BODILY TRANSFER AND SACRIFICIAL GESTURES:

RETHINKING THE HUNGRY TIGRESS JATAKA

IN MOGAO CAVE 254

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

Department of Art and Art History

The University of Utah

August 2014

The University of Utah Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

The Caves of Mogao, located just outside of the city of Dunhuang, have received much scholarly attention because they have preserved one thousand years of medieval Chinese visual culture from the fourth to fourteenth centuries. Right on the Silk Road, the Mogao site comprises nearly five hundred caves containing different varieties of Buddhist art. In particular, a number of scholars have focused their attention on Cave 254, dated around 475-490 CE. On the south wall of the cave there is a mural of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka, an Indian tale of one of the Buddha's previous lives before his enlightenment and entry into nirvana as the historical Buddha Shakyamuni sometime in the fifth-century BCE. The popularity of these narratives have prompted scholars such as Stanley Abe, Julia Murray, and Hsio-Yen Shih to offer visual analyses and perspectives on the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in terms of its purpose and function within Cave 254. The findings of previous scholars provide a launching pad for my own ideas and for what I will argue is an understudied aspect of the mural and the cave. As a result of personal experience with Cave 254, Michael Baxandall's theory of the "Period Eye" has emerged as a useful theoretical framework to interpret the mural, cave, and site in more detail. That is, we can try to reconstruct the viewing practices of the past through a close visual and contextual analysis of 1) gesture, 2) architecture, and 3) religious context.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First off, I would like to thank and give my appreciation to the chair of my committee, Winston Kyan. He has been an amazing mentor and has helped me grow as an academic. I have learned so much from him. Thank you for encouraging my research and my bizarre ideas on Chinese Buddhist culture. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Wesley Sasaki-Uemura and the lovely Elizabeth Peterson. Thank you for encouraging me to follow my academic dreams.

Secondly, I would like to thank my parents. My father, William K. Martin, has always been adamant about education and for that I am grateful. Thank you so much for all your love and support. I love you so much, Pappi. I could not have done this without you. I would like to thank my small, but beautiful mother, Shelly Martin Klomp. Thank you for your unconditional love and support and making me laugh through my darkest moments. I love you mom! I would like to thank my colleagues, Matthew Ballou, Lauren DeHerrera, and Patrick Maguire, for their encouragement and constant feedback. You guys mean the world to me. I would like to thank all my friends, family, and siblings. I could not have made it through without your love and strong everlasting support. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

The Mogao Caves, located just outside of the city of Dunhuang, have received much scholarly attention through the preservation of one thousand years of medieval Chinese visual culture from the fifth to fourteenth centuries,[1] and because of the discovery of the library cave in 1900, which yielded thousands of manuscripts and paintings.[2] Their dispersal to Western countries like France and Britain have created even more interest in this site and its materials. The Mogao Caves, which translates into English as the "Peerless Caves," is a key example of Buddhism making its way into Chinese society as well as the converging of different cultures and their influences on cave art. Right on the Silk Road, the Mogao site comprises nearly five hundred caves containing different varieties of Buddhist art. In particular, a number of scholars have focused their attention on Cave 254 dated around 475-490 CE.[3]

Among the numerous caves at the Mogao site, Cave 254 is among the most discussed by scholars. It was constructed during the Northern Wei Dynasty (439-534 CE). Walking into the cave, the visitor encounters a square room with a square central pillar. The first thing that one notices is the Buddha statue in a niche on the face of the central pillar facing the entrance. The figure sits in lotus position staring ahead. The niche is

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[1] The earliest record of activity at the Mogao Cliff is attributed to two monks, Yuezun and Faliang in 366 CE.

[2] The earliest decorated caves date to the Northern Liang (419-440), which are Caves 268, 272, and 275 CE dated to 421-433 CE.
See Roderick Whitfield, *Cave Temples of Mogao* (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000), 12-13.
The latest dated cave is Cave 3 dated sometime before 1357 CE. See Whitfield (2000), 29.

[3] This would fall under the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535 CE).

decorated with designs such as fire and white dots linked together to represent pearls. On the surrounding walls, many small Buddhas in niches are painted on the walls, and there are numerous murals depicting different moral stories.

Within this diverse iconography, on the south wall of the cave, is the jataka tale of "A Prince or an Ascetic Gives His Body to a Starving Tigress" (Skt. Vyaghri-jataka).[4] It is an Indian tale of one of the Buddha's previous lives before his enlightenment and entry into nirvana as the historical Buddha Shakyamuni sometime in the fifth century BCE. The color palette consists of shades of azurite blue and malachite green, expensive colors that made this cave particularly luxurious. The figures are gray with a darker gray outline, reflecting the oxidization of the original iron based pigments over time: the figures were once a flesh color. There is no doubt that Cave 254 and its murals are treasures of world art, but the question of why art historians are fascinated by this particular image remains. For example, this mural has prompted scholars such as Stanley Abe, Julia Murray, and Hsio-Yen Shih to offer visual analyses and perspectives on the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in terms of its purpose and function within Cave 254. For instance, Abe talks about the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural within the ritual context of the cave, and both Murray and Shih historicize the importance of jatakas in Buddhist culture during the Northern Wei period (386-535 CE).[5] The historiography of the mural and the cave is important,

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[4] Reiko Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 279-80. In this paper, I use the following abbreviations to indicate foreign terms: "Skt." for Sanskrit and "Ch." for Chinese.

[5] Stanley K. Abe, "Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple," *Ars Orientalis* Vol. 20, 1990.
Julia K. Murray, "Buddhism in Early Narrative Illustration in China," *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 48, 1995.

and I review the arguments of these scholars in further detail below. However, the findings of previous scholars provide a launching pad for my own ideas and for what I will argue is an understudied aspect of the mural and the cave. That is, we can try to reconstruct the viewing practices of the past through a close visual and contextual analysis of 1) gesture, 2) architecture, and 3) religious context.

Comparing the textual account with the image, the visual portrayal of the story is in disarray in its depiction. If one did not know the story before, it would be difficult to understand it. There are many scenes that are fused into one composition. The mural is read from right to left: at first, in the top right corner, the prince is kneeling while raising his left hand, which leads to the second depiction of him diving to his death. At the bottom right corner, his body is sprawled out while the cubs and the tigress eat his body. The story continues to the bottom left corner where the prince's brothers collect his bones while his mother stands posed in sorrow and despair. Miraculously, the prince's body is restored so that his parents are able to see him for the last time. Finally, at the top left, the scene ends with *apsarases* floating around a pagoda that holds the prince's bones.[6] To begin with one comparison, this pictorial representation is different from the eleventh century CE Sanskrit collection of verse jatakas, the *Bodhisattvavadanakalpalata* composed by Ksemendra, where the Buddha releases two criminals that have been sentenced to execution. In this textual version, the Buddha explains to his disciples that in a previous life, he was a prince that saved the criminals, who were cubs and their mother, a hungry tigress. Because he was kindhearted to all living beings, he prevented the tigress

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Hsio Yen Shih, "Readings and Re-Readings of Narrative in Dunhuang Murals," *Artibus Asiae*. Vol. 53, 1993.

[6] An *Apsara* (Skt.) of *Feitian* 飞天 (Ch.) is a female celestial being that is frequently depicted in Buddhist art of this period.

from eating her own cubs by surrendering his body to her.[7] Although the textual version is several centuries later than the mural in the cave, it still highlights the differences between text and image. For example, the image of the stupa seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural is not mentioned in any texts of the jataka.

For the past year, I have focused my research on the Mogao Caves, giving particular attention to the historiography of Cave 254 and the visual properties of the cave. A three-day on-site visit to Dunhuang from July 9 to July 12, 2013 provided invaluable opportunities to furthering my understanding of the Mogao site and Cave 254. As a result of this personal experience with Cave 254, Michael Baxandall's theory of the Period Eye has emerged as a useful theoretical framework to interpret the mural, the cave, and the site in more detail.[8] Baxandall's theory also raises a major challenge in the writing of this paper: how can one ever fully comprehend and translate a work of art in its historical context? This is a question that I as well as previous scholars looking at this specific cave have had to face.

My project integrates this question with the work of previous scholars who have looked at the Mogao Caves from several different points of view, including their purpose, their ritual aspects, their patrons, and their dating. These are all important aspects of research. In conjunction with this previous scholarship, I would further argue that research about Cave 254 is important because it sheds light on new aspects of Medieval Chinese Buddhist art and the importance of depicting jataka tales during this period.

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[7] Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature,* 9.

[8] Michael Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 29.

More specifically, the first section of this study focuses on the historiography of the Mogao Caves. I discuss the opening of the Library Cave and the dispersal of information on the Mogao Caves and Buddhism in general. I also address modern views on the Mogao Caves based on the discipline of Western art history. Then I move from a general historiography of the caves to a more detailed historiography of Cave 254 giving insight on other scholars' conclusions on the cave. After looking at other scholars' surmises, I provide a section on methodology that includes the ideas of Erwin Panofsky, Michael Baxandall, and David Morgan.

This leads into my own detailed iconographic analysis of a specific jataka in Cave 254: the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. While looking at the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, certain iconographic questions come to mind: What is the significance of using gesture in a story about sacrifice? Another question is what is the pictorial, spatial, and textual significance of a stupa within the context of its representation in the Cave 254 jataka? Lastly, what is the importance of religious sacrifice in a Chinese Buddhist context? Exploring these questions related to the mural of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka as well as Cave 254 offers new perspectives on a familiar image in Chinese art history that will help connect a specific topic in Chinese Buddhist art with broader concerns in art history.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in Cave 254 has attracted the attention of several art historians; indeed, it has become an iconic image in surveys of Asian Art. Some art historians go into meticulous detail while others briefly talk about the piece. This section will be an exploration and critique of the more detailed analyses of the image. Stanley Abe's article, "Art and Practice in Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple," investigates Cave 254 in concentrated detail. He explains Buddhism in Dunhuang, Buddhist imagery in Liangzhou,[9] the role of the central pillar in the function of Cave 254, and the practice of Sakyamuni and Maitreya visualization. In the final section of the article, he talks about the narrative paintings. Compared to the previous sections in his article, this section on the jataka mural is quite short. After briefly discussing the two jataka tales depicted on the northern and southern walls of the cave, he then goes into further description of the "Hungry Tigress" tale, which he calls the "Tiger *jataka.*" He makes several interesting points about the purpose of the jatakas in the caves saying they were "quite possibly a part of the visualization rituals practiced [in the cave]…[and also they could] illustrate an oral presentation."[10] He concludes by stating that the "painting was not expected to be the primary means by which the narrative was to be conveyed…the painting was thus free to emphasize the dramatic and emotional

[9] Liangzhou district is located in Gansu province. Dunhuang is in the upper regions of Gansu province.
[10] Abe, "Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple," 11.

aspects of the tale without consideration for strict narrative logic."[11] Abe's analysis regarding the ritual function of the pictorial jataka in terms of text and image relationships is compelling, but it lacks in-depth consideration of the specific iconography of the image.

Julia K. Murray's article "Buddhism and Early Narrative Illustration in China" uses Cave 254 as an example of "post-Han modes of narrative illustration." She focuses on the narrative features of the image. Like Abe, she argues that the seven scenes are visually composed in a manner that is difficult for someone who does not know the verbal or textual versions of the story to understand.[12] She references Hsio-Yen Shih's article, "Readings and Re-Readings of Narrative in Dunhuang Murals" in which Shih examines the implications of how the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural faces the *Sibi* jataka mural[13] on the north wall.[14] Shih's remark on the placement of the two murals should not go unnoticed, since it shows that the organization of the murals and the architecture of the cave were important.

The issues raised by Cave 254 and the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural are closely linked to the development of the Mogao Caves. Roderick Whitfield states that "by the late fourteenth century, Dunhuang—known as the 'Blazing Beacon' had developed into a bustling desert crossroads, lying just before the most arduous stages of the journey on the caravan routes linking China and the West."[15] Many travelers stopped by the oasis while

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[11] Ibid.
[12] Julia K. Murray, "Buddhism in Early Narrative Illustration in China," *Archives of Asian Art*, Vol. 48 (1995): 23.
[13] *Sibi* jataka tale is about King *Sibi* who offers a piece of his flesh to a hawk (a god in disguise) to protect a dove (another god in disguise) and is later praised for his generosity.
[14] Murray, "Buddhism in Early Narrative Illustration in China," 23.
[15] Whitfield, *Cave Temples of Mogao*, 5.

traveling on the challenging Silk Road. The Mogao site is about thirty minutes outside of the city of Dunhuang. In July 2013, I was able to experience a modern version of a pilgrimage to the site.[16] During that experience, I found one of the main caves is Cave 17, known as the Library Cave. The Library Cave was an archival cave that contained up to 50,000 documents on Buddhist and non-Buddhist history, sutras, and paintings.[17] The cave is, in reality, a small niche that is part of the larger Cave 16. Walking into Cave 16, one can see a small glass window to the right of the walkway. Looking into the niche, one sees a statue of the eminent priest Hong Bian (c. 851-862) and a small mural behind the figure.[18] The cave was sealed for many years until the Daoist monk, Wang Yuan-Lu, discovered it in 1900.[19]

After the discovery of Cave 17, people became more academically interested in the site. Aurel Stein, a Hungarian scholar from England, visited the caves in 1907. Among his many discoveries in Cave 17 was a version of the Diamond Sutra, a Mahayana Buddhist scripture that is the world's oldest printed text dated in its colophon to 868 CE. By making friends with Wang, he was able to acquire twenty-four cases of manuscripts and four cases of paintings and relics. Another famous voyager was Paul Pelliot, a Frenchman who arrived in Dunhuang in 1908 and spent three weeks analyzing the manuscripts and convinced Wang to sell him thousands of important manuscripts that

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[16] A green bus picks up curious tourists and scholars at eight in the morning for about nine yuan, which is about 1.50 in US dollars. One leaves the busy streets of Dunhuang, then rides through the desolate desert lands and comes to an abundance of trees to arrive at the site. It is mandatory to buy a ticket with either a Chinese-speaking guide or other foreign language proficient tour guide. On one tour, one sees about ten caves.
[17] Whitfield, *Cave Temples of Mogao*, 6.
[18] Some scholars claim that the small cave was a memorial to Hong Bian.
[19] "Mogao Cave 17 (Late Tang 848-907 CE)." Dunhuang Academy. Accessed February 20, 2013. http://enweb.dha.ac.cn/000C/index.htm.

Stein had overlooked. The ethical implications of these "discoveries" are still debated by scholars, who write that, "Wang fell victim to Stein's persuasion, and later Pelliot's, secretly selling off manuscripts for pittance, which he used to "restore" the rock-cut temples."[20]

There are two texts in particular that shed light on this controversy. Stanley Abe's article, "Inside the Wonder House" talks about the mixture of Greco-Roman and Asian Buddhist sculpture and how there are many shared influences. He argues that a monolithic view of Western influence on Asian art, which most likely shaped the views of explorer scholars such as Stein or Pelliot, is closely linked to colonialist agendas and should not be taken for granted. As Abe puts it:

> " From the time of its discovery, this art was understood by many Western scholars as derivative of the classical forms of Greece and was identified as 'Greco-Buddhist art' … While some kind of Western influence is understood by virtually all scholars in the field, the specifics of such influence, its extent, source, and transmission, continue to be disputed and a definitive accounting of this elusive issue has yet to be produced."[21]

Abe then introduces the Wonder House, or Museum of Lahore, which "appropriates remnants of Buddhist art into a Western taxonomy of order that is meant to make the art understandable to Western as well as contemporary Indian viewers."[22] He thus calls attention to the ability of art historians to look at an artwork and attempt to understand its original context.

Peter Hopkirk's book, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*, also sheds light on the controversy of travels in Asia by Stein and Pelliot. The Chinese called these men "foreign

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[20] Neville Agnew and Fan Jinshi, "China's Buddhist Treasures at Dunhuang," *Scientific American* Vol. 277 (1997), 43.
[21] Stanley Abe, "Inside the Wonder House," in *The Curators of the Buddha*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 63.
[22] Ibid., 65

devils" because they took away precious items from China.[23] Since their removal, many have questioned the proper ownership of these items. These manuscripts have been taken out of their native land and brought to Western cultures, but it is important to note that their preservation in cities such as Paris and London have also helped Western people understand the importance and significance of Buddhism in these caves during different Chinese dynasties. The Stein and Pelliot collections help scholars and students understand the importance of these works in an accessible way because of their respective locations and through digitalization efforts such as the International Dunhuang Project. However, this digital accessibility cannot compare to the experience of seeing and breathing in the artwork at Mogao.

[23] Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for the Lost Cities and Treasures of Chinese Central Asia* (London: Murray, 1980).

METHODOLOGY

Given my interest in using the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural and Cave 254 to explore historical viewing practices, Michael Baxandall's theory of the Period Eye has emerged as a useful theoretical framework to interpret the mural, cave, and site in more detail.[24] Even earlier, Erwin Panofsky focused his research on the iconology and iconography of artworks. He states that iconography is a "branch of the history of art which concerns itself with the subject matter of meaning of works of art, as opposed to their form."[25] Panofsky challenges the viewer to look at the motifs and allegories in artworks. He situates his method into three sections. The first section, *Primary or Natural Subject Matter,* introduces the "pre-iconographical description of a work of art" in which the viewer gives a simple visual analysis without outside information.[26] For example, looking at the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, one can see a chaotic composition with figures, animals, and architecture. The second section, *Secondary or Conventional Subject Matter,* looks at the understanding of meanings behind the images and motifs through outside resources.[27] Looking at the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, one needs to be knowledgeable of the jataka story and its importance in Indic and Chinese Buddhism. The last and most important section to my research, *Intrinsic Meaning or Content,*

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[24] Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, 29.
[25] Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), 26.
[26] Ibid., 28
[27] Ibid.

attempts to find the "intrinsic meaning" or specific cultural connotations in an artwork.[28] To find the "intrinsic meaning" in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in Cave 254 in a Northern Wei context, one needs to supplement Panofsky's ideas with Michael Baxandall's and David Morgan's theories. I use Michael Baxandall's study of fifteenth century Italian Renaissance art to project the same ideas onto medieval Chinese Buddhist art. I go further into this theory by comparing David Morgan's *The Embodied Eye*. Western methodology is useful to understand Chinese Buddhist art because it can break down key components specific to Chinese Buddhist art such as iconography and gestures into simple explanations for Western viewers.

In particular, Baxandall's famous concept of the Period Eye argues that everyone processes visual information differently because of varying cultures, beliefs, and occurrences in life. We attempt to understand the motivation underlying the making of a certain artwork by understanding the history of the culture of a given time period – even if we may have not lived during that time or place. Allan Langdale argues that Baxandall's Period Eye is a "sophisticated account of the practices by which organizational and stylistic aspects of a society might be projected or read, consumed and reproduced, in another part of that same society."[29] Another art historian, Joseph Manca, states that Baxandall applied his theory in a "sustainable way, and emboldened others to find the aetiology of style in patterns of particular, nonartistic aspects of quotidian

[28] Ibid., 30
[29] Langdale, "Aspects of the Critical Reception and Intellectual History of Baxandall's Concept of the Period Eye," 480.

behavior."[30] He also explains how Baxandall uses his book as a teaching guide for the nonart historian. The Period Eye is a way for someone to look at art in its context to understand and to appreciate a work of art. However, later in Manca's review, he talks about the negative aspects of attempting to understand a work of art in its historical context: "Baxandall set himself the impossible task of explaining artistic style through daily experience."[31] To truly write a social history of style is one of the many challenges an art historian has to overcome. As a Western researcher, it is hard for me to correctly understand medieval Chinese art. Through my research I can only go so far in understanding the social, historical, and cultural context of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural.

David Morgan's book, *The Embodied Eye*, expands on Baxandall's Period Eye by addressing "the fields of religious studies and art history with a broad visual culture theory."[32] Morgan explains that "a way of seeing is the historical development of visual routine that organizes a visual field, enacting within its structure the desire, fear, companionship of authority that shapes visual experience."[33] In order to comprehend the visual context of a certain time, one needs to train the eye to organize and to feel emotion through the painting. The viewer needs to find empathy in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural through the gestures and facial expression in order to obtain a visual experience.

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[30] Joseph Manca, "On Michael Baxandall's Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy," Review of *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, by Michael Baxandall, *The Journal of the History of Art* Vol. 6 (2005), 96.
[31] Ibid., 97
[32] Dana Wiggins Logan, "Review of *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling*, by David Morgan," *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* Vol. 25 (2013), 165.
[33] David Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012), 55.

Further into his book, he talks about different gazes. Two are particularly relevant: the "devotional gaze" and the "reciprocal gaze." The "devotional gaze" is defined as a "rapt absorption" of people before the image or an object.

Morgan's ideas of the Embodied Eye and "devotional gaze" compliment Baxandall's Period Eye perfectly because one needs to understand the emotional incentive of producing a religious work of art, as well as attempting to understand the viewer's devotion to the work. To understand the "devotional gaze" of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, one needs to understand the importance of Cave 254 in general. For instance, a person walks into the cave and sees the Buddha in a niche in the pillar. They walk to their left and see the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, and then circumambulate around the pillar and end viewing the *Sibi* jataka.[34] A modern viewer must understand the physical dedication to the cave in order to understand the "devotional gaze" towards the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. In Chapter Four of Morgan's book, "Icon and Interface," Morgan explains the importance of the icon and how it is viewed. He states that the icon becomes the sacred person that the devoted viewer imagines, which presents itself and returns the gaze to the viewer.[35] This idea is known as the "reciprocal gaze." Although Morgan's idea concerns Christian icons, it is interesting because it shows how an unspoken bond between the icon and the viewer is also relevant between the Buddha and the devout observer. Even though visitors that currently go to the caves do not practice these rituals of meditation and circumambulation, it is imperative in understanding the original purpose of the caves.

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[34] The *Sibi* jataka is another jataka about bodily sacrifice. See Ohnuma 7-9.
[35] Morgan, *The Embodied Eye: Religious Visual Culture and the Social Life of Feeling,* 165.

Panofsky, Baxandall, and Morgan provide a framework to expand my research as well as set a viewpoint for looking at gesture, architectural aspects, and sacrifice seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in Cave 254. The definition of gesture, based on the Oxford Dictionary, is described as a "manner of carrying the body; bearing, carriage, deportment."[36] The English word is derived from the Latin word, *gestus,* meaning "gesture, carriage, or posture" as well as the Medieval Latin word, *gestura,* meaning "bearing behavior."[37] One can argue that gesture is an act of emotion. We see gesture in dance, art, and a simple greeting. Whether consciously or subconsciously, a person is able to show genuine emotion through gesture. We see this "internal spirit" through Prince Mahasattva's gestures in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, which provides a lens to interpret the meanings behind the many gestures seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in Cave 254.

Michael Baxandall looks at gestures from an Italian Renaissance perspective. He uses Masaccio's *Expulsion from Paradise* as a case study (Figure 1). He lists possible gestures pertaining to the painting, such as grief seen through Eve pressing her breast with the palm of her hand, and shame seen through Adam covering his eyes with his fingers.[38] Although Baxandall associates specific gestures to certain situations, he gives no specific reason as to why he uses the word "gesture."[39] He only explains that "there are no dictionaries to the Renaissance language of gestures, though there are sources

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[36] Oxford English Dictionary Online, last modified 2014, accessed April 1, 2014, http://www.oed.com/search?browseType=sortAlpha&page=1&pageSize=20&q=gesture&quickSearch=true&scope=ENTRY&sort=entry&type=dictionarysearch.
[37] www.etymonline.com, April 1st, 2014.
[38] Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy,* 61.
[39] Manca, "On Michael Baxandall's Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy," Review of *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy,* 108.

which offer suggestions about a gesture's meaning: they have little authority and must be used with tact."[40] Because there was no specific definition of "gesture" in a Renaissance context, Baxandall brings it upon himself to use the word the way he chooses. Joseph Manca critiques Baxandall by saying he makes "no distinction between action versus communication. Some gestures are more purely like gesticulating…the use of the limbs for communication" but other emotions are "not intended to communicate to another."[41] I would argue that whether or not there is the intention of figures communicating with each other, each gesture is seen and interpreted by the viewer.

Looking at the detailed gestures in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, we see many different emotions and expressions. The composition, in general, is so confusing that it is essential to look at each scene individually. On the right, we see Prince Mahasattva raising his left arm to the sky while his right arm is pressed against his chest. In the next scene, his left arm barely touches the leaping figure of Prince Mahasattva's left leg as he dives down to his death: his left leg is bent while his hands are together (Figure 2). In the third scene, the prince is lying down with his knees bent and his hand above his head. Looking at the representation of the figure in each scene, one notices how calm each face appears to be. In the left bottom corner, we see five figures in utter grief. One figure is collecting the bones of Prince Mahasattva, while the dismay of the others is reflected in their faces and somewhat horizontal positions. We see Prince Mahasattva's body held by his weeping parents, and miraculously restored lying on an implied picture plain. Lastly, we see the pagoda surrounded by flying *apsarases*. The relationship

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[40]Baxandall, *Painting & Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy,* 61.
[41] Manca, "On Michael Baxandall's Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy," 108.

between the restored body of Mahasattva and the pagoda meant to commemorate his bones is an interesting one, and I address this relationship next. However the most important figure is Prince Mahassatva's sacrificial gesture to the hungry tigress.

By looking at the many gestures seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural one can obtain a further detailed visual analysis as well as recognize the importance of the figures' actions. As well, it is helpful to use Baxandall's formula of gesture seen in Renaissance painting and compare it to the mural seen in Cave 254. I chose gesture for one of my first sections because I feel that the viewer needs to understand the detailed actions portrayed in the mural to understand the importance of the stupa and sacrifice discussed. The gestures seen in the mural can be understood throughout time as well as through different cultural points of view.

Figure 1: *Expulsion from Paradise*, Tommaso Cassai Masaccio, 1427, Florence, Italy. Transferred from en.wikipedia original source: [1]. Licensed under public domain via Wikimedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Masaccio-TheExpulsionOfAdamAndEveFromEden-Restoration.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Masaccio-TheExpulsionOfAdamAndEveFromEden-Restoration.jpg.

Figure 2: "Tiger Jātaka, Cave 254, Dunhuang" by anonymous artists of the Northern Wei period; Maculosae tegmine lyncis- Wall paintings at Dunhuang.
Licensed under public domain via Wikimedia Commons:
http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tiger_J%C4%81taka,_Cave_254,_Dunhuang.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Tiger_J%C4%81taka,_Cave_254,_Dunhuang.jpg

STUPA

The pagoda constitutes one of the most interesting sections of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. Situated in the upper-left corner of the mural, one sees a three-tiered pagoda that is white with turquoise roof tiles. One assumes that the bones of the prince are buried underneath. As well, one can also assume that the pagoda is important because of the *apsarases* surrounding the structure, and that it is the last "scene" of the mural. The mural represents two different views of the pagoda: the birds-eye view seen from the top of the pagoda and the steps leading up to the pagoda that faces the viewer directly. This two-view perception of the pagoda is interesting because it makes the viewer jump from one perspective to another. After Prince Mahasattva's family collects his bones, one assumes that the bones are buried underneath the pagoda. However, as we have seen above, Mahasattva's body appears fully restored as his family holds him. The *apsarases* surrounding the pagoda, and its placement at the end of the cycle of "scenes," arguably heightens the religious importance of the pagoda itself.[42] In numerous South Asian textual versions of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka, there are few that actually talk about erecting a pagoda.[43] Usually, Prince Mahasattva becomes enlightened and the story ends. For example, Ohnuma compares two different versions of the retelling "Hungry Tigress" jataka in the *Avadanakalpalata*. The first version, *Avadanakalpalata* 95, is a retelling of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka where the Buddha reminisces about his previous

[42] I use the word "scene" because the mural is broken up into different sections of the story.
[43] Both Reiko Ohnuma and Naomi Appleton write on pagodas in South Asian texts.

life as a prince. He explains, "these same two [cubs] have become thieves through their remaining karma, and have [again] been rescued by me. Their mother was none other than that tigress."[44] This version does not talk about an erection of a stupa but focuses on reincarnation and karma. The second version, *Avadanakalpalata* 51, focuses on the "characteristics of narrative literature."[45] Similar to the first version, the Buddha reminisces about his previous life where he saves a hungry tigress where he concludes "remembering here and now my own [former] deeds, I gave rise to a smile."[46] This version does not mention a stupa.

Even though one can use stupa and pagoda interchangeably for the same structure, stupa is the word that is mostly used for Indic structures while pagoda is used for Chinese structures. In India, there are three fundamental Buddhist architectural forms, which are the stupa, vihara, and caitya.[47] The original Indic stupa was an "earthen relic mound with an egg-shape dome."[48] An example of this structure is the "Great Stupa" located in Sanchi, India originally commissioned in the third century BCE (Figure 3). The stupa is made of stone and is closer to the ground rather than tall like Chinese pagodas. Even though one cannot specifically date the time that pagodas were being built and used in China, one can say that cultural relations with India, Southeast Asia and Central Asia were prominent during the Northern Wei.[49]

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[44] Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature,* 9.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 13
[47] Xinian Fu and Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 85.
[48] Ibid., 85
[49] Ibid., 85

The relationship between Indian stupas and Chinese pagodas is also related to cave temples. For example, the Ajanta Caves, located in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra, India, are about thirty caves that date back to second century BCE to seventh century CE.[50] Most of the caves are called "Vihara" halls where people go for prayer as well to live and sleep. However, there are a few caves seen at the Ajanta site that are called "chaitya" halls and have stupas, but, unlike the stupas seen at Mogao, the stupas are not connected to the ceiling.[51] Cave 26 (Figure 4) was made around the fourth to seventh century, approximately the same time as Cave 254, and is one of the few Ajanta caves that contains a stupa inside. Looking at pictures, the cave looks similar to the nave of a cathedral: a person can walk through the hall towards the massive stupa. On either side, there are numerous pillars, a block of stone carvings of stories, and then a ribbed dome ceiling. One can see the detached stupa at the end of the cave. The earliest history of Chinese cave-temple sites goes back to the Eastern Han.[52] There are many different types of caves at the Mogao site with some having a square or rectangular floor plan while others are just small niches. Cave 254 is a central pillar cave in which the visitor encounters a square room with a square central pillar. Many caves at Mogao and other sites use a central pillar in the middle of the cave not only to support the ceiling, but also to allow devotees to circumambulate the pillar.[53] The devotees are able to walk around the pillar, whilst looking at the morality murals and the Buddhas in the pillar niches. In Stanley Abe's article, "Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist

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[50]Benoy K. Behl, *The Ajanta Caves: Artistic wonder of Ancient Buddhist India* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998), 26.
[51] Ibid., 27
[52] Xinian Fu and Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 88-89.
[53] Ibid.

Cave Temple," he explains that the central pillar is significant because it represents a stupa or pagoda set inside a cave. He also explains that many caves like these are "modeled on pagoda architecture, particularly in the representation of multiple roofs and bracketing systems," like the pagoda seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural.[54] These similarities between cave and pagoda illustrate one way in which Chinese Buddhist architecture separated itself from its "Indian origins."[55] The pagoda represented in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural echoes the pagoda-like structure of the cave.

The Author of *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-Yang*, Yang Xuanzhi, documented stories during the Northern Wei. For example, Yang discussed the travels of Song-yun and Hui-sheng to Central Asia and Ghandara. The expedition took place circa 519 CE, close to the time of Cave 254. Yang particularly writes about the appearances of stupas. In one occurrence he writes they arrived in a "kingdom" called Yü-tien 于闐, or Khotan, where they "cremated the deceased, and they then collected the bones and where they interred them they built stupa."[56] This historical tradition echoes the actions seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural where one sees a figure collecting the bones and later erecting a stupa. Later in their journey, they are traveling through the mountains where they:

> "arrived at the place where Tathagata, in his ascetism, gave himself up to feed a starving tigress. The high mountains presented a majestic appearance, and perilous cliffs soared into the clouds…Sung Yün and Hui-sheng contributed some

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[54] Stanley K. Abe, "Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple," 5.
[55] Xinian Fu and Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 88.
[56] Yang Xuanzhi. *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 220.

> of their traveling money to build a stupa at the summit, including a stone monument with an inscription…to record the achievements of the Wei."[57]

Reading the experiences confirms not only the importance of stupas in China during the Northern Wei, but also how the representation of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural's stupa/ pagoda seen in Cave 254 was influenced by visual experiences.

The greatest monument of the Northern Wei dynasty was the pagoda of the Eternal Tranquility Monastery (永宁寺) for which the Grand Dowager Empress Ling was the patron. It was one of the tallest towers in Luoyang. Unfortunately, the pagoda does not exist anymore, yet textual accounts and archeological excavations demonstrate the importance of this and other pagodas during the Northern Wei dynasty. Likewise, the Songyue Monastery pagoda (嵩岳寺塔) of the early sixth century (523 CE) is suggestive of outside influences on Northern Wei architecture (Figure 5).[58] Part of the Songyue Monastery on Mount Song, in Henan Province is one of the first brick pagodas built in China. It is a twelve-sided pagoda with many stories that gradually get smaller as they progress to the top. The structure shows the merging of the Indic stupa with a Chinese tower.[59]

There are two functions for a Chinese pagoda: burial and commemoration. The burial pagodas hold the ashes of famous Buddhist monks. Relic pagodas hold some trace of "the revered past," whether it is Buddha himself or another holy person.[60] Buddhologist Gregory Schopen compares the ideas of relics in Christian and Buddhist contexts. Through his comparison, he explains the English and Sanskrit derivations for

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[57] Ibid., 232
[58] Xinian Fu and Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, *Chinese Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 85.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Thorp, *Chinese Art & Culture*, 198.

the word relic. The English term for relic comes from the Latin *relinquere*, which means "to leave behind" or "relinquish" where the Sanskrit word for relic, *sarira* is related to the "body" or *dhātu* as the "constituent element or essential ingredient."[61] Art historian, Eugene Y. Wang, discusses the relationship between stupa and relics by noting that the "stupa is the vessel used to transport the soul. It marks the threshold to the other world."[62]

The transition from the Indic stupa to the Chinese pagoda and theories on the purpose of a pagoda illuminate what such a structure could represent in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. The ultimate conclusion is that the painted pagoda represents a relic pagoda and by extension, the body of either Prince Mahasattva or the Buddha in a previous life. The devotees that go to the Mogao Caves experience a similar ritualistic journey that one experiences going to a Chinese pagoda. The cave becomes the inside of the pagoda, which in turn becomes the body of the Buddha. This shapes viewing practices of the murals and the cave in general for the devout viewer because one can reflect on the importance of the body as something left behind.

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[61] Gregory Schopen, "Relic," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 256.
[62] Eugene Wang, "Of the True Body: The Buddha's Relics and Corporeal Transformation in Tang Imperial Culture," in *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, ed. by Wu Hung and Katherine T. Mino (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 102.

Figure 3: The "Great Stupa" at Sanchi, India, 3rd C. BCE.

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sanchi2.jpg#mediaviewer/File:Sanchi2.jpg

Figure 4: *Ajanta Cave 26*, Maharashtra, India, 5th C.

Figure 5: *Songyue Monastery pagoda*, Henan Province, China, early 6th C. CE
by Zeus1234 - Own work. Licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 via Wikimedia Commons: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Songyue_Pagoda_1.JPG#mediaviewer/File:Songyue_Pagoda_1.JPG.

SACRIFICE IN CHINESE BUDDHISM AND ANIMAL-HUMAN RESONANCE

The most interesting ideas pertaining to the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural in Cave 254 have been those of filial piety, karma, bodily sacrifice, and animal symbolism. Medieval China incorporated the idea of Buddhism into its society, in a large part, because of the acceptance of filial piety within the culture.[63] This section considers how, scholars such as Kenneth Ch'en, Alan Cole, and Stephen F. Teiser explore the tension as well as the transition from Confucian to Buddhist ideals. When appropriate, I focus more specifically on the relationship between filial piety and karma seen through the story of Mu-lian in conjunction with bodily sacrifice and animal symbolism seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural.

Filial devotion, also known as *xiao* in a Confucian context, is about serving one's family: "when parents are alive, serve them according to ritual. When they die, bury them according to ritual and sacrifice to them according to the ritual."[64] Confucian philosophy was adamant about keeping the family connected. Ancestor worship and being conscious about one's family was highly important in Chinese society. Buddhism made its way

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[63] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964), 179.
[64] Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1994), 20.

from India to China during the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220 CE), but was recognized by both common and upper class people during the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-535 CE).[65]

While Confucianism's filial piety functions as an ethical guide to serve and respect your elders and parents, Buddhism's filial piety is seen as a moral guide that can both spiritually benefit or spiritually condemn one's ancestors as well as oneself. Buddhism in China established a new version of filial piety that focused on the relationship between the mother and son rather than the father and son, which was the basis of Confucianism.[66] An example of this mother and son emphasis can be found in the story of Mu-lian. The story centers on a son trying to save his mother. It is an Indian Mahayana Buddhist story that deals with the idea of filial piety, karma and the idea of the "hungry ghost." The term "hungry ghost" implies a class of beings that are in constant hunger. Stephen Teiser has written a study of how the Indian narrative of Mu-lian became sinicized through the "purgatorial feast" held on the night of the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the Chinese calendar. This is when families give food and clothing to ancestors who have become hungry ghosts.[67] In this sense, Mu-lian becomes a model for other Chinese Buddhist devotees that are concerned about their ancestors. Mu-lian explains, "I was following my parents' traces to the ends of heaven and earth; only my father obtained rebirth above, so I was unsuccessful in reuniting myself with my dear mother."[68] Filial piety is essential in Chinese culture: it is important to respect your elders

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[65] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey,* 179.
[66] Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 41.
[67] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey,* 5.
[68] Victor H. Mair, trans., "Prosimetric Storytelling and Its Written Derivatives," in *Columbia Anthology of Traditional Chinese Literature,* edited by Victor H. Mair (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 1110.

and to look after your parents, especially the mother. There is a certain bond that should happen between the son and the mother where it is his forever obligation to take care of her because she birthed him. Even though it was Mu-lian's mother who put herself in a negative situation, he is obligated to save her. This story is one of many examples of filial piety that have been taught in Chinese Buddhism.

Like filial piety, karma plays a role with the Mu-lian story. Kenneth Ch'en's *Buddhism in China* also sheds light on this issue: "The word 'karma' means deed or act. Every act produces a result or fruit; a good deed produces a good fruit; and an evil deed, an evil fruit."[69] One can either have good karma (good fruit) or bad karma (bad fruit). Ch'en further explains that there is not a personal self in an individual and that the only way to gain praiseworthy karma and salvation is through the individual's acts.[70] For example, at the end of the Mu-lian story his mother turns into a dog:

> "I have received this body of a dog and my dumbness as a due reward. I spend my life walking, standing, sitting or lying. When I'm hungry, I eat human excrement in the latrines. When I'm thirsty, I drink the water which drips from the caves to relieve the hollow feeling…I would rather have the body of a dog and endure the filth of the earth than hear in my ears the name of hell."[71]

Because his mother acted selfishly in her life, the response is to her turn into a dog/ hungry ghost. This text makes the reader feel her pain, and at the same time understand the consequences of her actions.

Mu-lian resonates with the visual narrative of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural through the shared themes of sacrifice, filial devotion, and karma. Even though

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[69] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey*, 4.
[70] Ibid., 9
[71] Victor H. Mair, trans., "Prosimetric Storytelling and Its Written Derivatives," 1126. Although I use a translation that has been recorded much later than the making of Cave 254, it may reflect beliefs and practices that were not recorded until a later period.

Mahasattva's act of sacrifice was not towards his parents, it was motivated by his compassion for the mother of the hungry cubs. Yet it is curious as to why, on the bottom left side of the mural in Cave 254, the artist painted Mahasattva's mother holding the head of her restored son, while the father holds his feet. Did he want the viewer to feel the bond between Mahasattva and his mother? Is there a connection between the human mother and the hungry tigress? I would argue that the pictorial narrative shows that humans and animals are equal to each other.

Beyond the idea that animals are also subject to the laws of filial piety and karma the concept of animals being symbols for human relationships also helps in one's understanding of this image. Ch'en, Teiser, and Cole all observe this context differently: there seems to be two view points of animals. For example, Kenneth Ch'en discusses animals as one of the five states of existence: he explains that deities and man are good, but animals, hungry ghosts, and denizens of hell are evil.[72] This claim deserves some rethinking: why are animals considered lower forms of existence if they are doing good deeds seen in jatakas and other forms of Buddhist art? However, Ch'en contradicts himself by stating that in Mahayana Buddhism, "All creatures, no matter how lowly or humble, possessed the Buddha-nature in them and so were capable of attaining Buddhahood and salvation."[73] Attaining Buddhahood and salvation are parts of the idea of karma. From a more recent perspective, Stephen Teiser also argues, "If rebirth meant that all people were in principle part of the same line of descent, it also implied that other

[72] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey,* 5.
[73] Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China, A Historical Survey,* 208.

species deserved the same protection in the other world as did ancestors."[74] Animals have the ability to determine their future lives through enlightenment and sacrifice. Alan Cole, another Buddhologist, disagrees with Teiser by saying that humanity is the distinctive marker between a human and an animal.[75] However, Cole's statement is from a Confucian perspective. Although she is writing from a South Asian perspective, Reiko Ohnuma comes to the conclusion that specifically in jatakas, animals are viewed in a noble state that can make moral choices.[76] She explains that the shared perspective of animal rebirth, or karma, in "Buddhist literature is that such an existence is full of suffering and wholly governed by the concerns of physical survival."[77]

[74] Stephen F. Teiser, *The Scripture of the Ten Kings and the Making of Purgatory in Medieval Chinese Buddhism,* 138.
[75] Alan Cole, *Mothers and Sons in Chinese Buddhism,* 19.
[76] Ohnuma, *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature,* 294.
[77] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

After reconstructing historical viewing practices by analyzing gesture, architecture, and religious context seen in Cave 254, viewers can now understand the importance of the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. Looking at the historiography of the Mogao Caves helps the reader understand the importance of the site not only in a Chinese culture but also in a culture. One can also understand the long history of the site, which can be overlooked at times. Following the historiography of the Mogao Caves, Western methodology is used as a blueprint to analyze the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. Panofsky's iconology helped to become an introduction to Baxandall's Period Eye and helps the reader to understand a Western perspective that one would not originally apply. Following Baxandall's theory, Morgan's "Embodied Eye" helps expand my research on gesture, architecture, and sacrifice as seen in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. Baxandall's ideas on gesture help the viewer identify specific gestures seen in the mural.

After introducing the methodology and analyzing gesture in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural, the reader examines the significance of the pagoda seen in the mural as well as the cave itself, which represents a pagoda, by looking at the transition from an Indic stupa to a Chinese pagoda. Examples of the Sanchi stupa as well as Ajanta Cave 26 helps compare and contrast the Chinese pagodas and Cave 254. Finally, the viewer is introduced to new concepts that have never been evaluated in the "Hungry Tigress" jataka mural. There are undertones of filial piety, karma, as well as animal-human

relationships seen in “Hungry Tigress” jataka mural. All of these sections help the viewer to understand and appreciate the significance of the “Hungry Tigress” jataka mural.

Research on this particular mural has the ability to be taken further. It can be discussed via differing views on methodology as well as taken further via the acceptance of Buddhism in Korea and Japan as seen in other artistic interpretations of the “Hungry Tigress” jataka. It is difficult to understand and collect information on one particular site without the knowledge of the artist(s), the patron, etc. However, we do know that the “Hungry Tigress” jataka mural seen in Cave 254 is a piece that will be appreciated.

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