

## ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

Northern nomads as Buddhist art patrons  
during the period of Northern and  
Southern dynasties<sup>1</sup>*Dorothy C. Wong***Introduction**

Beginning in the latter part of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), nomadic tribesmen originally from territories to the north and west of China started to advance inland. In one estimate, a total of ten million people from the steppes had settled in northern China between the fourth and the sixth centuries.<sup>2</sup> The disruption caused by this large-scale ethnic migration ushered in a period of chaos and social fragmentation. Nomadic peoples set up numerous short-lived, petty kingdoms in the north, while displaced Chinese migrated south and established dynastic rule based at Jiankang (Nanjing).

Analyzing the sociological character of nomadic groups such as the Huns, the Tibetans, and the Xianbei, Wolfram Eberhard remarked how these great peoples created empires out of their sheer military strength, but that, with a few exceptions, they all disappeared from history once and for all when their empires disintegrated.<sup>3</sup> These nomads either became Chinese (if they were in China) or retained their old ways of living and remained in association with other nomadic tribes. Either case meant the loss of ethnic independence for these peoples.

The interactions between the pastoral nomads and the agricultural Chinese involved confrontation and conflicts as well as mutual adaptation and transformation. It was also out of this melting pot that the unified Sui (589–618) and Tang (618–907) empires were created. For the nomads who became Chinese, however, it meant losing markers of their cultural identity such as language, customs, and lifestyles. The conquest, settlement, and eventual integration of millions of ethnic peoples into China, creating a single polity, is crucial to the formation of the so-called “Chinese” identity. In varying manners, this process was repeated later on, when a number of non-Chinese groups established the conquest dynasties of Liao (947–1125), Jin (1125–1234), Yuan (1279–1368), and Qing (1644–1911).<sup>4</sup> In modern China, the roles of ethnic minorities in a

multiethnic nation-state remain a central concern. Given the current scholarly interest in ethnicity studies and in issues such as “Chineseness,” race, and ethnicity in late imperial and modern China, it is worth revisiting similar issues pertaining to the Northern and Southern dynasties (Nanbeichao, 386–581).<sup>5</sup>

The term “ethnicity” entered the English vocabulary fairly recently, and ethnicity studies began in earnest only after the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> Focusing on the post-industrial, post-colonial world in the context of rising nationalism since the nineteenth century, many models and theories derived from ethnicity studies, while germane to conditions in modern China, are not necessarily applicable to the historical period.<sup>7</sup> Ethnicity studies have, however, clarified how people construct their ethnicity and identity, a process that has gone on for ages, not just in modern times. Reiterating some of the key notions of current ethnicity studies can set the stage for a discussion that projects them into the historical dimension.

Richard Schermerhorn defines an ethnic group as:

a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these.<sup>8</sup>

The symbolic elements that qualify membership in a particular group thus define the essence of ethnicity and ethnic identity.

An ethnic group is also a social group, defined in its relation to other groups or to society as a whole. In early Greek usages, the term *ethnos*, from which the word “ethnicity” is derived, designates groups of animals or warriors, groups of distant peoples, or foreign and barbarous nations. The historical roots of the term thus imply a distinction between self and other, the familiar and the unfamiliar. In modern usage, the term “ethnic group” refers to groups of peoples with common culture, origin, or language. It is often employed from the perspective of the “we-group” or the dominant group in order to make a distinction between “us” and “them.”<sup>9</sup> Incorporated into the adjective “ethnic” are thus a cluster of binary concepts about boundaries and identity that include: self/other, dominant/subordinate, center/periphery, civilized/uncivilized, and so forth. Similar conceptions are certainly also found in China. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have been in contact with peoples dissimilar from themselves, whom they have called *yi* or *man*, translated as “barbarians.” In the Chinese worldview, China was the center of civilization and those who lived on the periphery were uncivilized.<sup>10</sup>

Ethnicity and identity are also subjective constructs. Individuals adhere to a variety of groups – social, political, cultural, religious, ethnic – for their identity. An individual’s alliance to any of these groups can change, however. Some of these groups may also vanish in the course of time. Thus, while groups of

peoples derive their collective identity by drawing boundaries between themselves and other groups, such boundaries are fluid and changeable. Individuals or groups of peoples can, if not always, make independent choices in aligning themselves with certain groups. Taking into account the factors of human agency and intentions, we thus have what Steven Harrell calls the "situational multiplicity of identity."<sup>11</sup>

Traditional scholarship on China emphasizes that ethnic groups have been absorbed into the larger Han Chinese population and uses the terms sinicization (*hanhua*), "Confucian universalism," and "Confucian culturalism" to discuss the phenomenon. It has been assumed that the Chinese define themselves through elements in their culture, such as the Confucian principles of loyalty and filial piety. Holding the Chinese state and the family to be ideal forms of social organization, they expect outsiders to adopt Chinese ways. In this frame of mind, the Chinese people have taken on "civilizing projects" or "inclusivist expansionism," conferring the benefits of their superior civilization to inferior peoples on their periphery, who become "accultured" and "assimilated" as part of the Han Chinese group.<sup>12</sup> Likewise it has been shown that the Chinese define themselves in terms of social kinship, describing the true Chinese as descendants of the mythical Yellow Emperor. In this model, those who possess a recognized Chinese surname can make claims to Chinese ancestry through a patrilineal relationship.<sup>13</sup>

While many of these ideas pervade traditional scholarship on China, current ethnicity studies cast doubt on terms such as "acculturation," "assimilation," and "sinicization," noting the assumption of cultural superiority and the ethnocentric perspective implicit in their use.<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this study, we will neither abandon traditional terms nor endeavor to coin new ones, but rather examine more closely the discourse of cultural changes and exchanges, seeking to illuminate the social and historical forces that shape the construction of ethnicity and identity in China.

In discussions of social, cultural, and military institutions of the Northern dynasties (Beichao, 386–581), historians use terms such as "sinicization" to denote the nomads' adoption of Chinese-style institutions and customs. Vice versa, they describe the reverse process of sinicization – namely, the adoption of nomadic culture and customs by the Chinese – as "Xianbei-ization" or "Sārbi-ization," with Xianbei referring to the nomadic group who founded the Northern Wei dynasty (Bei Wei, 386–534).<sup>15</sup> In both processes, nomadic rulers played an active role in instituting specific cultural policies. Furthermore, if Confucian universalism was one cultural ideology that the nomads could have adopted, their sponsorship of Buddhism represents a counter-choice. Like Confucianism, Buddhism enabled groups of peoples to create a common identity that transcended their ethnic differences. This chapter focuses on aspects of the important intersections of Buddhism with nomadic and indigenous Chinese cultures.

Coeval with the phenomenon of nomadic migration was the firm establishment of Buddhism in China during the period of disunion. Buddhism began to infiltrate China beginning in the first few centuries of the common era, with

missionaries, travelers, and merchants serving as carriers of ideas and art forms. The spread of Buddhism was initially limited to the trade routes and to towns and cities along those routes.<sup>16</sup> The collapse of the Han dynasty, however, created favorable conditions for the widespread reception of Buddhism in China. With that collapse came political chaos and an intellectual vacuum, resulting from the loss of faith in Confucianism and the social structure upon which it was built.<sup>17</sup> Buddhism's success in China also would not have been possible had not its doctrine been attractive and had not the Chinese, especially the educated, gentry class, endorsed it. Still, the crucial role played by the nomads in propagating the religion can hardly be underestimated.

Despite being cultural aliens, the nomads were aware of the superior literary and cultural tradition of the Chinese with whom they came into contact. Accepting the Confucian tradition and Chinese ways, however, would have meant subsuming their military superiority to and separateness from those they conquered. Instead, most nomadic rulers chose to adopt Buddhism as an alternative cultural policy. They also preferred to employ Buddhist priests of foreign origins as their trusted ministers and advisers.<sup>18</sup> Among the nomads, the comprehensiveness of Buddhism helped to create a powerful and useful ideology that enabled the conquerors to bond with the conquered, thus serving to unify a divided society. Furthermore, the Buddhist notion of divine kingship fostered the development of state cults, especially under the Northern Wei.<sup>19</sup>

The nomadic kingdoms' support of Buddhism created new loci of Buddhism and Buddhist art. Unlike the early centers that naturally developed along trade routes and in cities, many of these new centers were created at or near political capitals: Ye in Hebei under the Later Zhao (Hou Zhao, 328–51) and later Eastern Wei (Dong Wei, 534–50) and Northern Qi (Bei Qi, 550–77); Chang'an under the Former Qin (Qian Qin, 351–94) and Later Qin (Hou Qin, 384–417), and Western Wei (Xi Wei, 535–51) and Northern Zhou (Bei Zhou, 561–81); Gansu under Northern Liang (Bei Liang, 397–460; annexed by Northern Wei in 439) and Western Qin (Xi Qin, 385–431); and Datong in Hebei and Luoyang in Henan under the Northern Wei. Many of these nomadic courts sponsored centers for translating and studying Buddhist texts, attracting foreign as well as Chinese monks to the capitals. Imperial cave-chapels were excavated near capitals, including Yungang at Datong, Longmen and Gongxian near Luoyang, and Xiangtangshan at Ye. Historical and literary records also describe the magnificent monasteries and other monuments built in capitals such as Luoyang.<sup>20</sup> By the sixth century, Buddhism was widespread in the north and the populace joined the rulers and the aristocracy in making donations and dedicating images.<sup>21</sup> The vast quantity of Buddhist art works that has survived in the north attests to the pervasiveness of popular religious sentiments.

The main purpose of these pious acts was to gain religious merit, charity (*dāna*) being one of the key tenets of Buddhist teaching and an important precept in the conduct of piety.<sup>22</sup> Buddhists of the Northern and Southern dynasties helped to finance monastic institutions and support the clergy. They made images, built

monuments, or had Buddhist sacred texts copied to express their piety and to broadcast the religion's messages. They also underwrote the costs of ritual ceremonies and other festivities and made offerings of incense, flowers, and other votive dedications. Through material giving, devotees were promised spiritual gains in this world and the next. Imperial donors gave on behalf of the country in order to procure Buddhism's supernatural protection of the state. Likewise, leaders of clans and other social and religious groups prayed and made offerings for the well-being of their communities. Individual donors could accrue spiritual merit for themselves or have the benefits transferred to deceased ancestors, relatives, and, altruistically, to all sentient beings. Commingling with local traditions of ancestor worship and funeral cults, making donations for deceased ancestors and relatives became one of the most significant driving forces for Buddhist image-making in China.

The amalgamation of different ethnic groups into a single polity and the "Buddhist conquest of China" (to use Erik Zürcher's phrase) are two bilateral phenomena that overlaid interactive and transformational processes occurring at many levels: social, cultural, religious, political, and artistic. I do not propose, however, to touch upon most of these complex historical processes. Nor do I attempt to address nomadic patronage of Buddhist art in any comprehensive manner; such in-depth studies do exist, but many aspects still await further investigation. Instead, I will focus on the visual representation of donors in Buddhist art works, with the specific goal of investigating issues relating to the nomads' construction of their ethnicity and identity.

Patronage activities involve acts of both wish fulfillment and self-announcement. The donors' self-representation, along with records of their patronage activities, provide the most concrete evidence of how the donors saw themselves and how they wanted to be seen. At one level, these images and inscriptions convey explicitly the donors' intentions and reflect a certain degree of social and historical reality. At another level, they also carry implicit messages that express deep-seated attitudes and reveal the structure of the social order and hierarchy of which the donors were a part.

Inscriptions on Buddhist art works give copious information. They record the image dedicated, donors, dates, and reasons for the donations. Information about donors includes their names, titles, and sometimes lineage, geographical origins, and the social and religious organizations to which they belonged. The historical value of these dedicatory inscriptions has long been recognized, first by antiquarian and epigraphic scholars and then by historians of art, religion, and social history.<sup>23</sup> The rich evidence of donor imagery, however, remains largely untapped, despite a number of studies on the presence of foreigners and nomads in art works.<sup>24</sup> The present study is a preliminary investigation of the hitherto neglected visual record relating to nomads as Buddhist art patrons.

The representation of donors on Chinese Buddhist art works initially follows conventions established in Indian Buddhist art.<sup>25</sup> Donors are usually portrayed in diminutive size in relation to the hieratic, sacred images, and are shown on

the pedestals; both size and position indicate the relatively low status of humans in the scheme of the Buddhist universe. Like their Indian prototypes, donor images on Chinese Buddhist art works are not portraits of real personages but general types. Through the depictions of costume, hairstyle, objects such as status symbols, and spatial organization, there is clear representation of a donor's gender, ethnicity, kinship relations, vocation, and social status – all of which are key elements of identity constructs. Members of the clergy are shown wearing monastic robes and have clean-shaven heads. Secular donors and worshipers wear clothing unique to their social and ethnic backgrounds. Donors gave as individuals, as couples, families, or clans. They could also join monastic members or form social and religious organizations to express their piety collectively. Many of these associations are shown in the art works.

Although Indian prototypes provided initial models, Chinese Buddhist adaptations very soon developed to indicate the specific ethnic and social characteristics of local worshipers. Some of these modifications were derived from pre-Buddhist conventions that have long existed in China; others reflected decisions made by patrons, nomadic or Chinese. An overview charting these key changes over two centuries enables us to examine broadly some of the elements that constitute the construction of ethnicity and identity.

I will tentatively divide the Northern dynasties into two phases: (1) the fourth and fifth centuries; and (2) the sixth century. The first phase covers the initial period of Chinese Buddhist art as well as the first flowering of Northern Wei Buddhist art, with its locus at Yungang, in the second half of the fifth century. The second phase covers late Northern Wei Buddhist art, with its type-site at Longmen, and the period of divided Xianbei rule up until the unification under the Sui.

#### Fourth and fifth centuries

The fourth century and the first half of the fifth century encompass the initial phase of Chinese Buddhist art.<sup>26</sup> Local production of Buddhist art works remained relatively scarce, with a general lack of uniformity in style. Nevertheless, by the early fifth century, three regions had already emerged as centers of Buddhism and Buddhist art in northern China: Hebei/Shanxi, Chang'an in the Guanzhong plain, and Liangzhou/Dunhuang in Gansu.<sup>27</sup> All three centers received direct or indirect support from nomadic kingdoms in those regions: Later Zhao in Hebei, the Former and Later Qin in Chang'an, and Northern Liang and Western Qin in Gansu. By the second half of the fifth century, Shanxi under the Northern Wei emerged as yet a fourth major center.

The Chinese were first exposed to Buddhist art forms through portable images brought to China by foreign missionaries and travelers. Literary records document that the nomadic rulers often received Buddhist images from foreign missionaries and emissaries as tributes, which they in turn bestowed upon eminent monks as imperial favors.<sup>28</sup> Gradually local workshops began to produce Buddhist images. The earliest images produced in China, fashioned after imported models,

retain strong foreign styles, both Indian and Central Asian. Freshly imported foreign influences continued to commingle with developing indigenous styles.

Donors are represented on both individual images and at cave-temple sites. Small bronze images were personal devotional objects that could be carried on the body of the devotee, sometimes functioning as amulets.<sup>29</sup> Usually only a few centimeters high, small Buddhist bronzes tended not to represent donors because of their size. Many bore no inscriptions, while others carried brief inscriptions that identify the image, donors, date, and reason for the dedication. On bronze statues and stone sculptures of medium to large size, some of which might have originally been placed in temples, we begin to find the consistent representation of donors. Images of donors are also depicted in cave-temple sites in the northwest. The following examples will demonstrate the diverse representations of nomadic donors as well as some general patterns that were already established at this early date.

The first example is the well-known gilt bronze image of the seated Buddha, said to have come from Shijiazhuang in Hebei (Figures 3.1a and 3.1b).<sup>30</sup> The



(a)

(b)

Figure 3.1 (a) Monk donor on side of pedestal of seated Buddha with flaming shoulders, c. fourth century. Gilt bronze. H. 32 cm. (b) Secular donor on side of pedestal of seated Buddha image in Figure 3.1a.

Source: courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Bequest of Grenville L. Winthrop.

sculpture portrays a flame-shouldered Buddha, dressed in a heavy robe with parallel, ring-like drapery folds. Stylistically and iconographically, it retains strong characteristics of Indian Gandhāran and Central Asian Buddhist art of the first few centuries of the common era, which lead to uncertainty regarding whether the image was made in China after imported models or foreign-made and brought to China by missionaries or foreign travelers. The dating of the image is also unclear. It is generally thought to date from the fourth or early fifth century, although a second-century date has also been recently proposed.<sup>31</sup>

Two male donors are portrayed on the sides of the pedestal of the sculpture, shown in three-quarter view with one foot placed in front as though each is walking forward. The figure on the Buddha's proper left wears a thick, long coat. He has a mustache and his head is clean-shaven, suggesting that he is a monk. He holds offerings in both hands: a lamp in the shape of a cone of fire and an object that resembles a lotus bud. The figure on the Buddha's right wears a shorter belted coat with a straight hemline at calf level. Shorter than the monk, he has short, cropped hair and appears to be wearing a pair of boots. He also holds offerings in his hands: a lotus stalk and a small object.

The belted coat and boots of the second figure are typical of the costume of nomads from the frontier steppe land. Furthermore, as Marilyn Rhie notes, the tunic of the second figure, shown with the right side crossing over the left side, is characteristic of the dress of secular figures depicted in art works of Kushan Gandhāra (late first–third century CE) and other parts of western Central Asia. In China, the robe would have been worn with the left side placed over the right.<sup>32</sup> Both costume and hairstyle thus identify the secular donor as a non-Chinese, probably a nomad. Most likely both images of monk and secular donor represent foreigners, in fact, and this sculpture was probably made for and owned by foreigners in China.<sup>33</sup> The combination of monastic and secular donors seen here has precedents in Gandhāran Buddhist art, although the symmetrical arrangement of the two figures on the Buddha's two sides is distinctive and noteworthy (see further discussion below). The larger size of the monk suggests that he holds a status higher than the secular worshiper.

The next examples of donor representation come from the cave-temple sites of Binglingsi and Dunhuang in Gansu, located on the path of east–west traffic where the spread of Buddhism naturally developed. This region supported an international community of foreigners (Indians and Central Asians), including ethnic nomads (Xiongnu, Xianbei, and the proto-Tibetan Di and Qiang) who had conquered or settled in the area, alongside the local Chinese. Donor images are found in the earliest cave-chapels that date from the early fifth century. They reflect the diverse ethnic backgrounds of Buddhist patrons in this time and place.

Several groups of donors, for example, are painted on the north wall of Binglingsi Cave 169. This is the earliest cave at the site, bearing an inscription dated 420, the first year of the Jianhong reign of Western Qin.<sup>34</sup> Both monastic and lay devotees are represented here, including, among the monk-worshipers who are identified, Tanwubi, known as a foreign *dhyāna* master (*chanshi*; *dhyāna* or

*chan* means meditation).<sup>35</sup> According to the biography of the Chinese monk Xuangao, Tanwubi came to the Western Qin territory from western Gansu to preach meditation practices and gathered a large following. Xuangao, who also practiced meditation and was residing at Maijishan (another cave-temple site in southern Gansu) at the time, led his disciples to study with Tanwubi. Later the foreign master returned west and Xuangao was honored as the *guoshi* (preceptor of state) at the Western Qin court.<sup>36</sup> Records document both the vibrant Buddhist activities in the region and the nomadic court's involvement in those activities.

Other figures painted here probably include Chinese priests. The lay devotees are shown in both nomadic and Chinese-style costumes. One group (Figure 3.2) shows a monk followed by three women on the proper right side of a Buddha triad (that is, the left side of the triad from the viewer's perspective). The monk, shown with stubble on his face, wears a monastic robe that bares his right arm and covers a lower garment. He wears short boots, a hint that he might be of foreign origin. In his left hand he holds a lamp, in his right hand a small object



Figure 3.2 Images of monk, two female donors, and attendant, Western Qin, c. 420. Binglingsi Cave 169, north wall. Wall mural.

Source: Gansu Province Cultural Relics Unit and Binglingsi Cultural Relics Conservation Institute, eds, *Yongjing Binglingsi* (Beijing, 1989), plate 38.

that looks like an alms bowl. Cursorily outlined in ink and painted with color, the three women are shown in descending size to indicate status (note that the first two female donors are larger than the monk). All three female figures are clasping their hands together as if worshiping. The first two wear short coats with loose sleeves over long pleated skirts. Their hair, perhaps braided, is tied into two knobs placed either to the side or on top of the head.<sup>37</sup> They also have beauty marks on their faces and foreheads. The third figure, of smaller stature, is most likely an attendant. She wears a dark, short coat with tight sleeves over a pleated skirt. Dressed in fashionable garb, the two larger female figures are probably the principal donors, representing women of high status in Western Qin society. They wear a costume, short coats over long pleated skirts, that has become consistently associated with nomadic women.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, they are not identified by name, as the cartouches next to them are either left blank or the characters are no longer legible.

Another section of the same wall shows several female donors in the traditional Chinese dress of long, flowing robes with loose sleeves and scarves (Figure 3.3). The trailing robes and scarves create a sense of movement, evoking the Chinese figural style established by masters of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420) such as Gu Kaizhi (c. 345–c. 406). The coexistence in these wall paintings of donor figures wearing costume of different ethnic styles, along with both foreign and local priests attests to the international, multiethnic character of the Buddhist community of the region at that time.

The multiethnic character of patrons is also indicated at Dunhuang. On the west wall of Cave 268, which the Dunhuang Research Institute dates to the Northern Liang period or the first quarter of the fifth century, six donor images



Figure 3.3 Drawings of female donors in Chinese-style dress, Western Qin, c. 420. Binglingsi Cave 169, north wall.

Source: Zhang Baoxi, "Binglingsi de Xi Qin shiku," in *Yongjing Binglingsi*, p. 190, fig. 14.



Figure 3.4 Donor images depicted below Maitreya Buddha image in recessed niche, Northern Liang, early fifth century. Dunhuang Cave 268, west wall. Wall mural with pigments.

Source: Dunhuang Research Institute, ed., *Dunhuang Mogao ku*, vol. 1 (Beijing, 1981), plate 12.

are depicted below an image of Maitreya Buddha (Figure 3.4).<sup>39</sup> The figures are arranged symmetrically: a monastic member precedes two lay worshipers on each side, with males on the viewer's right and females on the left. The two male secular donors wear long robes with loose sleeves, dress associated with the Chinese gentry class and comparable to that seen on figures depicted in murals of Han and Jin tombs in the region. The woman on the far left also wears a long robe in the Chinese style. The figure next to her, however, wears nomadic dress: a short coat with tight sleeves over a long skirt (see Figure 3.1a). The monastic figures are both slightly shorter than the donors. The right figure wears a dark brown calf-length robe over an undergarment; the left figure wears a light-colored robe of slightly longer length. Their gender is not entirely clear, though it is possible that a monk is grouped with the male donors and a nun is grouped with their female counterparts.

At Binglingsi, donors wearing different costumes belonged to separate groups, so the mix of costume within the same group here is significant. Given that many

cave-chapels at Dunhuang are family chapels, one can assume that the secular donors belonged to the same family: perhaps two Chinese brothers and their spouses, one Chinese and one of nomadic origin. Such a representation, then, if it is any indication of social reality, suggests intermarriage among Chinese and nomadic peoples. However, one has to be cautious about assigning ethnicity based only on costume. As I will argue later on, under the influence of nomadic lifestyles, the Chinese could adopt nomadic dress and the nomads could adopt Chinese dress. In another early fifth-century cave-chapel, Cave 275, the lower section of the north wall depicts more than twenty male donors in a row. They are shown wearing short tunics and trousers, each with a piece of cloth tied around the hair knob.<sup>40</sup> In general it is assumed that this is the *hu* or nomadic costume, but it is also possible that Chinese men in the area, exposed to nomadic lifestyle, could have adopted such attire (if they did not belong to the gentry class). Costume can thus refer to lifestyle or social status, and not necessarily ethnic origin. Sixth-century cave-chapels at Dunhuang continue to show donors wearing both Chinese and nomadic costume, and in a variety of styles.<sup>41</sup>

Individual donors or members of a single family dedicated many bronzes and stone sculptures. A fair number of images from the second half of the fifth century portray a couple as principal donors, wearing the standard nomadic costume.<sup>42</sup> In this arrangement, the husband always stands on the Buddha's proper left side, the wife on the right.

A squarish stone pedestal in the collection of the Shodo hakubutsukan in Japan gives additional information about the nomadic origins of Buddhist patrons (Figure 3.5).<sup>43</sup> Originally supporting a carving, the pedestal portrays the donor and his family, along with the inscription. The front side shows, in low relief, an Atlantean figure in the center, holding a censer as an offering, flanked by two kneeling figures and a pair of lions. Male and female donors are portrayed on both sides. The inscription is carved in Chinese on the back. It records that the donor, Bao San, dedicates a stone *futu* and a copy of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* for his father and deceased mother in the third year of the reign of Taiping Zhenjun (442) of the Northern Wei dynasty.<sup>44</sup> Although *futu* can be a transcription for *stūpa* (or the relic mound that contains the Buddha's ashes), it can also mean the Buddha himself. Based on a study of the prevalent use of the term in Northern dynasties' inscriptions, the *futu* here probably refers to a cubical block, carved with recessed niches with Buddhist images on each of the four sides.<sup>45</sup> In making this dedication, the donor prays for the well-being of the emperor and his father's longevity, that his parents in their next life will encounter Maitreya Buddha, and that the dozen or so family members will all be blessed. The donor originated from Dingzhou Changshan (in Hebei) and served as *Yongchang wang changshi* (Attendant of the Establishment of Prince Yongchang), a post he held at the Northern Wei capital of Pingcheng.<sup>46</sup> His father was chief of a county in Hebei.<sup>47</sup> The donor's surname, Bao, is the sinicized form of Yilifa, used by the Turkic group Rouran as a rank title; among the nomadic peoples, it was common to use rank titles as surnames.<sup>48</sup> The Rouran were defeated by the Xianbei





Figure 3.5 Four sides of a stone pedestal, with the two sides (second and third panels) depicting male and female donors, Northern Wei, dated 442. Sandstone. H. 10 cm, W. 28.3 cm.

Source: Shodo Hakubutsukan, Tokyo.

and many were absorbed into the Xianbei confederation of the Northern Wei, while others fled and were said to be the Avars who invaded Europe some time later. Thus the inscription informs us that the donor belonged to a nomadic group that had followed the Wei, and that he and his father had held administrative offices in the Hebei region, the power base of the Northern Wei. The facts that the donor bears a sinicized surname and that the inscription is written in Chinese attest to the degree to which the nomadic donors had adopted aspects of Chinese culture. Furthermore, one of the key features of the Northern Wei state was its adoption of Chinese-style administration. Listing the rank and title of the donor's post conforms to the Chinese conventions of self-identification.

The images, however, retain the patrons' ethnic identity. Eight male donors are shown on one side and eight female donors and an attendant are shown on the other side, portrayed as if walking forward. Both groups wear the standard nomadic costume, and the women have their hair arranged into several knobs on the head. Each donor holds a tree branch as offering – an object commonly held by donor figures in Indian Buddhist art but rarely found in later Chinese depictions.

Thus far we have looked at a range of examples that portray predominantly nomadic donors whose ethnicity is expressed primarily through costume. The pedestal from Hebei provides additional information beyond costume, such as surname and official rank. The donors are portrayed as participating in votive activities as individuals, as couples, or as families – the most basic units of social organization. They are sometimes joined by monastic members, who appear to act as intercessors in presenting the secular donors to the deities. Scale denotes status; prominent donors wear more elaborate dress and are accompanied by attendants. Buddhist priests hold positions that are either superior or subordinate to secular worshipers. Except for the first example, which portrays two male figures, donors are separated by gender and arranged symmetrically and consistently in the left-right order: male on the Buddha's proper left side (viewer's right) and female on the Buddha's proper right (viewer's left). These patterns are by and large followed in examples at Yungang – the site of the first flowering of Northern Wei Buddhist art.

The Yungang cave-temples at Datong epitomize the symbiotic relationship between religion and politics developed under the Northern Wei.<sup>49</sup> The architect behind the grand project was Tanyao, a priest recruited from the Liangzhou area who was appointed *shamantong* (the chief of monks).<sup>50</sup> In his capacity as an adviser to the emperor, he promoted the Buddhist ideal of kingship, which rests on the notion of *cakravartin* (a universal monarch who sets the wheel in motion), a king who rules ethically and benevolently over the entire world. A Buddhist king also abides by the conduct of Buddhist piety, especially in his support of Buddhist institutions on behalf of the state, which in turn is promised supernatural protection.<sup>51</sup> Drawing upon the parallels between temporal and spiritual rulership, Tanyao further equated secular rulers with Buddhas. At his suggestion, five colossal Buddha images were carved to commemorate the five founding rulers of the Northern Wei dynasty. It is generally accepted that Caves 16–20 correspond

to the five Tanyao caves. Furthermore, the Northern Wei established Buddhism as a state institution with a centralized administrative structure. As the head of both church and state, the emperor was deified and given divine status. Portrayed as a demigod, the ruler assumed a higher stature that transcended his ethnic origins, enhancing his authority and enabling him to consolidate the power of the state. Buddhist ideology thus lent itself to the development of state cults under the Northern Wei, serving both political and religious ends effectively.

In addition to the Tanyao five caves, the Tuoba Wei rulers sponsored other imperial cave-chapels, including Caves 7–8, 9–10, and 5–6. None of these imperial cave-chapels portrays royal donors as human personages, however, although one may argue that the colossal Buddha statues are to be identified with emperors. Beginning around the 480s, however, we find many donor images, secular and monastic, shown beneath niches and images, in Caves 11 and 13 and on facades outside the earlier imperial caves.

One of the many examples is a three-story pagoda carved in relief on the south wall of Cave 11 (Figure 3.6).<sup>52</sup> The pagoda itself has recessed niches



Figure 3.6 Donor images on pedestal of relief carving of a pagoda, Northern Wei, third quarter of fifth century. Yungang Cave 11, south wall. Sandstone with pigments. Source: Yungang Cave-temples Cultural Relics Institute, ed., *Yungang shiku* (Beijing, 1991), vol. 2, plate 94.

embellished with images of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Two banners are hung from the central spire while two large bodhisattvas, in low relief, flank the pagoda. The donors are portrayed on the pedestal, divided into two groups, flanking a censer in the middle. The male group, on the viewer's right, consists of three priests followed by three lay worshipers; one more donor is shown on the short side. The female group consists of two women, on the far left, preceded by four monastic members. All the secular donors are attired in the customary nomadic dress: men in tunics and trousers, women in coats over long, pleated skirts. In addition, both men and women wear the tall headdresses and hoods associated with the Xianbei people, confirmed by clay figurines found in Northern Wei tombs.<sup>53</sup> The presence of monastic members as donors is quite prominent at Yungang, although there is no visual cue that would allow us to distinguish their gender.

Group patronage predominates at Yungang. Visually, the configuration of male and female donors accompanied by monastic members is most common. There are also all-monastic groups and single-gender groups. Inscriptions are rare and seldom record names, but they do record, for instance, images dedicated by an all-nun group and by a devotional society of thirty-six women and eighteen men.<sup>54</sup> These new groupings expand beyond family-based social units and suggest a new development in religious and social organizations through which members expressed their religious identity collectively. However, since all the donors are dressed in the same way and shown in equal size, there is no indication of the donors' backgrounds or social distinctions. (In a few examples, monks are shown larger than secular donors to indicate their leadership status.) One can surmise that these donor images generically represent Northern Wei noblemen and noblewomen, or perhaps represent a variety of social and perhaps ethnic backgrounds, but that a visual convention to distinguish social stratification had not yet been developed. When it was, in the sixth century, the convention borrowed primarily from Chinese conventions. The lack of social differentiation among the donor images at Yungang may convey a message of Buddhist egalitarianism. Historians of the period have often remarked on the relatively high position of women in nomadic societies.<sup>55</sup> The visual presence of women donors as equals of their male counterparts and the existence of all-female groups indicates the nomadic women's freedom to participate in public religious activities. It is also noteworthy that among the most important patrons of Buddhism during the Northern Wei dynasty were two imperial women: Empress Dowager Wenming (Wenming taihou; 442–90) and Empress Dowager Ling (Ling taihou; d. 528).<sup>56</sup>

The large number of donor images at Yungang in the last quarter of the fifth century represents a significant shift in patronage, from the imperial house to other sectors of society. In the inscriptions, the donors express their religious goals of enlightenment and rebirth in the Buddha's realm. They also pray for the well-being of the emperor and the state. These images, portraying donors in pious attitudes, underscore a popular religious sentiment that attests to the



success of the state cult as a focal point through which the populace could express loyalty and patriotism and, at the same time, maintain the sacred connections linking the state to the realm of the gods.

The donor images from Yungang and elsewhere in northern China demonstrate a general pattern in organization: bilateral symmetry, gender separation, and a consistent left-right order for male and female donors. Donor images on Indian Buddhist art works portray different types of figures and groupings, but they combine freely and never seem to conform to any particular formula.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, this relatively free approach seems to have become frozen into a formal arrangement in China, no matter whether the art works were commissioned by Chinese or by nomads. The same kind of hardening, formulaic treatment and rigid symmetry are also found in the local interpretations of Buddhist sculptural form, transforming whatever residual traits of naturalism might be found extant in Indian and Central Asian prototypes into simplified, flat patterns.<sup>58</sup>

The consistent practice of representing men on the Buddha's proper left side and women on the Buddha's right, absent in Indian prototypes, must bear some cultural significance, suggesting a hierarchy and decorum in actual social space. In his forthcoming book, David Summers proposes that the distinction between left and right is a planar articulation of culturally specific significance that denotes a constructable relation.<sup>59</sup> In the West, the right is preferred to the left primarily because of the association with dominance in human handedness. I would argue, however, that in China the left is preferred to the right because of alignment with cardinal directions. Since ancient times, the Chinese have constructed cities, palaces, and tombs in alignment with the north-south axis. Along with the development of the theory of *yin yang* and the five elements in Eastern Zhou (770-221 BCE) times, the four cardinal directions and the center became associated with the seasons, elements, colors, and symbolic animals. The south, associated with summer and symbolized by the red bird, is the most important of the four cardinal directions. The imperial palace and the emperor are always oriented towards the south. If the emperor is placed in the north, facing the south, then his proper left side becomes the east, associated with spring and life, and his proper right side the west, associated with autumn and death. The east is preferred to the west and thus is higher in hierarchical terms. In court ranks, the left minister precedes the right minister. Thus it seems apparent that the Buddhist icons in China have appropriated an orientation similar to that of Chinese rulers, placed in the north and facing an imaginary south. This logic would explain the consistent placement of men and women on the Buddha's proper left and right sides, since men hold a position superior to women in both Chinese and nomadic societies.<sup>60</sup>

The symbolism of the cardinal directions and left-right order is a well-established convention in China, articulating a constructed hierarchy of social relations and cultural significance. Buddhism's adoption of a Chinese orientation can be seen as a result of interactions between Chinese and Indian Buddhist

traditions that occur at a level deeper and more unconscious than any ethnic discourse. Nevertheless, the placement of donors in the proper social space also suggests aspects of the nomadic society that were different from the Chinese society, such as the prominence of women in the public domain and the relative lack of social differentiation (or perhaps the lack of representation of social groups other than the aristocracy). Some of these aspects, however, were to change drastically in the next century.

### The sixth century

The sixth century saw marked changes in the representation of nomadic Buddhist patrons, which resulted from either cultural policies instituted by nomadic rulers or developments of Buddhism. Emperor Xiaowen's (Xiaowen di; r. 471-99) relocation of the Northern Wei capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang in central China in 494 was a decisive event in the dynasty's cultural changes. One year after the move, he issued an edict to institute a series of sinicizing reforms, including requiring the adoption of Chinese dress, language, costume, rituals, and institutions.<sup>61</sup> The second phase of Northern Wei rule, based at Luoyang and lasting from 494 to 534, thus characterized a period of strong sinicizing trends. Closer contact with traditional Chinese culture also led to a resurgence of indigenous practices.

The Northern Wei's sinicizing measures, however, were largely revoked by the more militaristic Western Wei and Northern Zhou rulers, resulting in the so-called "Xianbei-ization" or "Sārbi-ization" process. Nomadic names were bestowed on Chinese - a practice which, as Albert Dien observes, served to recruit Chinese into the army.<sup>62</sup> The zigzag pattern of the nomadic rulers' cultural policies directly influenced the artistic portrayal of nomadic patrons, since both dress and surnames were interchangeable and not necessarily aligned with ethnicity. Having adopted Chinese dress, nomadic donors were now portrayed in elegant Chinese robes and, along with them, the paraphernalia of Chinese status symbols. Art works also show a greater reliance on name, title, kinship relations, and ancestry to indicate the donor's identity and social status. Furthermore, the prominence of military figures as donors can be seen as a general militarization of the society under nomadic rule.

By the sixth century, Buddhism had spread to the countryside in northern China and was widely accepted by both Han Chinese as well as their nomadic rulers. An important phenomenon was the development of Buddhist devotional societies called *yi* or *yiyi*, which first emerged toward the end of the fifth century as the main social and religious organizations through which the general populace expressed their devotions and identity.<sup>63</sup> Such organizations were modeled after the pre-Buddhist Chinese social and religious organization called *she*, which focused on earth-worship in local communities. With close ties to Buddhist temples (now centrally administered under the state), these lay Buddhist organizations drew members from towns and rural communities and developed

a structure that mirrored local administration and social stratification. Buddhist devotional societies also preferred to use the stele, a type of symbolic monument that had developed in the Han dynasty, to commemorate their patronage activities. The large number of still extant Buddhist steles from northern China attests to the important roles these devotional societies played in local religious and social life. For example, the prominence of nomadic settlers in the Guanzhong plain has been documented by a collection of steles from that region. In the following discussion, I will use a few examples to illustrate how some of these developments relate to changes in the nomads' perceptions of their identity and ethnicity.

Soon after Emperor Xiaowen relocated the Northern Wei capital to Luoyang, the excavation of cave-chapels began at the Longmen site, south of the new capital.<sup>64</sup> At the Guyang Cave, where most early images are concentrated, the representation of donors – including the way they are identified – differs drastically, even from the examples at Yungang. First, detailed inscriptions, executed in fine calligraphic style, identify most of the donors by name and list all their official and honorific titles. Some of these inscriptions are beautifully engraved on traditional Chinese steles called *bei*, which are carved in relief on the wall surface. Most of the individual images in the top rows of the north and south walls date from the 490s up to about the 510s. They were dedicated primarily by members of the Northern Wei imperial house and ruling elite.<sup>65</sup> Many male donors appear to have been close aides of Emperor Xiaowen or top-level military commanders who had accompanied the emperor on his southern expedition and had fought with him in other battles. Surnames such as Yuan (the sinicized name for Tuoba), Qiumu, and Helan indicate that they came from the “eight royal clans” of the Xianbei tribe. Other nomadic groups are represented as well, as in the example of an image of the Śākyamuni Buddha, dedicated by Yang Dayen for Emperor Xiaowen, dated *c.* 500–3 (Figure 3.7).<sup>66</sup> Yang held the title *fuguo jiangjun zhige jiangjun Liangzhou dazhong Anrongxian kaiguozi* (Bulwark General of the State, Commander of Palace Guards, Grand Protector of Liangzhou [in Sichuan], Dynasty-founding Viscount of Anrong District [in Qinghai?]).<sup>67</sup> He came from Qjuchi in Gansu; the Yang of Qjuchi was a prominent clan of the Tibetan Di people who had settled in Gansu since Han times and adopted many aspects of Chinese culture early on, including Chinese surnames.<sup>68</sup> Yang's dedicatory inscription is beautifully engraved on a Chinese stele, carved on the wall next to the image. Like other inscriptions from the same group, it overtly states the donor's loyalty to the state and the emperor, thus setting the patriotic tone of his patronage activities and reiterating the role of Buddhism in serving the state. Other donors from this group of Northern Wei aristocrats included several imperial women, who primarily dedicated images for their deceased husbands and sons, many of whom were warriors. Monastic donors also served the imperial house.

These detailed inscriptions thus provide us not only with information that supplements dynastic records, but also offer a glimpse at a historical moment



Figure 3.7 Seated Buddha image dedicated by Yang Dayen, inscription engraved on a stele carved in relief to the right of the niche, Northern Wei, *c.* 500–3. Longmen, Guyang Cave, north wall. Limestone.

Source: Longmen Cultural Relics Conservation Institute and the Archaeological Institute of Beijing University, eds, *Longmen shiku* (Beijing, 1991), vol. 1, plate 159.

when the Northern Wei noblemen rallied around the emperor, expressing their support for his political moves and cultural policies through their religious activities. With fine Chinese calligraphy, literary composition, and the appropriation of the Chinese stele form, these Buddhist inscriptions hark back to the traditional Chinese practice of commemorating illustrious scholar-officials, military officers, and local elites on steles during Han times.<sup>69</sup> During the Northern dynasties, the state bureaucracy was created after the Chinese model, with those serving the state classified into nine ranks, with corresponding salaries. The Northern Wei noble donors recorded in this cave mostly belonged to the top ranks, and the inscriptions list their honorific titles, rank titles, prestige offices, and titles of nobility as well as their actual posts. The emphasis on ranks and status certainly had Chinese parallels, and the manner of recording may have derived from Chinese practices (an early example has already been seen on the Hebei pedestal).

The social order reflected in these steles contains features unique to the nomadic aristocracy. First, the military role of the noblemen, as well as the identification of nobility status through surname is distinctive to nomadic society. In his analysis of the ruling elites of Chinese and nomadic societies, Denis Twitchett notes that many nomadic groups distinguished their nobility primarily on the basis of family, such as the eight royal clans of the Tuoba Wei.<sup>70</sup> Thus, surnames became an all-important clue to social identity. The Chinese also have had a long tradition of distinguishing status through surnames and lineages, such as the system of *jiupin* (nine ranks). After the Tuoba Wei gained control of the Central plain, the customs of emphasizing surnames and lineages to gauge relative family standing became rigidly institutionalized into a strict status hierarchy.

Second, among this early group of images at the Guyang Cave, donor images are not always shown, and when they are, the donors are portrayed wearing the Chinese dress of long, flowing robes and headdresses. The change in costume results from Emperor Xiaowen's edict to adopt Chinese dress. A particularly beautiful example is the panel of images beneath a Buddha image for Emperor Xiaowen (d. 499), dedicated by the priest Fasheng, the Prince of Beihai (Beihai wang), and his mother in 503 (Figure 3.8).<sup>71</sup> The Prince of Beihai, Yuan Xiang,



Figure 3.8 Images of imperial donors (Emperor Xiaowen on right, Prince of Beihai and his mother on left) engraved below Buddha image dedicated by monk Fasheng, Northern Wei, dedicated 503. Longmen, Guyang Cave, south wall. Limestone.

Source: Longmen Cultural Relics Conservation Institute and the Archaeological Institute of Beijing University, eds, *Longmen shiku* (Beijing, 1991), vol. 1, plate 141.

held the titles of *shizhong hujun jiangjun* (Princely Attendant, Protector General). He was a member of the Tuoba royal clan and had fought with Emperor Xiaowen in his southern campaigns. Yuan Xiang and his mother, both devout Buddhists, were associated with at least three other images in the Guyang Cave. On this Buddha image, dedicated by Fasheng, the donor images are divided into two groups, flanking the inscriptional panel in the center. Three monastic members precede each group. The right panel shows a prominent male donor, wearing the Chinese robe and tall cap of a Chinese official, probably representing the deceased Emperor Xiaowen. A group of attendants and the status symbols of a round fan and an umbrella accompany him. The left panel depicts two prominent donors and their attendants. The first figure is slightly larger and is accompanied by both an umbrella and a fan, while the second figure has only an umbrella. Judging from the scale and status symbols, they probably represent the mother of the Prince of Beihai, followed by the prince. The placement of Emperor Xiaowen on the Buddha's proper left, the preferred side, conforms to the hierarchy of left-right order established in previous examples. In contrast to the robust sculptural relief of donor images at Yungang, the style of these reflects a fluent, linear execution that evokes courtly elegance and the aesthetic taste of the Chinese gentry class. In choosing to adopt Chinese dress, the nomadic rulers transformed themselves into members of the Chinese elite, equipped with proper status symbols. In the following decades, the portrayal of Northern Wei royal donors developed into much grander schemes, including the famous panels from Binyang Cave (Binyang dong) at Longmen, dedicated by Emperor Xuanwu (Xuanwu di; r. 500–15) for his parents, Emperor Xiaowen and Empress Wenzhao (Wenzhao huanghou; d. 497), and the panels at Gongxian Cave 1, for Emperor Xuanwu and his consort, Empress Dowager Ling (Figure 3.9).<sup>72</sup>

Third, in the Guyang Cave, alongside images dedicated by members of the Northern Wei aristocracy, are other images, dedicated by devotional societies of local Han Chinese. Some of these had more than two hundred members, headed by local community or administrative leaders and joined by local clergy. The chiefs held official posts, mostly middle to low-level ranks in local governments or military units. As I have discussed in another study, the coexistence of Northern Wei nobles and Han Chinese as Buddhist patrons within the same cave was politically significant.<sup>73</sup> It signified the local Chinese support of the Northern Wei government and projected an image of solidarity among the nomadic and Chinese groups. Viewed in this light, the Northern Wei's cultural policies achieved their political goals on two fronts. On the one hand, the adoption of Chinese dress, language, and administrative structure, as well as the appropriation of Chinese status symbols, presented the nomadic rulers as legitimate and acceptable to the Chinese, especially the Chinese gentry and local administrators or commanders. The promotion of Buddhism, on the other hand, provided a common religious identity for both the conquerors and the conquered. The universal ideologies of both Chinese culture and Buddhism were used by the



Figure 3.9 Royal donors (Emperor Xuanwu? at top right), Northern Wei, first quarter of sixth century. Gongxian Cave 1, south wall. Limestone.

Source: Henan Provincial Cultural Relics Research Institute, ed., *Gongxian shikusi* (Beijing, 1989), plate 41.

state to unify a fragmented society, but they led to different outcomes. Ultimately, Buddhism proved to be a more cohesive force in cementing the society. As for Chinese culturalism, the nomads who adopted Chinese language, dress, and other customs began to lose their ethnic identity, but not without the interruptions of the revolt of the garrison soldiers from the frontier regions, leading to a reversal of some of the sinicizing reforms under Western Wei and Northern Zhou.

For the final phase of divided Xianbei rule from 534 to 581, I will focus on Chang'an, the Guangzhong plain, and their neighboring regions, primarily because the nomadic ethnicity of Buddhist patrons was strongly felt in these regions in the period preceding and during Western Wei and Northern Zhou rule. Crucial to the stability of the ancient capital of Chang'an, the Guangzhong plain – the vast territory surrounding Chang'an on the east, north, and west sides, marked by the Wei River to the south and the Tongguan Pass to the east – was one of the most bitterly contested areas among different ethnic groups

during the Northern dynasties. After Chang'an fell to the Xiongnu in 317, other nomadic peoples began to move into the area and occupied strategic locations. The Tibetan Di and Qiang groups established short-lived kingdoms of the Former Qin and Later Qin, both based at Chang'an. Under their sponsorship, Chang'an flourished as a major Buddhist center from the late fourth to the early fifth century, and a number of early Chinese Buddhist images were associated with that region.<sup>74</sup> In 418, the Daxia kingdom (407–31), founded by a Xiongnu tribe, sacked Chang'an, which led to the dispersal of the Buddhist community in the capital; many priests went north to Pingcheng or joined other Buddhist centers. The persecution of 446 was another setback for Buddhism in the region.

By the late fifth to early sixth century, however, there is evidence that Buddhism had become widespread in the region – a phenomenon that was common in other parts of northern China from Shanxi, Henan, Hebei to Gansu, vast territories that were under direct Northern Wei administration. Close to two hundred steles and individual sculptures have been recovered from the Guanzhong region, most of them coming from territories to the north of Chang'an and dating from the late fifth through the sixth century. A significant number of steles are mixed Buddhist and Daoist or Daoist in content, although in form they are not distinguishable from the Buddhist ones.<sup>75</sup>

By the sixth century, the Di people had primarily settled to the northwest of Chang'an, the Qiang to the north, and the Xiongnu in pockets throughout the area. These nomadic peoples coexisted with the Han Chinese, and some mixing began to occur over the course of the sixth century. Their presence and social interactions as Buddhist or Daoist patrons with the Han Chinese are documented in this group of Shaanxi steles. Most of these steles were dedicated by devotional societies, which drew members from local villages or communities. Like those from other areas, the steles record the names of the leaders and members of these societies. In his study of the inscriptions of this group of Shaanxi steles, the Chinese scholar Ma Changshou observes that members of these groups could have come from a single kin group, Han or non-Han. Sometimes all the members of the group shared the same surname; at other times, they bore different surnames but came from the same tribe. The Qiang people were most prominently represented and some of the most common Qiang surnames included Yao, Qi, Fumeng, Lei, Tongti, Lifei, Qian'er, and Dang.

An example is a Daoist stele, dated 521, dedicated by Qi Maren and some 120 members of the Qi clan (Figure 3.10).<sup>76</sup> Surrounding the Daoist image at the top, the donors are shown in three-quarter views, facing towards the center. They are also arranged in rows, with those holding titles given the preferred positions at the top. Surmounted by pairs of dragons, the stele is virtually indistinguishable from its Buddhist counterparts in format; iconographic features and other details identify its Daoist content. The stele comes from a village north of Fuping district, in Beidi commandery, to the north of Chang'an. Gradually the

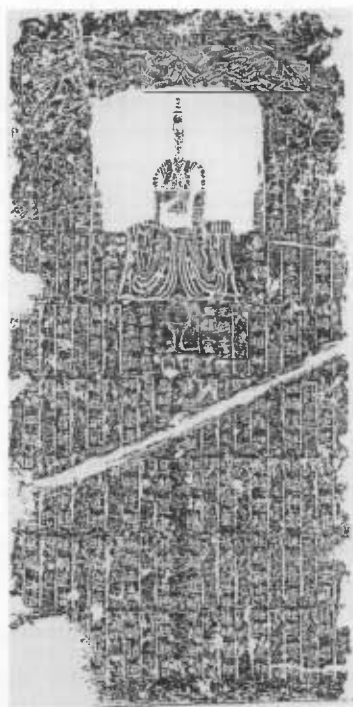


Figure 3.10 Daoist stele dedicated by Qi Maren and 120 members of the Qi clan, donors portrayed in rows surrounding the main image in top center of stele, Northern Wei, dated 521. Limestone. H. 157 cm. Yaoxian Museum, Shaanxi.  
Source: Yao Sheng, "Yaoxian shike wenji lüezhi," *Kaogu* 3 (1965), p. 138, fig. 3.

mixing of names, such as women of Han Chinese surnames shown alongside a predominantly ethnic group, also indicates cohabitation or intermarriages among the Han Chinese and the nomadic groups – a process of social and ethnic integration facilitated by Buddhism (and sometimes Daoism) as a unifying agent. Made in rural areas far from any metropolitan centers, most of these Shaanxi steles are crudely fashioned and yet retain an unpretentious, rustic charm.

The establishment of Chang'an as the capital of the Western Wei also brought the Tuoba Xianbei and other northern nomadic groups to the Guanzhong plain. Thereafter these groups also made their presence felt as Buddhist donors. Ma Changshou records a four-sided stele that indicates an interesting mix of ethnic groups, but an image of the stele, unfortunately, is not available.<sup>77</sup> Originating from the Weinan area to the north of Chang'an, the stele dates to the second year of the Wucheng reign (560) of the Northern Zhou. More than a hundred members of a devotional society dedicated a Śākyamuni image, and

their names are identifiable on the stele. Those holding religious or official titles are shown in the top tiers and accompanied by images, while ordinary members are only listed below by name. The religious titles of this group indicate an elaborate organization, but what is perhaps more interesting are the names of donors and their official titles. Some twenty-six ethnic surnames are recorded. Most prominently represented are Xianbei surnames: Tuoba, Yuwen, Helan, Fuyan, Yifu, Poluohan, and so forth. Xiongnu, Di, other nomadic tribes, and Han Chinese, as well as a few Central Asian names, are also recorded. Military titles include high-ranking commander-general (*tongjun*), inspector of provinces, and several commanders (*dudu*) of local districts, some conferred with aristocratic titles such as dynasty-founding viscount or baron (*kaiguozhi*, *kaiguonan*). These military officers were all stationed in the Weinan, Huayin, Sanyuan, and Pingyang regions to the west and northwest of Chang'an. In examining these names and the official titles and ranks listed, what comes across most strongly is the diverse ethnic mix of the group and its military character. Ma also records that the male donors are shown wearing the *hu* costume – tunics, trousers, and boots – while the women wear long skirts. The Western Wei and Northern Zhou rulers, reacting against the Northern Wei's sinicizing reforms, reinstated a strong military tradition in their states. In order to incorporate Chinese and other ethnic peoples into the military units, they were given Xianbei surnames.<sup>78</sup> Some of the Xianbei names recorded on this Northern Zhou stele therefore could have been bestowed as names denoting military service rather than the individuals' actual ethnic affinities. Ma points out that neither Xiaowen's reform to change the polysyllabic nomadic names to monosyllabic Chinese names nor the bestowal of Xianbei names by Western Wei and Northern Zhou rulers were extensively carried out, especially not the latter. Thus he concludes that the nomadic names recorded on this stele by and large reflect accurately the mix of nomadic groups in a region strategic to the stability of Chang'an.<sup>79</sup> Albert Dien, however, thinks that the Western Wei/Northern Zhou policy was more widely carried out than Ma would accept.<sup>80</sup> The religious, historical, and ethnological information on the large group of Shaanxi steles still awaits further research, but this particular stele could not have been a better example for illustrating some of the cultural changes that occurred under Western Wei–Northern Zhou rule.

The last example of a Buddhist stele illustrates well the synthesis of nomadic and Chinese cultures in visual terms (Figures 3.11a and 3.11b). Recovered from Gansu, the stele measures 113 centimeters high and 39–42 centimeters wide. It dates to the second year of the Jiande reign (573) of the Northern Zhou.<sup>81</sup> Shaped as a rectangular slab, it is surmounted by pairs of intertwined dragons in the traditional Chinese style. Both the obverse and reverse of the stele bear Buddhist images in recessed niches. The main inscription is engraved on the bottom of the obverse and the two short sides, while the donor images are portrayed, in low relief, in the lower half of the reverse side. The main inscription records that the main donor, Wang Lingwei, dedicates the stone slab and the images for his two deceased sons and parents, wishing that they will be





Figure 3.11 (a) Buddhist stele dedicated by Wang Lingwei and his family, Northern Zhou, dated 573. Stone. H. 90 cm, W. 39 cm. Gansu Provincial Museum.  
 (b) Reverse side of Wang Lingwei stele in Figure 3.11a, with images of donors shown in lower half.

Source: *Zhongguo meishu quanji: Wei Jin nanbeichao diaosu* (Beijing, 1988), plate 142.

reborn in the pure land of the Buddhas and that they will be able to attend the three assemblies (of Maitreya Buddha). He also prays that his family and all sentient beings will be protected from disasters and suffering. Inscriptions identifying the donors are also engraved next to the images.

The main donors are shown being drawn in ox carts or as equestrian figures and are portrayed in profile, a manner that is markedly different from earlier examples that portray donors standing in two symmetrically arranged groups, shown frontally and angling slightly toward the center. The earlier mode is a modification of Indian prototypes, as discussed earlier. Here the use of ox carts for women, horses for men as well as attendants, and umbrellas as status symbols, as well as the profile representation of processional images, represent a mode derived from the earlier Han art tradition of China.<sup>82</sup> In mural paintings

or stone reliefs of Han tombs and shrines, human figures, horses, and chariots are typically depicted in profile, proceeding in one direction on an imaginary ground line. Therefore, both the use of the Chinese stele form and the manner of representing donors in this example suggest a strong degree of Buddhist adaptation of and synthesis with indigenous Chinese artistic forms and styles.

Specific details of the donors, however, hint at their cultural, if not ethnic, identity. The equestrian figures are portrayed wearing round hats with a rim, trousers, and boots, and they seem to have braided hair – all characteristics of nomadic gear and customs. The inscribed names identify them as Wang's two deceased sons: Yanqing above and Yanming below. The names next to the ox carts identify the donors inside as Wang's deceased daughters. The names of his deceased parents are also given at the bottom. Presented as the main donors, Wang's deceased relatives become the principal recipients of the merit gained from this charitable act. The main inscription records that Wang bore the title *baozhu* (chief of a fortress). During the Northern dynasties, it was common for local towns and villages to build fortresses and muster their own militia groups for self-defense. Wang's other son, Songqing, held the titles: *kuangli jiangjun dianzhong sima beiji* (General of Vast Territories, Adjunct Commandant of Palace Cavalry). The stele also records the names of the women who married into the family; they have surnames such as Liang, Zhang, and Huangfu. Although Wang is a common sinicized surname adopted by the Qiang and other nomadic groups, without further evidence it is no longer possible to ascertain the donors' ethnic origins. Nonetheless, the costume of the equestrian figures and the military posts of the donors attest to the influence of nomadic culture on Chinese society as a whole.

### Conclusion

In this overview of the visual representation of nomadic patrons of Buddhist art, the broad range of examples has demonstrated how the donors constructed and advertised their ethnicity and identity through a number of elements: costume, name, rank, social status, geographical locality, and the social and religious groupings (such as families, clans, or devotional societies) to which they belonged. Identity signifiers such as costume and name were manipulable and thus rhetorical. The coexistence or juxtaposition of nomadic and Chinese cultural elements and human groupings also denoted social and sometimes political significance. To the nomads, adopting Chinese dress implied accepting Chinese ways and culture. Possessing a Chinese name meant proclaiming a kinship relation to the larger Chinese group. Both measures were initially taken to make the nomadic conquerors more acceptable to the conquered Chinese and thus diminish their differences, but those measures also contributed towards the nomads' eventual loss of their own ethnic characteristics.

The nomads certainly did appropriate Chinese orientations, status symbols, language, administrative structures, and visual styles of representation. Their emphasis on the military, the rigid status hierarchy, and, initially, a greater

public role for women were distinctive features that left indelible marks on Chinese society, and those features characterized their roles as Buddhist art patrons. The cultural elements that the nomads appropriated were primarily those that would enhance their prestige and status in the eyes of the Chinese, advancing their group identity as a ruling elite separate from those under their rule.<sup>83</sup> The nomads' appropriation of Chinese culturalism was not a smooth path, and it may have contributed to the apparent loss of their ethnic identity. But as many historians have pointed out, it would not be possible to understand the formation of Sui and Tang without understanding the incorporation of nomadic cultural elements in the process. The nomadic rulers initially supported Buddhism, both to create for themselves a cultural identity separate from the Chinese they conquered and to consolidate the power of the state. As Buddhism spread to the general populace, however, the religion proved more effective as a cohesive force in building a society that transcended cultural, ethnic, as well as social differences. A discussion of how Buddhism interacted with both nomadic and Chinese cultures is, therefore, crucial to understanding the larger, more expansive notion of Chinese identity that developed in early medieval China.

### Notes

- 1 An early version of this project was presented at the faculty seminar of the McIntire Department of Art, University of Virginia. I would like to thank my art historian colleagues, in particular Paul Barolsky and David Summers, for their astute observations and questions, which helped shape the current chapter. I am also grateful to Albert Dien and John Shepherd for their comments and suggestions of references. Special thanks are also due to the two editors of the book project, Don Wyatt and Nicola Di Cosmo, for their meticulous reading of the manuscript.
- 2 Tamura Jitsuzo, *Chūgoku shijō no minzoku yidō* (Tokyo, 1985). For discussions of China's relations to nomadic groups see Owen Lattimore, *Inner Asian frontiers of China* (London and New York, 1940); Wolfram Eberhard, *Conquerors and rulers: social forces in medieval China* (Leiden, 1965); Thomas J. Barfield, *The perilous frontier: nomadic empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).
- 3 W. Eberhard, *A history of China*, 2nd ed. (London, 1960), pp. 133–4.
- 4 See Herbert Franke and Denis Twitchett, eds, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 6 (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 1–42.
- 5 Studies of ethnicity and race issues in late imperial and modern China include: Evelyn Rawski, *The last emperors: a social history of Qing imperial institutions* (Berkeley, 1998); Pamela Crossley, "Thinking about ethnicity in early modern China," *Late Imperial China* 1 (1990), 1–35; *idem*, *A translucent mirror: history and identity in Qing imperial ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999); Frank Dikötter, *The discourse of race in modern China* (London, 1992); Melissa J. Brown, ed., *Negotiating ethnicities in China and Taiwan* (Berkeley, 1996); Steven Harrell, ed., *Cultural encounters on China's ethnic frontiers* (Seattle and London, 1995).
- 6 For an overview of the key concepts and theories of ethnicity by major writers, see the anthology *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York, 1996).
- 7 Rawski, *The last emperors*, pp. 2–8; Crossley, "Thinking about ethnicity in early modern China," pp. 4–5.

- 8 "Ethnicity and Minority Groups," in Hutchinson and Smith, eds, *Ethnicity*, p. 17.
- 9 Elizabeth Tonkin *et al.*, "History and Ethnicity," in Hutchinson and Smith, eds, *Ethnicity*, pp. 18–24.
- 10 On traditional Chinese attitudes about race and the Chinese worldview, see Dikötter, *The discourse of race in modern China*, pp. 1–30; J.K. Fairbank, ed., *The Chinese world order: traditional China's foreign relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968).
- 11 Steven Harrell, "Introduction," in Brown, ed., *Negotiating ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, pp. 1–17.
- 12 Steven Harrell, "Introduction," *Cultural encounters on China's ethnic frontiers*, pp. 3–36; see also John R. Shepherd, *Statecraft and political economy on the Taiwan frontier, 1600–1800* (Stanford, 1993), p. 521, n. 5.
- 13 See Patricia Ebrey, "Surnames and Han Chinese Identity," in Brown, ed., *Negotiating ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, pp. 19–36.
- 14 Taking a Marxist perspective, Susana B.C. Devalle equates the cultural-assimilationist approach in general with the attitude of colonial expansionism, in her *Discourses of ethnicity: culture and protest in Jharkand* (New Delhi, 1992), pp. 25–46. For critiques of such approaches in Chinese studies, see Crossley and Rawski (n. 7) and John R. Shepherd's response (n. 12).
- 15 For discussions of the Xianbei people's interactions with Chinese culture and society, see Albert Dien, "Elite lineages and the T'o-pa accommodation: a study of the edict of 495," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 19.1 (1976), 61–88; *idem*, "The bestowal of surnames under the Western Wei–Northern Chou: a case of counter-acculturation," *T'oung Pao* 63: 2–3 (1977), 137–77; *idem*, "A new look at the Xianbei and their impact on Chinese culture," in George Kuwayama, ed., *Ancient mortuary traditions of China* (Los Angeles, 1991), pp. 40–59; *idem*, "The stirrup and its effect on Chinese military history," *Ars Orientalis* 16 (1986), 33–56; Scott Pearce, "The land of Tai: the origins, evolution and historical significance of a community of the Inner Asian frontier," in E.H. Kaplan and D.W. Whisenhunt, eds, *Opuscula altaica: essays presented in honor of Henry Schwarz* (Bellingham, Wash., 1994), pp. 465–95. Dien uses the term "Xianbei-ization" while Pearce prefers the term "Sārbi-ization"; Pearce argues that the term "Xianbei" is mediated through the Chinese language and thus deprives the "Sārbi" people of their identity (*ibid.*, p. 467), citing E.G. Pullybank, "The Chinese and their neighbors in prehistoric and early historic times," in David N. Keightly, ed., *The origins of Chinese civilization* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), p. 453.
- 16 See Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1959); Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: a historical survey* (Princeton, NJ, 1964); Paul Demiéville, "Philosophy and religion from Han to Sui," tr. Francesca Bay, in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe, eds, *The Cambridge history of China*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 808–45.
- 17 Arthur F. Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese history* (Stanford, Calif., 1959), pp. 42–64.
- 18 See Arthur F. Wright, "Buddhism and Chinese culture: phases of interaction" and "Fo-t'u-teng: a biography," collected in Robert M. Somers, ed., *Studies in Chinese Buddhism* (New Haven and London, 1983), pp. 1–33, 34–67; Eberhard, *Conquerors and rulers*, pp. 126–7.
- 19 The Kushan rulers of India of the first to third centuries CE, also nomadic conquerors, exploited the concept of Buddhist kingship to promote royal cults; see John M. Rosenfield, *The dynastic arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), pp. 202–14.
- 20 An example is Yang Xuanzhi's *Luoyang qielan ji*, in *Taishō shinshū daijōkyō* (hereafter *Taishō*), ed. Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaigyoku (Tokyo, 1924–32), vol. 51, no. 2092; translated into English by W.J.F. Jenner as *Memories of Loyang: Yang Hsüan-chih and the lost capital (495–534)* (New York, 1981) and by Wang Yi-t'ung as *A record of Buddhist monasteries in Lo-yang* (Princeton, 1984).

- 21 Although also supported by Chinese rulers, the domestication of Buddhism in the south took a different path. See Arthur Wright, "Buddhism and Chinese culture: phases of interaction," pp. 11–15.
- 22 For studies of patronage activities in India see Barbara Stoler Miller, ed., *The power of art: patronage in Indian culture* (Delhi, 1992).
- 23 Buddhist inscriptions were first collected and studied in antiquarian and epigraphic works such as Wang Chang, *Jinshi cubian*, 160 *juan* (1805; Beijing edition, 1985) and Ye Changchi, *Yushi*, 10 *juan* (1909; Taipei edition, 1956). The Japanese scholar Ōmura Seigai wrote the first comprehensive history of Chinese sculpture, utilizing these inscriptions in conjunction with illustrations in *Shina bijutsushi: chōsohen*, 2 vols (Tokyo, 1916), which influenced Alexander C. Soper's *Literary evidence for early Buddhist art in China* (Ascona, 1959). Analyzing dedicatory inscriptions (both Buddhist and Daoist) from the Shaanxi region, the social historian Ma Changshou reconstructed the political, ethnic, and social history of the Guanzhong area in *Beiming suojian qian Qin zhi Sui chu de Guangzhong buzhu* (Beijing, 1985).
- 24 G. Scaglia, "Central Asians on a Northern Chi gate," *Artibus Asiae* 21 (1958), 9–28; Janet Baker, "Foreigners in early Chinese Buddhist art: disciples, lohans, and barbarian rulers," in Janet Baker, ed., *The flowering of a foreign faith: new studies in Chinese Buddhist art* (Mumbai, 1998), pp. 68–87; Albert Dien, "A new look at the Xianbei and their impact on Chinese culture."
- 25 For Kushan figures and donors in Indian Buddhist sculpture, see Rosenfield, *The dynastic arts of the Kushans*, pp. 215–29.
- 26 Buddhist images found in southern China date as early as the second century. See He Yunao, *Fojiao chuchuan nanshan zhilu* (Beijing, 1993); Marilyn Rhie, *Early Buddhist art of China and Central Asia* (Leiden, 1999).
- 27 See Dorothy C. Wong, "The beginnings of the Buddhist stela tradition in China," Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1995, pp. 280–303.
- 28 Fu Jian (r. 357–85) of the Former Qin presented to the Chinese monk Daoan gifts that included the following: a foreign icon seated with legs pendent, seven feet tall and covered with gold; a seated gilt image; a Maitreya image made of strung pearls; an icon embroidered in gold; and a woven image; recorded in Huijiao, comp. *Gaosengzhuan* (hereafter *GSZ*; *Taishō*, vol. 50, no. 2059), *juan* 5, p. 352; Yao Xing (r. 399–416) of Later Qin sent images of foreign origin to Huiyuan (333–416), Daoan's disciple, at Lu Shan; *GSZ*, *juan* 6, p. 360; see also discussions in Soper, *Literary evidence*, pp. 15–16, 33.
- 29 See Dorothy C. Wong, "Personal devotional objects of Buddhist Asia," in Larry Perkins, et al., *Intimate rituals and personal devotions: spiritual art through the ages*, exh. cat. (Gainesville, Fl., 2000), pp. 23–35.
- 30 The sculpture is now in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum at Harvard University; a detailed discussion as well as a review of previous scholarship on the sculpture is in Marilyn M. Rhie, *Early Buddhist art of China and Central Asia*, pp. 71–94; figs 1.44, 45, 61, 64, 65–8, 71, 76, 77.
- 31 *Ibid.* Japanese scholars such as Mizuno Seiichi assign a fourth-century date for the sculpture while Marilyn Rhie proposes a Han date.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 87.
- 33 Rhie believes that the image probably belonged to foreigners, possibly a monk, in China (*ibid.*, p. 91). In my opinion, this observation weakens her proposition that the bronze image was made in second-century Luoyang rather than fourth-century Hebei, where there would have been a much larger community of Buddhists, including many foreigners and nomads.
- 34 See Zhang Baoxi, "Binglingsi de Xi Qin shiku," in Gansu province cultural relics unit and Binglingsi cultural relics conservation institute, ed., *Yongjing Binglingsi, Zhongguo shikushi* (hereafter *ZS*) series (Beijing, 1989), pp. 182–92.
- 35 *Yongjing Binglingsi*, pl. 25.

- 36 *GSZ*, *juan* 11, p. 397; see also Jin weinuo, "Binglingsi yu fojiao yishu jiaoliu," in *Yongjing Binglingsi*, pp. 193–4.
- 37 It is known that nomadic women had the custom of braiding their hair; see Zhang Baoxi, "Binglingsi de Xi Qin shiku," pp. 189–90.
- 38 Items of clothing and textiles recovered from fourth- and fifth-century tombs in Turfan confirm the nomadic style of costume depicted in the murals, see Kong Xiangxing, "Cong Tulufan chutu de yiwushu kan Shiliuguo he Qushi Gaochang de fangjipin," in *Zhongguo lishi bowuguan guankan* 4 (1986), 52ff.; see also Ji Yuanzhi, "Zhongguo zaoqi fojiao gongyangren fushi," in *Dunhuang yanjiu* 1 (1995), 135–45.
- 39 It is possible that more donor figures are portrayed in the bottom row, but they are no longer legible.
- 40 Dunhuang research institute, ed., *Dunhuang Mogao ku*, vol. 1, *ZS* (Beijing, 1981), pl. 12; it is interesting to note that the row of male donors is matched by a row of bodhisattvas, not female donors, on the south wall.
- 41 See Fan Jinshi, Ma Shichang, and Guan Youwei, "Dunhuang Mogao ku Beichao dongku de fenqi," in *Dunhuang Mogao ku*, vol. 1, pp. 185–97; figs 7–9, 24, 25, 39–43, 54–9.
- 42 See *Zhongguo meishu quanji* (hereafter *ZMQ*), *Wei Jin Nanbeichao diaosu* vol. (Beijing, 1988) pls 88, 111; Tokyo National Museum, *Kondō butsu*, exh. cat. (Tokyo, 1987), col. pls 11, 14.
- 43 The pedestal is published in Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1961), p. 232, pl. 10. The sculpture was formerly in the collection of the Qing official Duan Fang, who published the transcription and annotations (one by the scholar Yang Shoujing) of the inscription in his *Taozhai cangshi ji* (1909), *juan* 6.
- 44 The *Mahāparinirvāna Sūtra* (*Taishō*, no. 374) was translated by the Indian monk Dharmakṣema (385–433) when he resided in the Northern Liang territory in Gansu.
- 45 A fair number of these carvings, some of which are identified in inscriptions as *futu*, are found from Shanxi to Chang'an and Gansu; see *ZMQ*, *Wei Jin Nanbeichao diaosu* vol., pls 70, 76.
- 46 Changshan is located to the northeast of Shijiazhuang. See Wang Zhongluo, *Beizhou dili zhi* (Beijing, 1980), vol. 2, p. 991. Both Yang Shoujing and Duan Fang concurred that the inscription suggested the donor served his post at the capital, see n. 43.
- 47 The inscription gives the donor's father's title as the former chief of a county called 邢邢. Both characters carry the radical of 邑, which led both Yang and Duan to surmise that the place might refer to Handan 邯鄲, an ancient city in Hebei (see n. 43). However, since these early inscriptions often have characters written in forms different from modern characters, it is possible that the two characters are variant forms of 刑刑. The phrase "qian Xing Xing ling 前刑刑令" can be read as chief of a place formerly known as Xing; since Eastern Zhou times, Xing has been associated with present-day Xingtai 刑臺, to the south of Shijiazhuang.
- 48 Yao Weiyuan, *Beichao huxing kao* (Beijing, 1958), pp. 94–5.
- 49 Seminal works on the Yungang cave-temples include Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio, *Unkō sekkutsu*, 16 vols (Kyoto, 1951–6), and Yungang cave-temples cultural relics institute, ed., *Yungang shiku*, 2 vols, *ZS* (Beijing, 1991); see also Su Bai, *Zhongguo shikushi yanjiu* (Beijing, 1996), and James Caswell, *Written and unwritten: a new history of the Buddhist caves at Yungang* (Vancouver, 1988).
- 50 See He Guangzhong, "Lidai sengguan zhidu kao," *Dongfang xuebao* 1: 1 (1957), 239–87.
- 51 The *Suvarṃbhāstamasūtra* (*The Golden Light Sūtra*) is particularly important in the promotion of state Buddhism; the text was translated into Chinese by Dharmakṣema in the early fifth century (*Taishō*, no. 663) and by Yi-ching (635–713; *Taishō*, no. 665). R.E. Emmerick translated Yi-ching's version into English, *The Sūtra of Golden Light* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970). See also William K. Mahony,

- "Cakravartin," in *Encyclopedia of religion*, ed.-in-chief, M. Eliade (New York, 1987), vol. 3, pp. 5–7; and Rosenfield's discussion of royal cults in Kushan India in *The dynastic arts of the Kushans*, pp. 202–8.
- 52 *Yungang shiku*, vol. 2, pl. 94.
- 53 Albert Dien, "A new look at the Xianbei and their impact on Chinese culture." See also Annette L. Juliano, *Art of the six dynasties: centuries of change and innovation* (New York, 1975).
- 54 The images are discussed in Dorothy C. Wong, "Women as Buddhist art patrons during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–581)," in Wu Hung, ed., *Between Han and Tang: religious art and archaeology in a transformative period* (Beijing, 2000), pp. 535–66.
- 55 Albert Dien, "A new look at the Xianbei and their impact on Chinese culture," p. 43.
- 56 The two imperial women's patronage activities are discussed in Dorothy C. Wong, "Women as Buddhist art patrons during the Northern and Southern Dynasties (386–581)."
- 57 Rosenfield, *The dynastic arts of the Kushans*, pls 33, 34, 69.
- 58 Laurance Sickman and Alexander C. Soper, *Art and architecture of China*, 3rd ed. (Harmondsworth, 1968), pp. 86–7.
- 59 David Summers, *Real Spaces: world art history and the rise of Western modernism* (London, 2003), ch. 5.
- 60 Akiyama Terukazu argues convincingly that a similar adjustment of orientation also occurs in the Buddhist cave-temples at Dunhuang, where most of the murals of the Western Pure Land, one of the most popular subjects, are depicted on the south walls of cave-chapels. Because of the orientation of the rock cliff of the Dunhuang site, all the cave-chapels have entrances on the eastern side. However, since a temple requires a southern entrance, a reorientation means the eastern entrance becomes the imaginary south, and the actual south wall (the left side upon entering) becomes the imaginary west, appropriate for portraying the subject of Western Pure Land; see *Arts of China*, trans. Alexander Soper, vol. 2 (Tokyo and Palo Alto, Calif., 1968), p. 214.
- 61 See Albert Dien, "Elite lineages and the T'o-pa accommodation: a study of the edict of 495."
- 62 See Albert Dien, "The bestowal of surnames under the Western Wei–Northern Chou: a case of counter-acculturation"; Scott Pearce, "The land of Tai: the origins, evolution and historical significance of a community of the Inner Asian frontier."
- 63 See Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese society: an economic history from the fifth to the tenth centuries*, trans. Franciscus Verellen (New York, 1995), pp. 260–77; Dorothy C. Wong, "The beginnings of the Buddhist stele tradition in China," pp. 294–303.
- 64 Important works on the Longmen cave-temples include: Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio, *Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* (Tokyo, 1941); Longmen cultural relics conservation institute and the archaeological institute of Beijing University, eds, *Longmen shiku*, 2 vols, *zS* (Beijing, 1991); Gong Dazhong, *Longmen shiku yishu* (Shanghai, 1981).
- 65 A study of the Northern Wei inscriptions and Buddhist patronage activities at Longmen is in Tsukamoto Zenryū, *Shina bukkyōshi kenkyū: Hoku-Gi hen* (Tokyo, 1942).
- 66 *Ibid.*, pp. 458–61; *zS*, *Longmen shiku*, vol. 1, pl. 159.
- 67 Wang Zhongluo, *Beizhou dili zhi*, pp. 318–20, p. 204.
- 68 Yao Weiyuan, *Beichao huxing kao*, pp. 342–46.
- 69 See Patricia Ebrey, "Later Han stone inscriptions," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 40 (1980), 325–53.
- 70 Denis Twitchett, "The composition of the T'ang ruling class: new evidence from Tunhuang," in A. Wright and D. Twitchett, eds, *Perspectives on the T'ang* (New Haven and London, 1973), pp. 55–7.
- 71 Tsukamoto Zenryū, *Shina bukkyōshi kenkyū: Hoku-Gi hen*, pp. 436–40; *Longmen shiku*, vol. 1, pls 140–2.

- 72 The panel with male royal donors from the Binyang Cave is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the one with female royal donors is in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. The Gongxian panels of royal donors are published in Henan provincial cultural relics research institute, ed., *Gongxian shikusi*, *zS* (Beijing, 1989), pls 41, 42.
- 73 See Dorothy C. Wong, "The Beginnings of the Buddhist Stele Tradition in China," pp. 303–17.
- 74 See note 28.
- 75 The mixed Buddhō-Daoist and Daoist trends in the region are a localized phenomenon. There is also indication that the Qiang and Di peoples patronized Daoism; see Zhang Yan, *Beichao fodayao zaoxiangbei jingxuan* (Tianjin, 1996). There are also more than half a dozen archaeological reports on the Shaanxi steles. See Dorothy C. Wong, "The Beginnings of the Buddhist stele tradition in China," pp. 8–9, n. 2.
- 76 The stele is published in Yao Sheng, "Yaodian shike wenzi lüezhi," *Kaogu* 3 (1965), 138, pl. 3.
- 77 An image of the stele or its rubbing is not available, but a transcription and discussion of the stele inscription is in Ma Changshou, *Beiming suojian qian Qin zhi Sui chu de Guanzhong byzu*, pp. 55–68.
- 78 Albert Dien, "The bestowal of surnames under the Western Wei–Northern Chou: a case of counter-acculturation."
- 79 Ma Changshou, p. 60.
- 80 Personal correspondence.
- 81 Wu Yiru, "Bei Zhou Wang Lingwei zaoxiangbei," *Wenwu* 2 (1988), 69–71; the stele is also published in *zMQ*, *Wei Jin nanbeichao diaosu* vol., pls 141–2.
- 82 A beautiful example of the use of oxcart and horse as status symbols for Chinese gentry donors is shown on a pedestal dated 524. The pedestal is now in the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, and is published in Osvald Sirén, *Chinese sculpture from the fifth to the fourteenth centuries* (London, 1925), pls 150, 151.
- 83 Note John Shepherd's observation that "Students of acculturation have long been aware that adoption of foreign cultural elements is not just borrowing; it involves complex decisions regarding the prestige ranking, selection, reinterpretation, replacement, and incorporation of cultural elements"; *Statecraft and the political economy on the Taiwan frontier, 1600–1800*, p. 521, n. 5.

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## GLOSSARY

Bao San	鮑纂	Fuping	富平
baozhu	堡主	futu	浮圖
bei	碑	Fuyan	扶延
Bei Liang	北涼	Gansu	甘肅
Bei Wei	北魏	Gongxian	鞏縣
Bei Zhou	北周	Gu Kaizhi	顧愷之
Beichao	北朝	Guanzhong	關中
Beidi	北地	guoshi	國師
Beihai wang	北海王	Guyang Cave	古陽洞
Binglingsi	炳靈寺	hanhua	漢化
Binyang Cave	賓陽洞	Hebei	河北
chan	禪	Helan	賀蘭
Chang'an	長安	Henan	河南
chanshi	禪師	Hou Qin	後秦
Dang	鞏	Hou Zhao	後趙
Datong	大同	hu	胡
Daxia	大夏	Huangfu	皇專
Di	氏	Huayin	華陰
Dingzhou Changshan	定州常山	Jiande	建德
Dong Wei	東魏	Jianhong	建弘
dudu	都督	Jiankang	建康
Dunhuang	敦煌	kaiguonan	開國男
Fasheng	法生	kuangli jiangjun dianzhong	曠陞將軍殿中
fuguo jiangjun zhige jiangjun	輔國將軍直閣	sima biejiang	司馬別將
Liangzhou dazhong	將軍梁州大中	Lei	雷
Anrongxian kaiguozi	安戎縣開國子	Liang	梁
Fumeng	扶蒙	Liangzhou	涼州

Lifei	荔非	Tuoba	拓跋
Ling taihou	靈太后	Wang Lingwei	王令猷
Longmen	龍門	Wei River	渭河
Luoyang	洛陽	Weinan	渭南
Ma Changshou	馬長壽	Wenming taihou	文明太后
Maijishan	麥積山	Wenzhao huanghou	文昭皇后
<i>man</i>	蠻	Wucheng	武成
Nanbeichao	南北朝	Xi Qin	西秦
Nanjing	南京	Xi Wei	西魏
Pingcheng	平城	Xianbei	鮮卑
Pingyang	平陽	Xiangtangshan	響堂山
Poluohan	破洛汗	Xiaowendi	孝文帝
Qi	綺	Xing	刑
Qi Maren	綺麻仁	Xiongnu	匈奴
Qian Qin	前秦	Xuangao	玄高
Qian'er	鉗耳	Xuanwudi	宣武帝
Qiang	姜	Yang Dayen	楊大眼
Qiuchi	仇池	Yanming	延明
Qiumu	丘穆	Yanqing	延慶
Rouran	蠕蠕	Yao	姚
Sanyuan	三原	Ye	鄴
Shaanxi	陝西	<i>yi</i>	夷
<i>shamantong</i>	沙門統	<i>yi</i>	邑
Shanxi	山西	Yifu	乙弗
<i>she</i>	社	Yilifa	俟力伐
Shijiazhuang	石家莊	<i>yin yang</i>	陰陽
<i>shizhong hujun jiangjun</i>	侍中護軍將軍	<i>yiyi</i>	邑義
Sichuan	四川	Yongchang wang	永昌王常侍
Songqing	嵩慶	changshi	
Taiping Zhenjun	太平真君	Yuan	元
Tanwubi	曇無毗	Yuan Xiang	元詳
Tanyao	曇曜	Yungang	雲岡
Tongguan	潼關	Yuwen	宇文
<i>tongjun</i>	統軍	Zhang	張
Tongti	同蹄		

## 4

## DEEP EYES AND HIGH NOSES

Physiognomy and the depiction of barbarians  
in Tang China*Marc Samuel Abramson*

In 1997, a polling firm asked a focus group of Shanghai youth to select during which era they would most like to be alive.<sup>1</sup> A plurality of the students chose the Tang dynasty (618–907), explaining that it was the period of “great China.”<sup>2</sup> These results reflect a widely held belief that the Tang era was a unique historical conjuncture of Chinese cosmopolitanism and power. Perhaps even more so than today, Tang society was remarkably receptive to foreign influences in nearly every cultural practice, from music to literature, food to clothes, and religion to medicine. Moreover, the Tang empire was the dominant power in East Asia and had the most powerful economy in the world, further elevating its reputation in the eyes of Chinese today.

The best known symbols of this worldliness are the surviving artistic representations of persons variously identified as “foreign,” “non-Han,” “non-Chinese,” or “barbarian.”<sup>3</sup> They appear in funerary and Buddhist statuary and murals, court and popular paintings, and in decorative art on such quotidian items as clothing and utensils. Among these representations, mortuary figurines and murals possess the greatest variety and vividness. They complement textual descriptions of non-Han physical appearance, which tend to be terse and reliant on a narrow range of stereotypical characteristics. The mortuary evidence not only embellishes these conventions but adds new ones that are seemingly less confined by literati conventions than are their textual counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

Specialists in Tang art history have used the faces and attire depicted in images of non-Han peoples to determine individuals’ foreign homelands, often with the goal of elucidating the process of the transmission and adoption of foreign culture in China. While this approach is valid, these images also need to be understood as a vital part of an internal discourse on ethnic difference and barbarism that intersected and transcended issues of material culture and geographical origins. Within this discourse, figurines and murals played a key role in constructing the barbarian body for Tang audiences.

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