

Dhāranī Sūtra Translation and Practices in Yungang

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the *Sūtra of the Great Divine Spells of Auspiciousness* (*Da jiyi shenzhou jing* 大吉義神咒經) and its profound influence in image-making and liturgical functions of the religious sanctuaries in Yungang, a 5th century court cave monastery. The paper will first investigate the translation of the text, and moves on to contextualize its content and significant meaning with protection of kingship, power struggle and Dharma protection. The focus will first be on ritual practices emphasized in the *sūtra*, exploring *Dhāranī* practice instructions, and how they accordingly made a significant impact not only on image-making, but also on the construction and function of religious spaces in a rock-cut monastery at the ancient capital Pingcheng (present-day Datong). I will argue that the visual representation of many types of Dharma protectors, deities, gods and demons are primarily based on this *Da jiyi Dhāranī sūtra*. I will also argue that the reason the visual representation of Mahesvara in Yungang differentiates itself significantly from other early images in India, Khotan and Dunhuang, and was not phallic, is precisely because the image was depicted based on the *Da jiyi sūtra*, and had little to do with the Chinese tradition, as was previously suggested. It is significant to note that the sacred texts translated in Yungang by Tanyao, the founder of the Yungang monastery, played a significant role in image-making, function and ritual practices.

Key words: *Dhāranī*, *Jiyi*, liturgy, ritual practice, spells, Tanyao, translation , Yungang