

representation in both figural and landscape painting in eighth-century

Tang Chinese art.

Notwithstanding that a full literary account of the history of Chinese painting in antiquity has existed at least since Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Painters of Renown from Successive Dynasties* (*Lidai minghua ji*), completed in 847,⁸ modern historians of Chinese painting have long been bedeviled by copies, exact replicas, and forgeries of famous masterworks painted throughout later centuries.⁹ By contrast, the archaeological remains at Dunhuang represent an authentic and continuous record of Chinese arts from the early fifth through the fourteenth century. When studied as an

"authentic visual sequence," Dunhuang Buddhist cave paintings and sculptures can themselves serve as a veritable narrative of Chinese art history.

Even more important is what Dunhuang's visual evidence can tell us about comelike geniuses such as Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406), Zhang Sengyou (active ca. 500–ca. 550), Yan Liben (ca. 600–673), Wang Wei (701–761), Han Gan (active ca. 742–ca. 756), and Wu Daozi (active mid-8th century), references by Zhang Yanyuan and others.

Mastering Representation

In *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*

(1960), E. H. Gombrich (1909–2001) compared three Greek male standing figures: the earliest, from the sixth century BCE (FIG. 3), is static and rigidly frontal; in the second, from about the fifth century BCE, a slight flexure in the limbs and a turn or tilt of the head seem to awaken the image (FIG. 4); the third and latest figure, from the late fifth century BCE, shows "a slight twist, so that life seems to enter the marble" (FIG. 5). He characterized this revolution in ancient Greek art as the Greek Miracle that illustrates the

early advance of Western European civilization.¹⁰ Gombrich maintained that in pictorial representation, "making comes before matching [reality]" through a process of "schema-and-correction."¹¹ He pointed to a larger truth about pictorial representation: the artist works neither from life nor from imagination alone; rather, he follows graphic schemata for transcribing visual forms onto the pictorial (or sculptural) surface and for embodying

8 Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji* in *Huashi congshu* 1; see also Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang*

Texts 1: 61–382.

9 See Fong, "Problem of Forgeries," 95–140; see also Cahill, "Chinese Art and Authenticity,"

and Silbergeld, "Commentary on James Cahill's 'Chinese Art,'" 17–36.

10 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 116–45.

11 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 116ff.

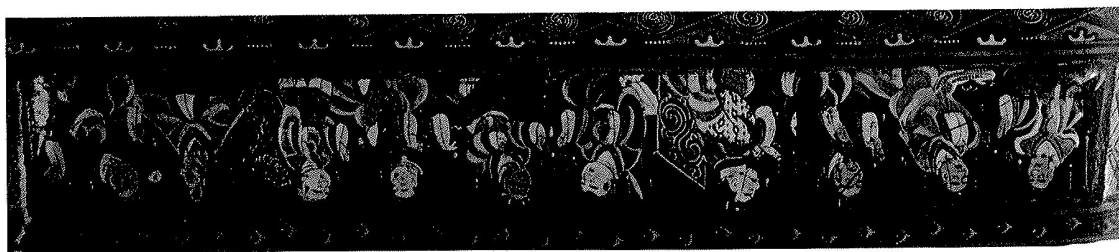
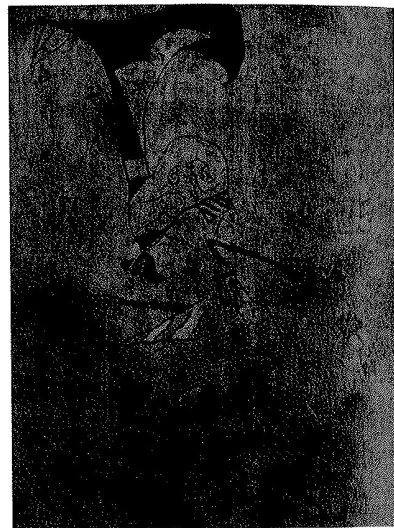
Clockwise from bottom left:

FIGURE 6 Woman with a Phoenix and a Dragon, 3rd century BCE. From Zhangjiajiaashan, Changsha, Hunan province. Ink and color on silk, 31.2 x 23.2 cm. Hunan Provincial Museum

FIGURE 7 Painted Basket with Scenes of Filial Piety, Eastern Han dynasty (25–220), early and century. From Namongri Tomb no. 116, Lelang Han cemetery, Pyongyang, North Korea. Detail. Lacquered panels over bamboo basket, height 22 cm, width 39 cm. Central History Museum, Democratic People's Republic of Korea

FIGURE 8 Wall painting from a tomb at Yingchengzi, Liaoning province, 2nd–3rd century. Detail





culturally embedded meanings associated with the image. Gombrich explained: "Archaic art starts from the schema, the symmetrical frontal figure conceived for one aspect only, and the conquest of naturalism may be described as the gradual accumulation of corrections due to the observation of reality."¹² He concludes, however, that "the 'corrections' introduced by the ancient Greek artist in order to 'match' appearances are quite unique in the history of art.... What needs explanation is the sudden departure from this habit [of reliance on schemata, on what is called conceptual art] that spread from Greece to other parts of the world."¹³

It was Julius Lange (1838–1896), a Danish scholar of ancient Greek art, who, in his posthumously published work "The Representation of the Human Figure in Early Greek Art," first articulated the Law of Frontality as an archaic visual schema that governed all "primitive sculptures of all people."¹⁴ In *The Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art*, Emanuel Loewy

(1857–1938) referred to this frontal schema as the archaic memory-image, thereby suggesting a psychological explanation of "seeing" (or perceiving) in early Greek art, which began with the two-dimensional, conceptual (child-like) mental image and was gradually adjusted in later art to depict natural appearances in three-dimensional space. "Only as art breaks away from the domain of the mental image do its means expand their powers in different directions," Loewy elaborated. "No one acquainted with history will suppose that this emancipation of art, viz., the discovery of nature, was made by sudden revelation all down the line.... We underrate the length and labor of the struggles that had to be undergone before, for the first time in history, artistic form took its law directly from nature."¹⁵

Lange's law of frontality describes perfectly the archaic drawing of a female deity on a third-century BCE silk banner from Changsha, Hunan province (FIG. 6), in which the figure is rendered in a simple linear schema of three additive parts in the flat picture plane: the face pictured in profile; the upper body and the voluminous sleeve covering the outstretched arm also seen from the side; and the lower body indicated by a flowing skirt that spreads out like the flattened silhouette of a piece of stoneware. On a painted lacquer basket recovered from the burial ground of the Chinese settlement of Lelang, in North Korea, dated to the early second century (FIG. 7), figures representing paragons of filial piety are rendered in two kinds of brushwork:

12 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 118.

13 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 116, 118.

14 Lange, *Darstellung des Menschen in der älteren griechischen Kunst*, as quoted in Loewy, *Rendering*

of *Nature in Early Greek Art*, 45.

15 Loewy, *Rendering of Nature in Early Greek Art*, 74–75.

FIGURE 9 Horse from the
the Wu Liang Shrine,
Eastern Han dynasty,
ca. 2nd century. Detail of
Stone Chamber 1, West wall,
Jiaxiang county, Shandong
province. Ink rubbing on
paper dating to before 1907;
height 78.3 cm. Princeton
University Art Museum, Far
Eastern Seminar Collection
(2002.307.11)





THE HAN-TANG MIRACLE

faces and hands are drawn in delicate fine lines that vividly suggest animation and gestulation, while boldly executed thickening-and-thinning drapery folds suggest the fluidity of the clothing and the bodily mass beneath but make no attempt at articulation of the body. In the somewhat later wall painting from a tomb at Yingchengzi, Dalian, Liaoning province, dating from the second or third century (fig. 8), the calligraphic quality of the modeling strokes in Han figure painting appears even more clearly, giving the billowing robes a life of their own, without reference to any movement of the human bodies within them. The commanding figure wearing a sword and the attendant standing behind him are each delineated by a series of thickening-and-thinning modeling strokes that extend beyond the contours of their columnar bodies. While successfully conveying the swelling and movement of the draperies, such brushwork also satisfies the artist's penchant for decorative patterns and calligraphic flourishes. Yet we still see no physical articulation of the human body underneath the draperies. Following Loewy's early psychological explanation of the memory-image, George Rowley (1893–1962) of Princeton University characterized archaic Chinese art as "ideational." He defined Han ideational art from the late third century BCE to the early third century CE as occurring when "the imagination is concerned solely with the idea [and not] with its physical appearance."¹⁶ Using a Han horse (fig. 9) to illustrate "an ideographic image of the thing rather than a descriptive likeness," Rowley wrote:

Call to mind the idea of any object, for example a horse; instantly, that object will appear as a flat profile before the mind's eye, right there, *en face*, isolated against a void.... Since shape is defined by bounding contour lines, early painting consists of planar motifs depending for their effect primarily on linear rhythms and on area relationships.... The composition was additive — that is, it ran along in time, and it depended upon the spacing of areas and intervals and upon harmonious repeats of shape for unity.... These mechanics of ideographic visualization set the limitations within which the creative imagination must work.¹⁷

In Chinese figural representation, as Rowley pointed out, the archaic mode of linear, two-dimensional, and largely frontal forms lasted about a thousand years, from the late Eastern Zhou (ca. 770–256 BCE) through the

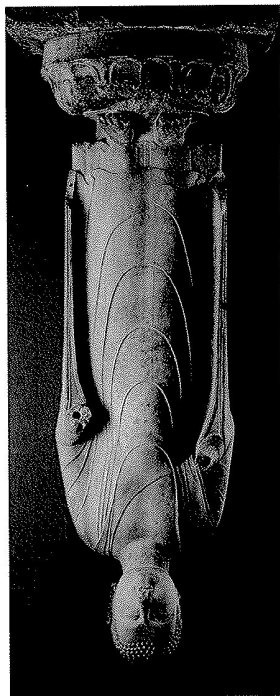
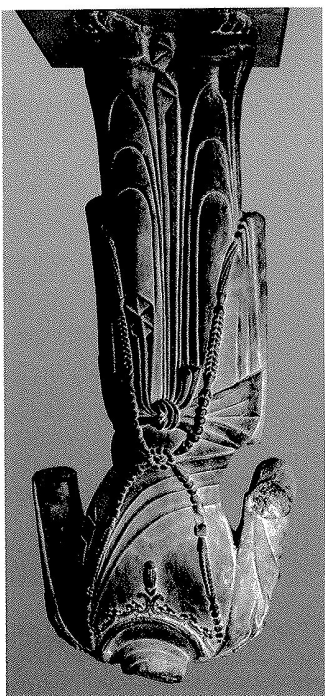
16 Rowley, *Principles of Chinese Painting*, 27, 29.
17 Rowley, *Principles of Chinese Painting*, 27–28.

FIGURE 10 *Buddha from Yungang Cave 6*, ca. 480. Sandstone, Yungang, Datong, Shanxi province

FIGURE 11 *Amitabha, Lord of the Western Paradise*, ca. 575–590. Marble; height 268.6 cm, width at base 100 cm, depth 80 cm. Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, The George Crofts Collection (923.18.13)

FIGURE 12 *Standing Bodhisattva*, early 8th century. Limestone with traces of pigment and gesso; height 101.7 cm, width 40.9 cm, depth 26.7 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., Gift of Charles Lang Freer (1916.365)





Qin (221–206 BCE), Han (206 BCE–220 CE), and Northern Wei (386–534) periods (FIG. 10). By the mid-sixth century there appeared a transitional style of cylindrical forms, in which organic relationships among parts of a figure evolved (FIG. 11). Finally, during the late seventh and early eighth centuries of the Tang period (618–907), a fully developed mode of well-articulated, three-dimensional human bodies with naturalistic drapery folds was achieved (FIG. 12).

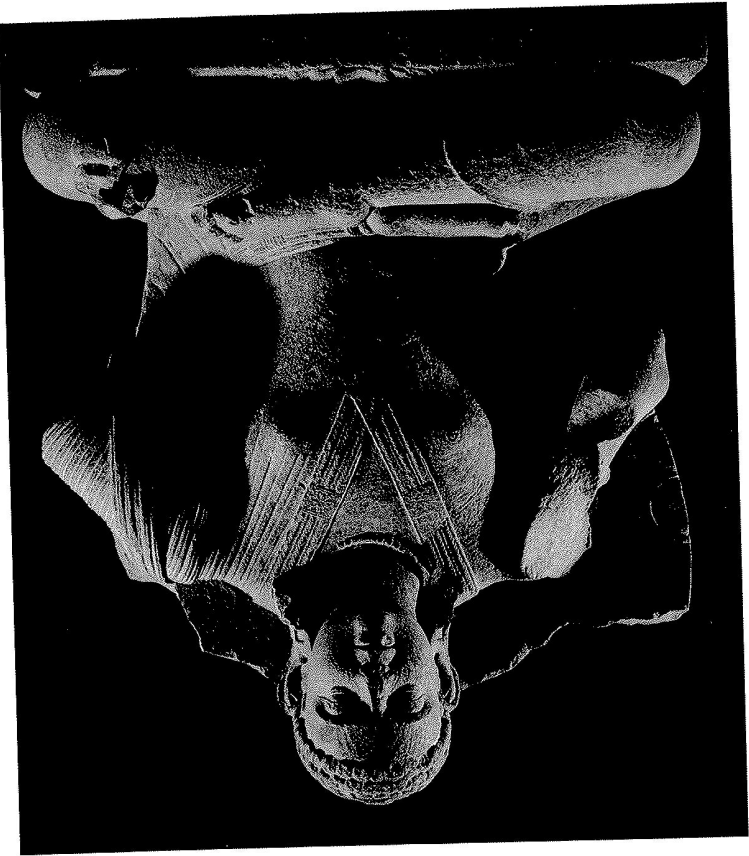
This evolution of mimetic representation in Chinese art may be called the Han-Tang Miracle. How do we relate this “awakening” of Chinese figure style, in Gombrich’s phrase, to “all those other activities that, for the humanist, belong to civilization,”¹⁸ namely, the religious beliefs, intellectual thought, and other cultural activities which took shape between the end of Han and the beginning of Tang — the formative period of later Chinese civilization?

In the four hundred years between the end of the Han empire and the reunification of the north and south under the Tang dynasty, Chinese civilization experienced a total transformation in literature, the visual arts, music, and intellectual thought. The main agent of cultural ferment was Buddhism, newly imported from India. Confucianism and Daoism were the two oldest systems of Chinese ethics and philosophy: the former taught social obligations of individuals to one another according to the principles of morality; the latter searched out the underlying patterns of the universe as guides to private and governmental conduct. These patterns, comprehended under the term *Dao*, or *Way*, were mystical rather than societal. Buddhism, upon its introduction to China in the first century, added a third, spiritual dimension to Chinese thought by presenting a coherent worldview and a system of metaphysical thinking more advanced than anything hitherto known in China. After the breakup of the Han empire, learned Confucian scholar-officials and artists, disillusioned with life at the various succeeding courts, turned away from the world of human affairs and sought spiritual enlightenment either through the Buddhist teachings of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path or through the Daoist understanding and appreciation of Nature. Both Buddhists and Daoists found emotional consolation and intellectual release in the pursuit of artistic and literary expression. These scholar-official-artists led the way for the later efflorescence of Chinese art and civilization.

Buddhism arrived in China from northwestern India, carried over the Himalayan mountains and through Central Asia by Kushan and Parthian

18 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 117–18.

FIGURE 13 *Bodhisattva*
Mañirya, Kushan period,
 late 1st or first half of the 2nd
 century. North India/Uttar
 Pradesh (Mathura region).
 Red sandstone; height
 105 cm. Musée Guimet,
 Purchase, 2000 (MA 6774)



missionaries. As Buddhist sacred images and their makers traveled across Central Asia, the early imported corporeal Greco-Roman Buddhist figure styles from Gandhara and Mathura of the Kushan period (ca. 2nd century BCE–3rd century CE) became flattened, in accord with contemporary Chinese conventions (FIG. 13). In *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on Visualizing the Sea of Samadhi* (*Foshuo guan sanmeihai jing*),¹⁹ translated into Chinese by the Indian Dhyaṇa (Chan) master Buddhahadra (359–429) at the court of the Eastern Jin (317–420) in Jiankang (modern Nanjing), we first encounter the ritual practice of *guan* (meditating/visualizing), in which the worshiper, through prayer and concentration on Buddhist images, conjures up vivid mental pictures of various narrative manifestations and transformations. Alexander C. Soper (1904–1993) has translated from this sutra:

In this way he will go... scrupulously visualizing the single

[Buddha] image until it is absolutely complete.... When he can see

a single figure [of the Buddha] perfectly he will go on to imagine

two... and then three... and then ten... and then a whole chamber

filled with Buddha images, so that no space remains between

them.... He who carries out this [process of] visualization will be

absolved of the sins accumulated during sixty millions of *kalpas*

of reincarnation.... In the time to come the acuteness of his mental

powers will permit him to meet the Thousand World-honored

Buddhas of this Bhadrakalpa, and They will be His teachers....

He will receive his teaching where the Buddhas of Light reveal

Themselves, in the Kalpa of the Constellations.²⁰

It was Zhiyi (538–597), the great sixth-century founder of the Tiantai (!: Tendai) school of Buddhism in Zhejiang province in southern China, who first taught “cessation-and-meditation” (*zhiguan*) — from *zhi*, “cessation,” or the silencing or putting to rest of distracting thoughts, and *guan*, “meditation/visualization” — as techniques of meditating on the nature (xing) of things and, by extension, of visualizing Buddhist images.²¹ The key word here is *guan* (visualizing or picturing).²² In holding “three thousand world-realms within one instant of conscious thought,” Zhiyi

19 See *Taishō*, vol. 15, no. 643, 645ff.

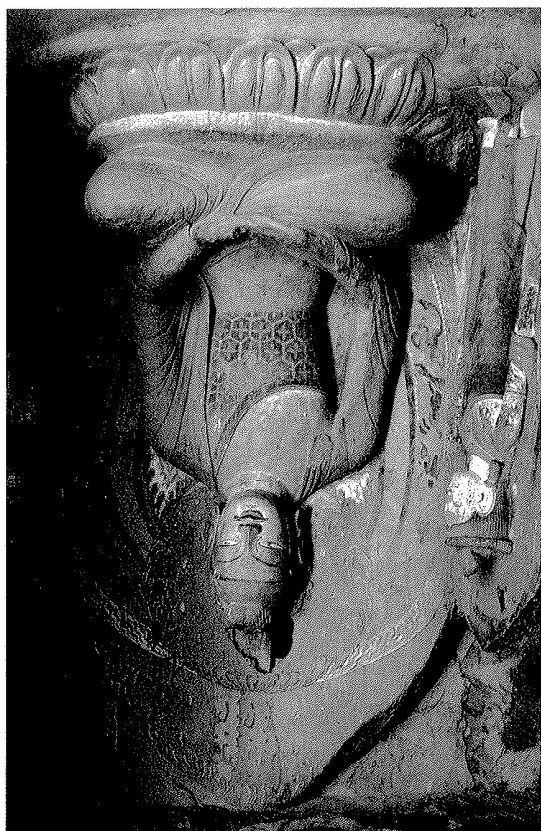
20 See Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art*, 190.

21 See Fung, *History of Chinese Philosophy*, 2: 375n1. For Fung’s exposition of Zhiyi’s “*zhiguan*,”

22 See also Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra*, xix.

FIGURE 14 *Bodhisattva Mañjūśrī*, second quarter of the 5th century. Detail. West wall, Mogao Cave 275, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy

FIGURE 15 *Seated Buddha*, dated 420. Cave 169, Binglinggong, Yongling, Gansu province



recalled the comparison from the *Garland Sutra* (*Huayan jing*) between the mind's creative power and the painter's imagination: "The mind (*xin*) is like a skillful painter capable of picturing the myriad worlds."²³ With Zhiyi's theological trope of cessation and visualization in mind, we may now turn to an analysis of the visual tableaux, or compositional schemata, employed by the Dunhuang figure and landscape artists from the fifth through the fourteenth century.

Foreign Impetus and the Chinese Response

The oldest Mogao grottoes, identified as Dunhuang Caves 275, 272, and 268, are a series of small oblong or square chapels occupying a single

tier in the mid-range of the excavated caves, which have been dated to the

second quarter of the fifth century. To the south in the same tier Caves 259, 257, 254, and 251 display the standard Northern Wei plan of an oblong or square chamber, but with a four-sided shaft of natural rock remaining at

the center; these may be dated to the second half of the fifth century and the beginning of the sixth. At the rear wall of Cave 275, a sculpted Bodhisattva

Maitreya, or Buddha of the Future (fig. 14), is seated with ankles crossed

on a high-backed throne, represented in the style imported from northwest India.²⁴ In marked contrast to his Indian confreres, the Dunhuang sculptor

showed little interest in the organic structure of the human body; the figure is rendered in a rigidly frontal and generalized manner, with massive

cylindrical neck, torso, and limbs and incised parallel drapery lines arrayed symmetrically over an otherwise undifferentiated surface. This treatment

compares closely with that of the seated Buddha dated 420 in Cave 169 at Binglingsi, Yongjing, in eastern Gansu province (fig. 15).²⁵

In the earliest extant Chinese gilt-bronze Buddha statuette, dated 338 (fig. 16), the Chinese artist imitated the imported Indian style as

it had been modified in Kucha, an important oasis city along the ancient Silk Road to the west of Dunhuang in present-day Xinjiang. It is cast with

parallel U-shaped curves across the chest, the rest of the figure lacking any corporeal sense of the body underneath.²⁶ The colossal seated historical

Buddha Sakyamuni in Cave 20 at Yungang, Shanxi, dating from the early 460s (fig. 17), is a squarely frontal representation of a well-proportioned,

23 Hurvitz, *Chih-i* (538–597), 271–318.

24 Images of Bodhisattva Maitreya depicted within a canopy from Gandharan sites have been studied by Yu-min Lee; see Y. Lee, "Maitreya Cult and Its Art," 140–259.

25 A similar Maitreya of the late fifth century, sitting cross-ankled, may be seen at Yungang Cave 12, east wall; see P. Ho, "Housing Maitreya," 74, fig. 1.

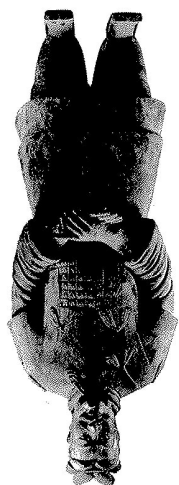
26 See Su Bai, "Buddha Images of the Northern Plain," 79–87.

Counter-clockwise from
upper right:

FIGURE 16 Seated Buddha,
dated 338. Gilt bronze,
40 × 24.1 × 13.3 cm. Asian
Art Museum, San Francisco,
The Avery Brundage
Collection (B60B1034)

FIGURE 17 Buddha from
Yungang Cave 20, ca. early
460s. Sandstone. Yungang,
Datong, Shanxi province

FIGURE 18 General, Qin
dynasty, 3rd century B.C.
From the Tomb of Qin-
shihuangdi, Terracotta
Museum of Terracotta
Warriors and Horses, Xi'an,
Shaanxi province



powerful figure with broad shoulders and a wide chest. Hewn from the cliff face, it measures some 13.7 meters from the base to the *usnisa* (circle in the forehead). The faint "archaic" smile radiates infinite compassion, but the crisply honed outlines lend the expression a certain sternness as well. What would have been body-revealing transparent drapery on the imported Indian model has been transmuted into flat ornamental patterns of hooklike pleats, added appliqué-style onto the flat surface of the body and arms. This appliqué style of linear garment patterns harks back to an archaic armored general of the Qin period (FIG. 18).²⁷ In both instances, the carving of negative (*intaglio*) and positive (*relief*) patterns reflects ancient Chinese craftsmanship used when reproducing written or depicted forms, whether carved in jade or stone, modeled in clay, cast in bronze, or printed with woodblocks in books with calligraphy or pictures. Both of these images demonstrate that Chinese artists retained archaic forms even while advancing toward new visual ends — a practice we shall revisit often here.

The same progression can be seen in northern painting styles. At Binglingsi Cave 169, dated to 420 (FIG. 19), the oldest Buddhist paint-

ings known in the northwest of China display a quintessentially Chinese calligraphic brush style. The expressive drapery lines of the images of standing bodhisattvas render the billowing surfaces of a loosely worn garment, ignoring the body within it. By contrast, the wall paintings

in Dunhuang Cave 275 dated to the second quarter of the fifth century (FIG. 20), like the cave's sculpted Bodhisattva Maitreya, exhibit a distinctly foreign style. The modeling of the faces as well as the bare torsos of the figures is achieved with schematic bands of flesh-tone colors, now oxidized to a dark brown, which makes the faces look like theatrical masks. The distant origin of this style was the three-dimensional *chiaroscuro* model-

ing technique found in Greco-Roman-influenced Indian paintings. An exceptionally successful example of the sinicized Roman-influenced style is seen in Dunhuang Cave 254 (FIG. 21), datable to the late fifth or early sixth century. Here the well-modulated shading on the face and body of the seated King Shivi most closely reflects painted figures at the Ajanta caves in the western region of India. The evolution of Chinese Buddhist art, however, cannot be explained by outside influences alone. Modern insights into cultural influence and development have taught that artists appropriate rather than receive influences — or, as Michael Baxandall

27 On the large standing gilt-bronze Maitreya figure, dated to 486, at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the drapery is rendered with the same kind of flat appliqué patterns of drapery. See the description of that image in Ludwig Bachhofer, *Short History of Chinese Art*, 18–46.

Clockwise from bottom left:

FIGURE 19 *Buddha and attendants*, dated 420. North wall of Cave 169, Binglingsi, Yongling, Gansu province

FIGURE 20 *Scene from the Siva Jataka*, second quarter of the 5th century. Detail of the west end of the north wall, Mogao Cave 275, Dunhuang, Gansu province

FIGURE 21 *Scene from the Siva Jataka*, second half of the 5th–early 6th century. Detail of the north wall, Mogao Cave 254, Dunhuang, Gansu province



puts it, being "influenced" is not a passive process but an active one, resulting in what artists make of the sources and how they interact with them.²⁸

In order to understand the challenge that this imported chiaroscuro style from the distant western regions presented to Chinese artists, we must first examine the nature and accomplishments of native Chinese figure painting up until this time. Buddhist art in the imperial Northern Wei caves at Yungang, Shanxi, signals that a decisive change in style was occurring toward the end of the fifth century. Whereas the earlier Yungang caves carved in the 460s and 470s (Caves 17–20), exhibit a consistently strong Indian influence, the sumptuously decorated Yungang Cave 6 (see fig. 10), dated to the late 480s, shows a newly sinicized Buddhist style

both in its large hieratic images and in its narrative illustrations. Instead of the Indian *samghati*, a square piece of cloth or shawl wrapped around the body, the large standing Buddha image in Cave 6 wears a Chinese gown called a *baoyi bodai* (courtly robe with square sashes); both the body of the robe and its flowing long sleeves are pleated, and the skirt plays into a wide swallowtail.²⁹ Since the Chinese preference is for robes whose tensile linear rhythms obscure the body beneath, the change in costume precluded the earlier Indianate interest in corporeality. This new fashion became the accepted style throughout the remainder of the Northern Wei and its successor dynasties — the Eastern Wei (534–550) and Western Wei (535–556) in the north.

This abrupt stylistic change at the Yungang caves in the 480s was part of a sweeping sinicization program carried out under the sinophile Toba emperor Xiaowendi, who ruled from 471 to 499. In 486 the emperor decreed a new style of dress based on Chinese court traditions; in 492–94 he moved his court south to Luoyang, the traditional Chinese eastern capital; in 495 he ordered that Hu, or non-Chinese languages, no longer be used officially; finally, in 496, he even changed his family name to Yuan, a Chinese name.

In "South Chinese Influence on the Buddhist Art of the Six Dynasties Period," Alexander Soper has stated that "the new fashion used at Yun-kang [Yungang] was borrowed ready-made from southern practice, and in the South, prior to its transfer, had been familiar for a century." Based on literary evidence, Soper attributes the invention of this sinicized Buddha style to the legendary fourth-century master sculptor and painter Dai Kui

28 Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention*, 58–62.

29 See Su Bai, "Yungang shiku fengqi shilun," 79–80; see also Feng Chenguang, "Beichao baoyi bodai zhuanqishu yuananyuan kaobian," 180–84.

FIGURE 22 Attributed to Gu Kaizhi (ca. 344–ca. 406), "The court instructress copies out the 'Admonitions,'" Detail from *Admonitions of the Ladies*, early Tang tracing copy (?). Handscroll mounted on a panel; ink and color on silk, 24.4 × 348.5 cm. The British Museum, London (0A.1903.4-8.1)



(330?–396) and his son Dai Yong (378–441), both of whom served at the culturally sophisticated Chinese Eastern Jin (317–420) and Liu Song (420–479) courts of the south.³⁰

In his *Record of Famous Painters of Renown from Successive Dynasties*, Zhang Yanyuan gave a detailed account of one of the rare Buddhist sites in southern China that, thanks to the protection of its powerful patron, the Grand Chancellor Li Deyu (787–850), managed to survive Tang Wuzong's (r. 840–846) devastating persecution of Buddhism in 845. This is the monastery Ganlu Si, some hundred li (about 50 kilometers) downstream from the present-day town of Zhenjiang, in Zhejiang province. Among Zhang's list of Buddhist wall paintings surviving at the monastery were

Gu Kaizhi's famous portrait of Vimalakirti, originally in the imperial Buddhist monastery Waguan Si in the Eastern Jin capital Jiankang

(present-day Nanjing), and a painting of Bodhisattva Manjusri by Dai Kui from an unidentified monastery. In the 820s, when Li Deyu served as the Surveillance Commissioner in Zhexi (present-day Zhenjiang), he had had these two paintings restored and then placed them together on the west wall of Ganlu Si's main hall.³¹

Gu Kaizhi's painting style is best represented today by the famous handscroll attributed to him, *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies* in the British Museum (fig. 22).³² In that scroll, the simple hairline

drawing of the court ladies is comparable with the archaic rendering of the female deity on the third-century BCE silk banner from Changsha

(see fig. 6). A child prodigy with rare gifts in scholarship and music as well as the arts, Dai Kui as a sculptor was best known for the set of five Buddha statues that he created in about 360 for the imperial Buddhist monastery Waguan Si in Jiankang.³³ Together with Gu Kaizhi's painting of Vimalakirti originally at the same site, Dai Kui's sculpted Buddha

images for Waguan Si epitomized the newly sinicized Buddhist style of the Chinese dynasties of the south. More than a half century later, in Wanfo Si in Chengdu, Sichuan — many hundred miles south and west of the standing Buddha image in Yungang Cave 6 (see fig. 10) — a standing Buddha sculpture reprises Dai Kui's sinicized style of a Buddha figure wearing a "courtly robe with wide sashes" (fig. 23). This sculpture, dated

30 See Soper, "Southern Chinese Influence," 47–112. See also Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Unkō*

sekkutsu; see also Nagahiro, "The Costume of Buddhist Images," 1–24.

31 Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*, juan 3: 52–53 in *Huashi congshu* 1: 56–57; see also Acker,

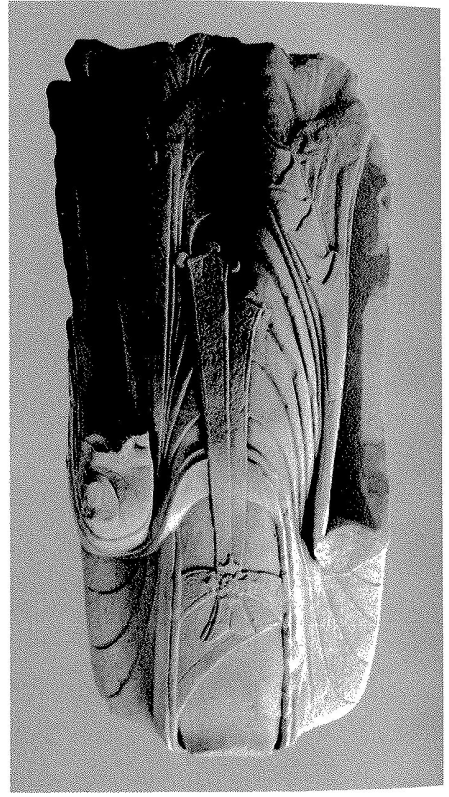
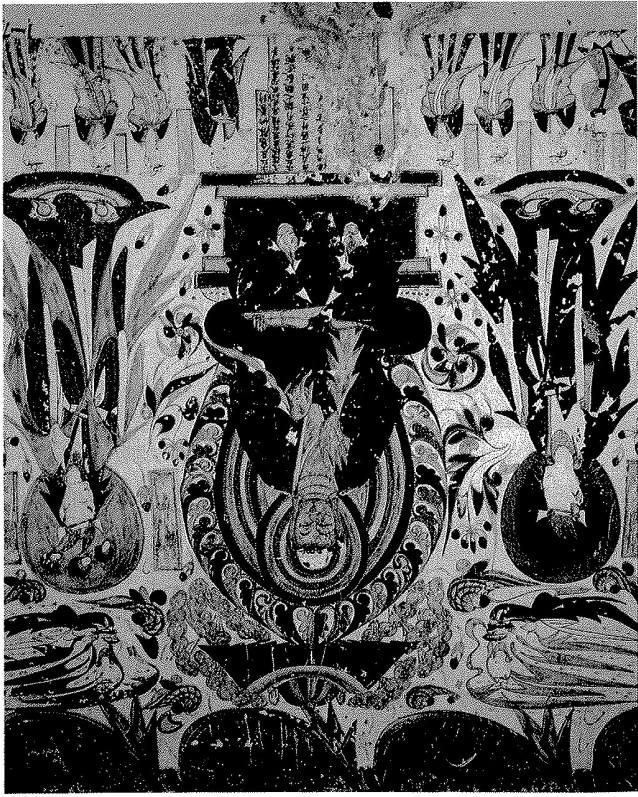
Some Tang and Pre-T'ang Texts 1: 366–77.

32 See Chapter 2 in this volume.

33 For a summary of recent Chinese and Western scholarship on Dai Kui, see "Dai Kui and New Images of Chinese Buddhist Art" in Liu Heping, "Juecheng," 100–101, and accompanying notes.

FIGURE 23 *Standing Buddha*,
dated 537. Stone, height
127.5 cm. Discovered in
1954 in Wanfo Si, Chengdu,
Sichuan Provincial Museum

FIGURE 24 *Buddha and
Bodhisattvas*, dated 538–539.
Detail of the north wall of
Mogao Cave 285, Dunhuang,
Gansu province



537, attests the rapid diffusion and the endurance of the sinicized Buddha image pioneered by Dai Kui in the fourth century in southern China.

The fully sinicized style is seen at Dunhuang in Cave 285, datable by

two inscriptions to 538 and 539. Among the most beautifully decorated

Western Wei caves, Cave 285 exhibits a striking mingling of foreign and

native styles. On the north wall of the cave (FIG. 24) Buddha Śākyamuni,

seated in the lotus position (S: *padmasana*), wears a robe showing the

Gandharan drapery pattern of parallel folds, but the two standing bodhi-

sattvas flanking him wear the sinicized courtly robes with square sashes

and swallowtail drapery ends. Below this iconic grouping are two facing

processions of male and female donor figures, clad in the elite styles of the

day. Recessed niches spanning the entire west (rear) wall contain painted

clay figures in the Central Asian style against a reddish background. On

the south wall (FIG. 25), the main space above the wall niches illustrates the

tale of Five Hundred Robbers, as related in Chapter 16 of the Chinese trans-

lation of the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*. And, as on the north wall, the east

wall features a formal grouping of a seated Buddha flanked by standing

bodhisattvas, with rows of donor figures below, painted in the Chinese style

of lean and attenuated figures wearing robes with swallowtail ends. Finally,

on the four sloping sides of the ceiling (FIG. 26) a profusion of mythical

animals and celestial beings, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, are painted

in a lively mixture of foreign and native styles. In the Central Asian-style

figures, the shading, carried out in delicately modulated reds and what

now appears as black (colors that have oxidized with age) with white high-

lighting, displays western influence, while the lines manifest a sensitivity

and calligraphic gracefulness unique to Chinese workmanship. At the same

time, in the hieratic images on the north and east walls, the linear outlines

of the faces and the draperies are reinforced by colored shading; despite the

slenderness of the figures and the flat swallowtail draperies, the images

appear volumetric. On the ceiling above the south wall, lively and inventive

linear drawings of birds and animals, known as *baihua* (literally, "white

paintings" that are commonly known as plain-line drawing), contrast with

landscape forms in blue, green, or brown.³⁴

A similar program of ceiling decorations executed in a mixture of *baihua*

and colored styles and exhibiting an ever greater awareness of volume is

found in Dunhuang Cave 249, datable to the first half of the sixth century,

about a decade later than Cave 285. The image of the running bull looking

back over its shoulder (FIG. 27) demonstrates significant progress toward

34 It is possible that the birds and animals were painted with colors that have faded over time.

FIGURE 25 Story of the Five Hundred Robbers. Detail of the south wall of Mogao Cave 285, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy

FIGURE 26 Overall view of Mogao Cave 285, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy

