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ROBERT L. THORP
RICHARD ELLIS VINOGRAD

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Half-title page: Fu Shan (1607–1684/5), *Poem in Cursive Script*. Ming–Qing. Hanging scroll. Shanghai Museum

Frontispiece: Att. to Han Gan, *Night-shining White*. Tang, 8th century CE. Handscroll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Title page: Kneeling bowman. Qin, c. 210 BCE. Earthenware. Museum of Qin Figures and Horses, Lintong

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5 AGE OF THE *DHARMA*: THE PERIOD OF DIVISION

DURING THE CENTURIES following the collapse of the Han dynasty, Chinese society and culture changed in many ways. This age of political turmoil saw repeated attempts to establish a comprehensive political and social order, and later historians have used many phrases to describe such efforts. Historians designate the decades following the Han, which ended formally in 220 CE, as the "Three Kingdoms" (or "Three States") period. Separate regimes—the states of Wei, Wu, and Shu—controlled the north, the Lower Yangzi, and the Sichuan Basin, respectively. In latter-day dramas and novels this period became a romantic age of military heroes and villains such as Zhuge Liang and Cao Cao. The Jin dynasty (265–316) reestablished order and held together until the loss of their capital, Luoyang, in the second decade of the fourth century. Moving across the Yangzi River, the Jin court regrouped and made their new capital in the area of modern-day Nanjing (Jiangsu). Regimes based here became known, after the fact, as the "Six Dynasties." These states included Wu of the Three Kingdoms period, the transplanted "Eastern" Jin, and the Song, Qi, Liang, and Chen dynasties. (The latter four are also termed the "Southern Dynasties.") The loss of the north in 316 can be regarded as a pivotal event. Transplanted elite lineages established new homes in the Lower Yangzi macroregion. The spread of an ethnic Han population into new terrain along the Lower, Middle, and Upper Yangzi led to the economic development of territories that had been on the fringe during the Han period. With a favorable climate and much uncultivated land, the southeast became over time the agricultural heart of China. Southern court aristocrats and landed gentry would later play an important role in the formation of cultural institutions after the Sui reunification of 589.

In the north, after 316, a succession of short-lived regimes controlled the old Han capitals at Chang'an and Luoyang, founded by tribal people who had lived within the Han borders. Historians regarded them as "barbarian" (*hu*): they spoke non-Chinese languages and relied originally on pastoral livelihoods quite distinct from those practiced in Han society. Tribal groups descended from the Xiongnu of Han times, the Tuoba (Tabgatch), a Xianbei people (ancestral to later Mongols), and the Qiang (ancestral to later Tibetans), controlled a succession of "Five Barbarian [States] and Sixteen Kingdoms." The Tabgatch (Northern) Wei regime achieved control over the entire north by about 440 and created a long-lasting, if not stable, regime. With its capital at Pingcheng near modern Datong (Shanxi), this state mounted campaigns against its own "barbarian" neighbors to the north and established relations with powerful states in West and Central Asia. The Wei moved its capital to Luoyang around 494, but within a few decades fell apart. Two pairs of successor regimes—Eastern Wei–Northern Qi and Western Wei–Northern Zhou—emerged, both built on Northern Wei political and social foundations,

5-1 Sakyamuni Buddha
Northern Qi, c. 550–77 CE. Polychrome limestone, height 46⅞″ (1.19 m). Longxing Si site, Qingzhou, Shandong. Qingzhou City Museum

and perpetuated a two-part, east–west division of the north until 581. In that year a Northern Zhou general's coup put a new ruler on the throne, and the Sui began. Within the decade Sui armies had unified both north and south, ending more than two centuries of division (see chapter 6).

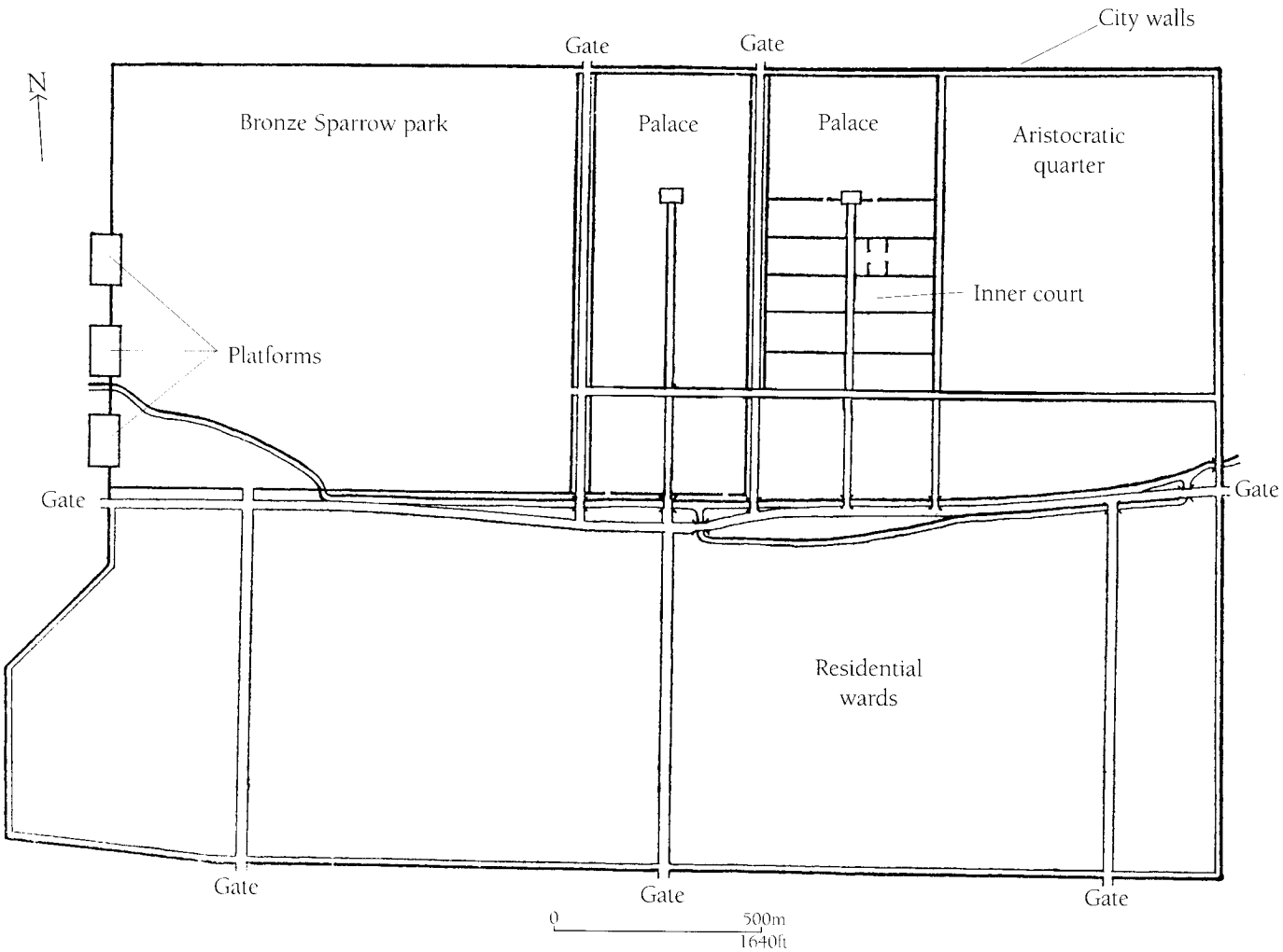
If any one cultural development can be accorded primacy of some kind in this discussion, it would surely be the growth on Chinese soil of a large and prosperous Buddhist community, one with deep roots in Chinese society and intellectual respectability. The earliest traces of the *dharma* (Buddhist teachings) in China proper date to the Han period. After the Jin court's retreat to the south, Buddhist believers grew in number among the gentry, a social change so marked that Erik Zurcher has dubbed it the "Buddhist conquest." The Buddhist community matured steadily in the centuries following the court's shift to Nanjing. Important Buddhist figures such as Dao'an and Huiyuan spread doctrines and devotional practices, and imperial patronage of prelates and temples became common. Buddhist believers also flourished in the Gansu corridor (a region then called Liang). As it expanded its control over the north, the Northern Wei state also became a major patron of the *dharma*. The northern states, moreover, were tied by land routes to the sacred heartland of the Buddha (portions of the Ganges Valley in India and Nepal) and to Central Asian states that promoted these teachings. As in the south, the social elite involved itself in the life of the Buddhist community, but court-sponsored patronage also led to a greater degree of significant regulation.

STATE AND SOCIETY

Between the mid-third century and the late sixth century, the area we call China proper normally sustained two, three, or more competing polities or political organizations. Most regimes styled themselves as imperial states ruled by a "Son of Heaven." To these rulers, legitimacy loomed as an over-riding concern. Since there could not be two Sons of Heaven, one (or more) claimants must be illegitimate. Rulers had a ready pretext for aggressive military campaigns to dislodge "false" sovereigns. For example, in 356 the Eastern Jin generalissimo Huan Wen marshalled forces and briefly retook the lost northern capital Luoyang. In 416–418, Liu Yu of Eastern Jin took advantage of internal divisions in the north and reclaimed both Luoyang and Chang'an. While these offensives had only short-term consequences, they remind us of the military aspects of state-to-state relations. The stronger regimes claimed to be the proper successors to the last Han sovereign. Cao Cao, the de facto founder of the state of Wei during the third century, made this claim with great seriousness, but his rivals in Wu and Shu did not assent. The Jin rulers, first at Luoyang and later at Nanjing, maintained a similar view, even though the north was beyond their control for good after their defeat at the Fei River in 383. Although hostility toward other states characterized debates at court, most advisors to these rulers came from a relatively homogeneous social group: gentry families established during the Han. Some families moved to the south, while others served under non-Han rulers in the north. Both groups regarded the Han model as natural and sought to re-create it under new masters. To claim the mantle of the Han, a proper imperial capital had to be created. The designers of Jiankang (Nanjing, the Southern Dynasties seat), of Pingcheng (the first Northern Wei capital), of the new Luoyang (the second Northern Wei capital, 494–534), and of Ye (Cao Cao's Wei capital and the Eastern Wei–Northern Qi capital in southern Hebei) all made claims for the legitimacy of their regimes through their city plans, imperial palace complexes, and other monuments.

Imperial Capitals: The North

Cao Cao established his capital at a site called Ye (in Linzhang County, southern Hebei) early in the third century. Although small by comparison with most later imperial cities, the new plan devised at this time established several long-lasting principles. But Cao Cao's successor promptly returned the capital to Luoyang, and Ye did not become a major center again until the Eastern Wei (534–555) and Northern Qi (555–570).



5-2 Plan of Ye in the 3rd century CE

During this second phase a new walled grid on the south expanded the area of the city severalfold. A rectangular wall with its long dimension running east to west defined the original (northern) city of Ye (FIG. 5-2). As might be expected, the city walls faced the cardinal directions. A major east–west thoroughfare connecting the single east and west gates bisected the city. South of this thoroughfare, residential wards (*fang*) occupied the area within the walls, while the imperial court utilized the zones to the north. The palace complex, aligned on the north–south axis, was approached from the central south gate. To the east of this imperial axis stood a second, inner court compound, similar in size and shape to the great halls of state. This precinct consisted of a series of small yards on the south and a larger rear palace. Government ministries flanked the main approach at the south of this eastern palace complex. Thus the halls necessary for the court were situated side by side in the north-central portion of the city. The western third of the northern zone became a large imperial retreat, the Bronze Sparrow Park, which also held an arsenal and other facilities. Three elevated platforms (*tai*), integrated into the west wall, supported pavilions for the imperial clan that could serve as defensive strongholds in a military emergency. Elite residences occupied the northeast corner of the city, adjoining the inner court compound. The accommodation of the imperial establishment, its palaces, offices for court bureaucrats, and mansions for the imperial clan figures prominently in the plans of Sui- and Tang-period Daxing cheng and Chang'an (see FIG. 6-2 below).

This survey of Ye fills in an important chapter in the history of planned cities in China. The other great northern capital, Luoyang, suffered

5-3 Guardian animal (*tianlu*)
Tomb of Emperor Wu of Southern Qi, Danyang, Jiangsu. Southern Qi, c. 493 CE. Stone, height 9′2″ (2.8 m)

Truly heroic in scale, this other-worldly animal is one of a pair crouching on the spirit path. Rarely, if ever, were larger animal sculptures installed in an imperial precinct. Yet the tomb's entire ensemble numbered simply six stones—two animals, two columns and two stele—a modest investment compared to later periods.

greatly at the fall of the Northern Wei in c. 534. The best preserved remains from Later (Eastern) Han and Northern Wei are those monuments sited outside the walled city, such as the Spiritual Terrace (Lingtai) of the Han or the great Yongning Temple of the Northern Wei (see FIG. 5-13 below). Similar problems of successive occupation and rebuilding confront attempts to study Jiankang. Physical remains of the ancient city underlying modern Nanjing remain virtually unknown, and all studies must rely on literary accounts; only in the suburbs of Nanjing are traces of the southern courts found (see below).

Imperial Tombs: The South

Imperial and elite tombs near Nanjing constitute evidence for an important stage in the development of burial practices. Some thirty imperial tombs have been identified (less than half of those recorded); about twenty tombs clustered northeast and southeast of the modern city can be attributed with some certainty to individual emperors and princes of the southern courts. Further east, in Danyang County south of the river, an area favored during the Southern Qi (479–502) and Liang (502–557) dynasties has been surveyed. All these tombs are sited at high elevations and in foothills. Burial chambers were installed inside hilly terrain and protected by it, while the approach and outer precincts occupied lower, more level ground. This siting accords with "geomantic," *fengshui*, principles still important in Chinese communities around the globe. According to *fengshui*, a prime location sheltered and drained by the natural terrain insured good fortune for the deceased and, by extension, for posterity. A specialist in geomancy had the task of identifying the most auspicious natural setting for tombs, houses, even cities. Many *fengshui* principles, however, also make "common sense"; the virtues of a sunny southern exposure and sheltered northern one can easily be understood.

Large stone carvings that define the "spirit paths" (*shen dao*), the formal approach to each tomb, survive in large numbers in the landscape. The large animals that populate these sites have generally been designated by such terms as "[Bringers of] Heavenly Blessings," *tianlu*, "Unicorns," *qilin*, and "Averters of Evil," *bixie*.

The names *tianlu* and *bixie* enunciate auspicious and apotropaic (evil-averting) roles for such creatures, who are descended from the winged and horned numinous animals of Eastern Zhou and Han. Imperial tombs generally have a pair of male animals, one with a single horn (*qilin*), the other with a pair of horns (*tianlu*). A huge *tianlu* from the Southern Qi tomb of Emperor Wu (Xiao Ji, d. 493) near Danyang represents the type (FIG. 5-3). Its body is almost 10 feet (more than 3 m) in length, the rearing head reaching a similar height. Facing a single-horned creature across the spirit path, this *tianlu* pulls its head and neck back and to one side. Its mate opposite mirrors this posture. By contrast with the steed of Huo Qubing (see FIG. 4-26 above), the animal is fully undercut, its weight carried by the massive limbs and a coiled tail. Surface patterns of whiskers, wings, and feathers complement the thick-set proportions, low-slung pose, and boxy carving. When one approaches the spirit path, these two animals appear first as large silhouetted forms. As one passes between them, they seem to turn their heads at the visitor. At princely tombs, the creatures look feline with their ample manes and lolling tongues, an echo of Han prototypes. Similar leonine creatures may also have enhanced the entrances to other imperial sites, such as the palaces. At the tombs of the Tang (see FIGS. 6-5 and 6-6 below), Song, Ming, and Qing emperors, stone animals and humans continued this southern tradition of imperial burial.

The imperial and princely tombs also have pairs of stone columns flanking the path. In each instance a fluted, monolithic shaft stands on a stone plinth shaped like two curling animals face to face. In several of the best-preserved examples, a capital carved with lotus petals and a bellowing creature thought to be a lion surmounts the shaft. Mounted below the capital, a rectangular slab bears the titles of the deceased, as with one Xiao Jing, a prince of the Liang enfeoffed as Marquis of Wuping (d. 523). Fluted columns can be found as early as the Later Han period, and the use of impressive stone carvings and memorial inscriptions probably began with the Later Han imperial tombs, although no examples survive.

Elite Tombs: The North

In the Northern Dynasties, political and social elites were not a homogeneous group. Instead, a dual system reconciled political power and social prestige. Non-Han rulers drawn from the minority tribal society held sway over a much larger ethnic Han population in which some of its own social elite retained privileged status. In the Northern Wei, for example, the Tabgatch controlled the imperial state through military force. Tabgatch elders governed Tabgatch society and ultimately reported, according to their customs, to the court in Pingcheng or Luoyang. Han (Chinese) elite families, on the other hand, administered the larger, ethnic Han population. They staffed a Han-style civil bureaucracy reporting to the Tabgatch court. Northern Wei society, while multiethnic, was thus divided into parallel social and political spheres.

The adoption of Han Chinese customs by ruling minority populations has generally been characterized as "sinicization" or "sinification," the argument being that a cultural minority must inevitably be absorbed by a vastly larger majority population and their culture diluted in the process. When the Tabgatch Northern Wei court explicitly adopted Han surnames, court ritual, and dress, that has been regarded as a high degree of sinification. However, such developments affected only small numbers of Tabgatch, essentially their elite who were resident at court. It can hardly have determined much of the style of life for Tabgatch people of lesser status and away from court. One might equally think in terms of a partial "Tabgatchization," as Victor Mair has remarked. Han elites who served Tabgatch overlords in practice adopted non-Han customs and values as they served the Northern Wei court. The proto-Mongols, proto-Tibetans, and Turks of the Northern Dynasties in fact contributed in many ways to what now, rather uncritically, is considered the "Chinese" culture of the Sui and Tang.

Northern elite families came to differ from their Han-period counterparts in several respects. Men trained as horse riders and became competent in martial skills. Many tomb wall paintings and figurines of the fourth through sixth centuries

emphasize mounted figures who ride out to hunt or to do battle in large groups. Some riders even play musical instruments while on horseback. Few gentlemen of the earlier Han period or of the contemporaneous southern courts could claim such equestrian skills. The social roles of elite women in the north also differed from the norms of the Han period. The relative freedom of women outside the household provides one contrast. Women had public lives, including the ability to move about in society, rather than cloistered ones spent within the family compound. An elite woman's status in her own clan could be significantly higher and her range of activities more varied than in earlier periods. Several prominent elite families provided empresses to a succession of northern rulers during the sixth century, and the women of these surnames often wielded great authority at court after marriage. (The first Sui emperor, Yang Jian, is depicted as the paradigmatic hen-pecked husband in Chinese writings. His empress, of the powerful Xianbei Dugu family, closely monitored and often controlled the activities of her husband.) Empresses and dowager empresses became the most influential patrons of Buddhist sites and monuments in the Northern Wei. Grand Dowager Empress Ling subsidized the greatest Buddhist monument of the age, the colossal pagoda of the Yongning Si (see FIG. 5-13 below). Active roles in elite family and court life, and public roles as patrons, set the fashion for the Sui and Tang elites.

However, as with men, women in subordinate roles are more common in the paintings and figurines that survive from tombs. (Depictions of higher-status women may be found in several portable scrolls attributed to this period; see FIGS. 5-25 and 5-28.) A fourth-century tomb at Jiuquan, in the Gansu corridor, shows a small orchestra performing for the pleasure of the tomb lord (FIG. 5-5). Three of the kneeling musicians are women, as are the three dancers, including a figure at the right who wears trousers. One woman plays a string instrument, one of the earliest depictions of a lute, *pipa*, in pictorial art. The central dancer carries two fans in her hands, striking poses to the melodies of her companions. Below the other figures, two female acrobats do handstands. The depiction of the tomb lord (not shown here), with his low couch, ample robes, fly whisk, and pillbox hat, follows conventions already in place at such Later (Eastern) Han burials as Anping (see FIG. 4-22 above). Two diminutive males attend their lord, one carrying a sunshade. The life-style depicted in this mural accommodates both Han and non-Han traits. The lord could be any Han official or land owner of the gentry, while the instruments suggest that the musicians and dancers may be performing non-Han music.

Large, multichambered brick tombs of the Later Han elite served as a model for burials in both north and south. The basic model or paradigm governing elite burials rested on two propositions: (1) the scale, plan, and appurtenances of burial chambers were indexes of social status, within prescriptive limits laid down by the state; and (2) underground chambers and their decorative programs, including figurines, replicated the social world of the living. More than repositories of disposable wealth, imperial and elite tombs commemorated social identities. The Jin imperial tombs of the late third and early fourth centuries near Luoyang, for example, followed more frugal standards than those of the Han period, having only one large chamber. This reduced scale and simpler plan characterizes many burials of the Southern Dynasties. On the other hand, one Northern Wei imperial tomb, the Yonggu ling (c. 481–484) of the Grand Dowager Empress Wenming, is rather more ambitious in scale, plan (with two chambers), and materials (the use of dressed stone) than any contemporaneous imperial burial in the south. Likewise, the nearby burial of a high-ranking court figure, Sima Jinlong (d. 484), a refugee relative of the defunct Jin imperial line, had a plan and structure modeled after such Later Han burials as Holingol and Anping. Sima Jinlong's multichambered brick structure with vaulted ceilings required fifty thousand bricks made to order.

By the sixth century, tombs in the north were generally more extravagant than those in the south. They consisted of a long, sloping ramp descending from ground level to the depth of the burial chamber. Air shafts punctured the ceiling, supplying light and air. With the use of fired bricks and vaulted ceilings with corbeled

courses, a single burial chamber accommodated low platforms for a pair of coffins as well as a large range of ceramic figurines. Door panels, lintels, jambs, and pediments made from polished limestone slabs carried line engravings. In the most deluxe tombs, painting covers both this stonework and the brick walls and ceiling. Sometimes these paintings continued outside the chamber door on plastered earthen walls up the ramp to ground level. The ceiling may have celestial subjects, such as constellations, the Milky Way, and zodiacal figures and animals. An array of attendants appropriate to the social rank of the deceased occupies the walls. Ceramic figurines augmented these painted representations. Similar courtiers and servants may be found in both wall paintings and figurines. The deceased thus reposed in a simulation of his or her immediate society. With the important exception of the Mogao chapels at Dunhuang (see FIGS. 5-18, 5-19, and 5-20), murals from elite northern tombs now supply the most significant body of evidence for painting in the centuries between Han and Tang.

Lou Rui, a Northern Qi aristocrat, died in 570. His family buried him near modern Taiyuan (Shanxi), then a capital called Jinyang. Lou held the rank of "proper First Rank Noble," an honorable status that came from both his birth in the family of an empress and honors accrued during his lifetime. This station placed him at the top of a social hierarchy formalized as nine ranks. Excavators have opened only a few other tombs of such lofty personages. The figurines in Lou Rui's tomb alone exceeded six hundred items. They cover the gamut from livestock and their grooms, to household serving men and women, to the mounted and armored warriors who accompanied Lou in his official capacities. The murals around the chamber depict attendants and courtiers who accompanied the deceased. Heralds, a mounted entourage, and a camel train occupy the walls of the ramp. The two mounted warriors shown in figure 5-4 are at the rear of a procession galloping along the ramp's middle register. The horses and riders are closely bunched together so that the ones on the outside obscure the interior ones. The riders in this illustration are shown in two different views: the one at left in a three-quarter pose and the one at right in strict profile. Their horses, on the other hand, are both in profile; the one at right rears back in response to a tightening of its reins. The horses appear small in proportion to the riders but the details of each mount, its reins and saddle cloths, are all accurately accounted for. Comparatively bold and regular lines describe every form, while coloring has been applied evenly to all the bounded areas. The accomplished rendering of these riders and their companions forecasts the "great age" of horse painting in the Tang period (see FIG. 6-35). An ox inhabits the heavens of the vaulted ceiling, amid other animals of the Chinese zodiac (FIG. 5-6). This magnificent animal was first drawn on the plaster ground in a sketch using brown pigment, now visible, then the lines of the sketch were redone in ink for the finished drawing. This superimposed drawing, more controlled and also more detailed, only partially follows the sketch. Clearly the artisan wielding the brush improved on the animal as he worked. Slippery smooth lines varying somewhat in width and often ending

5-4 Mounted warriors
Detail of wall painting, Tomb of Lou Rui, Taiyuan, Shanxi. Northern Qi, c. 570 CE

5-5 Musicians playing for the pleasure of the tomb lord
Detail of wall painting, tomb at Jiuquan, Gansu. Sixteen Kingdoms, 4th century CE

in wispy tails describe this bulky animal. Lou's tomb featured extensive painting, covering a total of more than 240 square yards (200 sq. m).

Excavations of a number of imperial burial complexes have occupied archaeologists near the other Northern Qi capital, Ye. These underground chambers also are covered with murals, although none has yet been published thoroughly. Moreover, some tombs hold huge numbers of figurines, dwarfing the large quantities known from Luoyang and Taiyuan. An imperial tomb near Wanzhang (Ci County, Hebei), for example, held about 1500 figurines. The composition of this vast array is striking: 81 armored riders, 304 armed attendants, 63 armored foot soldiers, 56 archers, 83 honor-guard attendants, 83 musicians, 368 civil officials of several ranks, plus various serving and dancing figurines, livestock, and models. This large number with its strong emphasis on military force suggests a very high-status tomb lord. We illustrate one atypical figure (FIG. 5-7). This official stands no less than 56 inches (1.4 m) tall, making it the largest tomb figure since the army of the First Emperor of Qin. The figurine was made in parts with cap, head, and torso joined. Hands within his long sleeves, the official stands at solemn attention, chest armor and long robe masking most of his body. The face has sharp features, with full lips, long nose, and pronounced, furrowed brows. One of a pair positioned outside the stone door of this tomb, a ceramic sculpture such as this compares favorably with the most sophisticated stone Buddhist images (see FIG. 5-1) from the same period. Although this tomb lacked an epitaph, its position and furnishings strongly point to an imperial attribution. Historians have suggested Gao Yang (d. 559), the founding emperor of Northern Qi.

5-6 Heavenly oxen
Detail of wall painting, Tomb of Lou Rui, Taiyuan, Shanxi. Northern Qi, c. 570 CE

5-7 Door guardian figurine
Northern Qi, c. 559 CE.
Earthenware, height 56¼" (1.43 m).
Tomb at Wanzhang, Ci County, Hebei. Institute of Archaeology, Beijing

THE *DHARMA* COMES TO THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

The teachings of the Buddha (*dharma*) were known in the Middle Kingdom during the Later Han. Devotees from the Western Regions had been coming to the Han realm for several generations, and emigré communities were established during the first and second centuries CE. This was largely a faith and philosophy of foreigners resident in the Han territory, by all accounts marginal to the court and Han elite as a whole. The first Chinese translations of Buddhist holy texts, *sutras*, were made in Han times and still survive in the "Three Baskets" (*Tripitaka* in Sanskrit, *Dazangjing* in Chinese), the library of the Buddha's teachings, rules for monastic life, and learned commentaries. This "Chinese Canon," as it is conventionally called, came over the centuries to hold more than 2500 titles in many thousands of volumes. Rendering a text into Chinese was far more challenging than the simple term "translation" suggests. Few people knew the Indic languages of the early *sutras* (based on ancient Sanskrit) and the Central Asian languages of the monks who came to Han, as well as Chinese. Therefore the process was one of approximating meanings in steps from one language to another. More fundamentally, concepts current in Indic or Buddhist thought for which no clear counterpart existed in Chinese were expressed by coopting existing terms. Thus *fa*—"law, way, method"—became the favored Chinese equivalent for the Sanskrit term *dharma*.

The historical narrative of the *dharma* in China has usually been constructed as a cycle divisible into stages. The earliest phase is generally considered a period of introduction, preparation—embryonic. Whatever the term, the status of the *dharma* at that time, judged from a Sinocentric vantage point, is that of a newly intrusive cultural phenomenon not yet widely disseminated in Chinese culture. This may fit some of the facts, but it slights the highly evolved character and ancient history of this complex phenomenon we label "Buddhism," a nineteenth-century European coinage. Buddhism itself was not in any way "embryonic" during the centuries prior to c. 300 CE. The next several centuries, generally 300–600, are customarily regarded as a period of growth and domestication, or as formative. The total number of believers, the numbers of men and women who had taken vows, and the roles of the Buddhist community within society had grown enormously by the time of Sui unification in 589. Many characteristic features of the *dharma* in China grow over this period. As a world civilization, Buddhism was also growing and changing. Developments within China often paralleled those elsewhere and sometimes were greatly affected by them. The narrative therefore is not self-contained but rather connected to the larger, pan-Asian community.

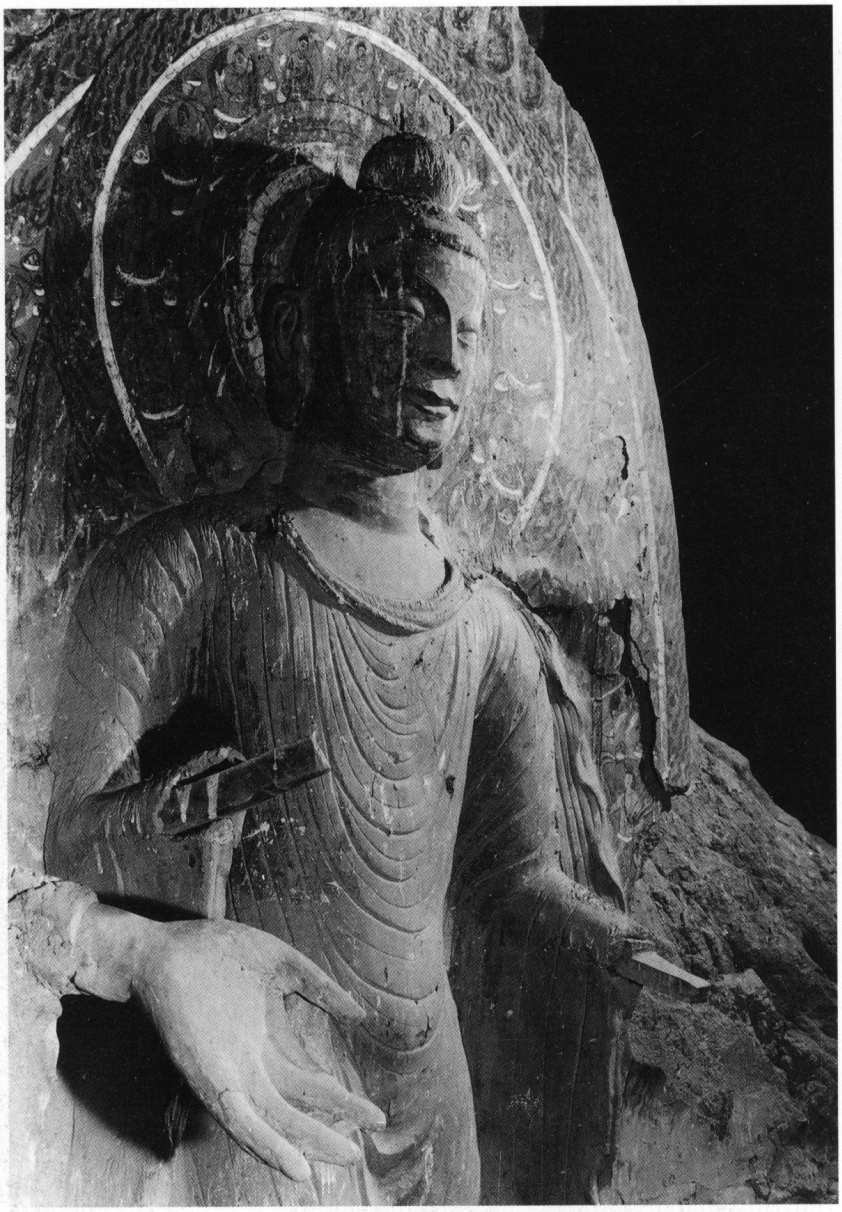
The models by which one explains the creation of a pervasive Buddhist culture within China also require elaboration. To speak loosely of "influence" or "impact" begs specific questions. We must imagine the ways events transpired in historical time, with living human actors in real social contexts. Transmission involved several different social groups and practical mechanisms. "Elite Buddhism" was transmission by importation (the term is borrowed from Jan Nattier). If powerful patrons wished, for example, they could sponsor a learned monk from the Western Regions who could make translations or otherwise promote the *dharma*. "Evangelical Buddhism," on the other hand, was transmission by export. Buddhist believers, whether tonsured or lay persons, brought teachings with them into a new society and then actively spread the words of the Buddha to expand the community. Many monks who came to North China from oasis statelets on the routes to the west or from Kashmir (Jibin) actively proselytized. "Ethnic Buddhism," finally, designates the faith and practice of a community that moved into a new society and followed the Buddha's teachings as emigrants inside a larger society. The first Buddhist communities of the Han period were made up of such resident foreigners. Each of these mechanisms can be documented in the Six Dynasties period; each left its traces in the historical and material records.

Central Asian and Liang Buddhism

Although the overland routes that skirt the Taklamakan Desert are today part of the People's Republic, they are no less "Central Asian" sites, and this term seems preferable to phrases such as "Chinese Turkestan." (The early population of these areas was not Turkic-speaking, and its connections with China were often superficial.) This terrain is today the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, largely a desert realm with a non-Han majority population. Abundant data show that many non-Han peoples occupied these regions prior to their annexation by the Qing in the eighteenth century.

Two sites on the southern Silk Road represent the kind of presence the *dharma* had achieved during the first several centuries CE. Both locations were recorded by Sir Mark Aurel Stein during his expeditions for the British Crown in the first decades of the twentieth century. At a site called Miran, Stein uncovered ruined *stupas* (reliquary mounds) and found fragments of clay sculpture and wall painting in the ambulatory passages encircling the base level. The paintings struck his eyes as distinctly Roman or Greco-Roman and recalled the art of northwest India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan that is generally named Gandharan. Like other leading European scholars of his day, Stein was disposed to see these works this way. Trained as a classical archaeologist and linguist, he knew more than a little Greek and Latin and was well aware of Alexander the Great's forays into the Indus valley and the later Greco-Bactrian kingdoms that flourished in that region. Thus Stein interpreted the ruined wall paintings with their light and shadow and perspective effects as evidence for the eastward penetration of Greco-Roman style and culture. In the desert north of Khotan (Hetian, Xinjiang), Stein also uncovered a large monastery complex with a walled *stupa* court called Rawak ("high mansion"). Its walls were covered with large clay sculptures of Buddhas on wooden armatures or supports. Here the torsos were reminiscent of Indic sculptural styles associated with the North Indian center of Mathura, where the earliest dated Buddha images had been created. Pious monks and nuns at the beginning of the reign of the great Kushan emperor Kanishka (dates disputed, perhaps c. 75–100 CE) dedicated many of these early Mathuran images. As at Mathura, the Buddha figures from the Rawak *stupa* stand squarely on two widespread feet, their bodies cloaked by relatively lightweight robes. The swelling forms of the chest, belly, and thighs are modeled as if the thin covering garment were taut against them. The robe is augmented by fine lines or strings that represent fabric folds. Both shoulders are covered, and a cowl collar encircles the neck. By contrast with the so-called Greco-Roman style at Miran, the images from Rawak were linked stylistically to an Indian artistic center. In both instances, Stein could offer only rough dates of about fourth century CE based on coin deposits.

The Gansu corridor leading from the eastern fringe of Xinjiang southeast toward the Wei River drainage was known in this period as Liangzhou. This was the region where Huo Qubing (see page 148) enacted his military exploits against the Xiongnu in this region. During the fourth and fifth centuries the corridor was ruled by a succession of small Xiongnu and Tibetan states. By the early fifth century the Liang capital had become a center of Buddhist culture, notable for learned monks from the Western Regions. Perhaps the most influential was Kumarajiva (c. 350–410), a native of Kucha on the northern route who presided over the translation of many of the most widely read *sutras* of medieval times. Kumarajiva's rendering of the *Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma (Saddharmapundarika)* became the most influential version of that powerful text in East Asia. Kumarajiva and his cohort also translated a variety of other texts that remained at the core of Buddhist devotion and philosophy in subsequent centuries. It was the claim of several of these texts of "Greater Vehicle" (Mahayana) Buddhism that, as the words of the Buddha, they were a final and totalistic revelation of his teachings, obviating earlier *sutras* and laying before the believer an ideal of conduct (in the form of the *bodhisattva*, a being whose nature is enlightenment) and a path to salvific enlightenment.



5-8 Standing Buddha
Cave 169, Bingling Si, Yongjing, Gansu. Western Qin, c. 420 CE. Clay on wooden armature, height 8′ (2.45 m)

The oldest ensemble of Buddhist images extant within China, this natural grotto high on a cliff in rugged country outside the Liang capital region features accomplished renderings of large figures derived from Central Asian and Indian models.

At some distance from the Liang capital is a cave-chapel site now known as Bingling Si (Yongjing County, Gansu). The earliest extant dated Buddhist images in China proper are clay figures and painted walls found in a natural grotto high on this cliff. Dedicated in 420 CE under the Tibetan Western Qin dynasty, these sculpted and painted images resemble those at the Rawak site near Khotan. A standing Buddha from one niche on the north wall faithfully reproduces the models created in North India (FIG. 5-8). Details such as two hems above the ankles, drapery hanging below the wrists, and the turned cowl collar reiterate conventions found at Rawak and Mathura. At Bingling Si the head with its halo displays crisply cut nose ridge and brows, lips and eyes. This plump, idealized physical type was developed in Indian workshops to represent a "great being" (*mahasattva*) such as a Buddha. The many sculpted images and inscriptions at Bingling Si suggest that the complexities of Mahayana devotion were already in place by the early fifth century. For example, one clay image is identified as Amitayus, the Buddha of Boundless Light and Long Life, while other Buddhas and Great *Bodhisattvas* are represented in painting. Buddhas of the Three Kalpas (past, present, and future ages) and the "Five Buddhas" (Sakyamuni and his predecessors) are also present. Not least, there are donors' names, including a monk called Faxian who could be the great traveler who visited Indian holy sites around 400.

Competition among groups promoting different revelatory *sutras* led to a variety of devotional cults in this period. The *Lotus Sutra*, the several *Wisdom (Prajnaparamita) sutras*, the *Western Pure Land sutras*, the *Flower Garland Sutra*, and the *The Holy Teachings of Vimalakirti* (*Vimalakirtinirdesa*) all had a demonstrable impact on devotion, image making, and the role of the Buddhist community in society. Several *sutras* that foretold the future descent of the Buddha of the Future, Maitreya, were among the most popular in the Liang region. An impressive early example is found in Cave 275 at the Mogao chapels near Dunhuang (Gansu). Better known as the "Caves of the Thousand Buddhas," according to local tradition the grottoes were begun in the fourth century. The oldest extant chapels date only to the fifth century, c. 420–440, when the Northern Liang regime exercised control over this area. The large (nearly 11 ft; 3.3 m) seated image of Maitreya against the rear (west) wall of this cave chapel is sculpted on an armature in clay (FIG. 5-9). Much of its surface is covered with later repainting, but the robe covering both shoulders, the ridges on the skirt, and the flattened sashes on the base are likely to be original. Portions of the rear wall with a reddish-brown ground are also original in color and content. Maitreya sits on a throne with a triangular back, legs pendant and ankles crossed. His dress is that conventionally used for a

bodhisattva. He wears a long skirt (*dhoti*) but is bare chested, with a necklace and jewelry in his ears and hair. The royal attire and the *bodhisattva* attributes derive from the life story of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who was born a prince and existed in this world as a *bodhisattva* prior to his extinction, *nirvana*, after eighty years of life on Earth. Maitreya exists in a heavenly realm, the Tusita Pure Land. According to the major *sutras*, he will some day come down to earth, ushering in a new era.

Northern Wei Patrons

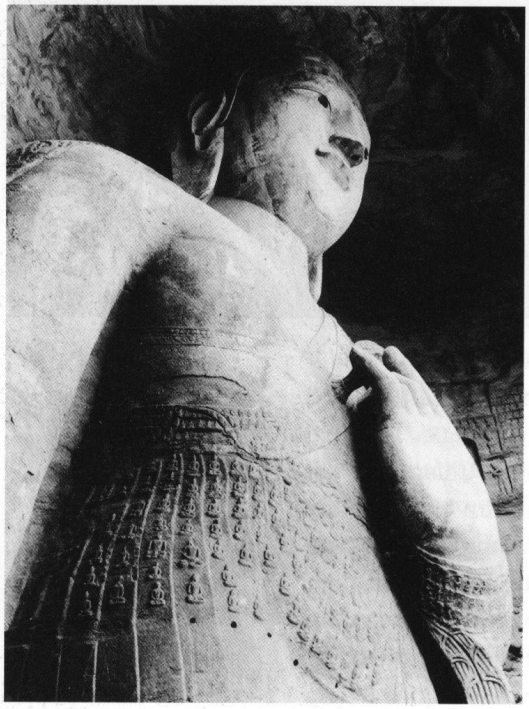
The Tabgatch (Tuoba) state supported the Buddhist community in a variety of ways. This patronage undoubtedly had complex motivations, including genuine piety, but other agendas complemented the latter. Emperors and empresses (see FIG. 5-17) and their families contributed wealth and property to the Buddhist community. The court elite too were personal patrons of Buddhist establishments, monks and nuns, and images. At the second Wei capital of Luoyang, many princely mansions were in fact turned into monasteries and nunneries on the death of the former occupant. The imperial court sponsored major projects such as the great caves at Yungang, outside the first capital of Pingcheng (near modern Datong, Shanxi). The dedications here came, in fact, after a severe proscription of the Buddhist establishment. In that light they are often seen as responses of atonement for past misdeeds. Bearing the huge expense of these large chapels may have been a kind of expiation for the bad *karma* induced by the persecution of c. 444–452. The Northern Wei state also exercised a degree of control over the community of monks and nuns. After the persecution, a monk from the Liangzhou region named Tanyao was installed as "superintendent of monks," an official post within the civil bureaucracy. Moreover, a system in which designated households contributed income and other support to Buddhist temples insured economic resources for the Buddhist community. Some writers use the term "State Buddhism" to summarize these aspects of the Buddhist community under the Wei.

first account of State Bud.

5-9 Maitreya Buddha, Cave 275, Mogao chapels, Dunhuang, Gansu. Northern Liang, c. 420–40 CE. Clay on wooden armature, height 10′10″ (3.3 m)

The caves cut in a sandstone cliff called Yungang (Cloudy Ridge) beginning c. 460 were the greatest projects attempted in China on behalf of the Buddhist community up to that time. The prestige and resources of the imperial state were summoned to guarantee their realization, and the results are still impressive after centuries of decay and damage. Five large caves at the west end of the cliff were probably done in two

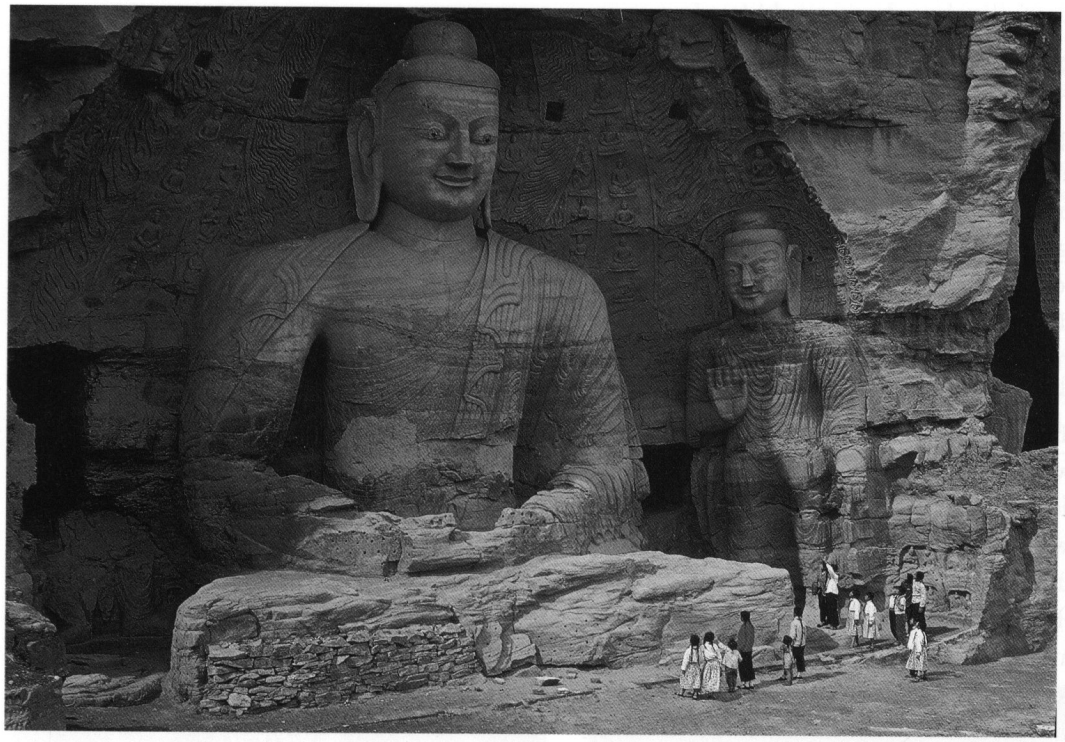
phases. Numbers 18, 19, and 20 were begun first, while two eastern caves, numbers 16 and 17, seem to have been started somewhat later. This periodization, advanced by Chinese scholars responsible for the site, raises questions about the symbolical significance of this project. Many writers assume that the five large caves were dedicated to the previous five Tabgatch rulers, in line with an explicit record of five gilt-bronze images made and installed in a pagoda for this reason. More recently John Huntington has interpreted the five images as a "Buddha field" with five deities centering on the standing Buddha of Cave 18, identified as Vairocana Buddha (Pilushana), the principal Buddha of the *Flower Garland Sutra*. Given the current dating of the caves, it seems more likely that Tanyao and his helpers did not have such a scheme in mind when they began. Work on Caves 16 and 19 was not truly completed until late in the century, about the time the capital was shifted to Luoyang. Identification of two of the colossal Buddhas is secure. A cross-legged Buddha in *bodhisattva* attire in Cave 17 must be Maitreya, and a standing Buddha flanked by disciples and wearing a robe covered with a myriad small Buddhas neatly cut between the pleats (FIG. 5-10) must be Sakyamuni, the Buddha of the present age. These small emanations suggest either a miraculous event (such as that at Sravasti, where the Buddha replicated himself to an assembly) or a transcendent Buddha such as Vairocana, who represents the "body of the *dharma*" (*dharmakaya*), rather than Sakyamuni. The theory of the multiple bodies of the Buddha was an important component of Mahayana belief and philosophy at this time, and the standing figure could exemplify this understanding. When the first three images were complemented by two more, the original eastern image (Cave 18) then became the central Buddha. However, there is no evidence it was recut or otherwise emended to take into account its new, central position. Unfortunately for Huntington's argument, the traits (postures, gestures etc.) of the other Buddhas are ambiguous or uncertain and so do not support the "Buddha field" interpretation.



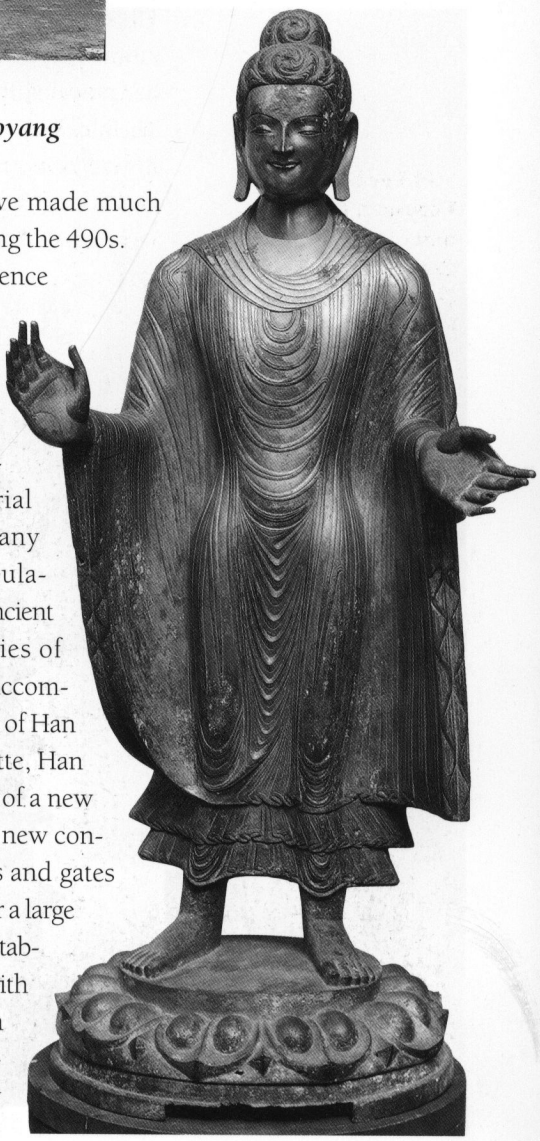
5-10 Buddha with Thousand Buddhas on robe
Cave 18, Yungang chapels, Datong, Shanxi. Northern Wei, c. 460–80 CE. Sandstone, height 51′ (15.5 m)

The exposed image of a seated Buddha designated Cave 20 has become a familiar landmark of early Buddhist art in China (FIG. 5-11). The original exterior wall has collapsed to expose this majestic figure to the elements. A standing Buddha at the west was probably destroyed by the loss of the standing wall so today only a single flanking image survives. Nonetheless it seems likely this cave represents the iconography of the Buddhas of the Three Kalpas (the past, present, and future ages). The disparity in scale between the seated Buddha (45 ft; 13.7 m) in a lotus meditation posture and the standing attendant Buddha (29 ft; 9 m) is extreme. Such a hieratic scale figured in most subsequent image ensembles. Both Buddhas are wearing so-called "western dress," attire then conventional among images in Liangzhou and along the Silk Road. Since the Wei state moved large numbers of people from the Dunhuang region to its capital at Datong, it is hardly surprising that images made there follow western models. The main Buddha is well preserved except for its hands and lower limbs, where the sandstone is much abraded. The facial features are plump and smoothly finished, with elongated eye slits, sharply cut nose and nostrils, extra large ear lobes, and wide, slightly smiling, pursed lips. The image is very broad at the shoulder and, when viewed from the sides, emerges awkwardly from the backing wall. The Buddha is in effect an extraordinarily large-scale high relief designed to overwhelm the enclosed space of its original chapel.

These five chapels created under Tanyao's direction must have produced a great sensation in the Tabgatch capital and throughout the realm. One might describe this as a "ripple effect," as when a large rock is dropped into a still pond. Images were made in explicit emulation of these grand prototypes, but to a much smaller scale. Such reproductions served as commemorative or souvenir images; brother–sister images were



5-11 Colossal Buddha
Cave 20, Yungang chapels, Datong, Shanxi. Northern Wei, c. 460–480 CE. Sandstone, height 45′ (13.7 m)



5-12 Standing Buddha
Northern Wei, late 5th century CE. Gilt bronze, height 55″ (1.4 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Kennedy Fund, 1926) (26.123)

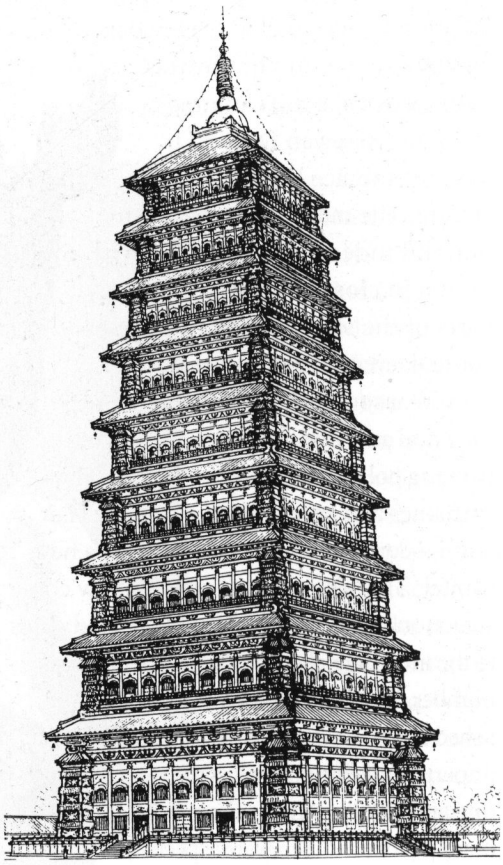
installed in other temples in the capital and elsewhere. Gift images reproducing the iconography and style were sent abroad by the court. Such processes help explain the large number of seated and standing Buddhas dated around the time of the construction of Tanyao's caves that resemble the colossal stone figures. The largest and finest is a standing Buddha, now in New York (FIG. 5-12). This graceful and pacific being falls into the lineage of Buddha images already described (FIGS. 5-8, 5-10, 5-11), descending from the North Indian type represented at Rawak and Bingling Si. It reproduces many details found on the colossal Cave 20 Buddha as well. The image is intact except for its body halo, or mandorla, and boasts a covering of gilt. Images such as this were dedicated in honor of five Tabgatch rulers, as mentioned above. Chinese Buddhist travelers including Faxian (c. 400) and the later Sungyun (c. 516–523) knew "famous" images in the Western Regions, especially in Jibin (Kashmir), Afghanistan, and North India. A gilt image like the standing Buddha could replicate an important cult image from the west, perhaps even the so-called Udyana Buddha, one of the first two images made in the earthly lifetime of Sakyamuni.

Court Patronage at Luoyang

Historians and art historians have made much of the shift of the Wei capital during the 490s. For most writers, the move is evidence for a conscious attempt by the self-styled "Filial and Cultured" emperor (Xiaowen Di, r. 471–499) to embrace Han (Chinese) culture. The more southerly location did indeed place the imperial capital in closer proximity to many parts of the state with their population and revenue. Luoyang was an ancient capital associated with the glories of the Zhou and Han dynasties. The accompanying policy shifts at court—use of Han surnames and speech, Han etiquette, Han attire—complemented the choice of a new capital. This also meant a wave of new construction projects, from city walls and gates to the imperial palace. In short order a large number of Buddhist temples were established in and around the new city, with imperial and elite patrons vying with one another to express their devotion. Imperial women were especially

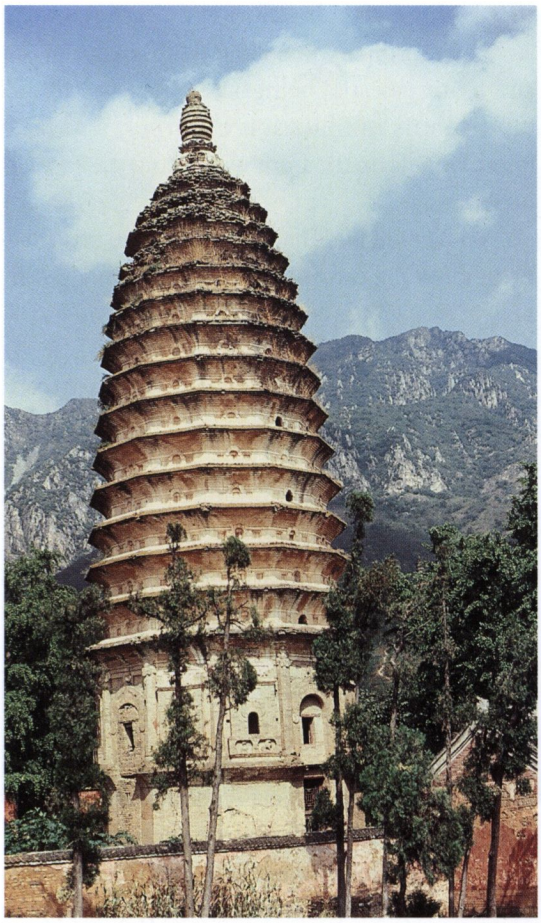
active as patrons of Buddhist establishments, images, and ceremonies. The many dedicatory inscriptions from this era express ancestral piety and pious goals such as rebirth in a Pure Land or the accumulation of merit. The two pagodas discussed below and the Wei chapels opened at Longmen, south of the city, all date from the first decades of the new capital.

The greatest monument of Northern Wei Buddhism must have been the great temple and pagoda given the name "Eternal Tranquility" (Yongning Si). Located just south of the palace, this temple was constructed c. 516 under the patronage of the Grand Dowager Empress Ling. Although she was later vilified in court histories, her piety should not be questioned. She was a sponsor of other good works and of many Buddhist ceremonies on behalf of her family and the state. The empress's stereotyped, negative portrait is more likely a result of resentment engendered by her power during the reign of her juvenile son. The nine-story pagoda (*ta*) of this temple burned down in a grand conflagration in 534, but literary descriptions are reasonably detailed, and its foundations have been excavated. The literary accounts record heights of as much as 1000 feet (c. 305 m), hardly credible for a wooden-frame structure. The actual base dimensions affirm a very large structure, however, with a pounded-earth platform as much as 330 feet (100 m) square and a foundation more than 12 feet (3.6 m) thick, itself measuring 160 feet (50 m) square. Plausible interpretations, such as the recent rendering by Yang Hongxun shown here (FIG. 5-13), hypothesize an earthen core rising through several levels and a surrounding wooden frame. The total height reaches about 490 feet (150 m). This well reasoned estimate still strains credulity. The facade of Yang's drawing is derived largely from reliefs found at Yungang. Each floor has nine bays framed at the corners by miniature towers. The consistent number of bays required a regular diminution of their scale for each higher floor. The tie beams and simple brackets shown are in keeping with stone facades of the period at cave-chapel sites. The rendering of both balcony (*harmika*) and spire (*catra*) also have analogues in the period. Although the ultimate derivation of the Chinese pagoda is from the *stupa* of Indic Buddhism, the model here was more indebted to the multistoried watch towers (*lou*) of the Han era. How Buddhist pagodas evolved prior to this time remains obscure; the process was not a simple borrowing.



5-13 Yongning Temple pagoda

Quite out of keeping with this design is the oldest extant pagoda in China, the great brick monument in the foothills of Mount Song (Dengfeng, Henan). Dedicated in the 520s, the Songyue Si pagoda (FIG. 5-14) is part of a temple near a suburban Wei imperial palace. At almost 130 feet (39 m) in height, it stands perhaps one-quarter the size of the lost Yongning Si monument and only slightly taller than the oldest wooden pagoda in East Asia, the five-story example at the Hōryūji (Nara, Japan). The Mount Song pagoda rises on a thick-walled, twelve-sided base of two full stories. Then follow fifteen closely spaced eaves made of corbeled brick that trace a parabolic arc to the spire. The bottom floor is essentially plain and may have been surrounded by a now lost wooden-frame gallery. The second level has large doorways



5-14 Songyue Temple pagoda
Mount Song, Dengfeng, Henan. Northern Wei, c. 520–24 CE. Height 132′ (39 m)

in each cardinal face and true windows in the eight intermediate walls. Those walls copy the elevation of a one-story, square *stupa*, a type associated at this time in China with the Indian king Asoka. Both the proper doors of the second level and the many miniaturized doors and windows under the fifteen eaves refer to an Indic prototype, the pointed *caitya* arch. The profile of the pagoda itself is indebted to towers (*sikhara*) over the sanctums of Indic temples. These references to non-Chinese architectural models support what texts record: Buddhist visitors from Central and Southeast Asia, including Sri Lanka and Funan (Vietnam), at the Wei courts.

The cave chapels south of Luoyang at Longmen ("Dragon Gate") on the Yi River also became a focus of imperial patronage. The "Treatise on Buddhism and Taoism" of the *Wei History* (*Wei shu*) records the effort to dedicate twin chapels to the previous emperor and empress by their son, Emperor Xuanwu, in about 500. Within a few years the emperor received a report that the project should be revised, and still later one that a third chapel in his honor should be added. Work on at least one of these three chapels was complete by 523 when Dowager Empress Ling visited the site. This must correspond to the so-called Central Binyang Cave (see FIGS. 5-15, 5-16, and 5-17), the largest and most lavish Wei-period chapel at Longmen. (The flanking north and south caves were completed only in the Tang era.) The work here consumed 82,366 man-days of labor, but it is not known how much of that effort was actually expended on the central cave itself. The space excavated is more than 33 feet (10 m) square and almost as high. The main image of the Buddha Sakyamuni on the rear wall is 21 feet (6.45 m) tall and is flanked by ten other large-scale images also cut from the rock as

5-15 Sakyamuni Buddha
Binyang Chapel, Longmen, Luoyang, Henan. Northern Wei, c. 523 CE. Limestone, height 21′ (6.45 m)

5-16 Head of Ananda
Binyang Chapel, Longmen, Luoyang, Henan

very high reliefs. The effort and detail invested were extraordinary: a ceiling with lotus designs and flying celestial beings, a floor with incised lotus motifs in imitation of carpet, and four tiers of reliefs on the front wall facing the ensemble of images.

Sakyamuni Buddha sits cross-legged on a high pedestal as the central icon of a pentad, a group of five: two standing *bodhisattvas* and two standing monks accompany him (FIG. 5-15). Each side wall has a standing triad of Buddhas with *bodhisattvas*. The entire ensemble may be interpreted as the Buddhas of the Three Ages, with Prabhutaratna or Kasyapa Buddha on one side and Maitreya Buddha on the other. The two monks or *arhats* flanking Sakyamuni contrast in appearance. The monk at the Buddha's right hand is young, perhaps intended to be Ananda, the Buddha's favorite (FIG. 5-16). The other, older figure presumably would be Mahakasyapa, the senior and most respected of the disciples. These multiple Buddhas recall the grand assemblies at the beginning of many Mahayana *sutras*, such as the *Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma*. Their haloes and body mandorlas, the celestials swirling above, and the other regalia of high status—from carpet to lions—truly bring the visitor into the presence of the Buddha. The makers of this cave portrayed the figures in a modified costume, perhaps another aspect of the adoption of Han customs already cited. Sakyamuni Buddha has both shoulders covered with an undergarment on the chest and a sash hanging down onto his lap. The fall of cloth over the edge of the throne platform is itself elaborated in pleasing fold patterns and ruffled edges. Similar details are visible on the standing figures, especially the hems of the Buddhas on each side. Such attire is already found at Yungang in the 480s, but became increasingly common at Longmen. It never altogether supplanted "western" garb, however, which can also be found at Longmen. Dress was a signifier of many things: attention to the rules of conduct; revered models; imperial links to the Buddhist community; and artistic styles flourishing in southern centers along the upper and lower reaches of the Yangzi River.

Images of imperial patrons actually appear, for the first time, in this cave. In spite of the major

5-17 Empress as donor
Relief removed from Binyang Chapel, Longmen, Luoyang, Henan. Limestone, height 6′4″ (1.93 m). The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (40-38)

In a rare glimpse of an imperial personage, the Northern Wei empress here wears a lotus-flower headdress and extends her arms in response to the offering of an attendant facing her at left. A matching relief illustrating an emperor as donor once flanked the chapel door but now resides in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

role of the Son of Heaven as a sponsor of artistic projects over the centuries, no credible representations of any emperor or empress survive prior to the Northern Wei period. The two reliefs that originally occupied the front wall of the Binyang Cave were hacked into pieces, but survive, reconstructed, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York) and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Kansas City). The relief depicting the empress (FIG. 5-17) presents her at nearly life-size. Wearing a lotus as a crown, she is accompanied by a dozen other women of the palace in their own varied hairdos and flowing robes. Her plump features notwithstanding, it is uncertain if this is a "likeness." Yet, in its time, no visitor could mistake the reference. The composition of patron and attendants draws on conventions preserved elsewhere, as can be seen in the *Nymph of the Luo River* and Yan Liben's *Thirteen Emperors* (see FIG. 6-26).

Dunhuang: Early Narratives

Early Buddhist cave chapels were designed and decorated with careful attention to texts from the Canon and their teachings, and they respond to analysis with the textual sources at hand. Prime examples are pictorial narratives placed in the Mogao chapels (Dunhuang, Gansu): Cave 285, dated by inscription to 538/539, and Cave 428, dated to the third quarter of the sixth century.

Cave 285 is atypical in plan: a large, open chamber flanked on two sides by eight small cells, probably for meditation (FIG. 5-18). Only two other instances of this plan are preserved at the site. Such chapels would seem to have sustained both communal activities and solitary practices. The main icon is a Buddha flanked by two cross-legged monks. Indeed monks and *arhats* are at the heart of the decorative program. Meditating monks or *arhats* in a wilderness setting form a border band at the base of the ceiling. A stunning array of deities and celestial beings are pictured on the red-ground walls surrounding the three niches. More predictable painted Buddha ensembles with donors cover most of the remaining wall surfaces.

The narrative of the "five hundred robbers" is laid out in a horizontal frieze running from front to rear along the south wall (FIG. 5-19). This is an

5-18 Interior view of Cave 285
Mogao chapels, Dunhuang, Gansu. Western Wei, dated 538/39 CE

Temple worship halls and pagodas were decorated with abundant color, precious metals, and fine textiles, a far cry from the austere stone reliefs and sculptures encountered in cave chapels. This chapel evokes splendors that must equally have characterized the Binyang Cave (see FIGS. 5-16 and 5-17) and other stone-cut chapels when they were first dedicated.

episodic rendering, its discrete episodes framed more or less strictly by placement of figures, architecture, and miniaturized mountains in strong azurite and malachite pigments. At the far left, a company of warriors on foot brandishing swords and shields engages cavalry. Here the tale begins with the king's army battling five hundred robbers. To the right, below a formation of cavalry, the vanquished robbers are presented to the king, and we witness their punishment by blinding. This particular episode illustrates several steps in a sequence. Five robbers, standing for five hundred, are shown bound, stripped of their cloaks, blinded, and then suffering the agonies of their punishment in the royal courtyard. The next episode takes place in a mountainous wilderness as the blinded robbers wail in distress, contorted into grotesque poses as they realize their desperate circumstances. Another episode is portrayed just right of a pair of mountain ranges. Here the robbers have been saved and their sight restored, and they are now seen in adoring postures before a seated Buddha. Finally, one more episode further right repeats the same composition, but with the telling detail that the one-time robbers are now in monk's dress, having taken vows. In spite of its exotic settings—the lapis mountains of the Western Regions—this pictorial rendering is what one would expect in a Chinese handscroll. A long horizontal format is well suited to episodic narration, although in scrolls the movement through time is from the viewer's right to left. The convention of a white ground on which figures and miniaturized landscape elements are placed is also in keeping with artistic practices of the two capitals, Luoyang and Nanjing. Not least, like the other icons of this chapel, the figures are drawn as elongated figures with Han-style court dress. The literary text that supplies the plot for this narrative is known from several collections in the Canon. Its message, the salvific powers of the Buddha on the one hand, and the potential for

5-19 Five hundred robbers
Wall painting on south wall, Cave 285, Mogao chapels, Dunhuang, 538/39 CE

enlightenment of all beings on the other, is firmly within the core of common Mahayana teachings.

Created on an even grander scale, Cave 428 is the largest excavation at the Mogao chapels before the Sui (589–617). The *stupa*-pillar plan here allows for a gathering of devotees in the front under a peaked ceiling and circumambulation around the pillar at rear. Painted groups on the walls complement sculpted images in niches on the four sides of the pillar. Walls flanking the doorway are in each case divided into three long registers, again calling to mind a frieze or Chinese handscroll (FIG. 5-20). The narrative on the south is the most famous of all stories of previous lives of the Buddha (*jataka*): that of Prince Mahasattva. Once upon a time in a previous incarnation Sakyamuni was a prince. One day he and his two brothers went riding in the wilderness, and there they spied a tigress and her cubs starving for lack of food. Mahasattva, unafraid and motivated by selfless compassion (*karuna*) or charity (*dana*), offered himself to the tigress by lying on the ground. She, however, was too weak even to begin to feed. To expedite matters, Mahasattva then wounded himself with a bamboo stick and threw himself from a cliff, smashing his body on the ground within reach of the mother tiger and her offspring. Our illustration shows these two scenes in the middle register and the brothers' response thereafter below. At bottom left we see the brothers gathering Mahasattva's bones, dedicating a *stupa*, and then galloping to their father. As with the Cave 285 narrative, brightly colored mountains separate scenes, and the narrative is to be read sequentially. The virtue of charity and selflessness is one of the six perfections (*paramitas*) of the *bodhisattva* path, another cardinal teaching of Mahayana texts.

5-20 Hungry tigress (*Mahasattva jataka*)
Cave 428, Mogao chapels, Dunhuang. Northern Zhou, c. 550–575 CE

Northern Qi Patrons

We have encountered the rulers of the Northern Qi regime at their capital, Ye (see FIG. 5-2), and their tombs (FIGS. 5-4, 5-6, 5-7). The major cave chapels patronized under imperial direction have been appreciated for much longer in spite of the serious damage they suffered. The major site near Ye, Xiangtang Shan ("Echo Hall" Mountain), is actually several complexes on a pair of mountains (Fengfeng City, Hebei). Inscriptions and later records indicate imperial patronage by the first few sovereigns of the Gao lineage during the 550s–560s. The secondary capital, Jinyang (modern Taiyuan, Shanxi), was also an important cultural center, as the tomb of Lou Rui shows. Here the nearby cave-chapel site is Tianlong Shan ("Heavenly Dragon" Mountain). Both sites have the sad distinction of having been vandalized to such a degree that many heads, figures, and reliefs have been removed from the limestone and sandstone walls. Many collections outside China are replete with splendid examples.

Northern Qi patrons also commanded the energies of stone-carving workshops at Dingzhou (Ding County, Hebei), a region further north from Ye and to the east, in modern Shandong. A deposit of over 2200 marble images was found in the ruins of an ancient temple in modern Quyang in the Dingzhou region during the 1950s. The more than two hundred dated images recovered document many devotional trends, especially the rise of several key *bodhisattvas*: Maitreya, the Buddha of the Future, and Guanyin (Avalokitesvara). More recently, ancient temple sites in modern Shandong have also yielded large numbers of steles and images produced by local shops active throughout the sixth century. A standing Buddha (Sakyamuni?) represents a workshop of Qingzhou (Shandong) and has the virtue of still carrying its original polychromy or colored pigments (FIG. 5-1). The figure's torso is completely carved on all sides. The posture is erect, static, and the facial features are composed and benign. Smooth surfaces and full features characterize the head, while the robe drapes the torso so closely that little of the underlying physique can be observed. The stone is covered by umber and lapis pigment and gilt, describing an elegant monk's robe. The restrained treatment of the robe contrasts with the animated linear details of Northern Wei products, and the sculptor gives greater attention to the volume of the body—both prerequisites for images of the Sui and Tang.

LUXURY AND ELITE ARTS

Specialized craft production for the elite continued during this period at capitals and regional centers. The resources and range of products available were not uniform, however, because the map was divided between competing states. Some kinds of production, like ceramics, were widespread, and regional centers supplied a considerable variety of goods for both everyday and mortuary purposes. Green wares (celadons) were produced in the Lower, Middle, and Upper Yangzi macroregions as well as in the north, for example. The number of production centers for other craft industries such as lacquer wares and silk textiles must have been more limited, since raw materials (lac and cocoons) were not equally available in all macroregions. Such products were certainly traded across political boundaries and figured in gift exchanges between rival courts. Metal objects, including some of gold and silver, were also made in this period, but the number of metal vessels that survive is greatly reduced when compared to the early empire. There must have been a decisive shift away from the use of bronze vessels for many purposes, perhaps in favor of high-quality glazed ceramics and lacquer wares. Based on present evidence the working of hardstones seems to have been in eclipse. Sources for the minerals in the Western Regions may have been inaccessible.

Stonewares and Glazes

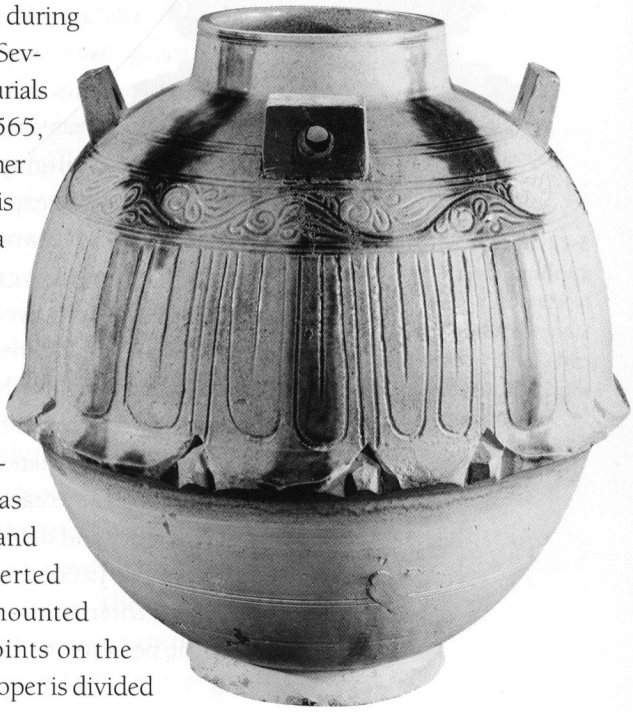
As early as the Shang and Western Zhou periods, potters were experimenting with clays that could be fired at high temperatures (c. 1200°C). In a reducing atmosphere, these clays burned to a gray color. Most authors designate such bodies "stoneware." High temperature fuses particles in the clay, rendering the bodies non-porous,

relatively hard, and less easily broken. These early stonewares, moreover, have a coating of glaze (see FIG. 2-12 above). This is slip with enough silica to form a glassy surface on the vessel during firing. While some glazing might have been accidental, the result of random ash deposits for example, most vessels clearly were dipped in, or painted with, a solution prior to firing. Thin glazes cover the surface but also collect in puddles or drips. These glassy spots are sometimes crackled as a result of shrinkage during cooling.

During the Southern Dynasties, major kiln centers in modern-day Zhejiang, both north and east of Hangzhou, produced stonewares with grayish-green glazes. With an eye on their glazes, European writers dubbed such ceramics either "greenwares" or "celadons," the latter term derived from the name of a theatrical character who wore a light green costume. The properties of these glazes are the result of their chemical recipes, which utilized feldspar as a fluxing agent and small amounts of iron for color. An iron content of 3 per cent can produce a dark brown glaze sometimes compared to burnt sugar (Deqing wares). Much smaller percentages yield the more typical gray-green tonalities. Starting at least by the third century, these kiln centers utilized "dragon kilns"—a type of kiln, with a large firing chamber on a pronounced slope, which can accommodate hundreds of pieces in a single firing. The forms produced, many using a fast wheel, range in size from diminutive water droppers, through basins and pitchers, to larger crocks and urns. Human and animal figurines and models for burial were made by using a variety of hand-modeling and slab techniques.

Ceramic production in the north paralleled that of the south. Many of the same utilitarian and mortuary types are found, including the ubiquitous pitchers with "chicken-head" spouts. However, several key developments are associated with northern kilns and most probably originated there during the sixth century, if not before. Unlike in the Lower Yangzi region, kiln sites of this period are not well documented, except for Shandong. Potters working in the Northern Qi realm had access to a fine-particle clay that burned white upon firing. By firing at high temperatures and experimenting with glazes, northern potters created precursors of "true porcelains." (Here we use the term to designate a hard, brittle, non-porous white body covered by a clear glaze. By convention, a true porcelain is also translucent and resonant when struck.) With a clear glaze, these vessels are of course white wares, and white wares flourished in the subsequent Sui and Tang periods in Hebei and Henan (see pages 214–215). When the glazes incorporated minerals that change color in firing, however, polychrome effects were achieved. A jar from the tomb of Li Yun (d. 576) near Puyang (Henan) was made from white clay thrown on a wheel (FIG. 5-21). Raised lotus petals rendered with a knife define the waist, and carved square lugs have been applied at the shoulder. The petals are incised lines, as is the band just below the shoulder. Green and brown colors are played off in the glaze. The overall brown was probably achieved by dipping the pot, while the vertical green splashes must have been applied with a brush or by dribbling the mineral onto the slip. Other vessels exhibit similar experiments with freely applied touches of contrasting colors. Such wares are precursors of the "three-colored," *sancai*, mortuary vessels and figurines of the Tang.

The use of appliqué elements to create a more complex silhouette and busier surface design can be charted during the late sixth century. Several large vases from burials in Hebei, one dated 565, and related pieces in other collections illustrate this aesthetic. Made on a wheel, the vessels have segmented bodies that suggest components more commonly combined in metalwork. The example illustrated (FIG. 5-22) has both a tall ring foot and a tall neck with everted rim. Large lugs are mounted at equally spaced points on the shoulder. The body proper is divided



5-21 Jar with four lugs
Tomb of Li Yun, Puyang, Henan. Northern Qi, c. 576 CE. Stoneware with glaze, height 9¼" (23.5 cm). National Museum of History, Beijing

5-22 Tall jar with appliqué decor
Northern Qi, c. 565 CE. Stoneware, height 27½" (70 cm). Tomb of Feng Shihui, Jing County, Hebei. National Museum of History, Beijing

into horizontal registers, not unlike ancient bronze ritual vessels. However, a medley of lotus petals, rosettes, and even the monster faces seen in Buddhist reliefs and sculptures cloak the body. The effect of these applied elements is a vessel that recalls the rich decoration of certain metal types, such as the exotic drinking vessel from a Northern Zhou tomb (see FIG. 5-30 below).

Calligraphy

Calligraphy became the first of the "visual arts" to be recognized within Chinese society as an appropriate elite pastime. As with the "fine arts" in European societies, it demanded more than ordinary skills or craft, even if a practitioner used the same tools and materials as a common clerk. To master calligraphy required the character traits of a gentleman. It was likewise an intellectual discipline, and serious study was essential to its mastery. Calligraphy was an art form with an explicit relation to its own history and to works of the past. As calligraphic specimens were collected, critical terminology was borrowed from other fields to express ideas about and reactions to this abstract art. Terms first employed in evaluating human character for bureaucratic purposes became part of the critical parlance of calligraphy. With collecting also came catalogues and, not surprisingly, forgery and debates about authenticity. History was written about the most famous masters and their works, and this lore in turn affected the perception of and reception of brush writing.

Wang Xizhi (307–365) was born into an elite family prominent in the Eastern Jin court society of his day. Even in his lifetime, Wang's calligraphy became highly prized by his social peers and was the object of determined collectors soon after his death. His legacy was evidently perpetuated within his family and their social circle. By the Sui and early Tang periods, it came to dominate the practice of calligraphy. Lothar Ledderose has characterized the works of Wang and his son, Wang Xianzhi (344–388), as the "Classical Tradition" because they served as a reservoir of models for calligraphers working in all three modern script types, especially running and regular (see "Script Types," page 175). Brush-written specimens (*tie*) of the "Two Wangs" are exceedingly rare; it is unlikely any piece now extant is actually from their hands. However, a number of tracing copies with excellent pedigrees do exist. These copies were made in the early Tang, when the enthusiasm for such works was at its peak. We cannot second-guess the claims made in that period for these specimens. However, these works and others now known only from rubbings became the core of the classical tradition in the eyes of Tang-period and later students of calligraphy.

Among brush-written specimens, we illustrate the *Sangluan tie* (FIG. 5-23). This work does not appear in premodern Chinese literature on the Wangs by virtue of the fact that it was preserved in Japan, presumably from the eighth century onward. The text is actually a letter written by Wang Xizhi discussing the funeral of a relative. The title is taken from the fifth and sixth graphs (*sang, luan*) in the first column at the right. The ink employed is a rich, saturated black applied in generous, often wide strokes. These thick touches are, however, juxtaposed with much thinner strokes, with exceedingly thin ligatures (connections) between the strokes. Some strokes betray split brush hairs or the drying of the brush as its ink was expended. The impression of unstudied, spontaneous writing is reinforced by the internal structure of each graph. Horizontals tilt from lower left to upper right. Vertical, axial strokes are skewed, so that they also incline left. The traces of the brush create an impression of animation as if the graphs were dancing