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## The Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa – On the Identity of the Bronze Drum in the Dunhuang Murals\*

### Abstract

The story of Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa (*Laoducha shengdou bian* 勞度叉聖鬥變) involves Minister Sudatta's encounter with the Buddha while seeking a bride for his son. Sudatta's conversion leads to the construction of a monastery, sparking a contest between Buddhist monks and six sectarian teachers, with Śāriputra's victory over Raudrākṣa showcasing Buddhist supremacy. The Dunhuang murals, based on the *Xiangmo bianwen* 降魔變文 (The Demon Conquering Story), are derived from the Buddhist *Xian yu jing* 賢愚經 (Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish) and reflect a complex relationship between scripture, *bianwen* 變文, and the murals. This article explores how these forms differ while maintaining a connection, focusing on the dharma combat scenes and the symbolic use of dharma instruments. The cross-patterned *jin* drum (*jin gu* 金鼓) in the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa is a fascinating element embedded in the broader context of Dunhuang murals, manuscripts, and the religious and cultural symbolism of late Tang dynasty art. The article inquiry into the interpretation of the *jin* drum, its identity, and the significance of the cross pattern involves a detailed examination of archaeological, artistic, and textual evidence.

The analysis of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa contest in Dunhuang murals and manuscripts, such as P.Tib.1293, reveals that the cross pattern on the *jin* drum holds deeper symbolic meaning beyond a ruptured drum skin. Traditionally, the cross pattern was thought to symbolise a 'broken drum skin' or 'wind-broken drum', representing the defeat of Raudrākṣa's followers. However, this interpretation is challenged, suggesting that the pattern may have connections to the cultural and religious significance of bronze drums used by southern ethnic minorities in China. The cross-patterned drum is identified as a bronze drum, similar to the Chongyang 崇陽 bronze drum, and linked to the metal classification of ancient Chinese musical instruments. These drums were sacred objects used in rituals to communicate with deities, particularly among southern Chinese ethnic groups. The drum's depiction in the contest scene reflects the clash between Buddhism and indigenous religious practices, symbolising the transition from animism and shamanism to Buddhist dominance. The broader cultural significance of this transformation highlights how Buddhism absorbed and transformed the religious symbols of local traditions, with the bronze drum serving as a metaphor for this shift. Ultimately, the *jin* drum in these murals represents not a rupture, but a deeper connection to the shamanistic traditions of the southern ethnic minorities and their gradual integration into Buddhist culture during the Tang dynasty.

**Keywords:** bronze drum, Yulin Cave 16, Dunhuang Caves, cross pattern, heterodox beliefs, Tianzhu

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## Introduction

The *Laoducha shengdou bian* 勞度叉聖鬥變 (Contest of Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa) story tells of Minister Sudatta's (Xudaduo zhangzhe 須達多長者) encounter with the Buddha while seeking a bride for his son in the kingdom of Śrāvastī. Sudatta's conversion to Buddhism prompts him to build a monastery, overcoming opposition from the six sectarian teachers. A contest ensues between Buddhist monks and the teachers, with Śāriputra emerging victorious over Raudrākṣa, showcasing Buddhist supremacy with supernatural aid.

The Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa depictions in Dunhuang murals are based on the manuscript known as *Xiangmo bianwen* 降魔變文 (The Demon Conquering Story<sup>1</sup>), which in turn originates from the *Xuda qi jingshe yuanpin* 須達起精舍緣品 (The Chapter on the Cause of Sudatta's Building a Monastery) from the Buddhist text *Xian yu jing* 賢愚經 (Damamūka-nidāna-sūtra Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish), a sūtra transmitted from ancient India and recorded by Chinese monks at the Vimalakirti Assembly in Khotan.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Xiangmo bianwen* 降魔變文 (The Demon Conquering Bianwen, also known as The Demon Conquering Story) is a Dunhuang *bianwen* 變文 text with an unknown author. It primarily tells a Buddhist story and is preserved in various Dunhuang manuscripts, including those catalogued under Stein numbers 5511 and 4398, Pelliot numbers 4524 and 4615, as well as in the Dunhuang Fragments collection. *Bianwen*, often translated as 'transformation texts', are a form of popular narrative literature that emerged during the Tang dynasty (618–907) in China. These texts were originally oral performances and later written down, combining prose and verse to tell various stories, often with religious or didactic themes. They played a significant role in the transmission of Buddhist teachings and folklore. The term *bian* refers to *jingbian* 經變. The term *jingbian* is typically translated as 'transformation of scriptures' or 'scriptural transformations', influenced by the Buddhist monks' practice of chanting and guiding. *Bianwen* evolved by inheriting the literary traditions of the Han (202 BCE–220 CE) and Wei (220–265 CE) dynasties, *zhiguai* 志怪 tales, and miscellaneous *fu* 賦 (prose-poetry) from the Six Dynasties period (220–589 CE). Over time, it developed into a mature literary genre (Wang 1957: 05).

<sup>2</sup> The Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa story describes the process by which the ancient Indian Buddhist devotee Sudatta (known as Anāthapiṇḍada, meaning 'the giver to the destitute') built a monastery, reflecting the spread of Buddhist teachings and the power of faith. The story is summarised as follows: in the ancient Indian city of Śrāvastī, the chancellor Sudatta (Anāthapiṇḍada), a devout admirer of the Buddha Śākyamuni, wished to invite the Buddha to Śrāvastī to give teachings. The Buddha agreed but mentioned that Sudatta needed to build a monastery for him and his disciples. With the help of Śāriputra, Sudatta chose a garden belonging to Prince Jeta (Jetakumāra). To acquire the garden, Sudatta famously covered the entire land with gold coins. Impressed by Sudatta's sincerity, Prince Jeta agreed to contribute to the construction. Once completed, the monastery was named 'Jetavana Anāthapiṇḍada Ārāma' (Jeta's Grove, the Monastery of Anāthapiṇḍada) by the Buddha, in honour of both Prince Jeta and Anāthapiṇḍada's joint merit. Based on *Xian yu jing* (1st century BCE–1st century CE), I summarised the story (*Xian yu jing* 2004: 117).

The relationship between the murals and the *bianwen* is bidirectional, characterised by connection, distinction, inheritance, and innovation, and the murals and the *bianwen* do not strictly adhere to the original narrative constraints of the Buddhist scriptures. In the discussion about this topic,<sup>3</sup> Li and Cai discuss the relationship between three narrative media forms (i.e., scriptures, *bianwen*, and murals) and posit that *Xiangmo bianwen* is derived from the Buddhist scripture *Xuda qi jingshe yuanpin*. The Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa in Dunhuang murals, particularly from the late Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) onward, is based on *Xiangmo bianwen*. If we use a metaphor of ‘source and flow’ to describe their relationship, the Buddhist scriptures are the source, while the *bianwen* and Buddhist murals are the flow. However, this is merely a simple and rough sequence of creation. When delving into the specific details of the *bianwen* and mural contents, the relationship becomes more complex. *Bianwen* and Buddhist murals, as two distinct forms of literary and artistic expression, do not rigidly adhere to the original narrative constraints of the Buddhist scriptures to which they are related. The story of Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa is deeply imbued with religious proselytising intent and primarily serves to propagate the dharma.

Buddhist murals, designed to capture attention through visual imagery, necessarily focus on compositions that can firmly seize viewers’ attention and evoke strong emotions. Consequently, scenes of dharma combat are prominently depicted in the centre of the mural compositions to achieve maximum visual impact. This article focuses on the visual representation of the dharma combat scenes, particularly examining the dharma instruments held by each side: Śāriputra, represented by a *jin* bell (*jin zhong* 金鐘), and Raudrākṣa, represented by the *jin* drum (*jin gu* 金鼓).

In all visual depictions of the Śāriputra Raudrākṣa contest, without exception, there is a portrayal of the fierce struggle between Buddhism and heterodox traditions. In these representations, the *jin* bell symbolises Śāriputra, embodying the majesty and power of Buddhism, while the *jin* drum signifies Raudrākṣa, representing the challenge and opposition of heterodox beliefs.<sup>4</sup> As mentioned by Wu Hong<sup>5</sup>, extant murals in the Dunhuang region, despite their vast scale and numerous figures, all contain five basic images: Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa (positioned on either side), a *jin* bell, a *jin* drum, and the central figure of King Kūṭadanta (as the arbiter of the magical contest). These five images also form the spatial framework for each combat scene in the *Xiangmo* text scroll (which is catalogued as P4524 and is a well-known artwork from the Dunhuang Cave of the Buddhist Scriptures). The outcome of this contest is the defeat of the

<sup>3</sup> Li – Cai 2000: 134–150.

<sup>4</sup> Zhuang 2002: 1.

<sup>5</sup> Wu 2023: 25–48.

heterodox traditions and their subsequent conversion to Buddhism. This symbolises that in the contest of faiths, the Buddhist ritual implements triumph, highlighting the powerful influence of the Buddha's teachings. The defeat of the heterodox traditions becomes an opportunity for the victory of the dharma and the universal salvation of beings.

It is noteworthy that from the outset of the story's narration, the *jin* bell is equated with Buddhist symbolism, while the *jin* drum is associated with heterodox symbolism. Akiyama Terukazu<sup>6</sup> compares the narrative elements of the murals with the positions of the *jin* drum and *jin* bell in Mogao Cave 196, known as the Demon Conquering Cave (Xiang mo ku 降魔窟), within the Mogao Grottoes complex. He suggests that the murals depicting the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa may be based on a story found in the *Xian yu jing*, particularly in the section titled *Xuda qi jingshe yuanpin*. The extant manuscripts and mural data related to this story are as follows:

1. *Xiangmo bianwen* from the Dunhuang Cave of the Buddhist Scriptures has been fragmented into several pieces. Some fragments are currently housed in the UK and France (S.5511, 4398, P.4615, 4524).
  - Dunhuang murals: There are currently 19 murals depicting the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa in the Dunhuang caves. These murals are located in the following Mogao Caves: 6, 9, 25, 53, 55, 72, 85, 98, 108, 146, 196, 335, 342, and 454, as well as in Yulin Caves 16, 19, and 32; Western Thousand Buddha Caves 12; and Five Temples Caves 3.
  - Additionally, a white line drawing draft of the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa was discovered in the Dunhuang Library Cave, catalogued as P.Tib.1293.

Among the aforementioned visual materials, the white line drawing draft, with its clear lines, precise details, ease of reproduction, pure artistic form, and practicality in academic research, has become an important tool for interpreting and studying artistic works.

Regarding the interpretation of the *jin* drum held by the heretical side in the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa, the researcher Zhu Xiaofeng 朱晓峰<sup>7</sup> analyses and explains the drum stand, the drum's structure, and the patterns on the drumhead. However, since the colour of the drum body and drumhead in the white line drawing drafts cannot be determined, the conclusion that the pat-

<sup>6</sup> Akiyama 1960: 23.

<sup>7</sup> Zhu 2017: 85–101. Zhu from the Dunhuang Academy provides a detailed analysis of the scene in the initial white line drawing draft P.Tib.1293 (catalogued as P.Tib.1293 at the French National Library), where the heretics are depicted striking the drum.

terns on the drumhead represent ‘cracks’ is somewhat lacking in evidence. This paper combines the images of the *jin* drum in the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa with archaeological data to attempt to uncover the true identity of the *jin* drum and reanalyse the symbolic meaning of the patterns on the drumhead.

### The interpretation of the cross-patterned *jin* drum

The well-preserved manuscript of the white line drawing draft of the contest between Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa, consists of three glued-together drafts. The second and third drafts clearly depict the cross-patterned *jin* drum, as shown below.<sup>8</sup>

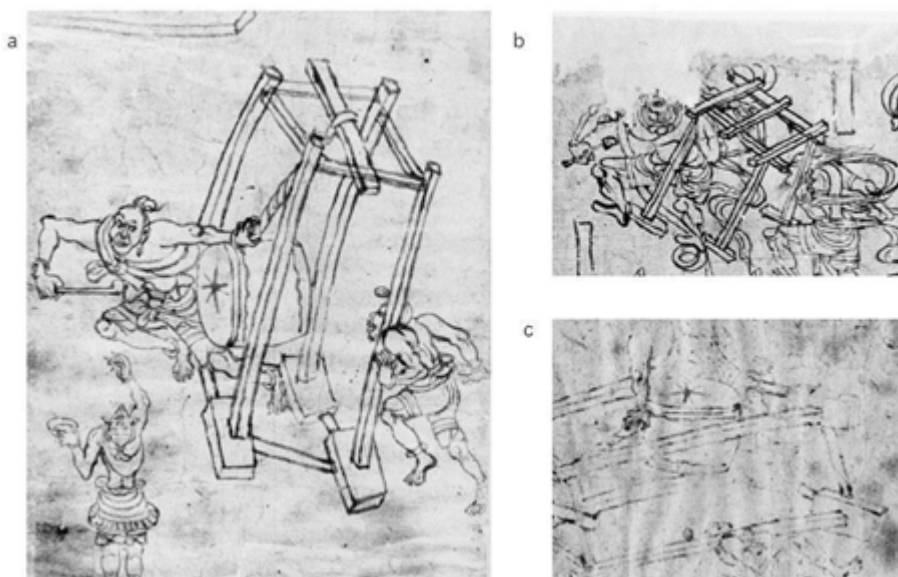


Figure 1.1: Three instances of the cross-patterned *jin* drum in the second draft of P.Tib.1293

This cross-patterned *jin* drum has clear symbolic significance, becoming a striking visual element in the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa contest illustrations. Sha Wutian 沙武田<sup>9</sup> states that P.Tib.1293 originated as an early draft for cave murals during the late Tang dynasty, and he believes that, once utilised in cave murals, it exerted a decisive influence on the paintings of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa contest for over a century. This is the true reason for the stylised development

<sup>8</sup> See material 1.1 in Appendix 1.

<sup>9</sup> Sha 2007: 117.

of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa contest murals that we see in caves today. The earliest appearance of this theme in Dunhuang murals dates to the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534/535), with only one such depiction from the early Tang. The late Tang and Five Dynasties periods saw a peak in the depiction of this theme, with 10 existing murals, seven of which feature the cross-patterned *jin* drum. These are found in Mogao caves 85, 9, 72, 98, 146, 55, and 454.

### The ‘wind-broken drum skin’ interpretation of the cross-patterned *jin* drum

For example, in *Xuda qi jingshe yuanpin*,<sup>10</sup> six contest scenes are described: ‘the battle of wind and trees’ (*feng shu dou* 風樹鬥), ‘the competition at the elephant pool’ (*chixiang zhi zheng* 池象之爭), ‘the vajra striking the precious mountain’ (*jinggang ji baoshan* 金剛擊寶山), ‘the golden-winged bird fighting the poisonous dragon’ (*jinchiniao zhan dulong* 金翅鳥戰毒龍), ‘the lion devouring the cow’ (*shizi dan niu* 獅子啖牛), and ‘the subjugation of the Yellow-Haired Demon by the Heavenly King Vaiśravaṇa’ (*Pishamen xiangfu huangtougui* 毗沙門天王降服黃頭鬼). These descriptions are largely reflected in the murals of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa contest. The drum is mentioned in the titles of various Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa contest murals,<sup>11</sup> with titles such as ‘wind-broken drum skin’ (*feng chui pi po* 風吹皮破) relating to the ‘battle of wind and trees’ scene.

The captions seem to suggest that the drumhead pattern signifies a ruptured drum surface (for example, Mogao Cave 454 contains the following caption: ‘The staff or mallet engraved with the character ‘上’ has not yet reached the surface of the drum. *Shangzi zhangzhui wei zhi mian* 上字杖槌未至面. The cross crack cannot produce sound.]; ‘*Shizi lie bu neng fasheng shi* 十字裂不能發聲時).’ This leads Zhu Xiaofeng to interpret the symbolic meaning of the drumhead pattern directly: the drum’s sound ceases, symbolising the defeat of Raudrākṣa’s followers, with the cross-patterned drumhead indicating a ruptured drum skin in visual art.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *Xian yu jing* 2004:117.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 for details.

<sup>12</sup> Zhu 2017: 87.



### The case of the ‘wind-broken drum skin’

To refute the view that the cross-patterned drum skin represents a wind-broken drum, I use the original scroll P.4524<sup>13</sup> of the *Xiangmobianwen* as an example, along with collected images of various Raudrākṣa contest murals from different caves.

Even the ‘wind-tree contest’ is missing in the existing manuscript. However, the cross-patterned *jin* drum representing Raudrākṣa’s side is meticulously depicted four times within.<sup>14</sup>

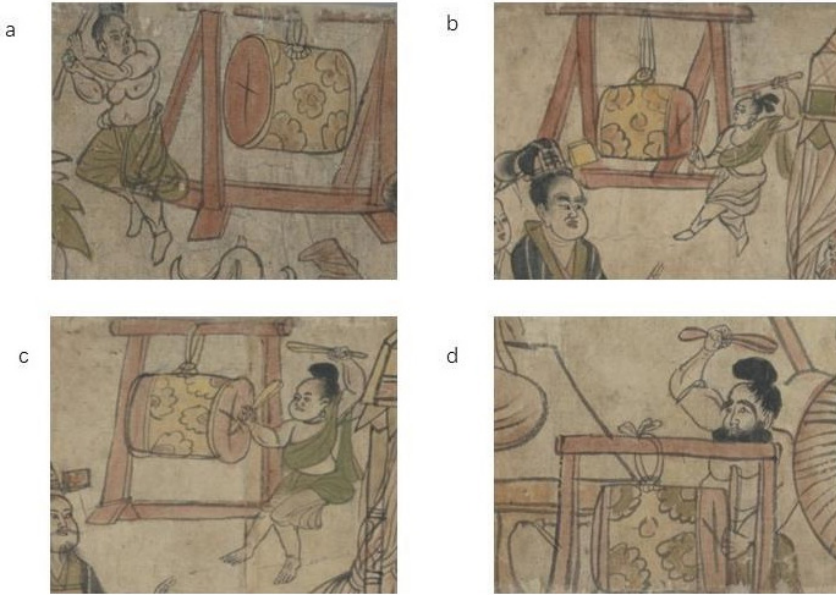


Figure 1.2: The *jin* drum depicted in scroll P.4524<sup>15</sup>

Even without the ‘wind-tree contest’ scene, the cross pattern on the drum-head is still clearly visible.

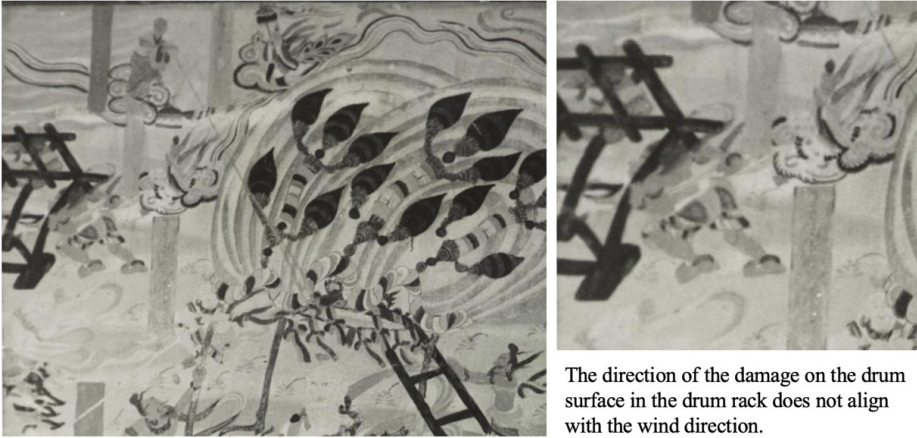
In the Raudrākṣa contest mural of Mogao Cave 146, the cross-patterned *jin* drum is clearly depicted, as shown in the picture.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Currently held in the Bibliothèque National de France: Pelliot Chinois 4524. The extant P.4524 is composed of 12 sheets of paper joined together. The scroll is 27.5 cm in height and has a total length of 571.3 cm. Due to damage at the beginning and end sections, the length of 571.3 cm does not represent the original length of the scroll.

<sup>14</sup> The extant P.4524 is composed of 12 sheets of paper joined together. The scroll is 27.5 cm in height and has a total length of 571.3 cm. Due to damage at the beginning and end sections, the length of 571.3 cm does not represent the original length of the scroll.

<sup>15</sup> See material 1.2 in Appendix 1.

<sup>16</sup> See material 1.3 in Appendix 1.



The direction of the wind.

Figure 1.3: Detail from Mogao Cave 146 mural

The material 1.3 appears distorted, but it is actually an artistic interpretation by the painter depicting a battle scene amidst strong winds. From the layout of the Raudrākṣa contest in Mogao Cave 146, with Śāriputra on the left and Raudrākṣa on the right, the direction in which the drum stand is blown aligns with the depicted wind direction. However, the direction of the cross pattern on the drumhead is opposite to the direction the drum stand falls. If the cross pattern was meant to show a ‘wind-broken drum skin,’ it should match the orientation of the *jin* drum depicted in the Raudrākṣa contest mural of Mogao Cave 9.<sup>17</sup>

Based on this, however, the captions of several Raudrākṣa contest murals mention ‘broken drum skin’ or ‘wind-broken drum skin’, leading Zhu Xiaofeng to conclude that the cross pattern indicates a ruptured drum skin.<sup>18</sup> I believe this interpretation is incorrect. The symbolic meaning of the cross-patterned *jin* drum may have other possibilities, necessitating a reanalysis of the drumhead pattern.

Therefore, we can explain the caption concerning the external side striking the drum in the Raudrākṣa contest mural of Mogao Cave 454, which states: ‘The cross pattern cannot make a sound’. This does not mean that the drum was rendered silent by the rupture of the drumhead during the contest. Instead, it means that the cross pattern, already present on the *jin* drum, prevented it from producing sound. However, it is unlikely that Raudrākṣa’s followers would use a perpetually broken drum for such a critical contest involving a fight for survival. Hence, we must explore the real identity of the cross-patterned drum, a question that scholars have not previously focused on.

<sup>17</sup> See material 1.4 in Appendix 1.

<sup>18</sup> Zhu 2017: 87.



### Analysis of the identity of the *jin* drum, using Yulin Cave 16 as an example

This section primarily investigates the Raudrākṣa contest mural in Yulin Cave 16, combining archaeological data to analyse and confirm the real identity of the drum, and based on this conclusion, to reanalyse the drumhead pattern.

The styles of illustrations vary significantly across different dynasties due to differences in artistic skills and aesthetic trends. Among the images from the Tang to the Western Xia (1038–1227) periods, the depictions of the *jin* bell and *jin* drum in Yulin Cave 16 are the clearest and most distinctive.<sup>19</sup>

Here, we need to discuss the ancient Chinese eight-tone classification system (*bayin fenlei fa* 八音分類法). The eight tones refer to the ancient Chinese classification of musical instruments. According to the *Zhouli* 周禮 (Rites of Zhou) section *Chun guan* 春官 (Spring Officials), musical instruments were categorised into eight types: metal, stone, clay, leather, silk, wood, gourd, and bamboo, known as the eight tones, one of the earliest musical instrument classification systems.

以八音：金、石、土、革、絲、木、匏、竹。<sup>20</sup>

The material of instruments in the eight-tones are: metal, stone, earth, leather, silk, wood, gourd, and bamboo.

As for the metal category instruments, the *Tongdian* 通典, compiled in the 17th year of Emperor Dezong's reign in the Tang dynasty (801), records:

金一，钟棧、钟鑄、鐃于、铙、鐃、铎、方响、铜钹、铜鼓。

Metal instruments include bell stands, bells, cymbals, gongs, clappers, bells, square chime, bronze cymbals, and bronze drums.<sup>21</sup>

Here is one example of an ancient Chinese 'metal' drum instruments, the Chongyang bronze drum Shangdai Chongyang Tonggu 商代崇陽銅鼓。<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See material 2.1 and 2.2 in Appendix 1.

<sup>20</sup> *Zhouli* 2022:479.

<sup>21</sup> *Tongdian* 2016: 3622.

<sup>22</sup> The Shang dynasty (1600–1046 BCE) bronze drum unearthed in Chongyang is the only surviving bronze drum with beast face patterns from the Shang dynasty in China. It has been referred to in related reports as the 'Shang dynasty Chongyang bronze drum'. The bronze drum consists of three parts: the drum crown, drum body, and drum base, and it mimics the form of a wooden drum with a leather surface. The bronze drum has an overall height of 75.5 cm and weighs 42.5 kg. It is one of the earliest bronze drums discovered in China, dating back to the late Shang dynasty, about three thousand years ago.



Chongyang Bronze Drum



i. Partial View of Chongyang Bronze Drum



ii. Partial View of the *jin* drum in Cave of Yulin Caves

Figure 2.1: Comparison of patterns between the Chongyang bronze drum and the *jin* drum<sup>23</sup>

The figure shows the Chongyang bronze drum and its drum body pattern compared to the drum body pattern depicted in the Raudrākṣa contest mural of Yulin Cave 16. It is evident that the bronze drum's body has concentric circle patterns, one of the most common patterns on bronze drums. This pattern is fully reproduced on the drum body of the Raudrākṣa contest drum in Yulin Cave 16. Combining the textual references to 'metal' instruments (i.e., bronze drums) and visual materials, we can conclude that the *jin* drum in the story is identified as a bronze drum.

<sup>23</sup> See material 2.1 in Appendix 1.

### Reanalysis of the ‘cross pattern’ on the *jin* drum head

From the P.Tib.1293, the *jin* drum head shows two main patterns: one is a cross pattern composed of a central point and seven lines, and the other is the cross pattern.

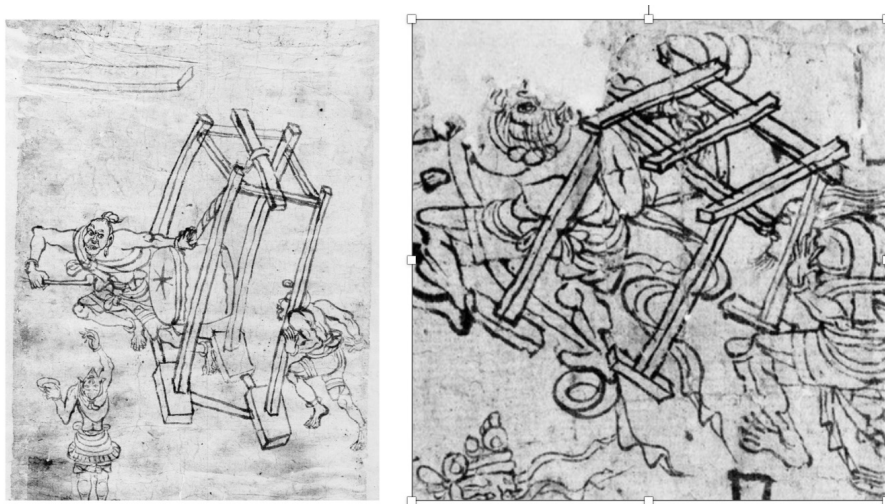


Figure 2.2: White sketch draft P.tib.1293<sup>24</sup>

The preservation of this pattern does not prove the presence of a ‘broken drum skin,’ but rather it has a deeper meaning. To accurately interpret the symbolic significance of the drumhead pattern on the *jin* drum, it is necessary to delve into the representation of the drumhead pattern in the manuscript. This process will help reveal the unique symbolic meaning of the *jin* drum in late Tang culture, providing deeper insights into the religious art and thought of that period.

Based on the drumhead pattern in the line drawing manuscript shown above and the earlier conclusion that the *jin* drum is a bronze drum, the only plausible explanation for the drumhead pattern is the cross pattern. The cross pattern is one of the earliest and most fundamental patterns on bronze drums, and it serves as a hallmark for identifying the types of decorative patterns on bronze drums.<sup>25</sup> In the Zuojiang Huashan Rock Paintings<sup>26</sup> in Guangxi, China, a prominent fea-

<sup>24</sup> See material 2.2 in Appendix 1.

<sup>25</sup> Li 2010: 35.

<sup>26</sup> Lu 2016: 71. The Zuojiang Huashan Rock Paintings Huashan yan hua hua shan yan 花山岩畫 are located in Yaoda Village, Tuolong Township, Ningming County, Chongzuo City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on the east bank of the Ming River. The paintings are 44 m high and 170 m wide. Ancient people mixed red hematite powder with animal fat, and using grass or bird feathers, they directly painted these marvellous murals on the natural cliff face.

ture is the numerous bronze drum images, predominantly using abstract patterns to depict the central cross pattern on the drumhead (as shown in Figure 2.3).

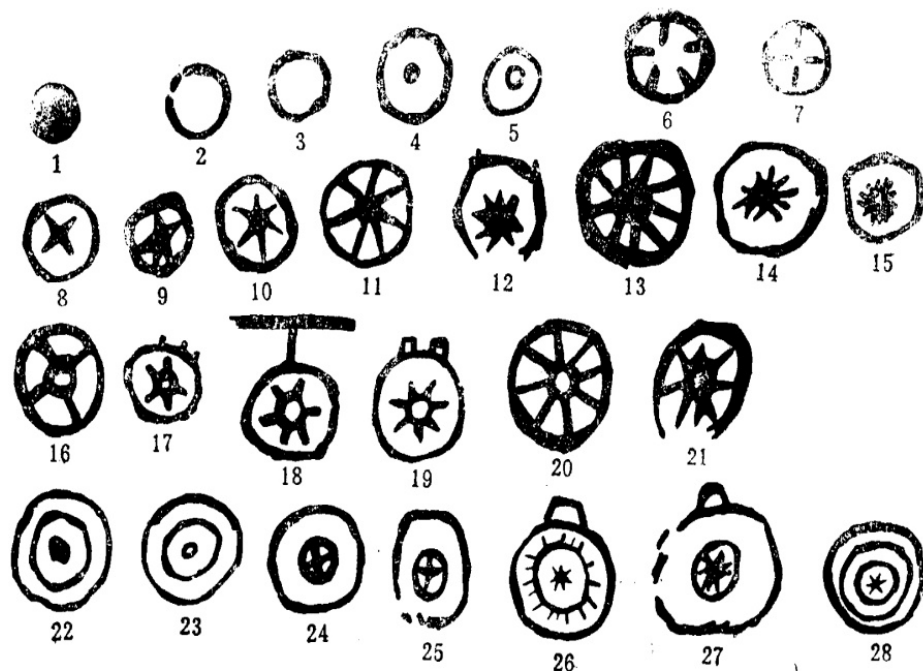


Figure 2.3: Bronze drum images in the Zuojiang Huashan Rock Art Landscape, Guangxi, China<sup>27</sup>

As shown in Figure 2.3, despite being creations of ancient southern minority ethnic groups from the Warring States period (475 BC–221 BC) to the Eastern Han dynasty (475 BC–220 CE), the rock paintings of Zuojiang bear both temporal and spatial disparities with Dunhuang patterns. However, there is a correlation between the two. The abstract sketches and line drawings by early artists from the Zuojiang region in Guangxi Province bear striking resemblance to the drum head patterns depicted in manuscript P.Tib.1293.

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The Huashan rock paintings include over 1,800 images, mainly depicting humans, animals, and artefacts, with humans being the primary subject. Human figures show only the head, neck, torso, and limbs, without facial features or other details. Animal images primarily depict dogs, all shown in profile in a forward-running stance. The artefacts mainly include knives, swords, bronze drums, and ox-horn bells. A typical composition features a tall, robust central figure armed with a knife and sword, with a dog at his feet, a bronze drum by his side, and surrounded by many smaller side-view human figures. These scenes likely record solemn yet joyful ritual ceremonies, remnants of shamanistic culture.

<sup>27</sup> See material 2.3 in Appendix 1.

### What is a bronze drum?

Given our detailed exploration of the *jin* drum element depicted in the flourishing murals of the mid-to-late Tang dynasty, it is essential to investigate the contemporary understanding of bronze drums, specifically how people of the medieval period (rather than modern scholars) perceived the structure, nature, and use of bronze drums.

For example, the *Tongdian* records:

銅鼓鑄銅為之，虛其一面，覆而擊其上。南夷、扶南、天竺類皆如此。  
Bronze drums are made of cast bronze, hollow on one side, struck from above.  
Such are those used by the southern barbarians, Funan, and Tianzhu [India], as well.<sup>28</sup>

By the Song dynasty (960–1279), Chen Yang's 陳暘 (1040–1110) *Yue shu* 樂書 (Book of Music) states:

銅鼓，唐樂圖所傳，天竺部用之。  
Bronze drums, as depicted in Tang musical illustrations, are used in the region of Tianzhu [India].<sup>29</sup>

According to the *Yinyue zhi* 音樂志 (Music Records), the *Sui shu* 隋書 (Book of Sui) indicates that the section on Tianzhu 天竺 (India) was incorporated into the festive music (*yan yue* 宴樂) categories in the Sui and Tang dynasties. The passage describes an event that took place during the Sixteen Kingdoms period when Zhang Chonghua 張重華 (327–353 CE), ruler of the Former Liang state, governed Liangzhou. It recounts envoys from India (referred to as Tianzhu) visiting his court to offer male performers as tribute.<sup>30</sup>

樂器有鳳首箏篪、琵琶、五弦、笛、銅鼓、毛員鼓、都曇鼓、銅拔、貝等九種。<sup>31</sup>

The musical instruments include the phoenix-headed *konghou*, *pipa*, five-string lute, flute, bronze drum, *mao yuan* drum, *dutan* drum, bronze cymbals, shells, and nine other types.

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<sup>28</sup> *Tongdian* 2016: 3622.

<sup>29</sup> Chen Yang 陳暘 (1040–1110), *Yue shu* 樂書 (*Book of Music*), Volume 130. Guangxu Second Year Edition, Volume 16, p. 25. *Yue Shu* was edited by Chen Yang (courtesy name Jinzhi 晉之), a famous musician and scholar of the Northern Song dynasty. The book was completed around the year 1100. Content structure: *Yue shu* consists of 150 volumes, systematically recording ancient Chinese music theory, instruments, musical notation, music education, and ritual music systems. It details the methods of making various instruments and performance techniques, and it includes numerous musical scores and examples.

<sup>30</sup> *Sui shu* 2018: 379.

<sup>31</sup> *Sui shu* 2018: 379.

From the above, we know that bronze drums were already in use in Indian music during the Sui and Tang periods (581–907). The story of the Raudrākṣa contest originates from the *Xian yu jing*. Many researchers<sup>32</sup> believe that its content and customs reflect Indian traditions. Thus, it can be concluded that during the Sui and Tang periods, bronze drums were recognised as Indian musical instruments.

### Cultural significance of the bronze drum as the jin drum

Tianzhu is an ancient Chinese term referring to India and, in a broader sense, the entire South Asian subcontinent. The religious conflicts in late-Tang China were particularly complex, necessitating a focus on the primitive religions of the southern ethnic minorities. It is important to clarify that what Western scholars refer to as ‘animism’ is commonly called ‘shamanism’ by Chinese scholars. The bronze drum with cross patterns symbolises the ‘shamanism’ of these southern minorities, prevalent in East and South Asia. It is a circular, waist-curved, four-eared, hollow instrument with a central cross pattern on its drumhead, often adorned with decorations of frogs, cattle, horses, and other motifs. This bronze drum has a history of over 2,000 years since its inception.



Figure 3.1: Bronze drum from the south of China<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Li – Cai 2000: 7–9.

<sup>33</sup> See material 3.1 in Appendix 1.



As the most representative artefact of the southern Chinese minorities, the bronze drum was widely used in southern China and Southeast Asia during its peak. Numerous ethnic groups utilised bronze drums, indicating its extensive cultural significance. Although I previously mentioned the Chongyang bronze drum from Hubei Province, it was merely to illustrate that all *jin* category drums in the eight tones classification system are collectively known as bronze drums. The Chongyang bronze drum, lacking cross patterns and similar in form to a *jian* drum (*jian gu* 建鼓)<sup>34</sup> found in central China, is a representative of Shang dynasty bronze ritual music, not a cultural product of the southern minorities of the South Asian subcontinent. Thus, it is not relevant to the discussion of the cultural significance of the bronze drum from Tianzhu.

The bronze drum has historically been a significant ceremonial, ritual, and sacred instrument for the southern ethnic minorities. Around the mid-Spring and Autumn period (770–476 BCE), a southern ethnic group in the primitive clan era was inspired by the sound produced by practical objects and cast the first bronze drum.<sup>35</sup> Since its creation, the bronze drum has played a crucial role in sacrificial ceremonies. Although no written records survive from that time period, archaeological artefacts vividly reconstruct the grand sacrificial ceremonies involving bronze drums.

The well-known sacrificial drum treasure vessel was unearthed from Tomb No. 20 at Shizhaishan, Jinning, Yunnan Province, in 1956. This artifact remains an important physical evidence for the study of ancient Chinese sacrificial culture. Although scholars have various interpretations of the religious significance of the sculpted contents on the vessel lid, it is undeniable that bronze drums have always been regarded as sacred instruments for communicating with deities and were used in various significant sacrificial activities of the southern ethnic minorities.

In the mural of Yulin Cave 16, the *jin* bell and *jin* drum form a striking contrast, with a notable deliberate omission of the *jin* drum, symbolising an emphasis on Buddhist themes while intentionally avoiding elements related to external religions. Same as the Buddhist-themed paintings found in southern China, specifically in the minority areas of Yunnan Province, the appearance of the bronze drum represents the subjugation of external religions to Buddhism. An example is the scene from the *Nanzhao tu zhuan* 南詔圖傳 (Restoration

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<sup>34</sup> The *jian* drum (*jian gu* 建鼓) was popular in vast areas inhabited by the Han Chinese and was used in court throughout various dynasties. The drum body is long and round, with a slightly thicker middle and narrower ends, covered with skins on both ends. It is struck on one end with two sticks, producing a loud sound that carries far. Many large drums found today originated from the *jian* drum.

<sup>35</sup> CABDRA 1988: 05.

of Nanzhao in the Second Year Scroll),<sup>36</sup> painted during the second year of the reign of Nanzhao King Shun Huazhen (899 AD), depicting the transformation of a bronze drum into a Buddha statue.<sup>37</sup>

The Nanzhao Kingdom (738–902 AD) was an ancient minority regime in southern China, in present-day Yunnan Province, where the earliest known bronze drums were discovered. The caption in the picture reads ‘transforming a drum’, but it is evident that it is actually a bronze drum, symbolising the process of primitive religions gradually declining with the spread of Buddhism.

Additionally, the ancient Yunnan region has another painting from the Dali Kingdom period (937–1253), the *Fansen guanshiyin tu* 梵僧觀世音圖 (The Painting of Brahmin Monk Avalokiteśvara).<sup>38</sup> In this painting, a bronze drum is placed at the feet of the Brahmin Monk Avalokiteśvara (as shown in Figure 3.2). Structurally, the Brahmin Monk Avalokiteśvara occupies the central area of the entire painting, serving as the main subject.

In the above image, the bronze drum has become a tribute and is placed sideways, signifying a lack of respect. Southern ethnic minorities typically placed the bronze drum upright to show reverence. However, in this painting, the bronze drum is merely an offering placed sideways in the tribute area to the Buddha, symbolising the subjugation of the original religious bronze drum to Buddhism, reflecting a logical relationship in religious rituals.

In exploring ‘external religions’, Yin Guangming<sup>39</sup> studied the process of the Sinicisation of the ‘Raudrākṣa’s contest’ theme from India to China, noting that this theme evolved from the Indian ‘Sudatta Building a Monastery Illustration’ to the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa theme. Its emergence and development were related to the historical Buddhist–Daoist conflicts in China. In this article, the

<sup>36</sup> The *Nanzhao tu zhuan* 南詔圖傳, also known as the *Restoration of Nanzhao in the Second Year Scroll* and the *National History Scroll of Nanzhao’s Restoration*, measures 5.73 m in length and 0.3 m in width. It was organised and painted by Nanzhao officials Ren Shuang 任爽, Zhang Shunhe 張順和, and Wang Fengzong 王風宗 in the second year of the Nanzhao Restoration (899 CE). Originally housed in the Nanzhao royal court, the scroll was later kept in the Qing imperial palace. In 1900, during the occupation of Beijing by the Eight-Nation Alliance, it was taken abroad and is now held in the Yurinkan Museum in Kyoto, Japan. It consists of painting scrolls and textual scrolls, with the text scrolls containing over 2,500 characters explaining and supplementing the paintings. The title states that the theme is based on Buddhist stories in *The Origin of Weishan* (Wei Shan Zhi Yuan 維山之源), *The Iron Pillar* (Tie Zhu 鐵柱), *Records of Xi’er River* (Xi Er He Zhi 西爾河志), and *The Zhang Family’s History of the State* (Zhang Jia Guo Zhi 張家國志).

<sup>37</sup> See material 3.2 in Appendix 1.

<sup>38</sup> Collection of the National Palace Museum, Taiwan. Painted by Zhang Shengwen 張聖文, a court artist of the Dali Kingdom, in the fifth year of Shengde (1180 AD). The scroll is on paper, 1635.5 cm long and 30.4 cm wide, and features 134 individual and composite images.

<sup>39</sup> Yin 2001: 4–13, 185.



Figure 3.2: *Fansen guangshiyin tu* 梵僧觀世音圖 (The Painting of Brahmin Monk Avalokiteśvara)<sup>40</sup>

identification of the *jin* drum as a bronze drum reveals not a Buddhist–Daoist conflict but a conflict between Buddhism and the indigenous, shamanistic religion of India (Tianzhu), deeply exploring the confrontation and competition between the two faiths.

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<sup>40</sup> See material 3.3 in Appendix 1.

## Conclusions

Returning to the ancient Indian sūtra *Xian yu jing*'s chapter titled *Xuda qi jing-she yuanpin*, the source of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa story, the presence of the drum element carries a strong cultural implication that has often been overlooked by past scholars. Through an in-depth study of the drum's musical imagery, I have identified the *jin* drum as a bronze drum. This judgment provides a more reasonable explanation for the previously misunderstood cross pattern and reveals that the faith represented by Raudrākṣa is essentially not Daoism but shamanism. This new discovery not only broadens our understanding of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa theme but also offers new directions and possibilities for related research.

The identification of the bronze drum enables us to re-examine the symbolic meaning of the cross pattern in the painting. The cross pattern is no longer a mere decoration or misunderstood symbol but holds deep religious and cultural significance. This discovery prompts us to reconsider Raudrākṣa and his belief system, separating it from the Daoist category and placing it within shamanistic belief system. This classification holds significant academic importance and provides a new perspective on understanding the diversity of ancient Chinese religious beliefs.

The religious clash between Buddhism and external religions in the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa theme is not only a cultural phenomenon but also a historical record. The identification of the *jin* drum offers a new angle to understand this historical and cultural phenomenon and provides rich material and new directions for future research.

In summary, by confirming the identity of the *jin* drum as a bronze drum, we can more reasonably interpret the meaning of the cross pattern and clearly understand the faith culture represented by Raudrākṣa. This identification also provides new possibilities for studying the thematic significance of the Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa. The depiction and symbolic meaning of the *jin* bell and *jin* drum in the paintings illustrate the collision, conflict, and eventual submission of two religious beliefs—Buddhism and external religions—enriching our understanding of religious history and culture.

## Appendix 1

## Sources of Materials and Illustrations

| Material No. | Description  | Source  |
|--------------|--|---|
| 1.1          | Three instances of the cross-patterned <i>jin</i> drum in the second draft of P.Tib.1293 | Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). <i>Pelliot tibétain 1293</i> . Accessed November 21, 2024. <a href="https://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc125169h">https://archivesetmanuscripts.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc125169h</a><br>Published with permission.  |
| 1.2          | The <i>jin</i> drum depicted in Scroll P.4524  | International Dunhuang Project. <i>La Bibliothèque nationale de France: Pelliot chinois 4524</i> . Accessed November 17, 2024. <a href="http://idp.nlc.cn/database/institute.a4d?id=23">http://idp.nlc.cn/database/institute.a4d?id=23</a> .<br>In the public domain, published based on permission.  |
| 1.3          | Detail from Mogao Cave 146 mural   | International Dunhuang Project. Photograph of a wall painting in Dunhuang Mogao Cave 146 taken by Raghu Vira in 1955. Accessed November 21, 2024. <a href="https://idp.bl.uk/collection/22A87518005248A1972DDE5E2F547AC9/?return=%2Fcollection%2F%3Fterm_any%25B%25D%3Dmc%253AMogao%252BCave%252B146">https://idp.bl.uk/collection/22A87518005248A1972DDE5E2F547AC9/?return=%2Fcollection%2F%3Fterm_any%25B%25D%3Dmc%253AMogao%252BCave%252B146</a><br>Published with permission. |
| 1.4          | Mogao Cave 9's <i>jin</i> drum depiction   | Gao Dexiang 高德祥 – Chen Xuejing 陈雪静 2022. <i>Dunhuang Yuewu Dadian 敦煌樂舞大典</i> Dunhuang Music and Dance Anthology, Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2022(09): 353.  |

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|-----|---|---|
| 2.1 | Comparison of patterns between the Chongyang bronze drum and the Yulin <i>jin</i> Drum  | This figure was created by the author. The image of the Chongyang Bronze Drum is sourced from the Hubei Museum ('Photo of Chongyang Tonggu,' accessed November 21, 2024, <a href="https://www.hbkgj.com/zgzb/p/6916.html">https://www.hbkgj.com/zgzb/p/6916.html</a> ). Additionally, the image of Yulin Cave 16 is sourced from the Dunhuang Academy ('Photograph of a Wall Painting, Yulin Cave 16,' accessed November 21, 2024, <a href="https://www.dha.ac.cn/info/1426/3670.htm">https://www.dha.ac.cn/info/1426/3670.htm</a> ). Both images are included in the <i>Music and Dance Anthology</i> (see 2.1 and 2.2).<br>Published with permission. |
| 2.2 | White sketch draft P.tib.1293.  | Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF). <i>Pelliot tibétain 1293</i> . Accessed November 21, 2024. <a href="https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc125169h">https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc125169h</a><br>Published with permission.  |
| 2.3 | Bronze drum images in the Zuojiang Huashan Rock Art Landscape, Guangxi, China   | CABDRA Chinese Ancient Bronze Drum Research Association (eds.) 中国古代銅鼓協會1988. <i>Zhongguo Gudai Tonggu</i> 中国古代銅鼓 [ <i>Ancient Chinese bronze drums</i> ]. Beijing: Cultural Relics Publishing House, 129.<br>Published with permission.   |
| 3.1 | Bronze drum from the south of China   | Photo courtesy of Guangxi Museum of Nationalities 'Cold Water Rushing Riding Water Bird Decoration Deformed Feather Man Pattern bronze drum'.<br>Published with permission.   |
| 3.2 | <i>Nanzhao tu zhuan</i> , with the caption 'transforming a drum into a holy image' ( <i>Yu da jingu huazuo yi laoren cheng yunjie zhu shengxiang</i> 于打金鼓化作一老人稱云解铸聖像) | Wang Ling 王玲 2017. 'The Symbolism and Reference Value of Musical Imagery in the Nanzhao Tuzhuan.' Beijing: <i>Renmin yinyue</i> 人民音樂 2017.06: 59.   |



|                   |   |   |
|-------------------|---|---|
| 3.3<br>(Fig. 3.2) | <i>Fansen guangshiyin tu</i> 梵僧觀世音圖 (The painting of Brahmin Monk Avalokiteśvara) | National Palace Museum, Taipei. <i>Open Data Area: K2A001003N000000000PAJ</i> . Accessed November 17, 2024. <a href="https://theme.npm.edu.tw/opendata/DigitImageSets.aspx?sNo=04027961">https://theme.npm.edu.tw/opendata/DigitImageSets.aspx?sNo=04027961</a> . Public domain, published with permission. |
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## Appendix 2

The following table is compiled based on the inscriptions related to wind and drums found in the murals of various caves depicting Śāriputra and Raudrākṣa.<sup>41</sup>

| Cave           | Inscription   |
|----------------|---|
| Mogao Cave 85  | 地神湧出助□吹外道時 (Earth deity emerges to assist □ when blowing against the heretic)   |
| Mogao Cave 72  | 外道欲擊論皴風吹皮破時 (Heretic about to strike the drum; wind blows; drum skin breaks)  |
| Mogao Cave 98  | 地神湧出助風吹外道時 (Earth deity emerges to assist when wind blows against the heretic)  |
| Mogao Cave 146 | 外道欲擊論鼓皮破風吹倒時 (Heretic about to strike the drum; drum skin breaks; wind blows; topples)  |
| Mogao Cave 55  | 外道欲擊□□風吹倒時 (Heretic about to strike □□; wind blows; topples)  |
| Mogao Cave 454 | 外道得勝聲金鼓而點上字杖槌未至面十字裂不能發聲時 (Heretic wins, strikes <i>jin</i> drum; inscribed the “上” characters, but before the staff strikes, the cross is split and no sound is produced) |

<sup>41</sup> Compiled by the author based on data from the database of the Dunhuang Academy of China. □ stands for undiscernible characters.

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