seizing the filial parrot. What is critical to the monoscenic mode according to Dehejia is that the imagery contain "sufficient narrative content to stimulate the viewer's recognition of the story" which would then allow the viewer to narrate the story to him or herself.⁷⁸

As noted above, the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau is confusing, and it is not clear whether a twelfth-century viewer could successfully untangle the various stories being presented, nor gather the overall significance of the work. Hence the need for the accompanying inscribed texts complete with very specific titles. This type of captioning would have served as visual aids for the literate worshipper as well as for the literate monk guiding illiterate or semi-literate worshippers through the grotto site.

Dehejia notes that the use of captioning appeared early on in Buddhist imagery, giving as examples the inscriptions found at the first-century BCE site of Bharhut, but then posits that the captions became fewer within the

can only conjecture upon, this is the only vignette not to include the identifying "That was I in a previous life" statement.

⁷⁷Dehejia, 374.

history of Indian Buddhist art as the stories became more familiar or were committed to writing, until eventually they no longer appeared at all.⁷⁹ Although elsewhere it has been conjectured that the captions found on Buddhist works at Chinese cavesites were by and large not meant to be read, I have previously argued that, given Great Buddha Bend's unusual outdoor setting and the relatively readable font of the inscriptions, this is one possible rationale for such fastidious labeling and numbering on the part of the Baodingshan's conceptual director.⁸⁰

Similar to Dehejia's analysis concerning the presence of inscriptions at Bharhut in order to familiarize worshippers with the various stories, one could argue that works such as the Kindness of Parents and Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableaux included stories which may have been unfamiliar to the populace as a whole, and thereby necessitated textual substantiation. Aside from the Baodingshan grotto, these sutras have not been found elsewhere rendered in stone. They do exist in written format, in both illustrated and non-illustrated scrolls as well as among several cave paintings found at Dunhuang.⁸¹ However, as Hu Wenhe has noted, the

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Dehejia, 378. Gombrich, 223, argues that throughout the history of Western imagery, the use of captions and titles served to encourage one "to find the link between image and idea".

⁸⁰Wu Hung argues against captions being actively read at Dunhuang in his work "What is Bianxiang?," 132-134, while I posit that the open-air nature of the Baodingshan tableaux precludes any of the problems inherent in Wu Hung's assessment of painted cave tableaux. See Kucera, 94-97.

⁸¹An inventory of the Dunhuang manuscripts finds 30 copies of variations on the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents and at least three copies of the Ten Kindnesses and Virtues, which forms one component of the Great Buddha Bend tableau. Text versions of the Buddha Preaches the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness are not as numerous, with only three being extant. Several of the scenes found within the Buddha Preaches the

differences between the imagery found at the two cavesites is quite extensive, with not only differing modes of representation but also differing content.⁸²

While Hu's work has focused on the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau, other authors have noted the differences between the Ten Kindnesses as presented at Great Buddha Bend when compared to textual handscrolls and image-oriented hanging scrolls found at Dunhuang.⁸³ Most authors agree that the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents was only one source utilized to create the tableau, and as such, the images may have required the text as a means of explanation.

Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness can be found individually represented at Dunhuang, but the collection of images as seen in this tableau at Great Buddha Bend does not exist within one cave at the Gansu site. See Choice Serial Murals in Dunhuang (*Dunhuang lian huan bi hua jing pin*) (Lanzhou: Gansu xiao nian er jing chu ban she, 1993), pages 44-45 regarding the story of Mahasattva, of which 16 versions are found at Dunhuang. The parallel story at Baodingshan, that of sacrificing one's self for a stanza, is also painted at Dunhuang in three different places, 80. A different version of the Prince Kalyanamitra story found at Baodingshan exists at six sites within Dunhuang. See Choice Serial Murals, 60. The story of the Prince Jati is also found at Dunhuang, at 34 different spots according to Choice Serial Murals, 72. Lastly, the tragic story of Prince Samaka is found within six different caves at Dunhuang, 77. I have created two tables (see fig. 15) – one of the Dunhuang manuscripts, the other of the narratives found painted within the Dunhuang caves – in order to emphasize how comparatively weak the relationship is between the overall content and construction of the Dunhuang and the Baodingshan narrative sequences.

⁸²Hu Wenhe, “*Dazu Baoding he Dunhuang de Da fang bian (Fo) bao en jing zhi bi jiao yan jiu*” (“A Comparative Study of Returning Favors Sutra Stories in the Baoding Shan of the Dazu Grottoes and the Dunhuang Grottoes”), 39-42. In contrast, Ning Qiang favorably compares the Baodingshan works to Dunhuang, maintaining that from a distance, the images on the surface seem to fuse into one, and therefore resemble a painting on a rock wall. See Ning's article, 21. Ning further supports this argument by stating that all Chinese sculptors were first trained as painters, 25.

⁸³Long Hui, “*Dazu fo jiao shi ke “Fu mu en zhong jing bian xiang” ba*” (“Dazu's Buddhist Rockcarvings of the Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents Transformation Tableaux - A Postscript”) *Shi jie song jiao yan jiu* no. 3 (1983): 16-26, and Sun Xinshen, “*Dazu Baoding yu Dunhuang Mogao ku Fo shou fu mu en zhong jing bianxiang de bi jiao yan jiu*” (“A Comparative Study of the Buddha Expounds the Sutra on the Profound Kindness of Parents Transformation Tableaux in the Mogao Caves and Baodingshan”) *Dunhuang yan jiu* no. 1 (1997): 57-68. Also see Qin Mingzhi, “*Bei Song <Bao fu mu en zhong jing bian> hua*” (“A Northern Song Painting of the Sutra on the Kindness of Parents”) *Wen wu* no.12 (1982): 36-38, for an analysis of one Northern Song hanging scroll specifically related to the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents, but which is markedly different from the tableau seen at Great Buddha Bend in terms of both content and mode of representation.

This leads to a third possibility for the text found within the tableaux—that in fact the representation of text was as important as that of image. This initial pairing of tableaux allows for analysis into the two different levels at which text functions at Great Buddha Bend. The first level of use is that of the inscribed text describing what is visually being represented to the worshipper. Good examples of this occur in both tableaux, but in differing forms. In the Scripture on the Kindness of Parents tableau, the worshipper views basically the exact image as is described in the accompanying inscription, i.e., the pregnant mother vignette is accompanied by text detailing her condition in fairly explicit terms:

The kind mother, from the beginning of her pregnancy, her entire body feels as heavy as if leaden, and her face is sallow as if she is ill. She moves only with great difficulty.

In the Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau, however, the inscriptions are not as brief, and considerably more information is presented in the carved texts than could feasibly be depicted. Overwhelmingly, the situation in this tableau points to the conscious decision on the part of Zhao Zhifeng to choose the "highlight" of the story, the portion of the text that was to be emphasized. One interesting example of this is seen in the tigress jataka vignette depicted on the second tier. Instead of portraying the more exciting and well-known portion of the scripture in which the Buddha makes his sacrifice on behalf of the starving tigress, Zhao chose instead to depict the parents mourning over their son, and the subsequent arrival of a bodhisattva

in the skies above them, who aids them in achieving enlightenment, thereby emphasizing instead how self-sacrifice can also be seen as a filial act.

The Scripture on the Repayment of Kindness tableau also presents the second way in which text functions at Great Buddha Bend, and that is in conjunction with ritual. Evidence for text being involved in rituals being performed at Great Buddha Bend is found in the banner of large scale characters that stretches to the right and left of the central Buddha's head, almost as if this was a thought that Shakyamuni wanted to broadcast in all directions. As noted earlier, the chant reads as follows:

Even if a red-hot iron wheel rotated on the top of
my head, I would not, because of this suffering,
give up the mind of enlightenment.

The term “chant” has been consciously chosen here, my contention being that this inscription was meant to be repeated. I base this upon the fact that this same verse appears periodically carved at various intervals throughout the Baodingshan complex. Although it is not known exactly which ritual this chant would accompany, it is clear that the verse was meant to be encountered at various intervals as one moved through the site. Other examples of ritual use being connected to the inscribed text will be seen in the upcoming chapter on the two tableaux related to the heavens of the Pure Land and the horrors of hell.

These initial two tableaux set the stage for the pair of sculpted works that follow. They make the worshipper acutely aware of not only his extreme indebtedness to his mother, but also of Shakyamuni Buddha's extraordinary

approaches to repaying his filial debts. As demonstrated by the Buddha in previous incarnations, clearly no price can be too high nor any sacrifice too great on behalf of one's parents. In the following two tableaux, the Buddhist establishment will provide the filial son with one method of repayment, as well as a gruesome reminder of the repercussions any failure to repay his debt can bring.