

**Paintings of Jātaka Stories and Events from the Life of Buddha from Kizil Rock – Cut Monastery, Xinjiang Province China**

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**Abstract:** Buddhist art was an important part of Buddhist culture, especially in the bygone eras where access and ability to read Buddhist texts were limited. The Jātaka stories and the events from the life of Buddha portray the loving kindness, compassion, generosity, intellectual ability, perseverance, serenity, etc., of the historical Buddha. The art provided the lay persons with an insight to Buddha and Buddhism. In Buddhist cultures, children receive their first understanding of Buddhism through the temple paintings and sculpture depicting the life events and previous lives of Lord Buddha. Kizil Rock – Cut Monastery which is also known as the Kizil Thousand Buddha Caves are located in the modern Baicheng county of Kuche (Kuqa) township of the Xinjiang Weiwuerzu (Uighur, Uygur) Autonomous Region of the People’s Republic of China. The grottoes extend in an East - West direction along the Muzhati River. Kizil Rock – Cut Monastery has 269 numbered caves with most of the construction between 3<sup>rd</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century CE. Kizil has more than 1,000 square meters of paintings adorning its walls, consisting of Buddha, Bodhisattva, Arahants, Dancers and Musicians, Heavenly beings as well Jātaka and stories from the events of the life of Buddha. Some of the identified Jātaka stories include Vessantara, Sivi, Suthasoma, Nalapana, Sasa, Themiya, Mahoshada, etc. and the events include birth, the great departure, first sermon, parinirvāna, taming of the elephant Nalagiri, etc. The Jātaka stories and events from the life of Buddha was popular in early Buddhist art of India and Gandhara as evident from the sculpture of Sanci and Bharut in India and discovered at Buddhist sites in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Kizil remains as the best preserved example of the early tradition of art in Central Asia. Buddhist Rock – Cut temples in China such as Dunhuang Mogao Rock – Cut Temple, Bezecliek, Yulin, etc., have very few examples of Jātaka stories and events from the life of Buddha. As such to understand the composition and themes at Kizil, it is necessary to study the early Buddhist art of India and Gandhara. However, the Kandyan period paintings of Sri Lanka, albeit dating from 16<sup>th</sup> century provides the best and the largest corpus of paintings from a tradition which has continued for more than 2 millennia, gives us an understanding of the Kizil paintings. This is a part of my ongoing research on the identification of hitherto unidentified paintings at Kizil.