

## INTRODUCTION

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### *The Sketch: Historical, Thematic, and Stylistic I*

This book takes as its subject the status of the pictorial sketch in Tang dynasty China. At the center of our inquiry into the medieval artist's practice is a rare, virtually unpublished collection of preparatory drawings or sketches from China's largest Buddhist site, Dunhuang. This cave-temple site is located in the multiethnic region of western China in Gansu Province that borders present-day Qinghai Province (traditionally a part of Tibet) to its south and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (the center of Uighur culture) to its west. The sketches are part of a hidden cache of manuscripts documenting the diverse population of Central Asia's Silk Road kingdoms. A primary concern of this study is the relationship between the artist's drafts and the finished works located in the oasis cave temples. Discussion of artistic production and the physical sketch also allows us to address fundamental questions about cognition and the nature of creativity posed by both practitioners and theorists in ninth-century China. Of fundamental concern to ninth-century critics was what constitutes art: does it rest in the process of making a work or in its completed, final form? In evaluating works of art, the authors of Tang art histories placed the highest value on spontaneity during the preliminary stages of painting. The physical sketch itself received little or no attention in art-historical writing by collectors during the Tang and subsequent dynasties. Instead, a great deal of attention was paid to the *process* or *act of drawing*; the connoisseur's interest was with a work's inception. Never collected or prized as evidence of the process of creation, sketches themselves attracted little attention in critical and biographical responses. But the act of sketching did. In celebrating spontaneous feats with brush and ink, claims for unmediated expres-

closest to nature through the mediating force of the artist. Elevating sketching to an aesthetic object independent of actual sketches or artistic practice, nineteenth-century critics invoked myth and magic, legend, and proto-scientific explanations to describe painting practice. The last portion of this book is concerned with what was at stake for critics who described practice so at odds with workshop evidence.

In order to address these larger issues, this study at the outset first defines the identity of the workshop painter and, second, describes the range of artistic activities associated with the sketch. The preparatory process shifted according to format and surface. The sketches reveal the artist's cognitive process during production, particularly in the spatially complex environment of monastic murals. The wall painter was one of many specialists in a nexus that included other artistic laborers and practitioners such as scribes, sculptors, cartouche inscribers, and storytellers, all of whom were organized into guilds or workshops. In this study, the "sketch" and "sketching" both point to an object and a process in the preliminary or preparatory stage of the artist's practice. Both the process and the physical document are germane to our discussion. As we shall see, many of the practices performed by the artist are coexistent but not intersecting with the biographical and critical discussion of the painter in contemporary texts. My interpretation explores the tension between the perspective on the atelier offered by literate medieval observers and that presented in the artists' preparatory sketches. Without trying to resolve the two, together these differing sources provide an animated view of this transitional moment in Chinese painting.

Physical evidence left by medieval painters indicates that artists active in Buddhist temples during the Tang and Five Dynasties (618–960) depended on sketches in two important stages of the painting process: one on paper, the other on the wall. Beneath the polished, meticulous overdrawing that showcased the colorful articulation of form populating Buddhist wall paintings, artists executed underdrawing in a free, loose hand by applying pale black ink on a dry surface. It was with this preliminary underdrawing that artists established the general contours of the composition; while approximate, these lines secured the proportion and the precision critical to compositions in Buddhist temples. I will explore this underdrawing stage in Chapter 2. Paintings covered vast surfaces and were positioned in dialogue with each other across interiors. The artist worked actively rendering images in these spaces.

At the Mogao cliff facade near the modern town of Dunhuang, grotto temples were hewn by artists and laborers out of a mountain scarp on the edge of the Lop Nor and Gobi deserts. The Sanwei mountain range separates Mogao from a sister cave site, Yulin, to the east. The paintings embellish hollowed

ing rock. The Dunhuang wall paintings are an important record of medieval Chinese painting, both Buddhist and secular. The cliff facade, stretching one mile north to south just to the west of the Dangchuan River, contains 492 cave temples decorated with Buddhist iconographic programs and portraits of their donors constructed between ca. 366 and 1250. Today, the earliest extant mural dates to the first half of the fifth century. The largest of these later, more elaborate cave temples penetrates as much as 75 feet (23 meters) into the mountain scarp, which is composed of a precarious mixture of loose stones and sandy soil. The cave temples contain four colossal Buddha images that extend as high as 122 feet (32 meters). Three, and in some places four, tiers of cave temples populate the relatively flat facade, which made it the ideal place in which to construct temples for local elites. Hewn from the northern section of this mountain scarp are another 200 grottoes once used as monastic living quarters. Crude beds, stoves, and storage ledges are evidence of the simple life led by those in residence. Once, freestanding temples almost certainly occupied the area at the base of the facade; three late Qing dynasty (ca. early nineteenth century) temples still stand.<sup>1</sup>

The mural painter's practice was improvisational in both freestanding buildings and cave temples. The activities and decisions of the wall painter in these spaces are the central concern of this study. To accompany or precede the preparatory work directly on the walls, another stage of preliminary sketching occurred. Sketches of key figures and schematic diagrams of mural compositions were made on paper, analogous to practices of Renaissance Italian muralists. Yet in China, artists' preparatory materials were not collected systematically by later connoisseurs, and few survived the premodern period. Our ability to characterize how medieval workshops functioned at all is owed to a rare collection of medieval ink-monochrome studies for Buddhist wall painting discovered at the site in 1900. The sketches were among the 42,000 manuscripts, finished silk paintings, and other sacred objects deposited in a sūtra cave at Mogaoku (that is, the Mogao caves). Dunhuang is arguably the best-preserved Buddhist temple complex remaining in Asia; in breadth and range of objects it rivals the Potala Palace in Tibet. Approximately 45,000 square meters of extant wall painting document the development of Buddhist painting from ca. 480 to 1250. The contents of the hidden library, which include the artists' sketches, also date to the medieval period, with the bulk datable to the ninth and tenth centuries.

### *The Sūtra Cave*

Sixty-five artists' preparatory works remain, representing great variety in artistic production, including ritual diagrams of altars and texts; reference draw-

figures on grotto ceilings, close studies of key figures in murals along the main walls of cave temples; practice drawings executed in a random style; and precise, unmodulated drawings for tracing figures on silk. Most commonly, these appear on the backs of damaged or discarded scrolls of sūtras (sacred Buddhist canonical texts). They are also found on single sheets of paper or long rolls of uneven rectangles and squares of joined sheets. The range of quality and type indicates that this collection once formed the working papers of long-standing ateliers active in the region and may have belonged to the government-supported painting academy or bureau. This institution was launched by the regional kings of Dunhuang sometime between 921 and 947 under the rule of Cao Yijin (r. 914–35) and his son, Cao Yuanzhong (r. 944/945–74), who, as military commissioners (*jiedushi*), governed the prefectures of Gua and Sha (Guazhou, lit. Melon Prefecture; and Shazhou, lit. Desert Prefecture), where the Dunhuang and Yulin caves stand. The Cao family established an independent kingdom after the collapse of the Tang dynasty and imperial authority in 907. All evidence indicates that these two rulers were responsible for founding and supporting the painting bureau that played a part in systematizing iconography and compositions and embellishing the cave-shrine programs and restoration works sponsored by the Cao kings.

The sketches were among thousands of manuscripts on paper and hundreds of paintings on silk included in the sūtra cave. A stele inside relates that the space was originally created as a memorial chapel for the Abbot Hongbian in 862. His portrait sculpture occupies the chapel now; but, at some point in the past, it was moved to the cave above to make room for the overflowing library (Plate 1). Hongbian assumed the position of the chief of monks or “general controller of the clergy” (*dusengtong*) when Zhang Yichao, a member of the local elite, overthrew Tibetan control in 848.<sup>2</sup> The stele, which records Hong Bian’s investiture in 851, was moved to his memorial chapel upon his death. The imperial court awarded Hongbian with gifts of silk, sūtra wrappers, and a purple robe, the latter indicating that he had attained the highest honor for a Buddhist in the Tang realm.<sup>3</sup> Sometime after the chapel was appropriated as a monastic library, it was sealed and hidden behind a false wall and covered with murals datable to the early eleventh century. There the contents remained unnoticed until June 22, 1900, when the local caretaker Wang Yuanlu, and his assistant discovered a break in a wall in the corridor leading into the main assembly cave temple (now labeled cave 16). The bulk of the manuscripts was removed in 1906–7 when the Hungarian Aurel Stein and the French explorer Paul Pelliot selected thousands of manuscripts and shipped them to Europe.

Dunhuang arts are exceptional for two reasons in regard to this study. First

pictonal arts largely damaged in the central plains and less remote parts of diasporic China.<sup>4</sup> The dismantling of Tang architecture and destruction of the capital of Chang'an in 881, when it was occupied by the warlord Huang Chao, is lamented in a famous poem by Wei Zhuang.<sup>5</sup> Persecutions of Buddhism, such as the xenophobic attack on Buddhist practice and its related material culture from 842 to 845 during the reign of Emperor Wuzong, meant the loss of many other wall paintings in the capital.<sup>6</sup> Zhang Yanyuan notes this temple destruction in his final chapter of the *Lidai minghua ji* (Record of Famous Painters Throughout the Ages), written ca. 845–47. Zhang nostalgically surveys the wall paintings lost during the Buddhist persecution, a clear indication that a significant number of murals in flagship capital temples was no longer extant. And a millennium later, no trace of temple wall painting in Chang'an remains, leaving Dunhuang painting, with its idiosyncratic qualities and regional features, the best index of three centuries of mural history when the mural was still the primary form of painting.<sup>7</sup> Second, the contents of this hidden medieval library, a preserved cache of otherwise neglected artist's materials, may be linked to the large repository of extant wall painting remaining in situ. Combined, the drafts and finished murals make the Dunhuang remains the only complete artistic environment of premodern China to have survived intact. Their discovery continues to challenge and change Chinese, European, and American perceptions of Tang art since the first publications on Dunhuang arts appeared in the 1920s.<sup>8</sup>

It is now believed that the contents of one major monastic library, Sanjie si, formed the bulk of the Mogaoku collection.<sup>9</sup> The manuscripts and paintings were sealed behind the cave-shrine wall sometime between 1002 and 1006, most likely propelled by the changing conditions of Silk Road communities such as Khotan and Dunhuang.<sup>10</sup> Some event prompted temple librarians to hide their extensive collections of sūtras along with a wide range of administrative documents written in Chinese, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Tocharian, Sogdian, Khotanese, Uighur, and other languages of the Silk Road. The latest securely dated manuscript is 1002, providing a *terminus ante quem* for dating.<sup>11</sup> During the early eleventh century, Karakhanid Muslims from Kashgar attacked Khotan, an important Buddhist center to the west of Dunhuang on the southern transportation loop around the Taklamakan desert. As noted in a 970 plea from the Khotan king to his uncle Cao Yuanzhong for help, these events may have been enough reason to board temple libraries, as the Islamic Karakhanid armies long threatened Khotan.<sup>12</sup> These Buddhist relatives of the Dunhuang leaders may have precipitated the library's closure when they carried news of the destruction upon fleeing the region. Khotanese paintings datable to the late tenth century and other sacred objects from that region are found in the

directly to Dunhuang when they need.

The exact circumstances of the cell's sealing are still not known, leaving us to speculate upon other possibilities for the closure. Throughout the history of Buddhism, notions associated with *mofa*, or the end of the Buddhist law, have induced the burial of hundreds of objects with the belief that, in Buddhist time, the world was destined for destruction. In recent years, hidden medieval libraries in Tibet and Nepal, and whole caches of exquisite Northern Zhou dynasty (556–81) sculpture in Shandong, have been uncovered.<sup>13</sup> In the twentieth century, the Dunhuang caretaker, Wang Yuanlu, was prompted to bury hundreds of simple, local sculpture in front of the cave site as an act of devotion when replacing older sculptures with newer ones. Undoubtedly spiritual piety was the motivation for the sealing of the sūtra cave.

Nowhere else in China does such a complete group of sketches survive. The Dunhuang preparatory materials are the only significant collection of artists' drafts to predate the eighteenth century, providing a body of original work to assess both the practice and the theories of art. On a practical level, they demonstrate the way in which over a period of one hundred years from the late ninth to the late tenth centuries medieval Chinese artists organized projects according to well-established, professionally driven production techniques. Complementing these rare drafts and the thousands of completed murals, administrative documents also from the sūtra cave provide explanations of the economic structure that gave support to the extensive painting and scribal workshops that produced this great mass of text and image. The economic infrastructure and the institutional framework surrounding the practice of art, and more specifically the collaborative, time-demanding work done by painting ateliers, has been little documented in the Chinese tradition. Performances of art and religious devotion by patrons, artists, and monks may be assessed with the aid of this extremely detailed documentation. The truly remarkable collection of materials from all facets of the artist's practice means that we may also assess contemporary responses to wall painting during the Tang.

### *Monochrome Drawing*

In this study, the sketch denotes the preliminary stage of painting either on paper or as underdrawing on the surface of a soon-to-be finished work. This practice of sketching and underdrawing (*baihua*) is distinct from the later tradition of monochrome ink in a fine-line drawing style called *baimiao*. After the tenth century, works executed in fine-line, unmodulated *baimiao* were considered to be finished paintings, indicating that by the eleventh and

in its own right. What was preparatory drawing in the Tang had become a finished visual statement in the Song dynasty (960–1279). By and large, in the Tang and Five Dynasties, monochrome drawing was used exclusively in the initial stages of painting and hidden beneath layers of opaque color and dense overdrawing.

The value of the Dunhuang ink sketches is that they preceded this revolutionary change in painting style in the eleventh century, when monochrome drawing became a style in its own right. There had been some admiration in the Tang for paintings executed in a strong linear style with faint touches of light color, and the occasional example was unusual enough to warrant comment.<sup>15</sup> The style of drawing in these Dunhuang sketches could be called proto-baihua, a nascent monochrome painting, belonging to the stage in Chinese art history before painters and patrons widely recognized monochrome style as finished work.<sup>16</sup> Drawing is a general term applied in this study to the whole range of monochrome brushwork including sketching, but typically referring to more polished execution of the brush.

### *Manuals and Drafts*

Without the polished details of finished paintings, the sketches expose “insider” features of artistic production. These notations of praxis—encompassing gesture, context, and cognitive activity—reveal habits of mind, providing a glimpse into the subjective experience of seeing and creating. Art practice is best understood as a range of activities. The great value of the Dunhuang sketches, in their randomness and haphazard states of completion, is that they provide clues about how these activities were accomplished. With an interest in behavior, cognitive anthropologists investigate how people think in the process of doing. This mode of inquiry focuses on cognitive behavior. Methodologically, I have been interested in the kinds of questions that will produce a full picture of the range of activities and movements associated with wall painting production. In the case of medieval Dunhuang, to investigate the implications of action and response, we may turn to the unfinished works where these traces of gesture, performance, and cognition are imbedded. Uncompleted objects may suggest more about artistic process than finished pieces; decisions are laid bare and vulnerabilities are apparent.

Analyzing documents in relation to the three-dimensional spaces with which they originally were connected allows us to determine how those objects were used in context. For instance, Dell Upton, in his investigations of architecture of the southern United States, analyzes the probate wills of home owners to determine the social function and status of interior spaces

documents, architectural context, and artistic works or material culture. By bringing these three together a great deal of activity and cognitive behavior may be reinstated into an artistic or social space. This approach may be fruitfully applied to the Dunhuang case, for which we have thousands of verbal and pictorial drafts, finished works, and administrative documents. Ethnoarchaeology, which uses the present to reconstruct the past, is useful to investigate modern Buddhist art workshops, involving as it does observing and collecting data on artistic behavior that has long since vanished. For this, we have relied on painting workshops in Qinghai Province, adjacent to Gansu Province, where Dunhuang is located. Artists there worked with the same level of technology as did painters in medieval Dunhuang. Behavioral context might be the most difficult feature of artistic practice to locate and define because materials that identify themselves as how-to manuals are the least likely to provide primary information on practice.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau advocates an investigative procedure that interrogates the unpolished and unprepared. For example, a recipe book is a cooking guide made with an audience in mind, but it does not really tell one how to cook. That is, vocabulary to describe desired activities such as “whip” and “chop” already assumes a certain amount of knowledge. These kinds of texts provide a retrospective view on the process composed only after a meal has been prepared. They are backward looking and are a schematic version of the production process. Similarly, painting manuals such as Han Zhuo’s *Shanshui chunquan ji* (Chunquan’s Compilation on Landscape; d. 1121) and *Zhaoxiang liangdu jingjie* (A Commentary on the Sūtra of Measurements in the Making of Icons; ca. 1742–43), which provides details on icon measuring, indicate well-established conventions for painting and sculpture.<sup>18</sup> The manuals do not tell how to actually make icons or landscape paintings; rather, they are comprised of a list of activities an artist would have considered in the production process. Yet they are not guides to actually executing those steps. Instead, Han Zhuo, for example, gives clues to conventional and artistic tropes of production and discussion, such as brushwork labeled with fanciful terms including “orchid-leaf line” and “beard-wispy mountains.” The Sūtra of Measurements in the Making of Icons provides ratios of proportion. Zhang Yanyuan’s *Record of Famous Painters Throughout the Ages* would be a third example; it presents an ideal of practice. Therefore, a painting manual is similar to a cookbook in that it is a post-production document. The type of casual draft sketches remaining from Dunhuang are of a completely different order. To continue the cooking analogy, the draft sketches are similar to the notes a cook scribbles on a scrap of paper or as marginalia in a cook-



### *New Directions in the Ninth Century*

Most of the Dunhuang documents are drafts and preliminary studies dating to a period of independence, ca. 890–980, when the region broke off from the rest of China and formed close cultural connections with its neighbors to the south and west: the Uighur kingdom based in Turfan, the Khotanese kingdom to its west, and the state of Shu in present-day Sichuan Province. During this period, Dunhuang artists made the most discernible changes in their art. Most significant was the emergence of a standardized stylistic and programmatic repertoire. Painters developed efficient production regimes, settled on iconographic schemes, and introduced a range of techniques to solve problems encountered while embellishing enormous cave temples and intricate silk banners. This standardization was due, in part, to increased patronage by lay devotees.

In the preceding centuries, the most influential source of patronage of the arts had been the imperial court, but this declined when the Chinese Tang dynasty fell in 907. For the next half century, cultural development gravitated to a number of regional poles where the arts industries developed rapidly, responding to new consumption demands. One of those centers was the Dunhuang court, commanded by a military government that maintained strategic alliances with other kingdoms throughout western China and Central Asia. The increased local demand for paintings and sculpture quickly professionalized the artist's practice—a key development that constitutes one of the primary topics of this study. The history of workshops and ateliers in China has yet to be written; this book is the first in-depth study of a group of painting ateliers productive in the same region over a century. Since guild history is an underexplored area of the field, this book will also have implications for the larger history of labor.

The sketches from Dunhuang are from a period that could be called “post–Wu Daozi.” Wu (active 710–60) was an artist in the capital of Chang’an and celebrated in ninth-century texts as the ideal wall painter of his time. Descriptions of his practice contain all the paradigmatic qualities associated with spontaneity admired in ninth-century texts and in aesthetic theory dating back to the third century B.C.E. The authors of the *Record of Famous Painters Throughout the Ages* and the *Tangchao minghua lu* (Celebrated Painters of the Tang Dynasty; ca. 842) emphasize the importance of the initial, preparatory stages of painting; and, particularly in Wu's case, of performances of underdrawing sketching. It is evident that Tang art criticism was

work yielding maximum results had long been advocated in popular tales and folklore. In the Tang, these values were again promoted, but in the context of wall painting and sketching. Tang writers attribute realism to magical intervention; realism is achieved according to these writers in the preparatory stage of painting when the artist should be directly aligned with nature and serve as its conduit. These fantastic claims underscore the need for an independent study of texts that address creativity and its connection to sketching in both its visual and textual dimensions.

Wu Daozi marked a new direction in painting because his naturalistic results were achieved in the monochromatic sketching stage with an economy of line, the texts report. His mid-eighth-century career seems to genuinely coincide with an increase in monochrome painting and an appreciation for it. Several factors during this period may have spurred the development of monochrome painting before it became a fully realized style in the eleventh century. Increased sketch production and the open-air, visible spectacle of the wall painter making approximate, preparatory contour lines in black ink were by-products of extensive mural production in thousands of temples during the Tang dynasty. This seems to have engendered an increase of an appreciation of monochrome drawing and sketching and led to its popularity even in the Tang. Sources on early painting mention only three artists known for their ink painting.<sup>19</sup> By the ninth century, seven artists are noted in Zhang Yanyuan's *Record of Famous Painters Throughout the Ages*; Wu Daozi is among them.<sup>20</sup> By the following century, during the Five Dynasties, monochrome figure painting emerged into a style that featured strong ink lines reminiscent of the definitive overdrawing used to finish brightly colored murals. Evidence is supplied by a handscroll attributed to Zhou Wenju, who served as a painter-in-attendance for Li Houzhu, ruler of the Southern Tang (r. 961–75), located in present-day Nanjing.<sup>21</sup> Executed in plain, fluctuating line with occasional small dabs of color, the scroll presents the viewer privileged glimpses of courtesan ladies at leisure—an old theme traditionally executed in fine line and color, as for example in *Ladies Drinking Tea and Tuning the Lute*, attributed to Zhou Fang (ca. 730–800). The Five Dynasties use of the new technique represents a significant shift in aesthetics that emerged from the workshop practices. The techniques developed in one area of expertise—wall painting production—appear to have influenced all other workshop painters. Muralists had to cultivate freehand drawing to make paintings from smaller drawings, and this skill spread broadly in ateliers.<sup>22</sup> Freehand drawing was absolutely essential in the Buddhist atelier. Its prevalence in the preparatory stages spurred a growing interest in quick brushwork and an aestheticization of spontaneous, unfettered expression associated with it. Whatever actually happened in later paint-

### *Process and Cultural Response*

Critical fascination with Wu Daozi's contribution as a seminal figure in this shift may be assessed against the extant remains of a contemporaneous working atelier at Dunhuang. This type of comparative analysis is desirable despite the geographical distance between the texts' authors based in Chang'an, in what is now Shaanxi Province, and Luoyang, in Henan Province, and the Dunhuang-area workshops to the west, in Gansu. When William Acker published a translation of *Record of Famous Painters Throughout the Ages* in 1954, capping three decades of research, the critical mass of the Dunhuang sketches, workshop financial documents, and finished paintings were not available for systematic analysis.<sup>23</sup> Small photos without interpretation or explanation of the sūtra-cave materials now in British collections were published in 1921 by Aurel Stein; a *catalogue raisonné* of the Dunhuang sketches in French collections was published in 1974 after the posthumous publication of the end of Acker's translation.<sup>24</sup> With these artists' materials today being more accessible, it is possible to assess the ninth-century claims about artistic practice with actual artists' working papers. The results are surprising. Comparing discussions of workshops and the archaeological evidence left by workshops reveals a coextensive, but not necessarily intersecting, relationship. That is, as I demonstrate in Chapters 5 and 6, the enterprise of analyzing discursive and object-based evidence is more complex than one of equating the written record with extant paintings.

The last chapter centers on a discussion of Wu Daozi because, in texts, he is cited as the renowned muralist who comes to symbolize new directions in Tang-dynasty wall painting. Wu's biography allows us to uncover much of the author's agenda, particularly about sketching and theories of creativity. By viewing his biography as paradigmatic, we may ascertain shifts in aesthetic theory at the time by interrogating the ways in which broad claims are advanced according to moral types—an interpretative strategy that has been widely accepted in the field—in order to advance those claims.<sup>25</sup> It is necessary to pose crucial questions about the texts themselves and challenge their usefulness as factual, historical resources. How were writers compiling their information? Were writers observing painting production directly? If not, what was their historically bound agenda? Why were claims made about artists that were inconsistent with practice? What was at stake for writers who described painting in a way that was clearly at odds with the evidence?

These questions point to the necessity of deploying interpretive models

that all accounts of acts are fundamentally different, as Bakhtin argues, from the acts that are actually performed.<sup>27</sup> Deploying theoretical tools may signal a novel approach, but the point is that the historical evidence from the Tang period warrants a thorough analysis given the recent finds in the last century. In this comprehensive study on ninth-century painting practices and their contemporaneous discursive rhetoric in the central texts addressing wall painting, it is evident that these are two “non-communicating worlds”; that is, the world of culture in which acts are objectified and interpreted and the world of action as experienced.<sup>28</sup> While in some way Bakhtin’s distinction between the worlds of culture and action is problematic in its artificial dialecticism, it provides a useful framework for our understanding of verbal descriptions of behavior and the other traces of behavior and gesture such as unfinished, preparatory artists’ materials. Because text occupies a place of supremacy over the visual in Chinese cultural critique, and modern art historians have come to rely on art histories written in the Tang as evidence of workshop activities, a study of ninth-century art that cannot manage to juggle the difference between the written and visual record would be incomplete.

In these texts, the ambivalence about sketches is noteworthy. In Tang dynasty China artists regularly copied from their own and others’ work, but in aesthetic theory these acts were denied value. Unmediated expression was idealized because it was rarely practiced. The texts emphasize and privilege intuitive creativity over learned artistic behavior and conventions. What was at stake for these writers who advanced claims of expression so clearly at odds with the way in which most painting was produced during this period? For Chinese theorists, these questions were heavily inflected by issues of class. Unmediated expression was constructed as an experience closer to nature and hence more naturalistic. Later, these class-bound values impacted many positions in Chinese art criticism. Although all types of artists produced copies in later theory the educated literatus was viewed as an original practitioner who creatively transformed (copied) old masters, whereas the professional (uneducated) artist reproduced images without personal inspiration. Critiquing the written record permits exploration of the moment in Chinese painting praxis and theory when these critical positions came into being. It probes fundamental issues concerning the nature of artistic creativity, representation, and resemblance for the subsequent eight centuries of traditional Chinese painting.

### *Performance*

The theme of performance crops up in several key areas in relation to behavior, action, and practice. The ninth-century art historians Zhang Yanyuan and

sketch as a seminal moment in artistic production when the painting, if not finished, is essentially complete. This sense of achievement is linked with Daoist-inflected ideals about work and labor that focus on the status of the body in artistic production. Performativity may be oversimplified in regard to abstract expressionism (“painting is an index of the artist’s engagement with surface”) and particularly in regard to the ways that these same modernist interpretations are applied directly to Chinese painting.<sup>29</sup> And yet Zhang and Zhu themselves conflate gesture and product to the extent that painting is a record of an artist’s brush movement. What is at stake for these critics is not an indexical recording of individuality and an unrecoverable temporal moment of creativity, but the mimetic imprint of natural forces spontaneously acting through the artist’s body. Behavior and gesture are linked to realism and presage latter notions of resemblance of a different kind.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, because performativity is invoked by ninth-century critics in their understanding of painting production, behavior and gesture elbow their way to the table for discussion.

Performance is also an important issue addressed in four other critical dimensions of this book. Of a different sort altogether is the routine replication of a composition by a workshop that uses techniques and methods passed down in traditional atelier practices. Chapters 2 and 5 consider the ways in which one theme (The Magic Competition Between Raudrāksha and Śāriputra) is executed sixteen times over roughly a century in cave temples at Dunhuang. They are variations on this one theme, executed according to a set of rules that are inherently flexible in mural production. The way that wall paintings are executed in the space of cave temples and freestanding temples is linked to behavior in this study. On the other hand, in discussions of banner production, the close detail work of tracing and copying is juxtaposed with the set of skills and artistic behavior of the muralist who employs freehand sketching to cover the large surfaces of the interiors. The spaces of practice are as different as the results. The banner painter works at a close distance to the silk or paper on a flat or angled surface near a window or in sunlight. The wall painter is working in a darkened space moving around to painting surfaces at great distance from each other. A third distinct method engages the monk-artist in a highly literate practice of combining sūtra text with ritual diagrams that engages him in copying from texts in precise, minute characters or script with abstract drawings of ritual worlds.

The discussion of artistic practice shifting according to format draws our attention to a consideration of the social performances required of the artist in the course of production. The painter and sculptor participate in ritual performances of patronage recognition and submit to the supervision of the temple officials. The ritual feasting and informal modes of evaluation by local

grape wine) was shared during work critiques and elaborate banquets given at the dedication of colossal images, permit a distinction between formal and informal artistic rituals in secular Buddhist art production.<sup>31</sup> And, finally, the theme of performance in painting itself directs attention to the intersection of oral and visual cultures of production. Tumbling and stage-like drama are depicted in murals in which magical discourse is featured in highly animated motion-filled tableaux. The bodies are overly muscular, defined by heavy accents of shading to emphasize the figures' corporeality. The audience is consulted in these exchanges by meta-narrators or clowns who gesture and grimace at the viewer in a shared conceit that the picture plane is indeed a representational fiction performed by both the artist and the audience.