



Opposite:

FIGURE 34 *Bodhisattvas*, third quarter of the 6th century. Detail of ceiling outside south-facing niche of Mogao Cave 428. Dunhuang, Gansu province

This page:

FIGURE 35 *Parivṛtaṇa*, third quarter of the 6th century. West wall, Mogao Cave 428. Dunhuang, Gansu province

FIGURE 36 *Mahāsattva Jātaka*, wall painting, third quarter of the 6th century. North side of east wall, Mogao Cave 428. Dunhuang, Gansu province



in Cave 428 the artist demonstrates a new ability to combine shading and outline in single, abbreviated modeling strokes. In the large composition of the death of Buddha on the west wall of the cave (fig. 35), the mourners' faces feature bold modeling strokes, and the familiar circular outline of the face gives way to intermittent contour lines. The faces of the smaller figures in the narrative scenes on the east wall (fig. 36) display only intermittent contours, with strong modeling strokes, most prominently a hooklike dot representing the cheekbones.

The achievements of the artists in Cave 428 clearly reflect what we now know about the development of three-dimensionality in northern Buddhist art during the Northern Qi (550–577) and Northern Zhou (557–581) eras. In an article published in 1984, Jin Weinuo associated the paintings in the newly discovered tomb of Lou Rui (531–570) with dated Northern Qi sculpture by linking them both to the sixth-century painter Cao Zhongda's (active ca. 550–ca. 577) style (*Caojia yang*), which according to traditional art historiography represented diaphanous "wet draperies [clinging to the body] as if emerging from water" (*caoyi chushui*).⁴⁰ Cao came from the Central Asian kingdom of Sogdiana, where his style originated. Jin elaborated:

Such stylistic changes in Northern Qi sculptures [in the northeast] are clearly matched by Northern Zhou images [in the northwest], with their full facial features and simple drapery style. This indicates that [works of] the different regions during the same time period shared certain common developmental characteristics. It also shows that political divisions did not prevent artistic communication [between different parts of China]. Such revolutionary artistic changes under the Northern Dynasties of Zhou and Qi must also be related to similar developments in the Southern Dynasties of that time.⁴¹

With the discovery in 1996 of the Northern Qi sculptures from the ancient site of Longxing Si in Qingzhou, Shandong province, Chinese scholars also realized that the question of renewed indianizing influences, whether in China's northwest or southeast, cannot be determined simply through typological comparisons of costumes or comparisons of face or body types of Northern Qi sculptures with imported indianizing models, be they Gandharan, Mathuran, Gupta, or Southeast

40 Jin Weinuo, "Caojia yang yu Yang Zhihua fengge," 37–51; see also Jin Weinuo, "Artistic Achievements of Buddhist Sculpture," 377–96.

41 Jin Weinuo, "Artistic Achievements of Buddhist Sculpture," 387–88.

FIGURE 37 Yu Hong's sarcophagus, 592. Detail. Stone. Shanxi Provincial Museum, Taiyuan



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Asian.⁴² In his 1999 study of Qingzhou sculptures, Su Bai, besides noting continuing southern influences, which had reached China from Gupta India via the long-established southern sea route, also made important observations on significant social and political dimensions of the stylistic revolution apparent in Northern Qi sculptures. He explains how, as unconscious cultural emissaries as well as Buddhist missionaries and devotees, the growing population of Central Asian merchants, priests, musicians, dancers, and artists — among them, the famous Sogdian painter Cao Zhongda — had enriched the cultural life of the Northern Qi capital Ye (present-day Handan, Hebei) and transformed it into a metropolitan center. He also points out that it was the Northern Qi who, by reversing Northern Wei's pro-southern, pro-Han cultural policies, built a new political and cultural structure that facilitated the reunification of the Chinese empire under the succeeding Sui (581–618) and Tang dynasties.⁴³

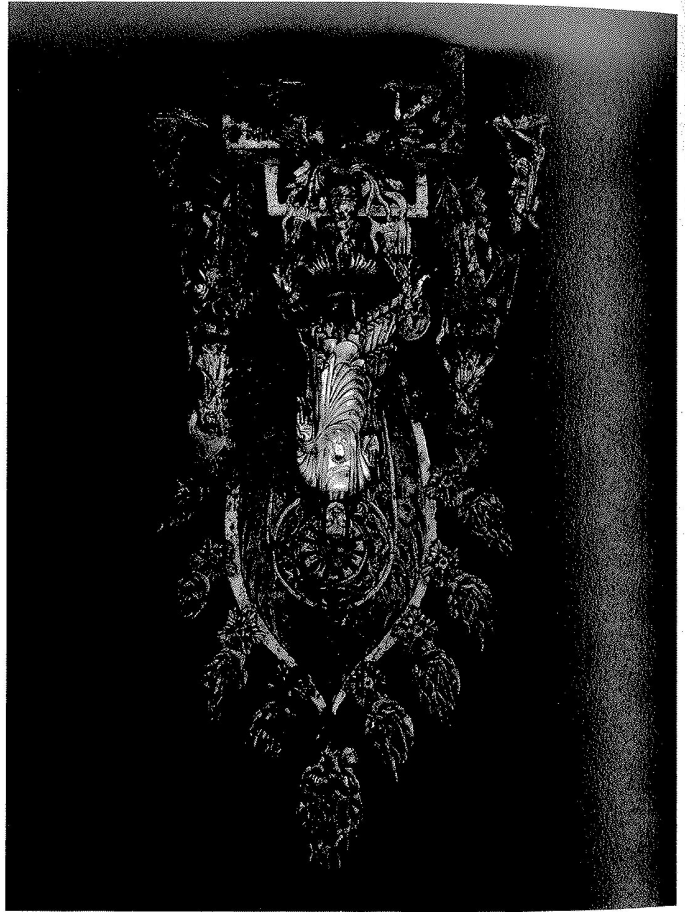
Su Bai's arguments received powerful endorsement later that year with the discovery of the tomb of Yu Hong (d. 592), a native of the Yu kingdom in Central Asia who had served as a Sogdian ambassador to Persia and later as an official of Northern Qi, then of Northern Wei, and finally of the Sui dynasty, in charge of the Central Asian community (primarily Sogdians) in Taiyuan, Shanxi.⁴⁴ Carved in relief on Yu Hong's white marble sarcophagus are round, volumetric figures in Sogdian dress and coiffure (FIG. 37). Similar Sogdian motifs are found on northern Chinese earthenware of the same period;⁴⁵ together they confirm the relation between the new style of Northern Qi Buddha image and the Cao Zhongda style of Sogdian origin. Su Bai concludes:

Thenceforth, most of the Sui and early Tang period temples followed the [Northern] Qi style of the Buddha image — as quoted from [the noted *vinaya* master, translator, and biographer] Daoxuan (596–667), "just as Cao Zhongda had transmitted the auspicious image from the West...." This proceeded from all state ceremonies and musical rituals during the Sui and the Tang having followed the old systems established during the Northern Qi period.⁴⁶

FIGURE 38 *Allepice Dedicated to Buddha*
Maitreya, dated 524. Gilt
bronze; height 76.9 cm,
width 40.6 cm, diameter
24.8 cm. The Metropolitan
Museum of Art, Rogers
Fund, 1938 (38.158.1a-n)

FIGURE 39 *Standing Buddha*,
dated 529. Stone; height
158 cm. From Wanfo Si,
Chengdu, Sichuan
Provincial Museum

42 See Qiu Zhongming, "Beichao wangi Qing-Qi guyu fojiao meishu yanjiu," 5–7.
43 Su Bai, "Qingzhou Longxingqi," 44–59; see also Su Bai, "Buddha Images of the Northern Plain," 86.
44 Su Bai, "Qingzhou Longxingqi," 44–59; see also Su Bai, "Buddha Images of the Northern Plain," 86.
45 For Northern Qi glazed earthenware decorated with Central Asian dancers and musicians, see Watt et al., *Dawn of a Golden Age*, 251, cat. no. 149.
46 Su Bai, "Qingzhou Longxingqi," 55.



The seemingly abrupt change to a volumetric style in Buddha images of the Northern Qi and Sui led some scholars to argue for renewed southern influences of Gupta models from the Indian centers of Mathura and Sarnath, transmitted through the art of the southern Liang dynasty during the first half of the sixth century.⁴⁷ But the development of three-dimensional naturalism in sixth-century Chinese painting and sculpture cannot be explained by derivation from indianizing or sinicizing models alone. Both northern and southern early sixth-century images show a growing interest in describing the substance of drapery folds, as evidenced by the late Northern Wei gilt-bronze *Altarpiece Dedicated to Buddha Maitreya*, dated 524 (fig. 38), now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art,⁴⁸ as well as by the southern Liang *Standing Buddha*, dated 529 (fig. 39), from the monastery Wanfo Si, in Chengdu. In the terracotta standing figure dating from about 516, excavated at Yongning Si, Luoyang, Henan, a cascade of flowing drapery successfully overlays traditional Chinese painterly linear elegance onto the modeling of a fully three-dimensional body.

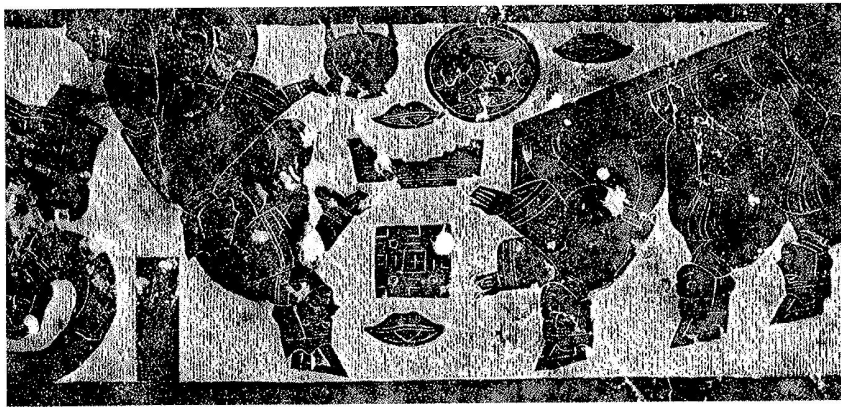
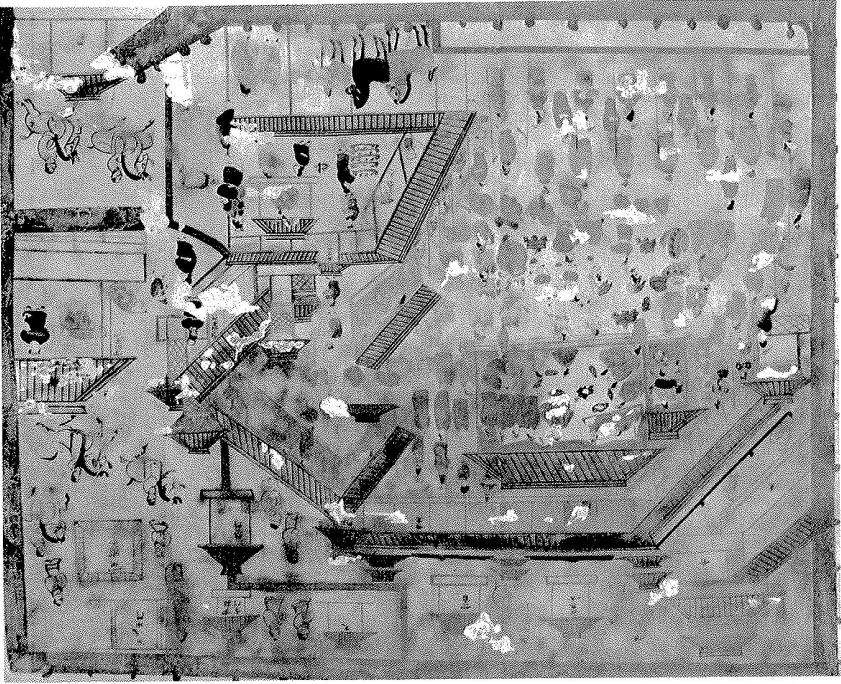
Similarly, the manner of describing spatial relations can be seen as an evolving interest. An important discovery of early Chinese painters was the use of diagonal lines forming parallelograms in the picture plane to suggest virtual reality in space.⁴⁹ In a banquet scene at Wu Liang Ci, the funerary shrine of the Confucian scholar Wu Liang (78–151), dated to 151 (fig. 40), simple diagonal lines representing the sides of a table or a floor mat evoke recession in space, while frontal silhouetted views of a *dining vessel*, a round plate of food, two covered dishes, and a square chessboard are piled up vertically in the two-dimensional picture plane.⁵⁰ And in *A Walled City*, a wall painting found in an Eastern Han tomb at Helingol, Inner Mongolia, dating to the late second century (fig. 41), parallelograms extending from the gabled rooftop motifs in the uppermost register of the painting create enclosed courtyard spaces filled with rows of figures and smaller buildings whose diagonal sides, as well as the receding edges of the floor mats within, help to position the figures in three-dimensional space.

In the illustration of the *jataka* tale of the nine-colored deer (*jūse lu*) in Dunhuang Cave 257, dating from the second half of the sixth century,

FIGURE 40 Banquet Scene, From the Wu Family Shrine, Eastern Han dynasty, ca. 2nd century. Detail of Stone Chamber 1, Wuzhai Shan, Haxiang county, Shandong province. Ink rubbing on paper dating to before 1907. Princeton University Art Museum (2002-307.2)

FIGURE 41 A Walled City, Eastern Han dynasty, 2nd century. Wall painting, found at Helingol, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region

47 See Soper, "South Chinese Influence," 95–97.
 48 For other examples, see the seated Buddha Prabhutaratna and Śākyamuni, dated to 518, in Sherman E. Lee, *History of Far Eastern Art*, fig. 205; an altarpiece dated to 529 in the Bernard Berenson collection, Florence, in Sickman and Soper, *Art and Architecture of China*, pl. 36; another altarpiece of about the same date at the Metropolitan Museum, in Alan Priest, *Chinese Sculpture in The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, cat. no. 19, pls. 33–36; and the standing Maitreya dated to 536 in the University Museum, Philadelphia, in Bachhofer, *Short History of Chinese Art*, fig. 58.
 49 For "virtual space," see Summers, "Virtuality," in *Real Spaces*, 431–548.
 50 For a discussion of this monument, see Wu Hung, *Wu Liang Shrine*.



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the narrative proceeds in a horizontal register across the wall in hand-scroll fashion, with diagonally overlapping mountain motifs serving as space dividers (FIG. 42). Because the mountains are arranged parallel to one another in the picture plane, they suggest neither spatial recession nor three-dimensionality. And in the illustration of the story of the Five Hundred Robbers in Cave 285 (see FIG. 25), dated to 538–539, the artist has arranged the mountain motifs into tentative space enclosures as settings for individual narrative episodes: depending on the different groupings of human figures required by the story, broken segments of mountain ranges running diagonally at different angles loosely form trapezoidal or triangular space cells. Finally in Cave 428 (FIG. 43), painted in the third quarter of the sixth century, a systematic approach in the description of spatial relations appears: linked mountain motifs forming trapezoidal or parallelogram space cells provide a unified and continuous setting for the narrative.

At Dunhuang a powerful triad of the Buddha and two bodhisattvas in Cave 427 (FIG. 44) exemplifies the Northern Qi and Sui penchant for rendering the human body in columnar form. In the narrative illustrations of the late sixth century, such as those in Caves 289, 290, and 296 (FIG. 45), figures and buildings — all conceived as forms receding and projecting in space — seem to burst out of the narrow confines of the horizontal register. In Cave 296, the artist, in order to emphasize recession, formed the city wall out of zigzag parallelograms, within which he turned each building at an angle, with one corner lying in the picture plane and its two sides moving diagonally into the distance. Clearly, all such paintings belong to the larger phenomenon of what we now describe as the Han-Tang Miracle at Dunhuang. Against the background of changing religious practices and social contexts, this “awakening” of such Buddhist depictions — both iconic and narrative, sacred and quotidian — into three-dimensional embodiments is congruent with all other intellectual and cultural activities in China of the times.

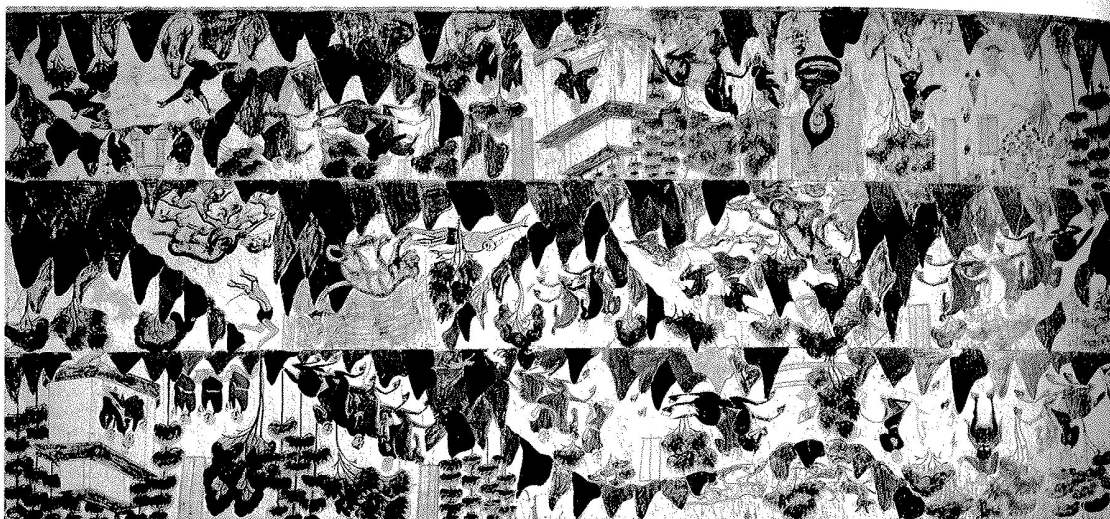
From the Southern Dynasties to North China

Buddhism struck deep roots and proliferated throughout China during the four hundred years between the Han and the Tang dynasties. In the process it was transformed into a system of beliefs with distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics, known across the East Asian continent as Northern Buddhism. Founded by Siddhartha Gautama Sakyamuni (ca. 565–ca. 486 BCE), a prince of the royal Saka clan in northern India, the Buddhist faith was based on ancient Hindu beliefs in karma (act or deed), requital

FIGURE 42 *Jataka of the Nine-Colored Deer*, second half of the 6th century. West wall, Mogao Cave 257, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy

FIGURE 43 *Prince Mahasattva Jataka*, third quarter of the 6th century. South side of the east wall, Mogao Cave 428, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy





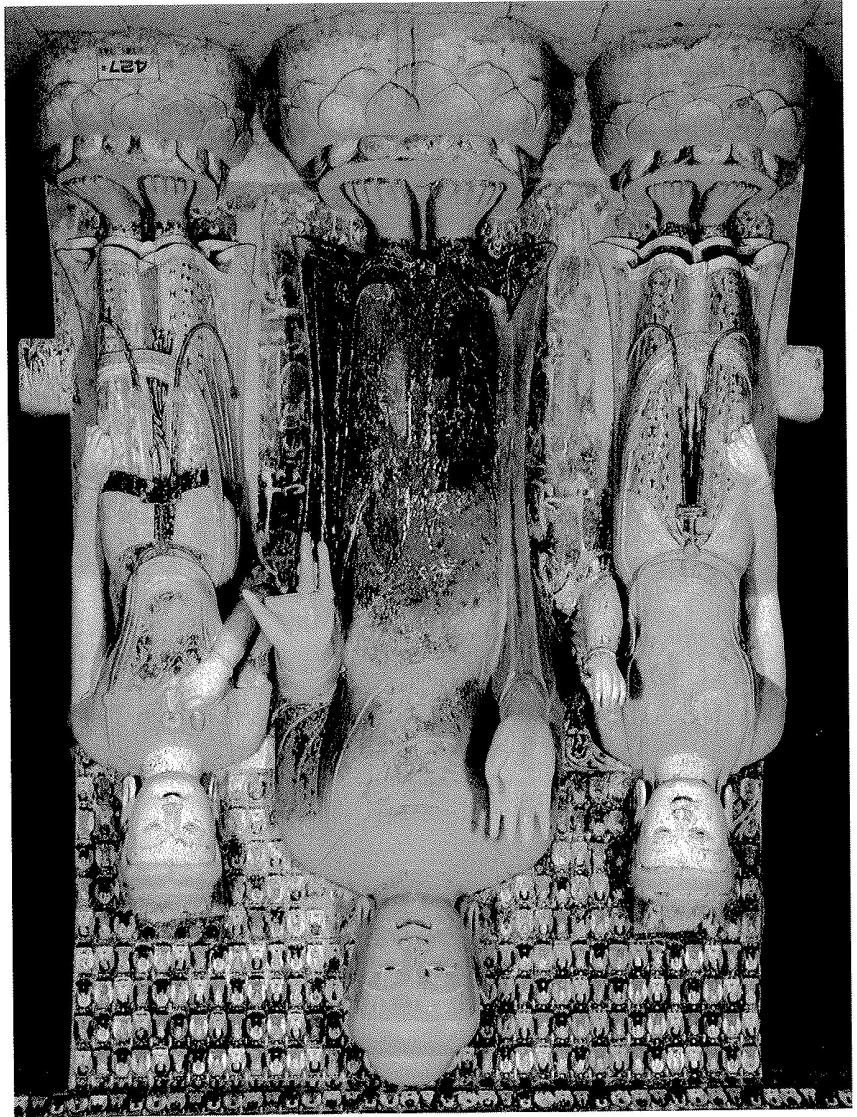


FIGURE 44 *Triad of Standing Buddha and Bodhisattvas*, Sui dynasty (581-618), Mogao Cave 427, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy

FIGURE 45 *Architectural Settings*, Northern Zhou dynasty (557-581), East slope of the ceiling, Mogao Cave 296, Dunhuang, Gansu province. Courtesy of the Dunhuang Academy





for one's deeds, and rebirth. In accordance with one's karma in each past existence, one is subject to an endless cycle of transmigrations — rebirths into a world of illusion, suffering, and death, continuing until one attains *bodhi* (enlightenment) and thereby enters into nirvana (the cessation of existence), or salvation. The original Theravada Buddhism (also called pejoratively, Hinayana, or Lesser Vehicle [of salvation]), which advocated celibacy and offered a philosophy of otherworldliness, was fundamentally opposed to Chinese Confucian values of harmonious family and social relations. Indeed, the belief that developed and eventually spread from China throughout East Asia was salvation in paradise through faith, rather than cessation of existence through individual effort and asceticism. Rebirth in a Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhist paradise could be achieved by simply invoking — with proper gifts or offerings — the names of appropriate divine beings. Many such paradises with their celestial inhabitants are represented in full glory in wall paintings in the Dunhuang caves.

Mahayana devotees never declared Hinayana to be false. They merely insisted that the "lesser vehicle" (*hinayana*) of the arhats (disciples of

Buddha; also known as *śravakas*, "those who heard his sermons") and the *pratyeka-buddhas* (self-enlightened beings who make no effort to enlighten others) was intended by the Buddha as a temporary teaching to be replaced ultimately by Mahayana, the Great Vehicle. In the canonical Mahayana sutra *Lotus of the Wonderful Doctrine* (*Saddharmapundarika Sutra*),

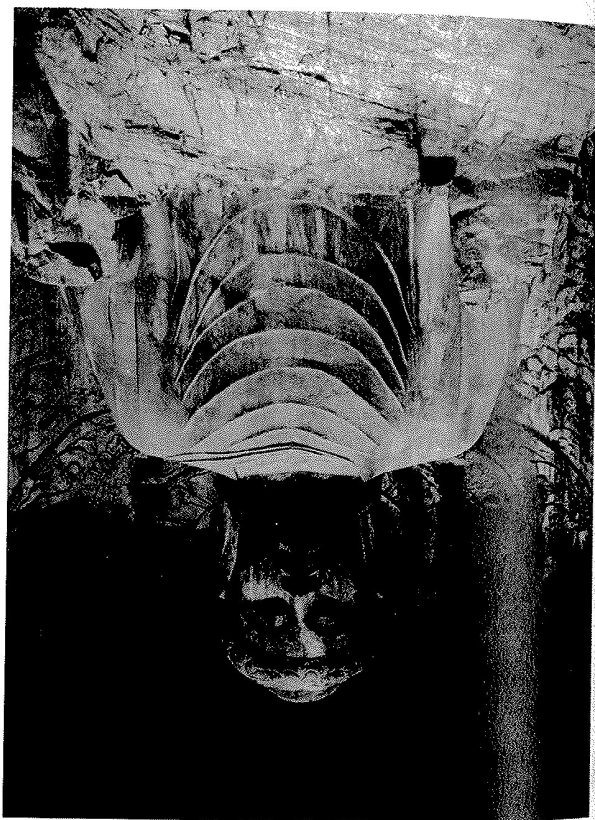
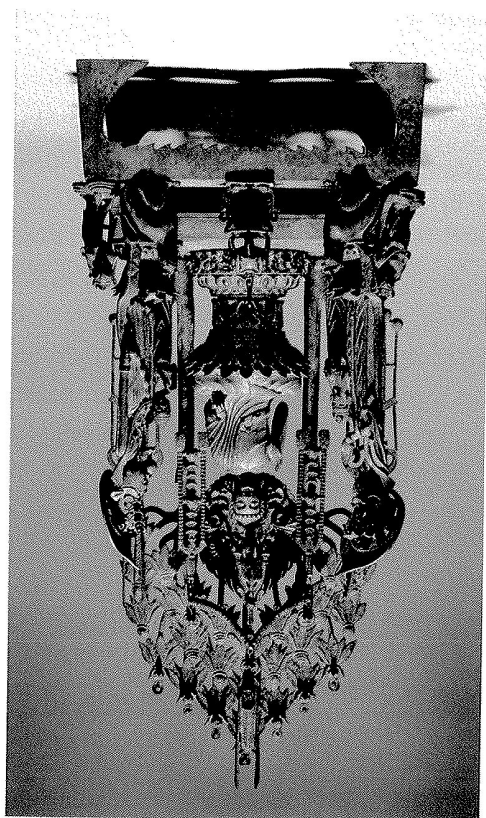
composed about 200, the Mahayana Buddha relates the famous Parable of the Burning House: a man notices that his house, in which his children are playing, is on fire. In order to induce his young children to leave their play and escape from a danger they fail to perceive, he offers them a choice of three different carts: a deer cart (*arhat* vehicle), a goat cart (*pratyeka-buddha* vehicle), and a bullock cart (*bodhisattva* vehicle). But after the children have left the house, they are all rewarded with bullock carts, the most desirable of all three vehicles. Thus speaks the *Lotus Sutra*, "In the same manner... the Tathagata Buddha, considering that... all beings are his children, leads them by no other vehicle but the Buddha-vehicle to full development. In this way, one has to understand how the Tathagata by an expedient device shows but one vehicle, the Great Vehicle."⁵¹

During the fourth and fifth centuries the nomad-dominated northern empires readily adopted Buddhism as their state religion. At Yungang Cave 20, constructed in the early 460s under the Northern Wei rulers, the

⁵¹ For a standard Chinese translation of the *Lotus Sutra* by Kumārajīva (384–417), a native of Kucha see *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*, 72–82. See also Nanjio Bunyū, *Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka*, 134.

FIGURE 46 *Vairocana Buddha*, dated 675. Limestone; façade measures about 30 m x 40 m; the central Buddha is approximately 17 m high. Fengxian Si, Longmen. Luoyang, Henan province

FIGURE 47 *Altarpiece with Amitābha and Attendants*, dated 593. Cast bronze; overall 76.5 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. W. Scott Fitz and Edward Jackson Holmes (22.407)



figural realism from an earlier drawing of the animal in a wall painting at Jiuquan, Gansu, dated to the fourth century (FIG. 28). The latter is a lively shorthand sketch of a buffalo, with different parts of the animal's anatomy conceived in characteristic profile views, whereas the Dunhuang drawing presents an organic, muscular creature chugging through a sketchy landscape of utterly flat forms. The mid-sixth-century Dunhuang artist had mastered three-dimensional representation with thickening-and-thinning lines alone, without the help of either color or shading but with keen attention to bulk and foreshortening. A few thick strokes around the animal's breast and back were added for emphasis.³⁵ For reasons best known to himself, the artist has placed his realistic bull in a thoroughly idealized landscape. It appears, therefore, that realism in representing nature came well after realism in representing figures.

The Rendering of Space

Traditional Chinese painting historiography was based on the concept of genealogy — what Zhang Yanyuan called "the transmission of teachers and schools" (*shizhi chuanxue*).³⁶ In describing the classical lineage of figure painting from Gu Kaizhi to Zhang Sengyou to Wu Daozi, Zhang wrote:

From ancient times, all writers on painting considered Master Gu Kaizhi beyond comparison.... Lu Tanwei [active ca. 465–472] learned from Gu Kaizhi, and Lu's sons Sui, Hong, and Su all learned from their father.... Zhang Sengyou's sons Shanguo and Rutong learned from their father.... [And] Wu Daoxuan [Daozi] learned from Zhang Sengyou.... In each case tradition was passed from master to pupil, all in turn from one to another.³⁷

Thus, Zhang Sengyou, a painter of the Liang dynasty (502–557), was considered the antecedent of the incomparable Wu Daozi of the Tang dynasty. As Zhang Yanyuan saw it, Zhang Sengyou and Wu Daozi were the two leading masters of a revolutionary style that permanently changed Chinese figure painting.

³⁵ It is interesting to compare the sixth-century Dunhuang "running bull" with a similar "white-painting" bull found in Lou Rui's tomb, dated to 570, illustrated in Wu Hung, "Origins

of Chinese Painting," 43.

³⁶ See "Discussing the Schools and Their Transmission in the Period of Northern and Southern Dynasties (317–589)," in Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*, juan 2: 19–21; and Acker, *Some Tang and*

Pre-Tang Texts 1: 160–76.

³⁷ See also translations in Acker, *Some Tang and Pre-Tang Texts* 1: 160, 162, 163, 166.

FIGURE 27 *Running Bull*,
first half of the 6th century,
North side of ceiling, Mogao
Cave 249, Dunhuang,
Gansu province

FIGURE 28 *Man and Buffalo*,
4th century, Painted brick,
from a tomb at Jiuquan,
Gansu Provincial Museum,
Lanzhou



In an eighth-century work depicting sights and events in Jiankang (Nanjing), the author, Xu Song, reports on an illusionistic marvel in flower painting called "receding-and-projecting flowers" (*aotu hua*), also known by its homonym as "receding-and-projecting painting" (*aotu hua*).³⁸ In Dunhuang Cave 272, datable to the second quarter of the fifth century, carefully shaded brushstrokes model bare-chested bodhisattvas whose diaphanous skirts cling tightly to their bulging bellies and thighs (fig. 29). The Dunhuang artist was no doubt fully aware of the realistic effect created by his illusionistic modeling technique, one that Tang writers would later refer to as *aotu hua* because the image appears literally to recede and project from the painting surface. On the ceiling of Cave 249, from the first half of the sixth century, spatial realism has been taken much further: celestial dancers and musicians perform behind the banister of a balcony constructed of concave-and-convex brick patterns drawn in perspective (fig. 30).³⁹ The same concave-and-convex motif is developed with elaborate care in Cave 288, also datable to the first half of the sixth century. By this time the shading of faces and nude torsos is executed with remarkably free brushwork. In the athletic demon figure (fig. 31), the shading is highly reminiscent of the light-and-dark strokes of sixth-century calligraphy. Receding-and-projecting flowers of the type made famous by Zhang Sengyou are painted on the ceilings of Dunhuang Caves 288 and 428 (figs. 32, 33), the latter datable to the third quarter of the sixth century. The flower compositions in Cave 428 recede and project even more successfully than those in Cave 288 by virtue of their twisting and turning leaves, which are rendered with a markedly superior knowledge of illusionistic foreshortening and perspective. In the three-dimensionally modeled bodhisattva figures in Cave 428 (fig. 34), the bodies were built first with the usual bands of shaded coloring, followed by white highlighting, and, finally, the principal features of the face and body were detailed with modulated brushstrokes in ink. The drawing discloses a developed sense of bone structure: the lines of the eyelids and eye sockets, for instance, wrap around the eyes; the curved nostrils and the upturned corners of the lips describe the curvature of the cheeks; and together the facial features are firmly articulated and set into the raised T-frame formed by the arching eyebrows and the bridge of the nose. The willow with held by one of the bodhisattvas is delightfully calligraphic, but at the same time its twisting form also represents a small branch turning three-dimensionally in space. Elsewhere

38 See Xu Song, *Jiankang shilu*.

39 Soper derives this treatment of a "celestial balcony" from the Kucha caves, which in turn was borrowed from an Indian source; see Soper, "Dome of Heaven" in Asia," 246.

FIGURE 29 *Bodhisattva*
second quarter of the 5th
century. Ceiling and west
wall niche, Mogao Cave 272,
Dunhuang, Gansu province.
Courtesy of the Dunhuang
Academy





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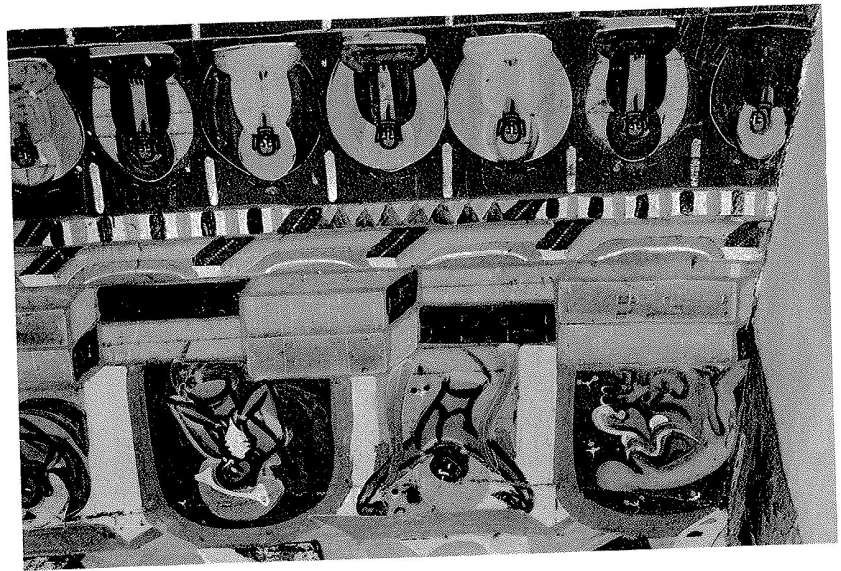


FIGURE 32 *Projecting*
Dunhuang
Ceiling, 1st
half of the
6th century. Upper
portion of east section
of the south wall, Mogao
Cave 249, Dunhuang,
Gansu province



FIGURE 31 *Demon Warrior*,
first half of the 6th century.
Lower portion of the west
wall, Mogao Cave 288,
Dunhuang, Gansu province



FIGURE 32 *Receding-and-Projecting Flowers*, first half of the 6th century.
 Ceiling, Mogao Cave 288,
 Dunhuang, Gansu province



FIGURE 33 *Receding-and-Projecting Flowers*, third quarter of the 6th century.
 Ceiling, Mogao Cave 428,
 Dunhuang, Gansu province



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FIGURE 34 *B* third quarter century, Detached niche of Mogao Dunhuang, China

FIGURE 35 *P* quarter of the West wall, Mogao Dunhuang, China

FIGURE 36 *M* Jataka, wall of third quarter century, Northern wall, Mogao Dunhuang, China

Opposite: