

Visual Images of Vimalakīrti in the Mogao Caves (581-1036)

Fan Lin
Department of East Asian Studies
McGill University
Montreal, Canada

February, 2006

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Universal Copyright © 2006 Fan Lin



Library and
Archives Canada

Bibliothèque et
Archives Canada

Published Heritage
Branch

Direction du
Patrimoine de l'édition

395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Your file Votre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-24891-1

Our file Notre référence

ISBN: 978-0-494-24891-1

NOTICE:

The author has granted a non-exclusive license allowing Library and Archives Canada to reproduce, publish, archive, preserve, conserve, communicate to the public by telecommunication or on the Internet, loan, distribute and sell theses worldwide, for commercial or non-commercial purposes, in microform, paper, electronic and/or any other formats.

The author retains copyright ownership and moral rights in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

AVIS:

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque et Archives Canada de reproduire, publier, archiver, sauvegarder, conserver, transmettre au public par télécommunication ou par l'Internet, prêter, distribuer et vendre des thèses partout dans le monde, à des fins commerciales ou autres, sur support microforme, papier, électronique et/ou autres formats.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur et des droits moraux qui protègent cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

In compliance with the Canadian Privacy Act some supporting forms may have been removed from this thesis.

Conformément à la loi canadienne sur la protection de la vie privée, quelques formulaires secondaires ont été enlevés de cette thèse.

While these forms may be included in the document page count, their removal does not represent any loss of content from the thesis.

Bien que ces formulaires aient inclus dans la pagination, il n'y aura aucun contenu manquant.


Canada

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Abstrait.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
List of Abbreviations.....	vi
List of Figures.....	vii
Introduction.....	1
Hypothesis.....	2
Sources and Methodology.....	4
The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra.....	5
Background Information on <i>Bian</i> 變, <i>Bianxiang</i> 變相, and <i>Bianwen</i> 變文.....	8
Past Scholarship.....	11
Main Chapters.....	21
Chapter 1 Pre-Sui Representations of Vimalakīrti.....	23
The Representation of Vimalakīrti in South China.....	24
The Representation of Vimalakīrti in North China.....	35
Conclusion.....	41
Chapter 2 Dunhuang Representations of Vimalakīrti (581-1036).....	44
Sui-Tang Representations of Vimalakīrti.....	44
Dunhuang Representations of Vimalakīrti (581-1036).....	50
Sui Dynasty (581-618).....	51
Early Tang (618-704) and High Tang (705-80).....	54
Tibetan Occupation (777-848).....	59
Under the Governance of the <i>Guifyijun</i> (848-1036).....	61
Conclusion.....	63
Chapter 3 The Vimalakīrti Murals from a Sociohistorical Perspective.....	66
The Ritual Function of the <i>Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra</i>	66
The Production of the Wall Paintings.....	68
Vimalakīrti Wall Paintings in the Prayers.....	69
Ritual and Caves.....	77
The Buddhist Cave as a Showcase for Political Purposes.....	80
Conclusion.....	81
Conclusion.....	83

Appendices	85
Appendix 1: Chapters of the <i>Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra</i>	85
Appendix 2: Translations of the <i>Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra</i>	86
Appendix 3: Northern Representations of the <i>Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra</i> in Sculpture	87
Appendix 4: Dunhuang Caves Containing the <i>Vimalakīrti bianxiang</i>	89
Appendix 5: Table of Caves with Their Corresponding Inscriptions	90
Bibliography.....	91
Figures.....	99

Abstract

This thesis examines the visual images of Vimalakīrti, an ancient Indian lay Buddhist, painted on the walls of the Buddhist cave complex at Dunhuang, Gansu province, between 581 and 1036. The sixty-nine Vimalakīrti paintings preserved at Dunhuang are a valuable source for the exploration of historical, religious, and artistic dimensions of wall paintings and sūtras. These visual images, together with other textual sources such as sūtras, commentaries, and inscriptions, suggest a variety of interesting questions: Why was this theme repeatedly represented? Do the images all have the same prototype? Is there a spiritual function contained in the layout of the caves and composition of the wall paintings? Did the meaning of these images change according to historical context? Did the patrons have a political scheme in mind when commissioning these devotional artworks? While it is difficult to provide definitive answers to all these questions, this thesis will attempt to clarify them and offer preliminary answers on the basis of available visual and textual sources.

The introduction of this thesis includes an overview of basic concepts related to wall paintings, a short history of the transmission of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, and a review of past scholarship on Vimalakīrti paintings and related subjects. The body of the thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter describes the important visual representations of Vimalakīrti before the Sui dynasty. The second chapter of the thesis will provide an introduction to representations of Vimalakīrti at Dunhuang from the late sixth to the early eleventh centuries. The third chapter examines the social functions and symbolic meanings of the Vimalakīrti paintings at Dunhuang.

Abstrait

Ce travail tente d'examiner les images visuelles de Vimalakīrti, un bouddhiste laïc ancien, qui ont été peint sur les murs des grottes à Dunhuang, dans la province de Gansu entre l'an 531 et 1036 de notre ère. Les 69 peintures de Vimalakīrti qui ont été préservées à Dunhuang sont des sources évaluables pour une exploration de fresques murales recouvrant des dimensions historiques, religieuses, et artistiques. Ces images visuelles accompagnées d'autres sources textuelles comme des sūtras, commentaires et inscriptions, suggèrent une variété de questions intéressantes: pourquoi ce thème était-il continuellement représenté? Les images avaient-elles les mêmes aspects? Le support ainsi que les grottes dans lesquelles ces images ont été inscrites avaient-elles des fonctions spirituelles? La signification de ces images change-t-elle selon le contexte historique? Les patrons avaient-ils des objectifs politiques précises au moment de leur commande? Bien qu'il soit difficile de répondre à l'ensemble de ces questions, ce travail va s'attacher à donner quelques premiers éléments de réponse.

L'introduction de ce travail précise les concepts relatifs aux fresques murales, un court rappel des sūtras de Vimalakīrti, ainsi qu'un bilan des travaux académiques sur les peintures de Vimalakīrti et les sujets qui y sont liés. Le corps de ce travail est divisé en trois chapitres principaux: le premier chapitre décrit les représentations visuelles importants de Vimalakīrti avant la dynastie des Sui. Le second chapitre fournit une introduction des représentations de Vimalakīrti depuis la fin du sixième siècle. Le troisième chapitre examine les fonctions sociales et les significations symboliques des peintures de Vimalakīrti à Dunhuang.

Acknowledgements

My interest in the Buddhist wall paintings began with my research internship at Dunhuang, 1995, while I was an undergraduate at Peking University. The famous image of Vimalakīrti in Cave 220 intrigued me and encouraged me to explore its origins and the cultural connotations. My Master's thesis is the fruition of those years of curiosity.

During the process of my writing, I received generous help from a number of people. I would like to extend sincere gratitude to my thesis advisor, Professor Robin D.S. Yates, for his guidance and encouragement, and for his numerous revisions of my writing, done with great patience and always filled with insightful comments. Professor Kenneth Dean offered precious suggestions and drew my attention to countless useful sources. A special thank goes to Li Geng, Associate Professor at Peking University, who kindly proofread my translations of passages from Dunhuang texts. I would also like to thank Ms. Xiaoyan Sun for all her help in the library.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank my friends at McGill University: Jim Bonk offered consistent help on the revisions of my thesis. James Benoit and Sara Neswald also helped in reading some chapters. Anik Fournier helped with the translation of the abstract into French. I would also like to thank my dear friends, Dr. Liu Yonghua, and PhD candidates Margaret Ng and Li Xiaorong, for discussing with me related topics.

Last but not the least, I would like to thank my parents, my brother, and my husband, for their continuous support and love.

List of Abbreviations

- BNWK* *Zhongguo Dunhuang xue bainian wenku* 中國敦煌學百年文庫, Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩 et al. comps. Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1999.
- DZJ* *Dazheng xinxiu dazangjing* 大正新修大藏經. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubangongsi, 1980-1992.
- HJAS* *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Cambridge: Harvard-Yenching Institute.
- KGJC* *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng Xibei Juan* 中國考古集成西北卷, Sun Jinji 孫進己 et al. comps. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997.
- LWL* *Dunhuang bianwen lunwenlu* 敦煌變文論文錄, Bai Huawen 白化文 and Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 eds. Taibei: Mingwen shuju, 1985.

List of Figures

Fig. 1-1: Cave 169, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Bingling si 炳靈寺, Gansu province. Date: 420.

Fig. 1-2: Cave 6, Vimalakīrti, Buddha, and Mañjuśrī, relief. Yungang 雲岡, Shanxi province. Date: 477-83.

Fig. 1-3: Cave 5A, Vimalakīrti, relief. Yungang, Shanxi province. Date: 465-94.

Fig. 1-4: Cave 45, Vimalakīrti, relief. Yungang, Shanxi province. Date: 495-524.

Fig. 1-5: Guyang 古陽 Cave, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, relief. Longmen 龍門, Henan province. Date: 516-28.

Fig. 1-6: Cave Lianhua 蓮花, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, relief. Longmen, Henan province. Date: 516-28.

Fig. 1-7: Binyang 賓陽 Cave III, Upper---Vimalakīrti; lower---Mañjuśrī, relief. Longmen, Henan province. Date: 508-23.

Fig. 1-8: Cave 1, Vimalakīrti, sculpture. Gongyi 鞏義, Henan province. Date: 386-534.

Fig. 1-9: Cave 127, Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Maijishan 麥積山, Gansu province. Date: 535-56.

Fig 1-10: Cave 102, Vimalakīrti; Cave 123, Mañjuśrī. Sculpture. Maijishan, Gansu province. Date: 535-56.

Fig. 1-11: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, stele. Zhili 直隸, Hebei province. Date: 527.

Fig. 1-12: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, stele. Northern China. Date: 534-50.

Fig. 2-1: Cave 420, western wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 581-618.

Fig. 2-2: Cave 433, ceiling: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 581-618.

Fig. 2-3: Cave 276, wall painting. Left: Mañjuśrī; right: Vimalakīrti. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 581-618.

Fig. 2-4: Floor plan and cross section of the canopy ceiling caves--Cave 220, date: 618-704; Cave 172, date: 705-80.

Fig. 2-5: Cave 220, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 618-704.

Fig. 2-6: Cave 220, detail of eastern wall: Vimalakīrti, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 618-704.

Fig. 2-7: Cave 220, detail of eastern wall: Non-duality Hand Gesture of Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 618-704.

Fig. 2-8: Cave 220, detail of eastern wall: Mañjuśrī and the Chinese emperor, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 618-704.

Fig. 2-9: Cave 103, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 705-80.

Fig. 2-10: Cave 103, eastern wall: Vimalakīrti, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 705-80.

Fig. 2-11: Section of “Lidai diwang tu” (Emperors of the Successive Dynasties), Emperor Wudi 武帝 (r. 560-78) of the Northern Zhou and Chen Houzhu 陳後主 (r. 582-89). Attributed to Yan Liben (?-673). Handscroll, ink and color on silk.

Fig 2-12: Cave 159, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 777-848.

Fig 2-13: Cave 159, detail of eastern wall: Tibetan ruler, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: 777-848.

Fig 2-14: Cave 61, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Date: 907-59.

Visual Images of Vimalakīrti in the Mogao Caves (581-1036)

Those who by my form did see me,
And those who followed me by voice
Wrong the efforts they engaged in,
Me those people will not see.
(From the *Diamond Sūtra*)¹

Introduction

This thesis examines the visual images of Vimalakīrti, an ancient Indian lay Buddhist, painted on the walls of the Buddhist cave complex at Dunhuang, Gansu province, between 581 and 1036. These images are based on themes originating from an Indian Buddhist sūtra, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. However, according to present evidence, no representation of Vimalakīrti has been found in India or Central Asia. The first representation in China appeared in the fourth century at Bingling 炳靈 Monastery (Gansu province), and the images of Vimalakīrti circulated widely in the north and south of China thereafter. The first images of Vimalakīrti at Dunhuang were created towards the end of the sixth century, after the Sui dynasty's (581-617) unification of China. The sixty-nine Vimalakīrti paintings preserved at Dunhuang are a valuable source for the exploration of historical, religious, and artistic dimensions of wall paintings and sūtras.

These images, together with other textual sources such as sūtras, commentaries, and inscriptions, suggest a variety of interesting questions: Why was this theme repeatedly represented? Do the images all have the same prototype? Is there a spiritual function contained in the layout of the caves and composition of the wall paintings? Did

¹ *Jingang boruo boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經, in *DZJ*, T8, p. 752; Edward Conze trans., *Buddhist Wisdom Books, Containing the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1958), p. 63.

the meaning of these images change according to historical context? Did the patrons have a political intention when commissioning these devotional artworks? While it is difficult to provide definitive answers to all these questions, this thesis will attempt to clarify them and offer preliminary answers on the basis of available visual and textual sources. Due to space limitations, the discussion will focus on the period between 581 and 1036.

Hypothesis

One of most important issues raised from these visual images (including wall paintings, paper and silk scrolls, and sculptures) regards their composition and location. I assume that the image of Vimalakīrti was depicted at a liminal location, which visually represented his religious status between lay and Buddhist (monastic?) societies. A symmetrical composition is comparatively fixed in most portrayals of Vimalakīrti and his rival, a Buddhist Bodhisattva, Mañjuśrī. With a close reading of the original text, I would argue that these two figures, respectively, represented the lay people and Buddhist clergy. Meanwhile, the Vimalakīrti theme was usually represented at a liminal space in the Cave complex, such as the lintel or the entrance wall, which signified an intermediary location between the outside and the inside of the space. After the Late Tang, lay patrons showed a clearer inclination to identify themselves with Vimalakīrti.

My second hypothesis concerns the iconographic origin of the visual images of Vimalakīrti. Based on the absence of visual representations in India, the Middle East and Central Asia, the similarity in artistic styles of paintings at Dunhuang and in China proper, and the textual descriptions of the establishment of the southern style in China, I assume that images of Vimalakīrti were a Chinese creation dating from the Southern and

Northern Dynasties, and that the Mogao murals were derived from earlier representations elsewhere in China. Meanwhile, one should note that continuities and ruptures in the modes of representation co-existed, meaning that the models from central China probably exerted influence long after the Tibetan occupation of Dunhuang, and that local political upheavals introduced changes in content and style as well.

The visual representation of Vimalakīrti went through a process of transformation and became a cultural sign. My thesis will describe this process in the medieval Chinese historical context. After the Vimalakīrti theme was introduced into China, it was represented continuously through a number of media, such as literature, visual arts and performance arts. While it was transmitted across geographic, cultural and political boundaries, the messages conveyed in the original sūtra were transposed and embedded within local sociopolitical contexts. Thus, its cultural connotations varied from different communities and social strata. This hypothesis will be tested through the examination of images and texts related to the artists and patrons involved.

Another issue is the treatment of time in the development of my argument. First, a rigid categorization of artistic style according to dynastic period fails to take into account the long and gradual process of artistic development; second, although Dunhuang first came under China's control in 111 B.C.E., it remained at the periphery of Chinese territory and control. In certain periods, particularly during the Tibetan reign (781–848), political relationships were cut off entirely. And this region only maintained a loose connection with the imperial court after its recapture by the Zhang lineage's "Return to Allegiance Army" (*Guiyijun* 歸義軍) in 848. Owing to local political influence on art production, instead of using the Chinese dynastic chronicle, I will divide the period

covered in the thesis according to changes in governance: Chinese control (581-777); Tibetan control (777-848), and *guiyijun* control (848-1036).

Sources and Methodology

The primary sources available for the present study can be divided into textual and visual materials. Textual sources include the written records of Vimalakīrti *bianxiang*, such as *Lidai minghua ji*,² and documents found in the Cave Library that are relevant to Vimalakīrti, like the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, the Vimalakīrti *bianwen*, and some prayers and inscriptions. Visual sources relevant to this study are available in several printed folios. The images found here are primarily of the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* from the Northern Dynasties, Sui, and Tang, including murals from the Mogao, Longmen, Yungang, and other cave temples, as well as banners and silk/paper paintings collected in libraries such as the British Museum and the Musée Guimet.

These materials have some shortcomings: first, there are no extant images of the Vimalakīrti from the Southern Dynasties, meaning that any study of these works is forced to rely solely on written records, which only list those works with high aesthetic value or by famous artists. Second, a number of visual representations have survived in the north, but there are few written records by or about the anonymous artisans who created them.³ Besides, the images and the texts on the stelae were usually published separately, which adds to the difficulty of obtaining conclusive textual interpretations. Third, the printed folios only provide about one third of the extant Vimalakīrti images, and they do not

² Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji*.

³ Liu Shufen, "Art, Ritual, and Society: Buddhist Practice in Rural China during the Northern Dynasties," in *Asia Major* 3.8 (Jan., 1995), pp. 19-20.

always provide sufficient information on the special arrangement of caves or the contents of the surrounding wall paintings.

Three primary methods serve as the foundation of my discussion. The first is iconographical research. Distinguishing characteristics of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, including their figures, poses, and mūdras, will be examined in terms of iconographical changes over time. Image comparison will be used to examine the general composition of the wall paintings. Again, this will allow for a meaningful examination of historical change. Secondly, I will make use of statistical analysis to analyze the structure and composition of visual images in the Mogao caves, as well as the identities and influences of important donors and contributors. Thirdly, I will make use of cultural comparison to provide a general introduction to the cultural contexts within which these murals were produced. More specifically, I will attempt to make temporal and spatial comparisons between Dunhuang and central China.

The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra

Vimalakīrti, as described in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, was a dāyaka (lay Buddhist, or *jushi* 居士) and lay bodhisattva in the city of Vaiśālī (in present day Bihar province, India). He was also a contemporary of Śākyamuni (ca. 6th cent. B.C.E.). In the seventh century, Xuanzang 玄奘 (596-664) visited a chapel to the northwest of Vaiśālī where he was said to have resided.⁴

⁴ Xuanzang 玄奘, *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記, in *DZJ*, T51, p. 908. For the translation, see Samuel Beal trans., *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, (Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1957-58), book VII, pp. 308-09.

Vimalakīrti means “undefiled reputation,” and is translated into Chinese as Weimojie 維摩詰,⁵ Jingming 淨名,⁶ and Wugoucheng 無垢稱.⁷ He is also occasionally referred to by the alias Golden Grain Tathāgata 金粟如來.⁸

Divided into fourteen chapters, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* narrates the following story: after hearing of Vimalakīrti’s sickness, Buddha asked his disciples to visit him. Several of his disciples, having earlier been defeated by Vimalakīrti’s famous rhetorical skills, declined the request; only the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī—the guardian of wisdom—felt confident enough to carry out this mission. After arriving at the house of Vimalakīrti, the two fell into a lengthy theoretical debate regarding “non-duality”⁹ and other subjects. Vimalakīrti augmented his arguments with the performance of various miracles and illusions, posing a challenge to the bodhisattva. Their debate soon attracted and enlightened those who had gathered, including their disciples, as well as kings, princes, elites, and other lay Buddhists. The story concludes with the Buddha showing himself, proclaiming the doctrine, and authorizing the sūtra. (See Appendix 1)

This sūtra belongs to the Mahāyāna-Suññatāvāda (the Emptiness School of the Greater Vehicle, 大乘空宗) School. The origins of Mahāyāna Buddhism can be traced back to a rising consciousness and activity among the laity. More specifically, over the first five centuries of Buddhist history, the laity began to show a preference for the

⁵ According to existing records, this name was first used in the translation *Gu Weimojie jing* 古維摩詰經 by Yan Fodiao 嚴佛調 in 188.

⁶ This name was first used by Jizang 吉藏 (549-623) in *Jingming xuanlun* 淨名玄論, in *DZJ*, T38, p. 853.

⁷ This name was first used in the translation *Shuo Wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經 by Xuanzang in 650.

⁸ Jizang, *Weimo jing yishu* 維摩經義疏, in *DZJ*, T38, p. 915.

⁹ Non-duality (advayatvā) is synonymous with reality, voidness, etc. But it must be remembered that non-duality does not necessarily mean unity, that unity is only one of the pair unity-duality; hence non-duality implies non-unity as well. See Robert A.F. Thurman trans, “Preface” in *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture* (New York: The Pennsylvania State University, 1976), p. 163.

Bodhisattva path rather than the older, and predominantly monastic, path to arhatship.¹⁰ Viewed against this background, the appearance and rapid spread of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* are not surprising. The text of this sūtra is thought to have appeared and gained popularity in India between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.¹¹ Unfortunately, all Sanskrit texts, except for some fragments found in Mahāyāna philosophical works, have been lost.¹²

The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* was first introduced to China in the third century, and was translated into Chinese eight times between the third and seventh centuries.¹³ (See Appendix 2A) The sūtra was later translated into Tibetan, Sogdian, Khotanese, Uighur, and several other languages. (See Appendix 2B) Today, only three complete Chinese versions, translated by Zhiqian 支謙 (ca. 219-ca. 259), Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (ca. 385-409), and Xuanzang 玄奘, are extant.¹⁴ Among them, Kumārajīva's version is the most common at Dunhuang: it is estimated that of the more than one thousand copies of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* found in the Cave Library, about six hundred were transcriptions of this translation.¹⁵

¹⁰ Paul Williams, "The Origins of the Mahāyāna, and the Laity," in *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 1989), pp. 20-26.

¹¹ Thurman, "Preface," p. ix.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Étienne Lamotte, *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa)* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1962), pp. 2-14.

¹⁴ These three translations are collected in *DZJ*, vol. 14.

¹⁵ He Shizhe 賀世哲, "Weimojie jingbian" 維摩詰經變 in *Fahua jing hua juan* 法華經畫卷 in Duan Wenjie 段文傑 et al. comps., *Dunhuang shiku quanji* 敦煌石窟全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe; Shanghai shiji chubanshe, 2000), vol. 7, pp. 182-83.

Background Information on *Bian* 變, *Bianxiang* 變相, and *Bianwen* 變文

The wall paintings in Dunhuang are usually called *bian*, and the Vimalakīrti paintings are also called *Weimo bian* 維摩變. The precise meaning of the term *bian* has often proven puzzling, and thus requires some further clarification.

Bian, literally means “transform.” It was first used in reference to a genre of paintings in the Eastern Jin dynasty (317-420). Faxian 法顯 (ca. 337–422) mentions *bian* in *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳:

The King [of Ceylon] then proceeded to make on both sides of the road representations (*bianxian* 變現) of the five hundred different forms in which the bodhisattva successively appeared; for instance, as prince Sūdāna, or as Syāma, as the king of elephants, as a stag, or as a horse. These representations are all beautifully painted and have a life-like appearance.¹⁶

王便夾道兩邊, 作菩薩五百身已來種種變現, 或作須大拏, 或作睽變, 或作象王, 或作鹿馬. 如是形像, 皆彩畫莊校, 狀若生人.¹⁷

Here, Faxian uses *bian* to refer to the sculptures presenting the *jātaka* tales (various stories on the transformations of the former lives of Buddha). Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ca. 9th cent.), a Tang (618-906) art historian, applies the term *bian* across several types of visual representation including painting, sculpture, and relief. He also provides a record

¹⁶ Based on James Legge's translation, *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms: Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fā-hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399-414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline* (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1965), p. 71.

¹⁷ Faxian, *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan*, in *DZJ*, T51, p. 685.

of several *bian* such as *Xiangmo bian* 降魔變,¹⁸ *Fahua bian* 法華變, *Weimojie bian* 維摩詰變 and others.¹⁹ All the *bian* paintings mentioned in Zhang's book were produced after the Southern Dynasties (420-589), and this genre was fairly popular until the Tang dynasty. In this sense, *bian* is equivalent to the expression *bianxiang*.

Bianxiang, literally "transformation paintings," refers to pictorial images based on both Buddhist sūtras and sometimes also secular stories.²⁰ Beginning in the High Tang (705-80), the term *bianxiang* was more narrowly used to describe a type of religious, primarily Buddhist, two-dimensional, complex pictorial representation.²¹ The works given the label *bianxiang* covered a variety of forms, such as picture scrolls, wall paintings, and painted banners, but excluded individual icons.²²

Bian is also an abridgement of *bianwen*. *Bianwen*, literally translated as "transformation texts," refers to a kind of prosimetric script based on both Buddhist sūtras (*jingbian* 經變) and secular stories (*subian* 俗變). A large number of *bianwen* texts were performed at Dunhuang during and after the Tang dynasty. According to surviving records, *bianwen* were also performed in Chang'an (present day Xi'an, Shaanxi province). The following excerpt, for example, indicates that by the Mid-Tang (781-847) low culture *bianwen* was present even in the imperial court:

¹⁸ "Subjugation" *bianxiang* comes from a story in which Śāriputra defeated the heretic Raudrāksha from the *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經. See *DZJ*, T4, p. 420.

¹⁹ Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1964), 60-75.

²⁰ Bai Huawen 白化文, "Shenme shi bianwen" 什麼是變文, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 429-45. English translation by Victor Mair, "What is *Pien-wen* 變文?" *HJAS* 44.2 (1984), pp. 493-514. In this article, Bai introduces different scholars' definitions of *bianwen*: for example, Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, Xiang Da 向達, Sun Kaidi 孫楷第, Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良, and Cheng Yizhong 程毅中, whose essays were collected in the *LWL*.

²¹ Wu Hung, "What is *Bianxiang*? ---On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *HJAS* 52.1 (1992), pp. 149-50.

²² Bai Huawen, "Shenme shi bianwen," in *LWL*, vol. 1, p. 438.

The father of the emperor²³ moved to the western inner palace and settled down. Everyday the emperor and the Lord Gao inspected in person the cleaning of the court, the trimming of the woods and the grass. Sometimes they discussed [the performance] of the tales that have been transformed and narrated. Although these talks and tales were not close to the principles of scriptures, they entirely pleased the feelings of His Highness.²⁴

太上皇移仗西內安置, 每日上皇與高公親看掃除庭院, 芟薙草木。或論議轉變說話, 雖不近文律, 終冀悅聖情。

Among the manuscripts discovered at the Dunhuang Cave Library,²⁵ several contain both *bianwen* and *bianxiang*. These scrolls provide evidence of a relationship between *bianwen* and the paper/silk-based *bianxiang*.²⁶ During performances, the *bianxiang* served as a visual aid to the *bianwen* on the opposite side of the scroll. While there is still some discussion in regards to whether or how wall paintings served as visual aids for *bianwen*, it appears that *bianwen* and *bianxiang* wall paintings were often

²³ The father of the emperor refers to Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗, Li Longji 李隆基 (r. 712-55). He was deposed by his son Suzong 肅宗, Li Heng 李亨 (r. 756-61). Here, it refers to the retired Xuanzong. See Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), vol. 3, pp. 460-61.

²⁴ Guo Shi 郭湜, *Gao Lishi waizhuan* 高力士外傳. Quote from Zhou Shaoliang, “Tan Tang dai minjian wenxue: du Zhongguo wenxue shi zhong bianwen jie shu hou” 談唐代民間文學——讀《中國文學史》中變文節書後, in *LWL*, vol. 1, p. 409.

²⁵ In 1900, while clearing sand from the entrance to Cave 16, the Daoist abbot Wang Yuanlu 王圓箎, the self-appointed caretaker of Mogao, and his workmen discovered the Cave 17 Library, a small side chamber crammed with scrolls. See Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1959). These manuscripts attracted a number of Western explorers and archaeologists, and were sold at a very low price. Today these Buddhist scrolls and paintings are preserved in Britain, France, China, Russia, and Japan. A full collection of the surviving documents is provided in Huang Yongwu 黃永武 ed., *Dunhuang baozang* 敦煌寶藏 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1981).

²⁶ Wang Zhongmin 王重民, “Dunhuang bianwen yanjiu” 敦煌變文研究, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 274-75.

complementary in performances at Buddhist temples, in grotto chapels, or in certain specially designated situations.²⁷

One colophon attached to a document describes the popularity of the Vimalakīrti *bianwen* at Dunhuang:

On the ninth day of the eighth month of the tenth year of Guangzheng (September 25th, 947), [I] transcribed this text on the twentieth *juan* at the Jingzhen Temple of Xichuan.... [I] am forty-eight years old as of this year, and have begun to lecture at the Yingming Temple; and the [lectures] are popular.

廣政十年八月九日在西川靜真禪院寫此第廿卷文書...至年四十八歲, 於州中應明寺開講, 極是溫熱。²⁸

The Vimalakīrti *bian* that I will discuss in this thesis include all the *bianxiang* and *bianwen* related to the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. Eight versions of Vimalakīrti *bianwen* have been found in the Cave Library.

Past Scholarship

Dunhuang studies began in the first decade of the twentieth century, shortly after the discovery of the Cave Library in 1900. The arrival in Europe of numerous Buddhist scriptures and scrolls drew the attention of scholars from various fields. These texts,

²⁷ Bai Huawen, "What is Pien-wen?" *HJAS* 44.2 (1984), pp. 505-07. Also see Victor Mair, "The Meaning of the Term *pien-wen*," in *T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies; Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 36-72.

²⁸ Guan Dedong 關德棟, "Tan 'bianwen'" 談變文, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 323-25.

retrieved by archaeologists and explorers, such as Sir Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot, marked the beginning of Dunhuang studies in Europe.²⁹

In the 1930's, a few Chinese scholars began to contribute to the research of *bianwen* and other Dunhuang texts. Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, Xiang Da 向達, Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉, Wang Guowei 王國維, and Chen Yinke 陳寅恪 began to organize and study these texts, mainly in terms of their relationship to popular culture.³⁰ Other scholars, such as Sun Kaidi, Bai Huawen, and Cheng Yizhong undertook analyses of basic issues surrounding *bianwen*, paying particular attention to the study of its origins, modes of performance, and influence on other literary works.³¹ Zhou Shaoliang, in 1965, took the important step of distinguishing *bianwen* from other types of popular narrative literature such as *sujiang wen* 俗講文 (secular-lecture text), *ciwen* 詞文 (lyric text), *huaben* 話本 (tale manuscripts) and *fu* 賦 (rhapsody), thus making *bianwen* a clear and definite genre.³² Of course, Dunhuang studies in China have not been limited to literary analyses, but encompass numerous fields ranging from art history and Buddhist research to vernacular language, popular culture, law, and the history of science.³³

²⁹ Sir Aurel Stein, *The Thousand Buddhas: Ancient Buddhist Paintings from the Cave-temples of Tun-huang on the Western Frontier of China* (London: B. Quaritch, Ltd., 1921).

³⁰ Wang Guowei 王國維, "Zuijin ersanshinian Zhongguo xin faxian zhi xuewen" 最近二三十年中國新發現之學問, in *BNWK*, vol. 1, pp. 49-52. For the other scholarship, see the discussion below.

³¹ Xiang Da, "Tang dai sujiang kao" 唐代俗講考; Sun Kaidi, "Tang dai sujiang guifan yu qi ben zhi ticai" 唐代俗講軌範與其本之體裁 and "Mantan bianwen de qiyuan" 漫談變文的起源; Cheng Yizhong, "Guanyu bianwen de jidian tansuo" 關於變文的幾點探索, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 41-70; 71-128; 239-48; 373-96.

³² Zhou Shaoliang, "Tan Tang dai minjian wenxue: du *Zhongguo wenxue shi* zhong bianwen jie shu hou," pp. 405-28. Zhou argued that *sujiang wen* were performed by people, while *bianwen* one person; *ciwen* was mainly composed with poems; *huaben* was close to short stories; and the *fu* referred to the rhapsody narrating a story.

³³ Ma De 馬德, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu* 敦煌莫高窟史研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996).

Dunhuang wall paintings have been a significant area of study within the wider fields of Dunhuang studies and Buddhist art. Since the 1970's, scholarship produced by the Dunhuang Academy has made these images more easily accessible. The most important of these publications include: *Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu* 敦煌莫高窟內容總錄,³⁴ *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記,³⁵ *Dunhuang shiku quanji* 敦煌石窟全集, and *Dunhuang yishu tudian* 敦煌藝術圖典.³⁶

Since the late 1950's, Western scholars have conducted extensive and detailed research into the art of Dunhuang on the basis of Chinese sources and scholarship. In 1959, Basil Gray's study provided a detailed introduction to Dunhuang's history, and the stylistic development and themes of the wall paintings.³⁷ Victor Mair has carried out detailed research centered on *bianwen* since the 1960's. Roderick Whitfield's *Cave Temples of Mogao Art and History on the Silk Road* provides a more recent introduction to Dunhuang's history and murals.³⁸

Chinese intellectuals began to study Vimalakīrti *bianwen* and *bianxiang* during the 1930's. After investigating *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, *Shansi tongzi jing* 善思童子經, *Yueshang nü jing* 月上女經,³⁹ and other Buddhist sūtras and historical records, Chen Yinke was inclined to conclude that Vimalakīrti had once been a historical figure. The

³⁴ Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo 敦煌文物研究所 et al. comp., *Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982).

³⁵ Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 comp., *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986).

³⁶ Lin Baoyao 林保堯, *Dunhuang yishu tudian* (Taiwan: Yishujia chubanshe, 1991).

³⁷ Basil Gray, *Buddhist Cave Paintings at Tun-huang* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).

³⁸ Roderick Whitfield et al., *Cave Temples of Mogao Art and History on the Silk Road* (Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000).

³⁹ *Shansi tongzi jing* and *Yueshang nü jing* were translated by Jñānagupta 闍那崛多 (523-600). These two sūtras separately recorded the deeds of Vimalakīrti's son Shansi 善思 and daughter Yueshang 月上. See *DZJ*, T14, pp. 605-15; 615-23.

sūtra's description of Vimalakīrti's outstanding rhetorical skills and astonishing magical feats led Chen to propose that the author of this sūtra was himself a layman.⁴⁰

In the late 1950's, Jin Weinuo 金維諾 undertook the first thorough research on the development of the Tang Vimalakīrti paintings. In two essays entitled "Bihua Weimobian de fazhan" 壁畫維摩變的發展⁴¹ and "Dunhuang wanqi de Weimobian 敦煌晚期的維摩變,"⁴² he examined sixty-three Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* murals, and analyzed changes in artistic styles from the Early Tang (618-704) to the period immediately following the Mid-Tang. Writing from a Marxist perspective, he tracks the development of the painting techniques, and measures the maturity of artistic style by the degree to which artists represented a broader scene of society and life. He argues that the painting of Vimalakīrti began in central China, and later influenced the development of Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* at Dunhuang. Through a study of iconography and written records, he concludes that Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* did not reach stylistic maturity until the Early Tang.⁴³ Following the Mid-Tang, as Buddhist doctrine became increasingly common in artistic representations, Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* were no longer limited to representations of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī as they appeared in the sūtra itself. Instead, painters widened their visions from simple descriptions of religious stories to broader depictions of social scenes reflecting the lives of the common people. For instance, while illustrating "Ānanda begged milk," the painter did not attempt to present the embarrassment Ānanda felt when he was refused, but vividly depicted a scene of rural life: a woman peasant is

⁴⁰ Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, "Dunhuang ben Weimojie jing 'Wenshushili wenjipin' yanyi ba" 敦煌本《維摩詰經》文殊師利問疾品演義跋, in *LWL*, vol. 2, pp. 447-53.

⁴¹ Jin Weinuo, *Zhongguo meishu shilun ji* 中國美術史論集 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981), pp. 397-408.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 409-21.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 397-408.

milking a cow while her son pulls a calf away from the cow. Scenes like this led Jin Weinuo to assert that these later Buddhist *bianxiang* were imbued with a vivid secular living atmosphere (*shenghuo qixi* 生活氣息).⁴⁴ Jin's scholarship has proven to be the cornerstone for later research into representations of Vimalakīrti. It must be noted, however, that his writings tend to ignore the religious motifs in these images.

He Shizhe 賀世哲 carried out his research on the motif of Vimalakīrti in the early 1980's, providing a systematic explanation of his opinions in the *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan* 敦煌石窟全集: 法華經畫卷⁴⁵ and "Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian" 敦煌莫高窟壁畫中的維摩詰經變.⁴⁶ He argues that Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* first appeared during the Sui dynasty, and that the exemplary works of the Early Tang dynasty may have been the creation of artists from central China, or were, perhaps, modeled on works from central China. Unlike Jin Weinuo, he points out that, with the exception of several outstanding paintings, the murals dating from the Middle and Late Tang became less creative in general, showing greater similarity in composition and more focus on Buddhist doctrines.

In 1990, Ning Qiang 寧強 published an essay entitled "Shangshi dengxiantu yu Weimojie jingbian" 上士登仙圖與維摩詰經變 in which he examined the two parts of the painting on the ceiling of Cave 249 (dated between 439 and 535).⁴⁷ In this essay, he suggests that one part of the mural was a depiction of Daoist immortals, while the other was based on a narrative story from the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. By comparing the

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 409-21.

⁴⁵ He Shizhe, "Weimojie jingbian," in *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, pp. 181-249.

⁴⁶ He Shizhe, "Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian", in *BNWK*, vol. 9, pp. 27-48.

⁴⁷ Ning Qiang, "Shangshi dengxiantu yu Weimojie jingbian," *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 1 (1990), pp. 30-37.

image of a goddess in Vimalakīrti's chamber with another painted by Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (344-405), he came to the conclusion that this representation was deeply influenced by the Southern Chinese style. This dating of the mural would make it the earliest surviving Vimalakīrti painting at Dunhuang.⁴⁸ His essay "Buddhist-Daoist Conflict and Gender Transformation: Deciphering the Illustrations of *the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa* in Mediaeval Chinese Art," is a careful examination of the Vimalakīrti images on the steles and cave walls.⁴⁹ For example, he notes that the female images were represented equal in size to the male figures and placed in positions superior to the main male disciples of Śākyamuni. He argues that this phenomenon reflected the significance of women in Buddhist society and their desire for recognition in Early Medieval China; in other cases, he suggests, the images were simply intended to flatter Empress Wu. He also points out that Vimalakīrti was occasionally represented as a Daoist figure instead of a lay Buddhist; he suggests that this was meant to flatter the Li royal family, who proclaimed themselves to be the descendents of Laozi, the progenitor of the Daoist religion. In his study of Cave 220, he also makes note of the fact that Buddha, who appears as a "judge" of the debate in the upper middle section of murals in Caves 332, 103, 159, and several others, does not appear in Cave 220. Finally, he suggests that the appearance of the Chinese emperor and his subjects in this mural is evidence of a further mingling of art, religion, and politics in the Early Tang.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ However, it seems that Ning again adopted He Shizhe's argument that the earliest surviving Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* at Dunhuang is dated to the Sui dynasty in his later publication. See Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Caves of the Zhai Family* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 53.

⁴⁹ Ning Qiang, "Buddhist-Daoist Conflict and Gender Transformation: Deciphering the Illustrations of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa in Mediaeval Chinese Art," *Orientalism* (Nov., 1996), pp. 50-59.

⁵⁰ Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China*, pp. 53-54.

Xiao Mo's 蕭默 book *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu* 敦煌建築研究 includes two main subjects: the layout of the Dunhuang cave-temples and the depictions of contemporary architecture (palace, temples and cities) in the wall paintings. He argues that the caves were designed on the basis of temples, and that their structures and religious functions were, accordingly, linked to those of temples. He also examines the transformation of the styles of the Dunhuang caves.⁵¹

Yi Cunguo's 易存國 research on Dunhuang art is an all-inclusive study of paintings, sculpture, architecture, dance, and literature. He also examines extensively the origins of *bianwen* and *bianxiang*. He argues that these were traditional forms in both China and India, and that paintings and writing were combined to aid in the visualization of Buddhist doctrines. He proposes that the *bianwen* and *bianxiang* bearing the motif of *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* can be taken as exemplary.⁵²

In recent years, Taiwanese scholars have also conducted research on *Vimalakīrti bianxiang*. In an essay published in 1991, Chen Qingxiang 陳清香 describes the editions and spread of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, and analyzes the historical and artistic value of *Vimalakīrti bianxiang* in Dunhuang.⁵³ She argues that the *Vimalakīrti bianxiang* did not come into being until the Early Tang. During this early period, these *bianxiang* dealt only with material drawn from the chapters containing “Mañjuśrī’s Consolation of the Invalid.” It was only during the High Tang that the *Vimalakīrti bianxiang* began to

⁵¹ Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu* (Beijing: Jixie gongye chubanshe, 2003).

⁵² Yi Cunguo, *Dunhuang yishu meixue* 敦煌藝術美學 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005), pp. 313-36.

⁵³ Chen Qingxiang, “Dunhuang bihua zhong de Weimo jingbian” 敦煌壁畫中的維摩經變 in *Di er jie Dunhuang xue guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 第二屆敦煌學國際研討會論文集, Zhongguo wenhua daxue Zhongguo wenxue xi 中國文化大學中國文學系 et al. eds. (Taipei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin, 1991), pp. 373-93.

mature, incorporating more chapters of the sūtra and introducing new figures. During the period following the Late Tang, the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* reached a peak in terms of the complexity of composition and variety of figures. This complexity necessitated the use of descriptions (*bangti* 榜題) to clarify the stories and doctrines.

Wang Zhimei 王志楣 provides an interpretation of the influences of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* among Chinese literati, and in literature and art.⁵⁴ By analyzing the written records of the Southern Dynasties, Wang argues that Vimalakīrti's lifestyle represented the model of an ideal spiritual existence to which many Chinese literati aspired. Following Jin Weinuo's scholarship, Wang also suggests that the Dunhuang murals reached maturity during the period between the Sui and Northern Song (960-1127) dynasties, and were primarily influenced by the art of central China.

The motif of Vimalakīrti has also received some attention by Western academics. Because it was often represented together with other sūtras, Leroy Davidson discusses the Vimalakīrti paintings during the course of his examination of the *Lotus Sūtra bianxiang*. Davidson notices that stories from the *Lotus Sūtra* and *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* were often combined within one mural.⁵⁵ He argues that the introduction of the image of Vimalakīrti can be attributed largely to his virtues, which were in accord with those required of a Confucian teacher: living at home, having a wife and children, and being revered by all.⁵⁶ Thus, this representation could be seen as an attempt by Buddhist benefactors to win over the Confucian literati.

⁵⁴ Wang Zhimei, "Weimojie jing yu Zhongguo wenren wenxue yishu" 維摩詰經與中國文人文學藝術, *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 5.7 (1992), pp. 263-98.

⁵⁵ Leroy Davidson, *The Lotus Sutra in Chinese Art: A Study in Buddhist Art to the Year 1000* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), pp. 29-49.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China by Eugene Wang examines the wall paintings of the *Lotus Sutra* theme. He believes that the pictures encompassed the temporal and spatial domains that the texts delimited. He also pays attention to the iconographic hybridization of the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* and the *xiangmo bianxiang* 降魔變相, owing to the similarly supernatural power of the protagonists, Vimalakīrti in the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* and Śāriputra in the *xiangmobian*.⁵⁷

In her essay “Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti,”⁵⁸ Emma Bunker argues that the absence of representations of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* in early Indian and Central Asian art suggests that Chinese artists had no foreign prototypes to guide them. Instead, they were forced to invent their own iconographic formulas for illustrating the sūtra. Two traditions of representation took form during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, a pictorial tradition for southern Buddhism and a sculptural tradition in the north. However, the northern traditions probably absorbed southern influences. This is indicated by similarities in the reliefs of Binyang 賓陽 Cave 3 (at Longmen, built between 508 and 523) with Gu Kaizhi and Dai Kui’s 戴逵 (?-396) works in the south. Marilyn Rhie applied Bunker’s suggestion, with greater detail, in her research on Pingyang 平陽 Cave III.⁵⁹

In “What is *Bianxiang*?” Wu Hung points out that the pictures of the famous debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī depict the two in direct spatial opposition. He compares Vimalakīrti *bianxiang* to the “Subjugation” *bianxiang* depicting the fight

⁵⁷ Eugene Wang, *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), pp. 370-73.

⁵⁸ Emma C. Bunker, “Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti,” *Artibus Asiae*, 30. 1 (1968), pp. 28-52.

⁵⁹ Marilyn Rhie, *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), vol. 2, pp. 193-98.

between Śāriputra and Raudrāksha. Both stories have a pair of opposing characters, a central theme of competition, and abundant magical manifestations. The early representations were simple, portraying the two debaters and their followers in two opposing groups, in association with their “antagonist themes.”⁶⁰ However, the darkness and cramped space of the caves in which the paintings are located precludes easy viewing. This suggests the possibility that these paintings were painted solely for the sake of creation instead of as visual aids for ritual performances.

In her newly published book, *Performing the Visual: The Practices of Buddhist Wall Paintings in China and Central Asia, 618-960*, Sarah Fraser also mentions the depictions of the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī. She argues that the close cultural contact between Dunhuang and the central plains from the Sui dynasty to the middle of the Tang dynasty ensured that cultural models and compositions from the capital, Chang’an, were very popular at Dunhuang and were used repeatedly over a long time. Among the most popular of these was the famous debate.⁶¹ She also notes that depictions of the debate were often placed on the east wall opposite the “Subjugation” *bianxiang*.⁶²

A most recent research by Lilla Russell-Smith, *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, is on the patronage of the high-ranking Uygur women. By examining visual images from Dunhuang and Xinjiang, she explained how the political and social aspects shaped the patronage and production of the Buddhist art during the tenth and eleventh centuries. In

⁶⁰ Wu Hung, “What is *Bianxiang*? ---On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature,” *HJAS* 52.1 (1992), pp. 149-50.

⁶¹ Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practices of Buddhist Wall Paintings in China and Central Asia, 618-960* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 52-54.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.121.

addition, the Vimalakīrti painting is one of the various motifs she investigates. By studying the iconography, technique, and composition of a wall painting from Cave 3, Murque (present day Baixiha, Xinjiang province), she argues that this painting dates from the tenth century, and is an evidence for the mutual influence between Dunhuang and the Uyghurs.⁶³

The above scholarship provides a general historical and artistic background of Dunhuang against which my own research can be developed. These works also suggest the possible relationship between *bianwen* and *bianxiang*, and their respective functions during performance. I take as a starting point two preliminary observations arising from the research related to the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang*: first, it is evident that most scholars believe that Vimalakīrti's images may be a Chinese creation (in a cultural and ethnic sense); and, second, these works bring to our attention the fact that Vimalakīrti's representation was influenced by Chinese art in the central plains. However, they do not describe the difference between the images in terms of artistic style or cultural background.

Main Chapters

The body of the thesis is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter describes the important visual representations of Vimalakīrti before the Sui dynasty. Because authorities from different ethnic groups controlled north and south China between the fourth and the sixth centuries, I will undertake a comparative examination of the traditions of these two areas. I will also examine the reasons for the absence of

⁶³ Lilla Russell-Smith, *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 91-96.

Vimalakīrti images in Inner Asia in comparison to the variety of written records and visual images found in China, with the intention of discovering whether Vimalakīrti should be regarded as a Chinese creation.

The second chapter of the thesis will provide an introduction to representations of Vimalakīrti at Dunhuang from the late sixth to the eleventh centuries. As there were three different governments controlling the Dunhuang region, the description of the images will be divided according to the periods of their rule. In addition to these images, a large number of poems were devoted to Vimalakīrti, providing a different vehicle for the Vimalakīrti theme. This chapter will examine the parallel Vimalakīrtis in the written sources and visual images.

The third chapter examines the social functions and symbolic meanings of the Vimalakīrti paintings at Dunhuang. The images were designed for and involved in ritual practices carried out at the cave temples, thus these paintings manifest not only aesthetic but also social and religious values. The social nature of these paintings will be further considered by examining the social positions and identities of patrons.

Chapter 1 Pre-Sui Representations of Vimalakīrti

The rise of Buddhism in China coincided with major political divisions and social upheaval. In 314, Former Zhao (304-29) sacked the Western Jin (265-316) capital, Luoyang, and the Western Jin court was forced to move and re-established itself at Chang'an. Only two years later, in 316, the Former Zhao overran Chang'an, and the Western Jin fell. These events signaled the beginning of the period of disunity; the empire was not reunified until 589. In north China, numerous minority ethnic groups—Xiongnu 匈奴, Xianbei 鮮卑, Jie 羯, Di 氐, Qiang 羌—along with several Han warlords controlled the so-called Northern Dynasties (386-581). In the south, various Han lineage groups established a series of contending dynasties known as the Eastern Jin (317-420) and the Southern Dynasties (420-589). Although Buddhism encountered some resistance and even persecution during this period, its primary experience was one of adaptation and ascendance.⁶⁴ A large number of Buddhist sūtras were introduced into south and north China. According to the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, 404 sūtras were translated into Chinese during the Eastern Jin, and 668 sūtras were translated during the Southern Dynasties.⁶⁵ Great families and emperors such as Emperor Wu (502-49) and Jianwen 簡

⁶⁴ In the south, Yin Xiaomo 尹蕭摹 (5th cent.) suggested that the private construction of Buddhist statues and stupas be forbidden; Emperor Xiaowu 孝武 (r. 454-64) of the Liu Song (420-79) commanded monks and nuns to obey Confucian rituals and respect their parents and the emperor. Guo Zushen 郭祖深 and Xun Ji 荀濟 wrote letters to Emperor Wu 武 (r. 502-49) of the Xiao Liang (502-57) to criticize the luxurious lifestyles of the Buddhist clergy and their contradiction with Confucian ethical ideals. See “Manyi zhuan 蠻夷傳,” in *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), *juan* 97, pp. 2377-99. In comparison, the transformation of Buddhism encountered more serious suppression in the north. Northern China saw two large-scale suppressions carried out by Emperor Taiwu 太武 (r. 424-52) of the Northern Wei (386-534) in 446 and Emperor Wu (560-578) of the Northern Zhou (557-81) in 574. See Li Yanshou 李延壽, *Nan shi* 南史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 70/1720-24.

⁶⁵ This period from 317 to 420 in the *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄 covers the following dynasties: the Eastern Jin (317-420), the Former Liang (314-76) and the Later Qin (384-417), the Western Qin (385-431) and Northern Liang (401-39). See Zhisheng 智昇 (8th cent.), *Kaiyuan shijiao lu*, in *DZJ*, T55, *juan* 9, pp. 502-19, 523-45.

文 (r. 550-51) of the Xiao Liang, and Emperor Daowu 道武 (r. 386-409) of the Northern Wei (386-534) became patrons of eminent monks and monasteries.⁶⁶ It was in this context that the images of Vimalakīrti first appeared in China.

The Representation of Vimalakīrti in South China

Zhiqian rendered a Chinese translation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* in the early third century,⁶⁷ suggesting that the sūtra was introduced into China at least by that point. The sūtra and Vimalakīrti himself became increasingly popular within Buddhist monastic and lay society over the course of the Southern Dynasties. It was translated six times, and was also the frequent object of study and commentary. According to the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 and other primary sources, Buddhist masters who commented on this sūtra included Daozu 道祖 (ca. 3rd cent.), Daorong 道融 (4th cent.), and Sengzhao 僧肇 (374–414) of the Eastern Jin dynasty, and Huijing 慧靜 (379-439) and Sengjing 僧鏡 (408-75) of the Liu Song dynasty (420-79).⁶⁸ Many other masters were specialists on this sūtra: Kang Senghui 康僧會 (ca. 3rd cent.) of the Wu Kingdom (222-80),⁶⁹ Zhidun 支遁 (314-66), Faxu 法緒 (ca. 3rd-4th cent.), and Zhu Fachun 竺法純 (ca. 5th cent.) of the Jin Dynasty,⁷⁰ Tandi 曇諦 (ca. 390-453), Sengdao 僧導 (ca. 358-454), Sengyin 僧隱 (ca. 5th cent.),

⁶⁶ Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1992), vol. 1, pp. 181-84.

⁶⁷ Zhiqian translated this sūtra into Chinese around the second decade of the third century. He went to the kingdom of Wu (220-280), where the king Sun Quan 孫權 welcomed him and appointed him a teacher to the royal prince. See Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518), *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, in *DZJ*, T55, *juan* 13, pp. 96-97.

⁶⁸ Huijiao 慧皎, *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, in *DZJ*, T50, pp. 363-69; 373. Among them, Sengzhao went to Chang'an to study with Kumārajīva from 401, and stayed in the north until his death.

⁶⁹ Jizang, *Weimo jing yishu*, in *DZJ*, T38, p. 974.

⁷⁰ As for Zhidun, see Zanning 贊寧, *Da Song seng shilue* 大宋僧史略, in *DZJ*, T54, pp. 239-40; for Faxu and Zhu fachun, see Huijiao, T50, pp. 396; 406.

Fazong 法宗 (dates unknown), Huiji 慧基 (411-96), Senghou 僧侯 (395-484), Huiwen 慧溫 (dates unknown), Sengbian 僧辯 (?-493), Daosheng 道盛 (ca. 428-88) and Daoxin 道馨 (ca. 5th cent.) of the Song period,⁷¹ and Sengzong 僧宗 (437-96) and Fa'an 法安 (453-98) of the Xiao Qi dynasty (479-502).⁷² The reception of the sūtra is illustrated in this description of Sengzhao's 僧肇 decision to convert to Buddhism after reading the sūtra:

(Sengzhao) preferred the mystic and subtle. He always took the *Zhuangzi* and *Laozi* (or *Daodejing* 道德經) as the essentials of his thought. One time, after reading the “De” Chapter in the *Laozi*, he sighed, “Although it is beautiful, it is still not perfect in terms of accumulating one’s karma for the other life.” At a later time, seeing the earlier version the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, he was pleased and completely accepted. After examining and understanding it, he exclaimed that he began to know what he should achieve. As a result he left home [and became a devotee].

(僧肇) 愛好玄微, 每以《莊》《老》爲心要。嘗讀《老子德章》, 乃嘆曰: “美則美矣, 然期神冥累之方, 猶未儘善也。” 後見舊《維摩經》, 歡喜頂受, 披尋玩味, 乃言始知所歸矣。因此出家。⁷³

Among those who read the sūtra was Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty. His commentary on the work is entitled *Jingming jing yiji* (Records of the Meaning of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* 淨名經義記).⁷⁴

⁷¹ For Daoxin, see Zanning, T54, p. 239; for the others, see Huijiao, *Gaoseng zhuan*, in *DZJ*, T50, pp. 370-71; 401; 407; 379; 408; 414; 376.

⁷² Huijiao, *Gaoseng zhuan*, in *DZJ*, T50, pp. 379-80.

⁷³ Huijiao, in *DZJ*, T50, p. 365.

The *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語 contains anecdotes on elite life from the late Han (202 B.C.E.-220 C.E.) to the Eastern Jin (317-420) that provide evidence of a general enthusiasm for this sūtra. In one anecdote, we learn that this was the first Buddhist sūtra Yin Hao 殷浩 (ca. 4th cent.) read after his banishment to Dongyang 東陽 in present-day Zhejiang province.⁷⁵ In others, we learn that members of the elite often employed Vimalakīrti's stories and words in their *qingtān* (pure talk/conversation 清談).⁷⁶ For example, a conversation between Zhi Dun 支遁 and Wang Tanzhi 王坦之 (ca. 4th cent.) concerned explanations of the sūtra:

Zhi Daolin (Dun) composed a "Treatise on Matter-as-such." When the treatise was completed he showed it to the Palace Attendant Wang (Tanzhi). Wang looked it over without saying anything whatsoever. Zhi asked, "Are you understanding it in silence?" Wang replied, "Since no Mañjuśrī is present, who can appreciate it?"⁷⁷

支道林造《即色論》成，示王中郎，中郎都無言。支曰：“默而識之乎？”王曰：“既無文殊，誰能見賞？”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Yao Silian 姚思廉, *Liang shu* 梁書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973), vol. 1, p. 96. This book is not seen in any later historical bibliographies.

⁷⁵ Xu Zhen'e 徐震堦, *Shishuo xinyu jiaojian* 世說新語校箋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), p. 127.

⁷⁶ *Qingtān* refers to a major Wei-Jin intellectual activity that incorporated philosophical discussions of life, society, and the universe. A great number of these stories were recorded in the *Shishuo xinyu*. See Qian Nanxiu, *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsin-yü and its Legacy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), p. 14; Tang Yiming 唐翼明, *Wei Jin qingtān* 魏晉清談 (Beijing: Renmin wuxue chubanshe, 2002), pp. 30-32.

⁷⁷ Richard B. Mather trans., *A New Account of Tales of the World* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 113.

⁷⁸ Xu Zhen'e, p. 121.

Here, a story from the sūtra is used as an allusion, implying that both men were familiar with the text. The story concerns a discussion between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī on the principle of non-duality:

Then the crown prince Mañjuśrī said to the Licchavi Vimalakīrti, “We have all given our own teachings, noble sir. Now, may you elucidate the teaching of the entrance into the principle of non-duality!” Thereupon, the Licchavi Vimalakīrti kept his silence, saying nothing at all. The crown prince Mañjuśrī applauded the Licchavi Vimalakīrti: “Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the non-duality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas.”⁷⁹

Zhi Dun compared Wang’s silence with that of Vimalakīrti. The analogy of a lay Buddhist as a lay bodhisattva showed Zhi Dun’s appreciation of Wang and his expectation of understanding.

As evidenced by this account of Zhi Dun and the lay Buddhist Xu Yuan 許掾 (4th cent.), chanting and discussing this sūtra had also become fashionable:

Zhi Dun (Daolin), Xu Yuan and other people were once gathered at the villa of Wang. Zhi acted as the dharma master and Xu as sūtra chanter. [Note: *Gaoyi shamen zhuan* (The Bibliographies of Eminent and Retired Monks) said, “At this time, Daolin was interpreting *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*.”] Whenever Zhi made an interpretation there was no one present who was not completely satisfied, and whenever Xu delivered an objection everyone applauded and danced with delight.

⁷⁹ Robert A. F. Thurman trans., *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: a Mahāyāna Scripture*, p. 77.

They were all filled with admiration for the rhetorical skill of the two performers, but without distinguishing the real meaning of the doctrines.⁸⁰

支道林、許掾諸人共在王齋頭。支爲法師，許爲都講。注：《高逸沙門傳》曰：“道林時講《維摩詰經》。”支通一義，四座莫不厭心。許送一難，眾人莫不拊掌。但共嗟詠二家之美，不辯其理之所在。⁸¹

The audience was fascinated by the excellent performance of Zhi and Xu. The arguments of both were persuasive, but neither was able to overcome the other. Zhi and Xu took opposing stances in a debate that paralleled the debate recorded in the sūtra between a monk and a lay Buddhist.

Zürcher has analyzed the popularity of this sūtra in early medieval China. According to his study, the sūtra contained elements that recommended it to both laity and monks. It could, on the one hand, be regarded primarily as a valuable compendium of Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine,⁸² on the other hand, the sūtra also contained features that made it particularly attractive to cultured Chinese; for example, the protagonists' fantastic dialogue resembled that of the eloquent *qingtān* adept and the sūtra was translated into an elegant Chinese language.⁸³ Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 argues that these two modes of reception were not strictly divided between monks and laity. He suggests that the sūtra took the

⁸⁰ Richard B. Mather trans., p. 113.

⁸¹ Xu Zhen'e, p. 124. Also see Huijiao, *Gaoseng zhuan*, in *DZJ*, T50, p. 0348. The English translation is on the basis of Richard B. Mather trans., p. 113.

⁸² During the end of Eastern Han, An Shigao 安世高 and Zhiyoujiachen 支婁迦讖 (Lokakṣema) separately introduced a great number of Mahāyāna and Hīnayāna Buddhist scriptures, which were transmitted to society. This implies that people could recognize the co-existence of these two schools. Lou Yulie 樓宇烈. "Dacheng fojiao he xiaocheng fojiao de qubie yiji zai Zhongguo liuxing de qingkuang" 大乘佛教和小乘佛教的區別以及在中國流行的情況, in *Zhongguo lizhi fengsu mantan* 中國禮制風俗漫談 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986), pp. 222-25.

⁸³ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: Brill, 1959), vol.1, pp. 131-32.

Buddhist concept of the “other world” into “this world”: the sūtra secularized the lifestyle of Buddhist monks, while also providing a religious influence on the laity.⁸⁴

Given this context, it is not surprising that Vimalakīrti’s image was frequently represented during this period on various occasions. The first well-known artist to have produced a Vimalakīrti image was the famous and highly regarded Eastern Jin painter Gu Kaizhi.⁸⁵ Born into an official family in Wuxi, Jiangsu province, Gu served as a government officer from young adulthood.⁸⁶ He is widely regarded as the founder of traditional Chinese painting. Gu’s venerated painting of Vimalakīrti⁸⁷ was regarded as one of the three excellences (*jue*, 絕) of the Wuguan Monastery.⁸⁸ A story was told about the making of this mural,

Another time, Gu Kaizhi (style name Changkang 長康, nickname Hutou 虎頭) painted Vimalakīrti in the northern small hall of the Wuguan Monastery 瓦官寺. After it was done, the painting retained its radiant color for a long time. The *Jingshi si ji* 京師寺記 (The Record of the Capital’s Monasteries) stated, “In the middle of Xingning Era (363-65), Wuguan Monastery was just established. The monks called a gathering, and invited the worthies in the court to donate. At that time, no gentry donated more than one hundred thousand. When it was Changkang’s turn, he directly made a note of one million. He had always been poor, so the people thought he was boasting. Later, the monks called in the

⁸⁴ Ren Jiyu, *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中國佛教史 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1981), p. 401.

⁸⁵ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 97.

⁸⁶ Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513), *Song shu* 宋書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), pp. 2079-87.

⁸⁷ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 94.

⁸⁸ This mural, together with a jade statue from Sri Lanka and Dai Kui’s sculpture of the Buddha, were claimed to be the “Three Excellences” (*sanjue*, 三絕) of the Wuguan Monastery. This image was still an attraction for the intellectuals into the Tang dynasty. See Zhipan 志磐, *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, in *DZJ*, T49, *juan* 36, p. 348.

donation. Changkang said, 'A wall should be prepared.' He kept the door closed while he commuted back and forth between his home and his monastery for over one month. What he had painted was an image of Vimalakīrti. When it was finished, he told the monks in the monastery before he painted the eyes, 'visitors on the first day should be asked to donate one hundred thousand cash, fifty thousand cash on the second day.' When the door was opened, the radiance of the painting was shining in the monastery. Donors crowded in, and a million cash was had in no time."

長康又曾於瓦官寺北小殿畫維摩詰，畫訖光彩耀目數日。《京師寺記》云：興寧中瓦官寺初置，僧眾設會，請朝賢鳴剎註疏，其時士大夫莫有過十萬者；既至長康，直打剎注百萬。長康素貧，眾以為大言。後寺僧請勾疏，長康曰：“宜備一壁。”遂閉戶往來一月余日，所畫維摩一軀，工畢，將欲點眸子，乃謂寺僧曰：“第一日觀者請施十萬，第二日可五萬，第三日可任例責施。”及開戶，光照一寺，施者填咽，俄而得百萬錢。⁸⁹

In some ways, the scene depicted in this legend is reminiscent of the crowds that are attracted to paintings in art museums or blockbuster exhibitions today. However, in the fourth century, a Buddhist monastery functioned mainly as a place for religious rituals. Therefore, this text suggests not only the ability of a well-executed painting to attract a crowd, but also the popularity of Vimalakīrti as an object of veneration.

Since this painting is no longer extant, we can only know it through several sporadic descriptions by its witnesses. Zhang Yanyuan commented that, “Master Gu was the first to make a picture of Weimojie [Vimalakīrti]. [He is portrayed] with well defined

⁸⁹ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 99.

and emaciated features that plainly show his illness, and [is shown] leaning upon a table having forgotten speech” 顧生首創維摩詰像，有清羸示病之容，隱幾忘言之狀。⁹⁰ From the description of sickness, it is clear that this painting represented Vimalakīrti in the debate. Furthermore, *shouchuang* 首創 confirmed the originality of this image by Gu Kaizhi. The mention of Vimalakīrti’s silence is also important: silence should not be taken as a loss for words but as evidence of a higher level of understanding. This silence was the expression of an all-inclusive answer to Mañjuśrī’s question. The above description indicates a striking parallel between the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* and the *Zhuangzi*. The image of emaciation and *yinji* 隱几 (leaning upon a table) is quite similar to Nanguo Ziqi, who was said to lean upon an armrest, with his body like a withered tree and his mind like dead ashes. *Wangyan* 忘言 (having forgotten speech) is also one of the most important aesthetic ideas in the *Zhuangzi*, meaning that words are not important if one gets the meaning.⁹¹ Owing to the popularity of the *Zhuangzi* during the Southern Dynasties among the literati, the Vimalakīrti that Gu Kaizhi painted represented an ideal gentleman, and these imaginary characters will be represented in the coming years.

People who saw this wall painting always left with a deep impression. The famous Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-70) once chanted a poem about a copy of this famous image,

On Seeing off the Reminder Xu Ba on his Return Journey to Jiangning (now

Nanjing, Jiangsu province). In the past, I once visited this county, and requested a

⁹⁰ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 41. William Acker trans., *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting* (Westport: Hyperion Press, 1979), p. 193.

⁹¹ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 ed., *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), vol. 1, p. 43; vol. 4, pp. 943-44. Burton Watson trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York; London: Columbia University, 1968), pp. 36; 302.

copy of Vimalakīrti of Waguan Monastery from Scholar Xu. This is recorded at the end of this text.

...

I felt hungry and thirsty while looking at the painting,

But it is so vague and remote while I was chasing its trace.

The image of the Gold Grain Tathāgata (Vimalakīrti) by Hutou (Gu Kaizhi),

His magic spirit is just unforgettable.⁹²

送許八拾遺歸江寧觀省。甫昔時嘗客遊此縣，於許生處乞瓦棺寺維摩圖樣，志諸篇末。

.....

看畫曾飢渴，追蹤恨淼茫。

虎頭金栗影，神妙獨難忘。

Even though Du Fu had seen the copy of this painting only once, hearing of Jiangning years later still evoked a powerful memory of Gu's work. What impressed Du Fu were not the details of this painting, but the spirit (*shen* 神) of the figure. The meaning of *shen* is close to the descriptions of *dianjing* (點睛, painting the eyes) and *guangzhao yisi* (光照一寺, the radiance of the painting shining in the monastery) in Zhang Yanyuan's narration. The resonance of spirit was ranked first among "Six Laws" (*liufa*, 六法), which were considered the standard of painting techniques by Xie He 謝赫 (fl. 500).⁹³

⁹² Du Fu, "Song Xu Ba gui Jiangning 送許八歸江寧," in *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩, Qing Shengzu 清聖祖 comp. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), *juan* 225, p. 2414.

⁹³ The Six Laws were first mentioned by Xie He in his *Guhua pinlu* 古畫品錄. They included: spirit resonance (*qiyun shengdong* 氣韻生動); bone method (*gufa yongbi* 骨法用筆); reflecting the object (*yingwu xiangxing* 應物像形); appropriateness to type (*suilei fucai* 隨類賦彩); division and planning (*jingying weizhi* 經營位置); transmission and conveying (*chuanyi moxie* 傳移模寫). See Acker, p. 4.

Several other painters from south China, like Zhang Mo 張墨 (dates unknown), Lu Tanwei 陸探微 (5th cent.), Zhang Sengyou, and Yuan Qian 袁倩 (ca. 5th cent.) also produced images of Vimalakīrti. According to Zhang Yanyuan's description, the above painters living during the fifth century were either personally associated with Emperor Ming (r. 465-72), also a Buddhist painter and devoted patron, or served as officials in the royal court. Therefore, these "famous paintings" (*minghua* 名畫) contributed to the development of a refined court style during the Southern Dynasties.

Lu Tanwei enjoyed a high reputation for portraiture. He produced two paintings of Vimalakīrti: one Vimalakīrti portrait (*Weimo xiang* 維摩像) and one painting of Ānanda and Vimalakīrti (*Anan Weimo tu* 阿難維摩圖).⁹⁴ The latter painting probably depicted the meeting between these two figures during which Vimalakīrti explained the function of fragrant food to Ānanda.⁹⁵ Zhang Sengyou was also a famous portrait painter. He left a portrait of Vimalakīrti, which was extant until the Late Tang. However, according to Zhang Yanyuan, their works remained inferior to Gu's in terms of painting technique. "Lu [Tanwei] and Zhang [Sengyou] both tried to equal this portrait, but never did so" 陸與張皆效之, 終不及也.⁹⁶

Yuan Qian, the foremost student of Lu Tanwei, was the first to use the *bian* genre to represent the stories of Vimalakīrti. Although his painting technique was reckoned to

⁹⁴ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 127.

⁹⁵ When Ānanda sensed some perfume that he had never smelled before, he was told this perfume emanated from the bodies of all those who partook of the fragrant food. Then Vimalakīrti explained to him the function of the food. It could not be digested until one entered a higher level of cultivation. Here, the fragrant food can be understood as a symbol of knowledge or cultivation. See Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 122-23.

⁹⁶ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 41. Acker trans., p. 193.

be only of the upper middle rank (*shang zhong pin* 上中品), his *Vimalakīrti bian* was undoubtedly a masterpiece:

[Yuan] also painted a scroll of *Vimalakīrti bian*, including more than one hundred stories. Its composition is lofty and refined, the Six Laws [of painting] were all presented, and the positioning was without error. Like having communion with the divine souls, (people) gazed at the painting with reverence, pointing and looking. The painting made the preceding painters, like Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei, feel a sense of shame, and made the following painters, like Zhang Sengyou and Yan Liben, sigh in astonishment.

又《維摩詰變》一卷，百有余事，運思高妙，六法備呈，置位無差。若神靈感會精光，指顧得瞻仰威容，前使顧、陸知慚，後得張、閻駭嘆。⁹⁷

From the above text, we know that Yuan painted the *bian* on a scroll. The perfect arrangement of a number of incidents demonstrated both the narrative quality of this painting and Yuan's familiarity with and appreciation of the *sūtra*.

Some of the representations discussed above were preserved by later generations. In Zhang Yanyuan's time, the works of Zhang Mo, Lu Tanwei, Gu Kaizhi, and Zhang Sengyou were still extant. Many of the murals were transmitted through copies, such as the one seen by Du Fu. Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107), a famous Northern Song painter, probably owned a painting (or at least a copy) of the *Vimalakīrti* by Gu Kaizhi.⁹⁸ Interestingly, in times of disorder, these "fixed" murals could even be moved to more

⁹⁷ Zhang Yanyuan, p. 134.

⁹⁸ Acker deduced that Mi probably had a painting, or at least a copy, of *Vimalakīrti* by Gu Kaizhi, owing to the name of his workshop, "Jingming zhai (淨名齋, Workshop of *Vimalakīrti*).” See Acker, pp. 372-73.

secure places. For example, when the Buddhist persecution was initiated in 845,⁹⁹ the Vimalakīrti mural by Gu Kaizhi and the Mañjuśrī by Dai Kui were moved to the Ganlu 甘露 temple (now Zhengjiang, Jiangsu province), for which Li Deyu 李德裕 (787-849), the Minister of Wuzong's reign, was the patron.¹⁰⁰ Both murals were placed on the western wall, which was probably the original arrangement in the Waguan temple.¹⁰¹

Generally speaking, the prosperity of Buddhist religion and the appreciation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* among the elite and scholars led to a growing public awareness of the themes of Vimalakīrti paintings. These paintings exhibited different styles such as portrait painting and narrative painting, and most followed a two-dimensional pictorial tradition, as opposed to a sculptural tradition. These masterpieces played an important role in the formation of a court style in which visual representations of Vimalakīrti held a prominent place.

The Representation of Vimalakīrti in North China

Although people in the north did not show as great an interest in the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* as those in the south, it was still widely accepted at court and among higher officials and the populace.

Yao Xing 姚興 (r. 394-416), king of the Later Qin (384-417), showed great enthusiasm for this sūtra, which he regarded as “the dwelling of resting spirits” 棲神之宅

⁹⁹ Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 841-46) ordered the Buddhist persecution; see his edict “Hui fosi le sengni huansu zhi” 毀佛寺勒僧尼還俗制, in Dong Hao 董浩 comp., *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), vol. 1. *juan* 76, p. 350.

¹⁰⁰ Li Deyu and Niu Sengru 牛僧儒 led two parties in the Niu-Li Faction struggle. Emperor Wuzong was in favor of Li, and appointed him the Prime Minister. See Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修, “Li Deyu zhuan” 李德裕傳, in *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), vol. 17, pp. 5335-41; Michael Dalby, “Court Politics in Late T'ang Times,” in Denis Twitchett ed., *The Cambridge History of China* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), vol. 3, pp. 639-54. As for the story, see Acker, pp. 366-72.

¹⁰¹ Zhang Yanyuan, pp. 74-75. Acker trans., p. 372.

¹⁰² The great translator Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (385-409), one of the most famous translators in Chinese history, had traveled to north China and was invited to the Later Qin.¹⁰³ Kumārajīva rendered a translation of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* from Sanskrit.

The Xiaowen 孝文 emperor (r. 471-99) of the Northern Wei, a promoter of Chinese culture, invited Tandu 曇度 (d. 489), an expert on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, to give instructions on the Satyasiddhi Shastra (成實) at the capital Pingcheng (present day Datong, Shanxi province).¹⁰⁴ The next emperor, Xuanwu 宣武 (r. 499-515), personally instructed his courtiers on this sūtra.¹⁰⁵ Available visual representations in the north included sculptures, wall paintings, and steles found at Bingling (Gansu province), Gongxian 鞏縣 (Henan province), Tianlongshan 天龍山 (Shanxi province), Yungang 雲岡 (Shanxi province), Longmen 龍門 (Henan province), and Maijishan 麥積山 (Gansu province). (See Appendix 3)

The first of these images, found in Cave 169 at Bingling, dates to 420, a time when which the region was under the control of the Western Qin (385-431) (fig. 1-1). The mural is found on a northern wall, and shows Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī on the right (east) and left (west) sides of Amitābha.¹⁰⁶ An inscription reading “image of Vimalakīrti” (*Weimojie zhi xiang* 維摩詰之像) proves the figure’s identity. Vimalakīrti is depicted leaning on a bed, with his left elbow resting on a dais, accompanied by an attendant beside him. He is represented as a bodhisattva rather than a lay Buddhist, as indicated by

¹⁰² Sengzhao 僧肇, *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經, in *DZJ*, T38, p. 327.

¹⁰³ Fei Zhangfang 費長房, *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, in *DZJ*, T49, p. 79; Huijiao, *DZJ*, T50, pp. 330-33.

¹⁰⁴ Huijiao, *Gaoseng zhuan*, in *DZJ*, T50, p. 375.

¹⁰⁵ Wei Shou 魏收, *Wei shu* 魏書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), p. 209.

¹⁰⁶ Gansu sheng bowuguan 甘肅省博物館 et al. ed., *Bingling si shiku* 炳靈寺石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982), figure 3, pp. 5-6.

his clothes and the halo around his head. His body, especially the chest and waist, is painted in a slightly feminine way, which is a distinguishing feature of Indian and Central Asian techniques.

The Yungang caves are located at Mount Wuzhou 武州, near the Northern Wei capital Pingcheng. The distinct structural and thematic divisions of these caves correspond to three periods: the first, coinciding with Emperor Wencheng's 文成 reign (452-65), was characterized by an attempted revival of Buddhism following the suppression by Emperor Taiwu; the second period, beginning with Emperor Xiaowen's succession to the throne in 465 and ending in 494, the year in which the capital moved to Luoyang, saw the most prosperous production at Yungang; the third period, dating from 495 to 524, marked a decline in production in terms of both quality and quantity.¹⁰⁷ Eleven sculptures related to Vimalakīrti have been dated to the second and third periods. Cave 6, created between 477 and 483, contains a relief representing the sūtra (fig. 1-2). Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī sit on either side of Buddha. Vimalakīrti wears typical Han-style garments and sits on a small table, while Mañjuśrī shows a greater Indian influence, with a curved sitting posture and his loose-fitting vestment on his body.¹⁰⁸ A similar representation was produced in Cave 5A; the garments and postures are virtually identical (fig. 1-3). A relief containing Vimalakīrti is carved into the southern wall of Cave 45, which was built during the third period (fig. 1-4). The lines of his image are very

¹⁰⁷ Shanxi sheng wenwu gongzuo weiyuanhui 山西省文物工作委員會 et al. comp., *Yungang shiku* 云岡石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1977), pp. 5-11.

¹⁰⁸ Bunker, p. 31.

simple.¹⁰⁹ All these figures adopt the same posture: seated on a short dais, with a chowry in one hand, and with the other hand resting on one knee or a bed.

After the Northern Wei moved its capital to Luoyang in 494, the nearby Longmen Caves were developed. The first thirty-five years witnessed a profuse production of sculptures patronized by imperial families, high officials, and nobles.¹¹⁰

The lintel of a niche on the northern wall of the Guyang 古陽 Cave at Longmen, shows a scene of the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī (fig. 1-5). This cave was constructed around the time of Emperor Xiaoming (r. 516-28).¹¹¹ These two bodhisattvas began to be represented with a group of attendants. Another relief of Vimalakīrti was created on the lintel of a niche in the Lianhua 蓮花 Cave during the same period (fig. 1-6). While the debate was presented on the lintel, small sculpted images of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī were set apart.

Binyang 賓陽 Cave 3 at Longmen, sculpted between 508 and 523, also depicts in relief the discussion between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī (fig. 1-7). The two figures, each with a large group of attendants, are carved in relief on individual panels. Bunker makes an insightful comparison of these two panels. She argues that the panel of Vimalakīrti was created on the basis of Gu Kaizhi's Waguansi mural for the following reasons: first, the two panels show a great difference in terms of painting skills. The Vimalakīrti panel demonstrates a skillful manipulation of composition and perspective while the Mañjuśrī panel is stiff and lacking in compositional unity. Second, both Soper and Bunker mention the wholesale adoption of Southern Qi artistic ideas in the Pingyang Caves at Longmen.

¹⁰⁹ Shanxi sheng wenwu gongzuo weiyuanhui et al. comp., *Yungang shiku*, fig. 100.

¹¹⁰ Longmen wenwu baoguan suo 龍門文物保管所 comp., *Longmen shiku* 龍門石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980), pp. 5-6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

They attribute this to the arrival of the refugees from Shouchun, a city close to Nanjing.¹¹² Their analyses provided a possible answer for the relationship of the Northern and Southern styles.

Besides the Longmen caves, the imperial families in the north also patronized the caves at Gongyi 鞏義 (in present-day Hebei province), Tianlongshan (in present-day Shanxi province), and Xiangtangshan 響堂山 (in present-day Hebei province) during the period from the end of Northern Wei to the reunification in 589. These caves were located near capitals or important cities: Gongyi and Longmen were near the Northern Wei capital Luoyang; Tianlongshan was close to Jinyang 晉陽 (in present-day Shanxi province), an important city of the Eastern Wei (534-50) and Northern Qi (550-57); Xiangtangshan was close to Ye 鄴 (present Linzhang, Hebei province), the capital of the Northern Qi.¹¹³

At Gongyi, Cave 1 includes a sculpture of Vimalakīrti that was created in the late Northern Wei. He is depicted seated on a lotus seat, and holding a chowry (fig. 1-8). At Tianlongshan, an image of Vimalakīrti was found.¹¹⁴ Tang Yong 唐邕 (ca. 6th cent.), the Imperial Secretary of the Northern Qi, ordered the inscription of the sūtra on the walls of the Northern Xiangtang 北響堂 caves.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Bunker, p. 32; and Alexander Soper, "Life Motion and the Sense of Space in Early Chinese Representational Art," *Art Bulletin* 30.3 (Sept., 1948), p. 179.

¹¹³ Guojia wenwuju jiaoyuchu 國家文物局教育處 comp., *Fojiao shiku kaogu gaiyao* 佛教石窟考古概要 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993), p. 125.

¹¹⁴ Chen Mingda 陳明達 comp., *Gongxian Tianlongshan Xiangtangshan Anyang shiku diaoke* 鞏縣天龍山響堂山安陽石窟雕刻, in *Zhongguo meishu quanji. Diaosu bian* 中國美術全集. 雕塑編 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989), p. 11.

¹¹⁵ Hu Jinggui 胡景桂 comp., *Guangping jinshi lue* 廣平金石略, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1986), ser. 3, vol. 25, p. 111.

The Maijishan caves, located at Tianshui, were probably constructed during the Later Qin period. Many of the visual representations of Vimalakīrti here appeared after the Northern Wei. Two murals have been found in Caves 127 and 135. The painting in Cave 127 occupies the upper part of the left wall, and provides a valuable example of narrative painting on the Vimalakīrti theme (fig. 1-9). This mural combines stories from several chapters in the sūtra including “Mañjuśrī’s Consolation of the Invalid,” “The Expedient Method of Teaching,” and “Looking at Living Beings.” The debate between Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti constitutes the main plot of this painting and shows important structural similarities with the post-Sui Dunhuang representations—for example, trees are used to separate different scenes. Two other sculptures on this theme are preserved in Caves 102 and 123 (fig. 1-10). Owing to the limitations of the available materials, it cannot be known whether Vimalakīrti sits opposite Mañjuśrī; however, the two sculptures seemed to represent a silent meditative Vimalakīrti, instead of someone engaged in a heated discussion. Furthermore, their hairstyles and caps seem to show a Han-Chinese influence.

The spread of Vimalakīrti’s images can be linked to the widespread construction of Buddhist steles across north China. Extant examples include steles attributed to the monks Faliang 法亮 and Fahai 法海, and Situ Yongsun 司徒永孫 in Henan province;¹¹⁶ and two steles of the Northern Wei and the Eastern Wei (fig. 1-11; 1-12). Since these steles are preserved in the U.S. and Japan, their exact original locations are unclear. The reliefs on these steles depict Mañjuśrī’s visit during the illness of Vimalakīrti as described in “Mañjuśrī’s Consolation of the Invalid,” the visit of kings and vassals to

¹¹⁶ Lu Xiuwen 盧秀文, *Zhongguo shiku tuwen zhi* 中國石窟圖文志 (Lanzhou: Dunhuang wenyi chubanshe, 2002), vol. 2, pp. 432-33.

Vimalakīrti in the “The Expedient Method of Teaching,” and the goddess playing a joke on Śāriputra in the “Looking at Living Beings.”¹¹⁷ These steles manifest a wide range of ability. While many are crude, some reliefs dating to the Eastern Wei are skillful and elegant, and were probably based on pictorial paintings.

These steles performed an important role in the lives of Buddhist believers in the local communities (*she* 社 and *yi* 邑) of rural north China. Urban craftsmen who were invited to the rural regions carved these steles for rural dwellers. On other occasions, prepared steles were transported from the city to villages. A variety of Buddhist rituals such as the bathing of Buddha, Buddhist visualization and recitation rituals, assemblies for worship of Buddha and self-cultivation, were performed around these steles.¹¹⁸

Conclusion

It is highly probable that the southern representations influenced the northern style after the sixth century. First, there is no evidence to indicate that Vimalakīrti paintings appeared in India or Inner Asia. The representations closest to Inner Asia appeared at Bingling and Maijishan. The artwork in the caves at these two locations deserves further study because it was produced at a relatively early age, and they adopted the medium of wall painting instead of sculpture, which was broadly used in the North. However, other representations seem to support a southern origin, in terms of their composition and the style of the main figures. Second, the earliest recorded work in the south was produced around the turn of the fourth century, and works on a large scale began to appear after the

¹¹⁷ Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo 天水麥積山石窟藝術研究所 comp., *Maijishan shiku* 麥積山石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998), pp. 193-94.

¹¹⁸ Liu Shufen, “Art, Ritual, and Society: Buddhist Practice in Rural China during the Northern Dynasties,” in *Asia Major* 3.8 (Jan., 1995), pp. 19-47.

second half of the fourth century; in the north, the first surviving work is dated 420, and a great number of the works appeared in the second half of the fifth century. In other words, the theme of Vimalakīrti appeared one century later in the north than in the south. Therefore, this suggests that the iconography of Vimalakīrti was most likely a Southern creation. Especially, the painting by Gu Kaizhi has had influence on northern representations.

Materials played an important role in determining the general form of Vimalakīrti representations: since most of the northern caves were carved out of mountain rock, sculpture and relief were the main forms, while wall paintings and paper/silk scrolls were adopted in the south. However, some relief-stelae, like Binyang Cave 3, in the north relied more on two-dimensional linear skills than three-dimensional sculpture, this also suggests the northern emulation of the south.

In the south, many artists enjoyed a high reputation. As literati-officials, they were either in close contact with imperial families, or served themselves as court officials. In the north, the nobles and kings were the primary patrons of the caves. However, no records were kept of the anonymous artisans. Despite the political boundaries between the divided China, population migrations still allowed the communication of artwork prototypes. Monks like Sengzhao, an enthusiast of Vimalakīrti, or refugee artists probably were the vehicles by which these prototypes spread.

The available sources reveal several centers of artistic production that had a considerable impact on the production on their peripheries. Nanjing was the center of painting in the south. The famous painters in Nanjing produced numerous murals, scrolls, and sketched copies, which inspired production in other locations. Datong was once the

capital of the Northern Wei, and continued to be an important nexus of economy and transportation even after the capital was moved to Luoyang. Luoyang was also the second capital under the Northern Zhou. Both Longmen and Gongyi were close to Luoyang. The Maijishan caves were near Tianshui, an important city on the eastern Silk Road. Other cities, like Ye and Jinyang, were also surrounded by caves. Therefore, these cities constituted the knots of a network, which included the caves in the suburbs as well as the surrounding countryside. In this network, the cities provided artisans and prominent patrons, and thus influenced nearby cave-temples and villages.

The representations of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī on the lintels or doorways of the caves also shed some light on the identity of Vimalakīrti. Specifically, since the lintels or doorways can be symbolized as a boundary between the secular world and the religious world, this special positioning signifies the lay Buddhist identity of Vimalakīrti.

This period saw the proliferation of genres, including murals, sculptures, reliefs, and steles. All these images show certain similarities in terms of composition. For example, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are always shown as a pair in a constrained space (stele, mural, lintel, or niche); where space permitted, attendants of each party would be added; a Buddha was always situated in the middle or upper middle position. This implies that the debate became a theme painting during this period. However, these images show few similarities in terms of artistic style, figures, postures, and settings. This phenomenon suggests that, in this network, the production of these images may have been inspired by the transmission of the general artistic ideas and Buddhist ideas rather than specific sketches.

Chapter 2 Dunhuang Representations of Vimalakīrti (581-1036)

Sui-Tang Representations of Vimalakīrti

Although the Sui (581-618), which reunited China in 589, was a short lived dynasty, the period under Emperors Wendi 文帝 (r. 581-604) and Yangdi 煬帝 (604-18) witnessed a rapid development in Buddhism. Brought up in a Buddhist nunnery, Emperor Wendi had been a pious Buddhist believer since his childhood. This belief was accompanied by an awareness that Buddhism could play an important role in restoring political unity to China after two and a half centuries of disunity.¹¹⁹ Over the course of his rule, he authorized the ordination of 230,000 monks and nuns, the construction of 3,792 monasteries, the copying of 132,086 rolls of scripture, and the production of 106,580 images.¹²⁰ Emperor Yangdi was also a generous patron of various monasteries, and, furthermore, received Bodhisattva precepts (*pusajie* 菩薩戒)¹²¹ from Zhiyi 智顗 (538-97),¹²² the de-facto founder of the Tiantai 天臺 sect and author of *Weimo jing xuan shu* 維摩經玄疏, one of the most important commentaries on the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*.

The influence of Buddhism continued to expand during the Tang Dynasty.

Although Daoism was the state-sanctioned religion during the Tang, most emperors sponsored the construction of monasteries and supported a variety of rituals, while also

¹¹⁹ Arthur Wright, "The Formation of Chinese Ideology, 581-604," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 71-104.

¹²⁰ Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 5.

¹²¹ This refers to the precepts that are to be observed by bodhisattvas. These precepts are made up of the ten major and forty-eight minor rules taught in the *Fan wang jing* 梵網經, as well as the threefold pure precepts taught in the *Shan jie jing* 善戒經. Bodhisattva precepts include the precepts for lay Buddhists and monks, and here it refers to the former situation.

¹²² Zhiyi integrated Buddhist ideas from different sects, and is also believed to have made a significant break from the Indian tradition. After several years spent traveling, he retired to Mount Tiantai 天臺 where he began transmitting his teachings. His teachings drew great attention from the emperors of the Chen (557-89) and Sui dynasties. See Daoxuan 道宣, *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, in *DZJ*, T50, pp. 564-68.

exerting control over Buddhist clergy and property.¹²³ Empress Wu Zetian 武則天 (r. 690-705) and Emperor Daizong 代宗 (r. 762-79) were particularly known for their generous material support of Buddhism. However, Buddhism's position in Chinese politics still remained tenuous—Emperor Wuzong 武宗 (r. 840-46), for example, initiated large-scale Buddhist persecutions around 845.¹²⁴

During the Sui and Tang dynasties, an increasing number of sūtras were translated and introduced. Xuanzang 玄奘 had the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* retranslated in 650 for the seventh time.¹²⁵ A number of commentaries on this sūtra were also written, fifteen of which have been preserved in the Dunhuang Cave Library. Along with several commentaries by anonymous authors, these works include the *Weimojing yishu* 維摩經義疏, *Weimojing lueshu* 維摩經略疏, and *Jingming xuanlun* by Jizang; *Weimo yiji* 維摩義記 by Huiyuan 慧遠 (522-92); *Wugoucheng jingshu* 無垢稱經疏 by Kuiji 窺基 (632-82); and *Jingmingjing jijie guanzhong shu* 淨名經集解關中疏 by Daoye 道液 (8th cent.).¹²⁶ These commentaries center on the textual meaning and doctrines of this sūtra. Furthermore, the appearance of the commentaries demonstrated the status of sūtra as a Buddhist classic drawing increasing attention.

On the basis of extant literary and historical works from central China, it is clear that Weimojie, the Chinese name of Vimalakīrti, became a metaphor referring to the

¹²³ Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Liu Xu, “Wuzong benji” 武宗本紀, *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975), 18/603-06. Kenneth Ch'en, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp. 226-33.

¹²⁵ Xuanzang translated seventy-four sūtras. He chose some sūtras that had already been introduced into China because these sūtras were not consistent with the original versions in Sanskrit. See Tang Yongtong, *Sui Tang fojiao shigao* 隋唐佛教史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982), pp. 74-77.

¹²⁶ These commentaries were collected in *DZJ*, T38.

cultivated lay Buddhists and intellectuals of high social status beginning in the Tang dynasty. On one occasion, impressed by Xuanzang's profound knowledge, Emperor Taizong (r. 627-49) tried to persuade Xuanzang to return to lay life and help govern the country by appealing to Vimalakīrti: "I would like Master to take off the cassock of Subūti, and put on the plain clothes of Vimalakīrti (意欲法師脫須菩提之染服, 掛維摩詰之素衣)."¹²⁷ The term *ranfu*, literally "colored/dyed clothes," had been used to refer to monks' cassocks since the Southern Dynasties.¹²⁸ Playing on this term, Emperor Taizong used *suyi*, plain or undefiled clothes, to refer to lay people.¹²⁹ The name Vimalakīrti was an allusion to the ideal lifestyle of a lay Buddhist.

Even the names of Tang literati often signified their admiration for Vimalakīrti. He Zhizhang 賀知章 (659-744), a famous Tang poet and calligrapher, had the courtesy name Weimo 維摩; the great Tang poet and painter Wang Wei 王維 (701-61), a lay Buddhist, had the given name (Wei) and courtesy name (Mojie 摩詰) which together constitute the complete name of Vimalakīrti in Chinese. Not surprisingly, the name of Vimalakīrti appeared also in poems. For example, Li Bo 李白 (style name Qinglian jushi 青蓮居士, 701-62) invoked the name to describe his own life.

The Blue Lotus Recluse, the banished transcendent from heaven to earth,
Has hidden his fame in wine-shops for thirty years.

Why did the Adjutant of Huzhou bother to ask?

¹²⁷ Huili 慧立, *Da Tang Daci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳, in *DZJ*, T50, p. 255.

¹²⁸ During the Southern dynasties, the monks' cassocks were black in color, and were called "dark colour clothes" (*ziyi* 緇衣). Since attaining a black color required dying, the cassocks were also called "dyed clothes." *Ranfu* became an appellation for monks.

¹²⁹ Contrasting with *ranfu*, *baiyi* 白衣 or *suyi* 素衣 refer to a lay Buddhist. The *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* says that though *Vimalakīrti* dressed in the white robes of a layman, he observed all the rules of pure conduct laid down for monks. See Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, pp. 32-33. All the translations of this sūtra used *baiyi*; however, *suyi* was probably a synonym of *baiyi*.

The Gold Grain Tathāgata is the later incarnation.

青蓮居士謫仙人，酒肆藏名三十春。

湖州司馬何須問？金粟如來是後身。¹³⁰

The Gold Grain Tathāgata was an alias of Vimalakīrti. By claiming that his later incarnation would be the Gold Grain Tathāgata, Li Bo is attributing wine drinking and other secular interests to the lifestyle of Vimalakīrti, who also liked to spend time at wine shops, casinos, and brothels.¹³¹ Although Li Bo had been interested in Daoist religion from his youth, here Vimalakīrti's lifestyle seems to have been more appealing.

In Bo Juyi's 白居易 (style name Xiangshan jushi 香山居士, 772-846) poems, Vimalakīrti is given other meanings. With its ideal of freedom from social obligation, Buddhism provided justification for Bo's appreciation of the reclusive spiritual world. He showed a specific preference for the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* and went so far as to identify himself with Vimalakīrti on a number of occasions. After he assumed the position of Prefect in Hangzhou at the age of fifty-one, he read the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* and played a lute in his spare time.¹³² In one of his poems he writes,

The lay Buddhist in white clothes and the Immortal of Mythic Fungus,
Sometimes singing while getting drunk, and sometimes sitting in meditation.

The Vimalakīrti of the present time who also drinks wine,

¹³⁰ Li Bo, "Da Huzhou Jiaye Sima wen Bo shi heren" 答湖州迦葉司馬問白是何人, in Wang Qi 王琦 annotated, *Li Taibo quanji* 李太白全集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), vol. 2, p. 876. According to Wang Qi, Jiaye was the surname of a clan from India, which, coincidentally, was the same as that of Mahk yapa, the disciple of Buddha.

¹³¹ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, pp. 33-34.

¹³² Bo Juyi, "Dongyuan" 東院, in Bo Juyi, *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988), *juan* 20, vol. 3, p. 1335.

Qi Ji¹³³ in the past who did not request money...

白衣居士紫芝仙，半醉行歌半坐禪。

今日維摩兼飲酒，當時綺季不請錢。...¹³⁴

The figure of Vimalakīrti in this poem combines Buddhist meditation with his pastimes of drinking and singing. In another poem, Bo used this figure as an allegory for his own lay Buddhist life.

With a wife, I am the same as Vimalakīrti,

Without sons, I am like Deng You.¹³⁵

Do not mention the days when I am alive,

Nor will I have worries after I die.

有室同維摩，無兒比鄧攸。

莫論身在日，身後亦無憂。¹³⁶

According to traditional views, men were expected to be particularly concerned for their wives and sons. However, Buddhist doctrine taught that bodily existence and earthly attachments were associated with deluded vision. This is why Bo admired Deng and

¹³³ Qi Ji refers to one of the four recluses during the Qin and Early Han dynasties. The style name of these four recluses was also the Immortals of Mythic Fungus. Their refusal to work for the Qin tyrant and the first Emperor of the Han expressed Bo's ideal, to be righteous and not to care about money. See Sima Qian 司馬遷, "Liuhou shijia" 留侯世家, in *Shi ji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 55/2046-47; Huangfu Mi 皇甫謐, *Gaoshi zhuan* 高士傳, in Wang Yunwu 王雲五 comp., *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), vol. 3396, pp. 64-65.

¹³⁴ Bo Juyi, "Zi yong" 自詠, *juan* 31, vol. 4, p. 2130.

¹³⁵ When Deng You (4th cent.) was fleeing from the Hou Zhao (328-51), under the reign of Shi Le 石勒 (r. 328-33), to the Eastern Jin (317-420), Deng You abandoned his own son but kept his nephew, the son of his late brother. See Fang Xuanling 房玄齡, *Jin Shu* 晉書 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), p. 2339.

¹³⁶ Bo Juyi, "Xian zuo" 閑坐, *juan* 19, vol. 3, p. 1311.

Vimalakīrti, who had possessed these attachments but remained aloof from their attractions. Other examples in Bo's writing reflect similar sentiments.¹³⁷

Wall paintings were commonly seen in Buddhist monasteries in central Chinese metropolises like Chang'an and Luoyang, as recorded in *Lidai minghua ji*, *Si ta ji* 寺塔記,¹³⁸ and *Tang chao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄.¹³⁹ During the Sui-Tang period, visual representations of Vimalakīrti became even more widespread in Chang'an. The *Lidai minghua ji* and other records provide information on artists who produced works portraying Vimalakīrti. Sun Shangzi 孫尚子 (ca. 6th cent.) painted a Vimalakīrti on the east wall of the hall of Dingshui 定水 Monastery in Chang'an;¹⁴⁰ Yang Qidan 楊契丹 (ca. 6th cent.) painted a mural at Baosha 寶刹 Monastery in Chang'an;¹⁴¹ Wu Daozi 吳道子 (689-759) painted Vimalakīrti murals in several monasteries;¹⁴² Yang Tingguang 楊廷光 (7th cent.), Liu Xingchen 劉行臣 (7th cent.), Yang Huizhi 楊惠之 (8th cent.),¹⁴³ Yan Liben 閻立本 (?-673) and Wang Wei¹⁴⁴ of the Tang also produced murals with Vimalakīrti as the subject. These Sui-Tang artists were influenced to some extent by the

¹³⁷ "People have difficulty understanding Vimalakīrti, his body was not converted, but his mind was" (淨名事理人難解, 身不出家心出家), in "Zaofu yunmusan" 早服雲母散, *juan* 31, vol. 4, p. 2161; "A bed [of the sick person] about one square *zhang* faces the south, which troubles Mañjuśrī when he inquires after the sick" (一床方丈向陽開, 勞動文殊問疾來) in "Da Xian shangren laiwen he fengji" 答閑上人來問何風疾, *juan* 35, p. 2389; and "People could not just understand my title, the Venerable from Vaisali and Director Bo in the Department of State Affairs" (惟是名衡人不曾, 毗耶長者白尚書) in "Xingbu shangshu zhishi" 刑部尚書致仕, in *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao*, *juan* 37, vol. 4, p. 2546.

¹³⁸ Duan Chengshi 段成式, *Si ta ji*, in *DZJ*, T51, pp. 1022-24.

¹³⁹ Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄, *Tang chao minghua lu*, in Huang Binhong 黃賓虹 et al. Comps., *Zhonghua meishu congshu* 中華美術叢書 (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1998), vol. 8: 2.6, pp. 3-38.

¹⁴⁰ Zhang Yanyuan, *juan* 3, p. 67.

¹⁴¹ Zhang Yanyuan, *juan* 8, p. 163.

¹⁴² In Jianfu 薦福 Monastery in Chang'an, Wu had a wall painting entitled "Weimo benxing bian" 維摩詰本行變; at Anguo 安國 Monastery, also in Chang'an, he had a wall painting of "Weimo bian" 維摩變. See Zhang Yanyuan, pp. 60; 64.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, *juan* 9, p. 177; *juan* 3, pp. 72; 74.

¹⁴⁴ As for Yan Liben and Wang Wei, see Zhou Mi 周密, *Yunyan guoyan lu* 云煙過眼錄, in Huang Binhong et al. comps., *Zhonghua meishu congshu*, vol. 6: 2.2, pp. 13; 23.

painting tradition of the Southern Dynasties. According to Zhang Yanyuan, all the above artists were direct or indirect disciples of Gu Kaizhi, Zhang Sengyou, and Lu Tanwei.¹⁴⁵ Like their masters, the Sui-Tang artists also took official positions at the court; for example, Sun Shangzi was the District Defender of Jiande 建德 County (Zhejiang province) (*Jiande xianwei* 建德縣尉), Zhan Ziqian the Commander-in-chief of the Grand Master for Closing Court (*Chaosan dafu zhangnei dudu* 朝散大夫帳內都督), Wu Daozi a Palace Erudite (*fengneijiao boshi* 封內教博士), Yan Liben the Vice Director of the Right in the Department of State Affairs (*Youxiang* 右相), and Wang Wei the Assistant Director of the Right in the Department of State Affairs (*Youcheng* 右丞).

Dunhuang Representations of Vimalakīrti (581-1036)

Dunhuang was incorporated into the Tang Empire in 619. However, owing to struggles between warlords, the region was not pacified until 623.¹⁴⁶ After its occupation of the Gaochang (Karakhoja) kingdom in 640,¹⁴⁷ the Tang was able to control Dunhuang, and Tang culture was promoted on a large scale throughout the area. However, after the An Lushan 安祿山 (?-757) rebellion (755-63), Tang power was severely weakened and Tibetans threatened Chang'an and the northwest frontier.¹⁴⁸ The Tibetan regime occupied Dunhuang between 777 and 848, during which time the political and cultural relationship with the Tang was almost entirely cut off. When the Tibetan leaders at Dunhuang refused

¹⁴⁵ Zhang Yanyuan, pp. 29-31.

¹⁴⁶ Shi Weixiang 史葦湘, *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji: Dunhuang lishi yu Mogaoku yishu yanjiu* 敦煌研究文集: 敦煌歷史與莫高窟藝術研究 (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), pp. 22-23.

¹⁴⁷ Liu Xu 劉昫, "Taizong benji" 太宗本紀, *Jiu Tang shu*, 3/50-52.

¹⁴⁸ C. A. Peterson, "Court and Province in Mid- and Late T'ang," in Denis Twitchett ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 490-91.

to offer their allegiance to the King in Lhasa, armed struggles broke out in the Gansu corridor between Dunhuang and Lanzhou. These lasted throughout the 840s, until a Chinese adventurer named Zhang Yichao 張義潮 (d. 872) raised an army named the *Guiyijun*, and drove the Tibetan overlords out in 848.¹⁴⁹ After Zhang recovered Dunhuang, a loose connection with the Tang imperial court was reestablished. The third Military Commissioner (*jiedushi* 節度使) Zhang Chengfeng 張承奉 (ca. 10th cent.) decided to claim independence for the “Kingdom of the Golden Mountain” (Jinshan guo 金山國) around 910, but his attempts met with failure when he proved unable to defend against the attacks of the Uighurs.¹⁵⁰ Cao Yijin 曹議金 assumed the position of Military Commissioner in 915, and soon pacified the chaos at Dunhuang. The Cao’s rule lasted until 1036 when the Tanguts took over the region. Generally speaking, the Zhang and Cao families (with the exception of Zhang Chengfeng) maintained allegiance to the Chinese imperial court.

Among the sixty-four caves at Mogao that contain the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang*, eleven were painted during the Sui dynasty, thirty-two were painted during the Tang dynasty, seventeen during the Five Dynasties (907-60), and seven during the Northern Song. (See Appendix 4)

Sui Dynasty (581-618)

The first Vimalakīrti wall painting appeared during the Sui, and this period saw a large number of other productions on this theme. Among the ninety-nine caves built in the Sui,

¹⁴⁹ Michael Dalby, “Court Politics in Late T’ang Times,” in Denis Twitchett ed., *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 678-79.

¹⁵⁰ Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 110-12.

eleven caves (Caves 262, 276, 277, 314, 380, 417, 419, 420, 423, 425, and 433) contain paintings on the Vimalakīrti theme.¹⁵¹

The cave structures of this period can be divided into two distinct forms: 1. Cave complexes in which half of the rooms have “A” shaped ceilings while the other half have flat ceilings (Caves 262, 276, 417, 419, 423, and 433);¹⁵² 2. Square caves with canopy ceilings (Caves 277, 314, 380, 420, and 425).¹⁵³ In Caves 262, 423, and 433, wall paintings are located on the rear ceilings and images of Vimalakīrti are painted on the northern sides; in six other caves (276, 314, 380, 417, 419, and 420), wall paintings are painted outside the niches on the western walls, and images of Vimalakīrti are again located on the northern sides. Thus, the structures and composition of the caves and wall paintings became comparatively fixed in the thirty years: the themes usually appear on the ceiling and areas surrounding the niches on the western walls, and Vimalakīrti is always placed on the right side facing the viewer. As I will discuss later in this thesis, most of the later wall paintings adopted this arrangement.

In only two caves (Cave 169 at Bingling and Cave 433 at Dunhuang), was he represented with a halo. However, as a lay Buddhist, Vimalakīrti was usually presented without a halo. He was the most frequently presented protagonist among the lay Buddhists in Buddhist wall paintings.

¹⁵¹ He Shizhe, “Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de *Weimojie jing bian*,” p. 29.

¹⁵² This type of cave is usually composed of two parts within a cave complex (fig. 2-4): the former half has an “A” shape ceiling, and the latter half a flat roof, and a central pillar is always built to symbolize a stupa. This type of cave complex was basically an emulation of a Buddhist temple. See Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu yanjiu*, pp. 297-308.

¹⁵³ The design of this type probably originated from a combination of temple and Chinese canopy (*douzhang* 斗帳) designs. A niche is usually built on the wall opposite to the entrance. However, there is no center pillar in the cave. This type of cave was the most common one in the Sui-Tang dynasties, and it was constructed on the basis of Chinese official government buildings. See Xiao Mo, pp. 308-19.

These wall paintings center on the story of the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī. Owing to the constricted space, the content of the image is limited and only a small number of figures are depicted. Apart from a relatively detailed treatment of the chapter “Mañjuśrī’s Consolation of the Invalid (Vimalakīrti),” there are only sporadic and simple images based on three other chapters, which included more narrative stories. For example, four figures surrounding a large container in the middle of the mural in Cave 420 represent the story of “requesting rice from the fragrant earth” (fig. 2-1). This story relates how, when Śāriputra thinks about eating at noontime, Vimalakīrti telepathically senses his thought and sends a bodhisattva to the Buddha Fragrance Accumulated who bequeaths fragrant rice to those in Śāriputra’s residence.¹⁵⁴

The artistic styles are diverse in terms of composition, poses, and cave structure. On several occasions, the visual representation in the caves departs from the original sūtra. For example, in one mural a residence with several compounds is presented as the setting for the debate. In the original sūtra, knowing the coming of Mañjuśrī, Vimalakīrti empties his room of all its contents and his attendants (his worldly attachments), and leaves nothing for himself but a couch.¹⁵⁵ Most of the steles of the Northern Dynasties remained loyal to the original sūtra, presenting a room with only Mañjuśrī sitting on a lotus seat and Vimalakīrti resting on a decorated bed. However, most of the Sui wall paintings depict a residence complex including several rooms, and some (Caves 262, 420 and 433) even place the figures in two separate rooms (fig. 2-1; 2-2). Cave 276 dispenses with rooms altogether, placing the debate outside of Vimalakīrti’s residence. The two protagonists, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, are depicted standing in a garden beside a bodhi

¹⁵⁴ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, pp. 112-15.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65.

tree, which symbolizes the enlightenment of Buddha (fig. 2-3). The various arrangements demonstrated that many artists worked in these caves independently, and that they had their own sketches.

Early Tang (618-704) and High Tang (705-80)

During this period of one hundred and sixty years, only thirteen murals on the Vimalakīrti theme were made (Early Tang: Caves 68, 203, 206, 220, 242, 322, 332, 334, 335, 341 and 342; High Tang: Caves 103 and 194). However, owing to the introduction of more incidents from the sūtra, the artisans had to pay more attention to their arrangement of the stories.

After the establishment of the Tang, more and more caves began to adopt a canopy ceiling structure, which indicates a local adaptation of the Buddhist caves in China and its periphery. Therefore, except for Cave 332, which still has an “A” shaped ceiling and a central pillar, all the others were constructed with a canopy ceiling and a niche on the western wall. In eight caves, the Vimalakīrti paintings are painted outside the niche on the western wall, either on the northern side of the niches (in Caves 68, 206, 334, 341, and 342), or on the southern side (in Caves 203, 242, and 322). In two caves, his image is painted on the southern side of the eastern entrances. In ten of the thirteen caves, Vimalakīrti is painted on the right side, and Mañjuśrī on the left. If we suppose that the viewer in a typical cave (fig. 2-4) would go through the entrance door and then enter into the main room, he would be immediately faced with the western niche. Thus, the Vimalakīrti paintings, generally painted on the entrance wall and beside the western niches, were given a position of greater spatial significance, because the entrance wall is

the boundary between the inside and the outside of the cave and the western niche is the most inner part of the cave, where a statue of Buddha is always located.

The Vimalakīrti painting in Cave 220 (built in 642, fig. 2-5), a masterpiece demonstrating outstanding sketch techniques, also shows new characteristics in comparison with the Sui paintings. We see for the first time the presence of a large number of attendants (fig. 2-6). Below Mañjuśrī are a Chinese emperor and his retinue, and below Vimalakīrti are foreign kings and princes from Central Asia. Second, Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti are represented within one room: Mañjuśrī is placed under a splendid canopy, and Vimalakīrti is on a decorated bed. This setting was commonly seen during the Northern Dynasties (fig. 1-12 & 1-13), but was rarely seen in the Sui. Third, Buddha is painted under a large canopy adorned with jewels that appears above the whole mural. In the original sūtra, Jeweled Accumulation, the son of a wealthy man in Vaiśālī, and five hundred other people, offer their treasure-adorned canopies to Buddha. Buddha combines the people's canopies into a unitary canopy large enough to spread over the entire thousand-million-fold world.¹⁵⁶ The canopy is one of the most important Buddhist iconographic devices. As one of the "Eight Auspicious Symbols," it stands for a celebration of victory over the forces of Evil Mara, as well as a sign of one's royal status.¹⁵⁷ Bringing these canopies together was clearly highly symbolic: first, this was a display of inconceivable magic power, and thus resonated with the story of Vimalakīrti's victory over Mara (see below); second, the coverage of the ten-thousand fold world expressed Buddha's wish that all living beings achieve enlightenment.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁵⁷ Fredrick W. Bunce, *A Dictionary of Buddhist and Hindu Iconography* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997), pp. 59; 182.

¹⁵⁸ Jizang, *Weimo jing yishu*, in *DZJ*, T38, p. 908.

The wall paintings in Cave 220 show great similarity to the paintings in Cave 335 (built in the Early Tang) and 103 (built in the High Tang, fig. 2-9). These three paintings are painted on the upper wall of the east entrance, and all portray the same main figures. Although these three murals use different painting techniques—ink sketches (*baimiao* 白描) in Cave 103, washes (*yunran* 暈染) in Caves 335 and 220—the main figures, Vimalakīrti, Mañjuśrī, and the visiting Chinese Emperor, are similar in both composition and gestures (fig. 2-6; 2-10). Besides, the scenes surrounding Vimalakīrti's residence are similarly arranged in all three murals. The possible explanation of this connection could be that the already-built caves provided an archetype, and the later artists exercised different styles of sketches and washes according to the fashion of the time.

From the Tang onward, the figure of Mañjuśrī was distinguished by a hand gesture of “non-duality” (*zhenru buer famen* 真入不二法門). This was different from previous ages, when he was displayed with a casual gesture, or holding his *ruyi* (如意, a kind of scepter). Here the selection of this unique gesture instead of a *ruyi* serves to clarify the meaning of the painting. Upon seeing the two fingers of Mañjuśrī, one knows immediately that the painting is concerned with the debate on non-duality (fig. 2-7). The gesture of Mañjuśrī and the chowry of Vimalakīrti become the unique icons for these two bodhisattvas. Meanwhile, this gesture also creates an effect reminiscent of the *mūdra*. As symbolic gestures of hands, *mūdras* create magical power through special finger movements, guarantee the efficacy of spoken words, and seal the identity of the

subjects.¹⁵⁹ Here, this gesture exerts the power of mūdra and emphasizes the importance of silence.

In High Tang paintings, there is an increasingly dense representation of incidents. A heavenly goddess on the Vimalakīrti side and Śāriputra on the Mañjuśrī side are commonly represented. The heavenly goddess on the Vimalakīrti side is shown scattering flowers, while Śāriputra tries to shake off the flowers but fails to do so. This scene originates from a story in the sūtra: a heavenly being in Vimalakīrti's room, after hearing the bodhisattvas' instructions on doctrine, scatters heavenly flowers over the bodhisattvas and the major disciples, the flowers fall off the bodhisattvas but stick to Śāriputra and the other disciples. The goddess provides the interpretation that, unlike the disciples, the flowers did not make any distinctions between disciples and bodhisattvas. However, because the disciples were fearful of the cycle of death and life, the senses of form, sound, smell, taste, and touch availed themselves of these vulnerabilities and allowed the flowers to stick to them.¹⁶⁰ Sometimes, the story of Śāriputra and the heavenly goddess is also represented. In this story, Śāriputra inquires about why the goddess does not change out of her female form; when the goddess discovers that he is still caught up in gender distinctions, she uses her magical powers to transform Śāriputra into her own female body, and vice versa.¹⁶¹ This story addresses the significance of non-discrimination based on external phenomena. No historical evidence could explain why this representation appeared at this moment, but within a larger historical context, the increasing influence of

¹⁵⁹ Dale Saunders, *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), p. 9.

¹⁶⁰ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, pp. 86-87.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91. Ning Qiang believes that the representation of this incident reflected the status of women of that time. See Ning Qiang, "Buddhist-Daoist Conflict and Gender Transformation: Deciphering the Illustrations of the Vimalakīrti-nirveda in Mediaeval Chinese Art," *Orientalism* (Nov. 1996), pp. 50-59.

Chan 禪 Buddhism in Dunhuang probably provides some clue,¹⁶² because of the lack of emphasis on language and writing in Chan Buddhism.

The purpose of these representations was to illustrate the vanity of physical appearance and the illusory nature of physical phenomena. However, artists also created a series of scenes in which they portrayed their fantasies of the heavenly world. Similar to the stories mentioned above (in which Vimalakīrti shows the Sumeru heavenly world to those in his residence and requests food from the Buddha Fragrance Accumulated), here he also requests seats from the Sumeru Lamp King. This story presents an incident similar to the second: Śāriputra thinks about sitting after having stood for a long time; knowing his mind, Vimalakīrti miraculously borrows more than three million thrones from the Buddha Sumeru Lamp King.¹⁶³ When the thrones descend from the sky and come to rest in the house of Vimalakīrti, they arrange themselves without crowding and the house seems to enlarge itself accordingly. Vimalakīrti, the lay Buddhist, becomes an agent to link this world and the other transcendent world.

During the High Tang period, *baimiao* 白描 ink sketches were employed at Dunhuang, as in Cave 103 mentioned above. According to Shi Shouqian 石守謙, this technique was different from the line drawing common in earlier periods in central China, and was probably a combination of both Chinese and Inner Asian techniques. With the introduction of the Indian painting technique of concave-and-convex style (*aotu fa* 凹凸法),¹⁶⁴ the Chinese ink sketch technique faced the challenge of representing three

¹⁶² He Shizhe, "Weimojie jingbian," in *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, p. 194.

¹⁶³ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, pp. 75-77.

¹⁶⁴ *Aotu* painting technique was introduced from India accompanying the spread of Buddhism during the Southern Dynasties. First used in a wall painting by Zhang Sengyou, this technique paints shadows by using washes, thus it produced a three-dimensional effect.

dimensions.¹⁶⁵ The “Lidai diwang tu” 歷代帝王圖 (fig. 2-11) by Yan Liben and the images of the emperor and his entourage in Cave 220 (fig. 2-8) provide similar visual effect of ink sketches. This is one instance of the mutual influence of Chinese and Inner Asian styles that was common at Dunhuang.

Tibetan Occupation (777-848)

After the Mid-Tang, the Tibetan kingdom occupied Dunhuang, and the region was politically independent from central China. Therefore, the cave temples at Dunhuang were protected from the anti-Buddhist persecution in 845 during which numerous art works were destroyed in central China.¹⁶⁶

During this period, nine wall paintings on the Vimalakīrti theme (Caves 133, 159, 186, 231, 236, 237, 240, 359 and 360) were produced. The layout of these caves was comparatively fixed: all the caves adopted the reverse canopy ceiling structure, with a niche on the western wall; in seven of the caves, images of Vimalakīrti were located on the southern side of the eastern entrance (on the right side from the viewer’s perspective).

One feature of this period is the neat organization of the paintings. Beginning in the Early and High Tang, some paintings had been vaguely divided into three vertical parts: the upper part represented the universe of Buddha, the middle part the debate and other relevant miraculous stories, and the lower part the worldly visitors, such as emperors and princes. During the Mid-Tang, this structure was arranged in a more orderly fashion with the insertion of supplementary frames. These frames help to regulate

¹⁶⁵ Shi Shouqian, “Sheng Tang baihua zhi chengli yu bimaiao nengli zhi kuozhan” 盛唐白畫之成立與筆描能力之擴展, in Shi Shouqian ed., *Fengge yu shibian* 風格與世變 (Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen youxian gongsi, 1996), pp. 47-51.

¹⁶⁶ Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T’ang*, pp. 132-34.

the cluttered images of the stories. Cave 159 is a perfect example of this composition (fig. 2-12): the upper part depicts the Buddha land by providing images from the chapters “The Buddha Land,” “The Feast Brought by the Emanated Incarnation,” and “The Inconceivable Liberation”; the middle part depicts the debate and the visiting emperor and officials; the lower part includes three rectangular frames on each side, depicting stories from the “The Expedient Method of Teaching” and “The Disciples’ Reluctance to Visit Vimalakīrti.” Walls and buildings were also introduced to delimit the boundaries for different modules, making the whole composition more precisely organized. Cave 133, 237, 359, and 360 adopt a nearly identical structure, except that the lower rectangular frames of Cave 359 are filled with the figures of patrons.

Another prominent change during this period is that the Tibetan king took the place of the Chinese emperor. The king leads a group of attendants, including officials and envoys (fig. 2-13).

In earlier paintings, all the settings were based on the narratives of miraculous stories. However, during this period, the artisans tried their best to present even abstract doctrines. For example, according to Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine, all phenomena are like dreams, flames, and lightning—the products of deluded vision.¹⁶⁷ This sūtra also mentions that all beings are the product of deluded vision, like dreams and flames, like the moon in the water or an image in a mirror, born of deluded thoughts.¹⁶⁸ Concrete images of men looking into a mirror or kneeling beside a pool were produced in order to convey this doctrinal message (to show that the human body is devoid of individuality

¹⁶⁷ *Jingang boruo boluomi jing*, in *DZJ*, T8, p. 752; Edward Conze trans, p. 68.

¹⁶⁸ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, p. 47.

like water).¹⁶⁹ Wall paintings of this period also reveal an attempt to include as many incidents as possible, thus the arrangements often appear cluttered and excessive.

Under the Governance of the *Guiyijun* (848-1036)

After Dunhuang was taken over by Zhang Yichao, the Tibetan kings were removed from prominent positions in the murals and relocated among a group of foreign rulers who came to visit the debate. The new rulers cooperated, through intermarriage and other methods, with the Khotanese and other nearby powers to defend themselves against the Tibetans.¹⁷⁰

The Late Tang period saw the production of twelve murals on the Vimalakīrti theme (Caves 9, 12, 18, 85, 94, 132, 138, 139, 143, 150, 156, and 369). Sixteen murals were composed during the Five Dynasties (5, 6, 22, 44, 53, 61, 98, 100, 108, 121, 146, 261, 334, 335, 342, and Yulin 榆林 32).¹⁷¹ The caves still retain the canopy ceiling and niche on the western wall common to the earlier caves. However, there is the occasional addition of an altar for Buddha in the middle of the cave. In sixteen caves (5, 6, 12, 18, 22, 61, 85, 98, 100, 108, 121, 132, 138, 146, 156, and 369), images of Vimalakīrti are painted on the northern side of the eastern entrance. In Caves 261, 334, and 335, front rooms are installed, and the theme is painted on the entrance wall.

Given the relatively stable social circumstances, prominent families patronized more caves during this period. The Zhang and Cao families were among the most ardent

¹⁶⁹ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁷⁰ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 deduced that the Cao Family might be of Sogdian origin, although they claimed to be the descendents of a Cao clan from Inner China. See his “Dunhuang Guiyijun Cao shi tongzhizhe wei Sute houyi shuo” 敦煌歸義軍曹氏統治者爲粟特後裔說, in *Zhongguo Zhongguo yu wailai wenming* 中古中國與外來文明 (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2001), pp. 258-74.

¹⁷¹ The Yulin caves were located 180 km away from the Mogao caves. The term “Dunhuang caves” usually refers to both sites.

patrons of Buddhist rituals and constructions. In most cases, the images of the patrons were added to the murals.¹⁷² At least twelve murals (Caves 5, 18, 53, 61, 98, 100, 85, 108, 121, 132, 138, 146, and 334) include portraits of patrons.

Many of the images of the patrons were added posthumously. Considering a wall painting as an imagined space, when the images of patrons shared the same space with the Buddhist motifs, a sense of invitation and protection was created, meaning that the patrons were invited into the Buddha Land and were safeguarded there. In this sense, these images serve the expectation of the afterlife, presumably in the Buddha Land.

The Vimalakīrti murals with the richest content (Cave 61) and of the largest size (Cave 98) were produced during this period. Cave 98 was built between 915 and 925, attributed Cao Yijin. The Vimalakīrti mural in this cave is 12.65 meters long, and 2.95 meters wide. Cave 61 was constructed between 947 and 951, and the owner was Cao Yuanzhong's wife. The Vimalakīrti mural in this cave (fig. 2-14) contains the stories of thirteen chapters from the original sūtra. Owing to its abundant content, the images are accompanied with fifty-nine explanatory inscriptions, adding up to a total of 1600 characters. All this content, including narration and doctrine, was carefully designed and integrated into the murals. Here we see a reverse attention being paid to the sūtra, in other words, the canonical Buddhist classics. In this sense, the writing gives authority to the images.

The symmetrical composition of this painting is close to that of the mural in cave 159 (fig. 2-12), which was built during the Tibetan occupation. The debate was moved out of the inner chamber to the outer door, as indicated by the presence of pavilions and

¹⁷² Duan Wenjie, "Gongyangren huaxiang yu shiku 供養人畫像與石窟," in *KGJC*, vol. 4, pp. 2292-94.

trees. However, different from Cave 159, a Chinese emperor with a gesture similar to that of the emperor in cave 220 was reinserted at the bottom of wall.

Some of the stories represented had never appeared before in the cave murals. One of these is the story of Vimalakīrti converting the female retainers of the evil Mara.¹⁷³ In the sūtra, Mara, disguised as the God Indra, wants to tempt the Bodhisattva Upholder of the Age by sending him twelve thousand female entertainers in the appearance of heavenly goddesses. Vimalakīrti disclosed the conspiracy, and converted all twelve thousand of Mara's followers. The inclusion of this story sheds light on the magical power of Vimalakīrti. Furthermore, within the social context, this representation also resonated with the appearance of a large number of *xiangmobian*, a theme of Śāriputra overcoming Raudrāksha, aiming to celebrate the victory over the Tibetans.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, the thematic similarity of Vimalakīrti's subjugation of Mara possibly manifested a similar intention.

Conclusion

After the establishment of the Tang dynasty, the Vimalakīrti theme became increasingly popular at Dunhuang, and its representations became richer in content. These changes have drawn the attention of scholars, many of whom have focused on the composition and placement of wall paintings.

As the main subject of the wall paintings, the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī determines the overall composition. As Wu Hung has observed, the debate depicts the two bodhisattvas in direct spatial opposition, and no matter how the order and

¹⁷³ Burton Watson, *The Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, pp. 56-57.

¹⁷⁴ Duan Wenjie, "Zhang Yichao shiqi de Dunhuang yishu" 張議朝時期的敦煌藝術, in *BNWK*, vol. 5, pp. 73-74.

placement of the other plots is arranged, the main protagonists are always these two figures.¹⁷⁵ However, some wall paintings adopt a third party above the symmetrical pair. When the image of Buddha is presented above the two debaters, the whole painting constitutes a triangular composition. The mudrā of the Buddha signifies his status, and the large canopy symbolizes his power of assembly. The sūtra also ends with the manifestation of the Buddha, and his instruction provides a “happy ending.” In the wall paintings, the image of Buddha added to these two bodhisattvas brings a sense of unity alongside the competition.

Owing to the symmetrical composition of these two debaters, their positions have also received attention. Victor Mair has suggested that the right side is generally associated with good, while the left is associated with evil.¹⁷⁶ It is true that left and right reveal stable semantic meanings from the Han dynasty onward: the right side is usually superior to the left side, and this recognition was commonly applied to official positions and the arrangement of people’s seats. The “left way” (*zuodao*, 左道) refers to heretical doctrines. However, in the Dunhuang wall paintings, it is more likely that no value judgments have been involved for the following reasons: first, Mañjuśrī was usually on the left side, but it is almost impossible to imagine that Mañjuśrī, the guardian of wisdom, could be considered to be on the evil side in these Buddhist religious sites. Second, in the Zhai family cave, the Chinese emperor is portrayed on the lower left side instead of on the right side, where a group of foreign princes is located. If superiority had been

¹⁷⁵ Wu Hung, “What is *Bianxiang*? ---On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature,” *HJAS* 52.1 (1992), pp. 149-50.

¹⁷⁶ Victor Mair, *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 76.

considered, the placement would have been the opposite. One explanation would be that the fixed positions might be inherited from the same sketch.

If we locate the images of Vimalakīrti within the surrounding space, we find that these images usually appear at the following places: on the lintel of a door (shallow relief, during the Northern Dynasties), on the entrance wall (mural, between the Sui and Five Dynasties), and beside a niche containing Buddha (Buddha could also be viewed as Path or Door leading to enlightenment). The door or the lintel functions as a barrier between the outside and the inside of the cave, and thus the lay world and religious world. These locations could be perceived as a symbolic liminal space.¹⁷⁷ If this is the case, then the activity of making paintings at these specific locations served the ritual purpose of associating the outside and the inside. The meaning of the “door” could be twofold: first, it could be seen as a door between the Buddhist world and the laity, represented by Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti respectively. In most cases, the entrance wall is also the primary location for images of lay-Buddhist patrons, who situated themselves between a liminal space between the lay life and Buddhist institutions. Second, the essential teaching of the sūtra was the “entrance to the Dharma of non-duality” and, thus, the door could symbolize a way to non-duality and the realm of the Law, as the two debaters indicate. Among the caves of which the patrons are known, the Vimalakīrti theme was always a favorite for lay patrons, but not for Buddhist clerical patrons (see Appendix 5). With the images of patrons being painted at his side, the image of Vimalakīrti might have served as a guide, leading his patrons to the Buddha Land.

¹⁷⁷ In my thesis, I would argue that the division of the Buddhist clergy and the lay communities was metaphorically reflected in the spatial representation of the cave temples. The lay-Buddhist, situated between the Buddhists and the lay people, was also represented in a liminal space, meaning a location connecting the outside and the inside, i.e. the entrance, or a lintel.

Chapter 3 The Vimalakīrti Murals from a Sociohistorical Perspective

Patrons, artisans and Buddhist clergy all had a direct impact on the Buddhist art works at Dunhuang: from the spatial arrangement of the Buddhist caves to the production of wall paintings. In addition, I attempt to uncover the motives behind the different modes, which were used to present the meaning of the sūtra, by examining the traces in extant commentaries and inscriptions. This chapter examines the impact of these subjects on the artwork at Dunhuang, and the relationship of their texts to visual representation.

The Ritual Function of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*

The repeated representation of certain themes is one suggestion that these themes were not selected randomly. During the Sui-Tang period, the Vimalakīrti theme at Dunhuang gradually grew in popularity, and came to be painted with increasing elegance and detail.

These changes, along with concurrent developments in textual records, attest to the increasing importance of this theme. Buddhist believers copied scriptures with great enthusiasm; for some, this work promised a cure for sickness, others sought to salvage their own souls, or release the souls of their dead relatives. A number of written records indicate that the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* was one of the texts believed to have this sort of religious power. A story recorded by the monk Feizhuo 非濁 (?-1063) in the *Sanbao ganying yaolue lu* 三寶感應要略錄 tells of the good karma of an anonymous young scholar who kept copying this sūtra. Once, having come down with an illness, the young man copied the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*. Shortly after, a goddess soon manifested herself in his dream and cured him. His increased faith led him to copy the sūtra again for his late parents. His copying was again followed by a dream: his father appeared and

informed the son that his parents' souls had been released from hell. The scholar's own life was lengthened as a result of his tremendous effort, and he was finally incarnated in the land of Golden Grain Tathāgata Buddha (the former incarnation of Vimalakīrti).¹⁷⁸ Similar stories were recorded in Buddhist biographies written between the Southern Dynasties and the Northern Song dynasty. A Tang dynasty account gives the story of a man named Yao Dai 姚待, a native of Zizhou 梓州 (in present day Sichuan). Yao was a pious copyist of this and other sūtras. His efforts were rewarded by the rescue of his parents who had been reborn as a deer and a butcher.¹⁷⁹ These stories, and others, indicate that the transcription of this sūtra was considered a meritorious act that could bring healing, lengthen the copyist's life, or assuage suffering souls. The text embodied the inconceivable power that resolved these bodily and spiritual concerns.

More than one thousand copies of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* have been found in the Dunhuang Library.¹⁸⁰ Their prefaces indicate that most were dedicated to the copyists' dead relatives. The scribes (*jingsheng* 經生) also frequently copied this sūtra for patrons who were concerned about their afterlives.¹⁸¹

The commissioning of wall paintings, like the copying of sūtras, functioned as a form of worship, and images of patrons (*gongyangren xiang* 供養人像) can be understood as parallel to attributions of the copying of texts. However, different from portable texts, the wall paintings were immobile and iconic. People could only experience a mural by coming to the caves. Thus, the cave became an imagined Buddhist world in

¹⁷⁸ Feizhuo, *Sanbao ganying yaolue lu*, in *DZJ*, T51, p. 840.

¹⁷⁹ One story is about Monk Puming 普明. Music could be heard when he chanted the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*, and he cured a woman possessed by an evil spirit. Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ He Shizhe, "Weimojie jingbian," in *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, p. 183.

¹⁸¹ Fang Guangchang 方廣鎬 and Xu Peiling 許培玲, "Dunhuang yishu zhong de Weimojie suoshuo jing ji qi zhushu" 敦煌遺書中的《維摩詰所說經》及其注疏, in *KGJC*, vol. 4, pp. 2431-35.

which patrons were also included. Buddhist texts were more often associated with the world of purgatory, where souls were judged and copies of sūtras could soothe their suffering.¹⁸²

The Production of the Wall Paintings

At Dunhuang, there were two organizations associated with the artisans who produced the caves and the murals: workshops (*zuofang* 作坊) and the painting academy (*yuan* 院). A workshop was more informal and project-based, whereas the academy was a standing institution (some textual sources suggest that the academy was established around 930).¹⁸³ The two organizations co-existed, and both produced wall paintings for the local government and lineages. Both were also incorporated into taxation systems: the artisans fulfilled their tax obligations according to the level of their painting skills.¹⁸⁴ The establishment of these organizations facilitated the passing of techniques and sketches from master to apprentice. In addition to the skilled artisans of the workshops and academy, corvée laborers were conscripted for the construction of the caves. Although these people lacked professional skills, their labor made them indispensable for the heavy work involved in cave construction.

The presence of organized institutions for the construction and decoration of the caves suggests the division of labor and collaboration that was necessary for the

¹⁸² Stephen F. Teiser, "Picturing Purgatory: Illustrated Versions of The Scripture on the Ten Kings," in Jean-Pierre Drège et al. eds., *Images de Dunhuang : dessins et peintures sur papier des fonds Pelliot et Stein* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1999), pp. 169-98.

¹⁸³ Sarah Fraser, *Performing the Visual: The Practices of Buddhist Wall Paintings in China and Central Asia, 618-960*, p. 16.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

completion of a large project. Increasing organizational complexity also helps to explain the increasing size of the caves and abundance of their content.

Monks also took a significant role at the Dunhuang caves. During the Tang dynasty, there were a number of monasteries at Dunhuang.¹⁸⁵ The monks and nuns acted as both the ritual specialists and the guardians of the caves. Monks from Qianyuan 乾元 and Jinguangming 金光明 Monasteries stayed at Dunhuang and took charge of the ordinary business of these caves. For example, they cleaned the caves, took care of the guests, and also built the nearby irrigation system.¹⁸⁶ They were also active patrons of the caves especially caves constructed for meditation.¹⁸⁷ They were also invited to hold Buddhist ceremonies.¹⁸⁸

Vimalakīrti Wall Paintings in the Prayers

The patrons of the caves included a variety of people. Some were members of the great local lineages whose family members often held local official positions; others included lower level bureaucrats, local communities, and Buddhist clergy.

Patrons included original owners and consecutive donors, according to the stage at which they contributed to a project. Owners were those who initiated the establishment of the cave and to whom the caves were attributed; consecutive donors supported cave maintenance and repair, or added their images to the wall of a pre-existing cave.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 203-04.

¹⁸⁶ Ma De, "Mogaoku yu Dunhuang fojiao jiaotuan" 莫高窟與敦煌佛教教團, in *BNWK*, vol. 25, pp. 296-304.

¹⁸⁷ Ma De, "Mogaoku yu Dunhuang fojiao jiaotuan," pp. 305-08.

¹⁸⁸ Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 195.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-61.

Although the boundaries are not entirely clear-cut, most Vimalakīrti paintings were commissioned under the name of local lineages. The existing prayer documents (*fayuan wen* 發願文), records of merit (*gongdeji* 功德記), and inscriptions on the wall paintings include important messages identifying the cave owners.¹⁹⁰ From the Mid-Tang, these prayers were characterized by lengthy texts, often including an account of the owners' lineage history as well as verses corresponding to the main content depicted in the mural. Many of these prayers were preserved in the Cave Library, which was sealed at the beginning of the 11th century and preserved a large number of documents written in the previous century.¹⁹¹ Among these, I have found twelve texts relevant to Vimalakīrti wall paintings (Appendix 5). Ten of the twelve caves to which they refer were owned by prominent local lineages or high officials (Caves 5, 61, 94, 98, 100, 108, 220, 231, 332, and 454). The other two caves (Cave 85 and 143) were owned by two Buddhist Controllers (*sengtong* 僧統). The Controllers were in charge of all Buddhist monastic establishments at Dunhuang, responsible for monitoring the number, qualifications, and conduct of Buddhist monks and nuns, as well as the financial affairs of the Buddhist monasteries.¹⁹² Although they were Buddhist monks, this was a de facto official position, and it was their families who inherited and maintained these caves after their deaths.¹⁹³ Therefore, the Vimalakīrti wall paintings appear more frequently in caves patronized by locally prominent lineages and high officials. Their social roles, as influential and wealthy local lay Buddhists, gave them a deep sense of affinity with Vimalakīrti.

¹⁹⁰ Ji Xianlin 季羨林 comp., *Dunhuang xue da cidian* 敦煌學大辭典 (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1998), p. 182.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 636.

¹⁹³ Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 223.

In these texts, narratives of lineage history are always intentionally intertwined with descriptions and appeals to the transcendent power of the cave motifs. The prayers also reveal the patrons' social status, gender, and position in the family through the ordering of names. Importantly, the history of the family was also situated in a larger social context. There are references to the family's contributions to local society or the country, disclosing their self-identification with both the locality and central Chinese power. Their involvement in social affairs often resulted in the imbuing of Confucian social values into Buddhist discourse. For example, the Yin 陰 family commissioned cave 231, containing a Vimalakīrti painting on the eastern entrance, in 839. The family invited Master Dou 竇夫子, a scholar titled Tibetan Erudite 大蕃國博士, to compose a prayer for their cave.¹⁹⁴

The gentleman Yin has a courtesy name Jiazheng. His ancestors were originally native to Xinye in Nanyang prefecture (Henan province)... He led eight battle arrays at the pass [on the frontier]; when he was middle-aged he seized land. After ten years at war, he wandered about and finally arrived here. From that time, his descendents have been natives of Dunhuang. [My] great grandfather's name is [Yin] Siyuan, the Grand Master for Proper Consultation of the Tang court...[My] grandfather's name is [Yin] Tingjie, the Left Courageous Guard of the Tang court...[My] father's name is [Yin] Bolun, the Mobile Corps Commander of the Tang court...

The regulations and the family registers were turned over to the Tibetan court. The principles of the blood covenant are maintained in the relationship

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 291-96.

between nephew [i.e., Tibet] and uncle [i.e., the Tang court].¹⁹⁵ Bears know how to love their cubs; [we] remove the swaddling [from our babies] and tattoo their bodies [following Tibetan customs]; husbands and wives untie their hairpins and plait their queues. How would one think if removed from the grace of previous days and [made to] bid farewell to the emperor who served the ten thousand generations? In the year when this event [of Tibetan occupation] took place, people had to kneel before the masters of the two dynasties...

I plan to chisel one cave and niche on Mount Mogao for the current Emperor and his ancestors of seven generations, far-reaching and imperishable, a record for the future...Also, [my] younger brothers Jiazhen and Lichan, a monk of great virtue, [with expertise on] the *Tripitaka* and clerical regulations, from Shazhou, and others, further contemplated brotherliness and respect, and facilitated its glory.

公姓陰，字嘉政，其先源南陽新野人也... 塞門八陣，掠地中身，野戰十載，流連至此，至今爲敦煌人矣。曾皇祖諱嗣瑗，唐朝正議大夫...皇祖諱庭誠，唐朝左驍騎...皇考君諱伯倫，唐朝遊擊將軍...

羈維拔籍，已負蕃朝；敵血盟書，義存甥舅。熊羆愛子，折檻裸以紋身，鴛鴦夫妻，解鬟髮而辮髮；豈圖恩移舊日，長辭萬代之君。事遇此年，屈膝兩朝之主...將就莫高山爲當今聖主及七代鑿窟龕一所，遠垂不朽，用記將來。又有弟嘉珍及弟僧沙州釋門三學法律大德離纏等，進思悌恭，將順其美。

¹⁹⁵ The relationship of uncle and nephew probably refers to the marriages of Princess Wencheng 文成 and Princess Jincheng 金成 to the Tibetan kings. A stele recording the marriages was erected in 823. See Zheng Shan, *A History of Development of Tibet* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2001), pp. 90-91.

This prayer begins with a genealogy of the Yin lineage, and follows with an account of the dilemma they faced in struggling for survival under the Tibetan occupation while still maintaining loyalty to the Tang court. On the one hand, the family had to serve the Tibetans for the sake of the security of their lineage; on the other hand, they also identified themselves as Tang loyalists by devoting this cave to the Tang rulers. Following this, the text further describes the layout of the wall paintings. The last part of this text includes a record of a collective patronage group, composed of current members of the Yin lineage. Although a brother (Lichan), sister (Zhihuixing 智慧性), and three nephews (Zhixin 智欣, Huai'e 懷萼, Ciri 慈日) had become Buddhist clergy, the family did not consider them as *chujiaren* 出家人 (literally people who left home, here an common appellation for the Buddhists), but still regarded them as members.

For the owners with high official position, the prayers often include more than only family concerns. Cave 454, built between 940 and 942 with a Vimalakīrti painting on the eastern entrance, was owned by the Military Commissioner (*jiedushi* 節度使) Cao Yuanshen 曹元深 (10th cent.).¹⁹⁶ The prayer states,

At this time, I, the Minister of Works, the Military Commissioner of Hexi, first began by worshipping the eight classes of supernatural beings (*nāgas*, *devas*, *rāksasas*, *gandharvas*, *asuras*, *garudas*, *kinnaras*, and *mahoragas*), that they would protect the field office of the Military Commissioner from suffering disasters; Brahmā, Śakra, and the four Mahārājas (the four heavenly guardians), that they would pacify the upheavals of the country; that they would protect the

¹⁹⁶ According to Ma De, it is Cao Yuanshen who built the cave, and at a later time, other patrons repainted the murals with other themes of paintings. Contra his opinion, He Shizhe believes that the owners of Cave 454 were Cao Yangong and his wife. See Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 131-32.

current king who forever wears a heavenly crown, bring peace to the ten *dao*,¹⁹⁷ and bring ease to the eight directions. Next, I would pray for my life, that it would be as long as Pengzu; for the Princess, the Queen of the State, that she will preserve female demeanor and support the rule; for the sons and daughters, that they will receive instructions for high-mindedness; for those who died, that their spirits will be reborn in the Pure Land; for the related lineages that they will be bequeathed with good fortune and permanent blessing; and for the people in the whole prefecture, that they will also have a slight share of the blessing.

...

[The painting of] Śākyamuni coming to the meeting is clear and bright. The Xianjie Thousand Buddhas have a graceful light on their heads, and the four Heavenly Guardians protect the world in order to pacify the places far away. The Bodhisattva *Shengwen* 聲聞 (*Śrāvaka*) testifies to the real nature of the entities.

[The wall paintings of] *Bao'en Sūtra* are searches for good merit, [the painting of] *Lotus Sūtra* [*Saddharmapundarīka Sūtra*] instructs the unenlightened children.

[The painting of] *Jinguangming* 金光明 *Sūtra* persuades people powerfully, and

[that of] *Siyifantian* 思益凡天 *Sūtra* allows knowledge of things beyond ten

thousand *li*. [The painting of] of *Tianqingwen* 天請問 *Sūtra* helps settle problems

according to one's requests, and that of *Huayan* 華嚴 *Sūtra* [*Avatamsaka Sūtra*]

talks about the origin of various results. [The wall painting of] of *Lengqie* 楞伽

¹⁹⁷ The ten *dao* probably refers to the Ten Frontier Commands: Anxi 安西, Beiting 北庭, Hexi 河西, Shuofang 朔方, Hedong 河東, Fanyang 范陽, Pinglu 平盧, Longyou 隴右, Jiannan 劍南 and Lingnan 嶺南. The first nine were established during between 711 and 733, and Lingnan was established in 753. Dunhuang was under the rule of Hexi Command. See Denis Twitchett, *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3, pp. 366-67; 448.

Sūtra [*Lankā Sūtra*] immediately gets rid of overly-eager wills, and that of *Yaoshi* 藥師 *Sūtra* [*Bhaisajya Sūtra*] projects the twelve highest prayers. Heresies are defeated, and [people] abandon evil and select the right way. Vimalakīrti manifests the sickness and his body; Śāriputra instructs on the emptiness of all things, and the eight classes of supernatural beings that support this phenomenon.

...

People who construct these caves avoid countless impending calamities, and those who see them have their sins removed, to the sands of the Ganges.

...時則有我河西節度使司空, 先奉爲龍天八部, 護蓮府卻殄災殃; 梵釋四王, 靜挽槍而安社稷; 當今帝主, 永戴天冠, 十道澄清, 八方順化; 次爲司空已壽, 以彭祖¹⁹⁸而齊年; 國母天公主,¹⁹⁹ 保坤儀而同助治; 郎君娘子, 受訓珪璋; 先過後亡, 神生淨土; 枝羅親族, 吉慶長年; 合郡人民, 同沾少福之嘉會也。

...

釋迦四會, 了了分明; 賢劫千佛, 頂生威光; 自在四天, 振定遐方; 菩薩聲聞, 證成實相。報恩尋思獲果, 法華誘化童蒙, 金光明勸念甚深, 思益通曉萬里, 天請隨問開決, 華嚴談什果之宗, 楞伽頓舍高心, 藥師發十二上願, 降魔伏諸外道歸正捨邪, 維摩示病示身, 舍立弗宣揚空教, 龍天八部助勢加威, ...

...建之隨殃萬劫, 睹之者罪滅恒沙。²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Pengzu was said to be the descendent of Emperor Zhuanxu 顓頊. He was enfeoffed at Pengcheng 彭城, and lived seven to eight hundred years old. See Wang Shumin 王叔岷, *Liexian zhuan jiaodian* 列仙傳校箋 (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo chouben, 1995), p. 38.

¹⁹⁹ The Heavenly Princess, or Queen Mother of the State, was the honorable title of nee Li, the Uyghurian wife of Cao Yijin. See Ji Xianlin comp., *Dunhuang xue da cidian*, p. 361.

²⁰⁰ Huang Yongwu comp., *Dunhuang Baozang*, vol. 128, p. 389 (Pelliot No. 3457). As for the transcription, see Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 130-31.

During his five year posting as the Military Commissioner, Cao Yuanshen spent three years building this cave.²⁰¹ He not only prayed for his family's karma, but also for the peace of the region. All social strata were taken into consideration: from the emperor and his country, to Cao's family and relatives, to the Hexi region and the people. Mentioning his family and official responsibilities, the prayer confirmed his legitimate position in this region. Through its mentioning of images based on a variety of sūtras, the prayer also indicates that the caves could be visualized as an imagined Buddha land.

As I will discuss further below, these prayers were offered in ceremonies conducted after the completion of the wall paintings. In other words, at the moment of the prayer's verbal articulation, the religious function of the visual presentation was ritually activated. The prayer and the cave complex were thus interrelated. When the visual and textual modes were combined, the cave complex showcased and publicized its influence through a sacred voice.

Themes from the Vimalakīrti paintings were also mentioned in the above prayers. For example, the prayer for Cave 454 says "Vimalakīrti manifested his sickness and body" 維摩詰示病示身;²⁰² the prayer for Cave 94 says, "The residence of Vimalakīrti is only one square *zhang*, but like a mustard seed could include the Sumeru" 淨居方丈, 芥納須彌;²⁰³ the prayer for Cave 231 says, "the paintings of the *Bhaisajya-guru-vaidūrya-prabhāsa sūtra*, *Pure Land Sūtra*, *Avatamsaka sūtra*, *Maitreya sūtra* and *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* were separately painted on the Northern wall" 北牆畫藥師淨土華嚴彌勒

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Huang Yongwu, *Dunhuang baozang*, vol. 130, pp. 195-99.

維摩變各一鋪,²⁰⁴ “The sincere and virtuous Mañjuśrī is in a position of offering help, and inquired after (Vimalakīrti’s) sickness” 厚德文殊補處, 詢於詣疾.²⁰⁵ In Cave 98, the prayer says, “to humbly manipulate the power of good, to open wide the door of *upaya* (expedient means).²⁰⁶ His kindnesses extends to the vast reaches, and far-reaching is the enlightened one” 俯運善權之力, 廣開方便之門, 邈以能仁, 遐哉妙覺者也.²⁰⁷

Using language as their mode of representation, the prayers are resolutely structured in a linear narrative. In comparison with the two-dimensional paintings, the explanation of the Vimalakīrti representation in the prayers limits itself to a partial perspective, meaning that some prayers emphasize Vimalakīrti’s magic power, some his sickness and body, and some Mañjuśrī’s virtue. The visual images, on the other hand, have an omniscient perspective missing in the texts. Furthermore, all of the images are distinguished by stability and continuity of composition, almost always adopting a roughly identical triangular frame (with the Buddha on top, and Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī on each side) combined with symmetrical composition. However, the linguistic descriptions, composed for the particular interests of patrons, show variation and individualism.

Ritual and Caves

There are no direct descriptions of the relationship between ritual and caves. However, based on the locations and appearances of the cave images, scholars have proposed

²⁰⁴ Huang Yongwu, *Dunhuang baozang*, vol. 134, p. 4638. As for the transcription, see Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 294.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Buddhism utilizes temporary means to achieve the true teaching. It could be utilized on a variety of occasions: Vimalakīrti’s hanging around the wine shops and brothels was considered means of expedience to instruct people; and his showing sickness is also for such a purpose.

²⁰⁷ Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, pp. 115-16.

several alternative associations between these images and ritual. Shi Weixiang, Bai Huawen, and Victor Mair tend to believe that these murals were visual aids for *bianwen* performance.²⁰⁸ However, arguing from the appearance and structure of the caves, Li Yongning 李永寧 and Cai Weitang 蔡偉堂 conclude that the dark cave chambers would preclude oral recitation rituals.²⁰⁹ Wu Hung furthers this argument by suggesting that these paintings were produced to demonstrate Buddhist devotion, and were not intended to be viewed by people; furthermore, in some cases the appearance of *bianxiang* predated that of *bianwen* and so could not have served as visual aids.²¹⁰ Ning Qiang, in an examination of cave 220, argues that the family caves also functioned as familial shrines.²¹¹ The above scholars provide different views on the functions of these visual images and the relationship between the two-dimensional wall paintings and the linear narrative of the sūtra.

There is no conclusive answer in the absence of further evidence. However, textual materials provide some clues to the ritual significance of the caves. Usually after a cave was built, a ceremony—a purificatory fast (*zhaihui* 齋會) or, more commonly, a feast—would take place. For example, the prayer patronized by Zhang Huaishen 張淮深, includes mention of the preparation of a feast for 1000 people.²¹² The holding of these large gatherings ritually transformed the architecture of the caves into a visual representation of a Buddha land. Furthermore, this occasion also demonstrated the

²⁰⁸ Shi Weixiang, p. 195. Victor Mair, *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 1. Bai Huawen, "What is 'Pien-wen'?" *HJAS*, 44.2 (1984), p. 505.

²⁰⁹ Li Yongning and Cai Weitang, "Xiangmo bianwen yu Dunhuang bihua zhong de Laoducha doushengbian" 降魔變文與敦煌壁畫中的勞度叉鬥聖變. Quoted by Wu Hung, "What is *Bianxiang*? --- On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *HJAS* 52.1 (1992), pp. 134-35.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

²¹¹ Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China*, p. 5.

²¹² Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu*, p. 313.

collaboration between monks and lay communities.²¹³ Nonetheless, no solid scholarship discloses the location of the feasts.

In addition to these rituals, caves also played a role in rituals linked to annual festivals. During major festivals, candles and lamps would be lit in every cave.²¹⁴ On the eighth day of the twelfth month, the day commemorating the Buddha's enlightenment, and the fifteenth day of the first month, the Lantern Festival, lamps and candles were lit in every cave. During the reign of the *Guiyijun*, the Military Commissioners or famous monks organized these festivals as well as other large-scale fasting ceremonies. Patrons would donate money to monks who stayed at the caves to dust and to light the candles.²¹⁵ Also during these festivals, caves without owners would be assigned to prominent local lineages, which willingly agreed to raise the funds necessary for worship. Prayers offered during the festivals were often entitled "Texts for Lighting the Lanterns in the *Sheyi* Community" (*sheyi randeng wen*, 社邑燃燈文) or "Texts for Fasting in the *She*" (*shezhai wen*, 社齋文).²¹⁶ By suggesting the viewership, lighting candles aimed at reactivating the votive space.

Therefore, there are indications that viewership or the presence of worshippers was important in ritual activities connected to the caves. First, the caves served as the location for the visualization of a transcendent Buddhist world. Second, they were a site of significant ritual activity during important festivals. Third, they functioned as showcases for prominent lineages to publicize their status and record their merit. In all

²¹³ Jacques Gernet, *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History From the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 257-58.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 195-97.

²¹⁶ Ning Ke 寧可 and Hao Chunwen 郝春文 comps., *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao* 敦煌社邑文書輯校 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997), pp. 16-17.

these cases, the viewers were composed of family members and visitors and the imagined Buddhist transcendental beings.

The Buddhist Cave as a Showcase for Political Purposes

The wall paintings represent stories taking place around the sixth century B.C.E, thus constituting a space in which this then-already-ancient world was preserved. Meanwhile, the visual representations incorporated a great number of contemporary elements, and these elements disclosed the political claims of their patrons.

An image of the Chinese emperor appears in Cave 220 (fig. 2-8). This phenomenon, according to Ning Qiang, reflects the political orientation of the patron, the Zhai Family, a prominent family in Dunhuang.²¹⁷ Zhai Fengda 翟奉達, the first owner of the cave, was a calendarist, and some of his family numbers had served in the local army that participated in the Tang's military occupation of Gaochang 高昌 in 640.²¹⁸ Cave 220 was built two years later, when the ascending Tang power had recently secured regional peace, it would not be a surprise if this prominent local family would have liked to express their loyalty to the Tang emperor, Taizong (r. 619-42).²¹⁹ After Cave 220 was built, similar images appeared in Cave 103. During the Tibetan reign, the image of the Chinese emperor was replaced by a Tibetan King (fig. 2-13). And consequently, the King's image was removed shortly after Zhang Yichao reclaimed the region. The

²¹⁷ Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China*, pp. 53-54.

²¹⁸ Shi Weixiang, "Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang Mogaoku 絲綢之路上的敦煌莫高窟," in Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo comp., *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji* 敦煌研究文集 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1982), p. 84.

²¹⁹ Duan Wenjie, "Dunhuang bihua zhong de yiguan fushi" 敦煌壁畫中的衣冠服飾, in *BNWK*, vol. 5, p. 38.

reinstallation of the Chinese emperor proclaimed the Zhang family's allegiance to the Tang.

After the An Lushan rebellion (756-73), the Chinese central government could not control Western China, and this situation prevailed throughout the Tibetan occupation and the governance of the Guiyijun. As the highest official position at Dunhuang, Military Commissioners had to cooperate with surrounding powers. Intermarriage with the Khotan and Uygur kingdoms was one method used to resolve potential conflicts. The owners of Cave 98, the Cao family, monopolized the position of Military Commissioner from 915 to the 1036. During this period, they established close relationships with the Khotan and Uygur kingdoms through intermarriage with the Khotanese kings and Uygur princesses.²²⁰ For example, under the Vimalakīrti painting in cave 98, twenty-one patrons are listed, including Li Shengtian (Visa Sambhava, r. 912-66) who was the Khotan King and the son-in-law of Cao Yijin, and Cao Yijin's wife who was a Uygur princess. Although these figures all belong to a large family, they were also represented by their official titles and social status. These listings conveyed the social status of the patrons and their diplomatic relations with the rulers.

Conclusion

Cave paintings clearly served religious purposes, and the Vimalakīrti theme was no exception. The medium of cave paintings distinguished itself from others: the paintings were drawn on the two-dimensional surface of the cave wall, but were situated in the three-dimensional space of the caves. When represented alongside images of lineage or

²²⁰ As for their intermarriages, see Rong Xinjiang, *Zhongguo yu wailai wenming*, pp. 266-68.

official patrons, this theme manifested the patrons' devotion to Buddhism and concern for the afterlife.

Meanwhile, one should note that the caves also conveyed political messages. Located on the Tang frontier and at the periphery of Tang cultural influence, the location of Dunhuang forced its residents, especially local officials and lineages, to consider their political and cultural identity. These elements were intentionally represented in order to manifest their social status, which changed along with the changing political influence and domination of the Tibetan and Tang courts.

The functions of the wall paintings and the rites carried out in the caves were significant aspects of the Buddhist caves. However, available primary sources do not provide definite answers in these areas. Further analysis will require new discoveries or alternative interpretations of existing materials.

Conclusion

This thesis has discussed the transformation of Vimalakīrti paintings as visual images embedded with cultural meanings. The styles of the visual images of Vimalakīrti varied according to region and period. During the Southern Dynasties, two-dimensional painting on walls and paper was the dominant medium, and brushwork was highlighted. Copies of the original paintings not only imparted religious doctrines, but also came to be seen as masterpieces of painting technique. In the south, most patrons were famous temples, which were open to the general public. A number of famous artists incorporated the Vimalakīrti theme into their paintings, and many intellectuals were attracted by his charisma and rhetorical skills, as well as the elegant writing of the sūtra. Therefore, the image of Vimalakīrti in the south, in addition to its religious meaning, also signified the aesthetic and cultural tastes of intellectuals.

In the north, three-dimensional stelae and sculptures were the dominant media; patrons of cave paintings were mainly imperial families of high social status, while those of stelae were mostly local communities of low status. Owing to their geographic locations, only members of particular groups had access to these images. Although professional artisans were also influenced by the southern styles, differences in modes of production and media led to the development of a distinct tradition in the north. Meanwhile, since these visual presentations served a predominantly religious function, images of Vimalakīrti were also closely linked to descriptions in the original sūtra.

Representations during the Sui and Tang dynasties synthesized northern and southern styles. Intellectuals continued to appreciate Vimalakīrti as an ideal model of a wealthy and eloquent lay Buddhist. In Dunhuang, Vimalakīrti paintings gradually

occupied more space in the cave and came to constitute a separate theme. During this process, the location of these paintings, either on the entrance wall of the cave or alongside images of patrons, was directly associated with Vimalakīrti's image as a lay Buddhist, an image that appealed to local elites.

In the original sūtra, Vimalakīrti drew together various religious, social, and cultural domains: he was a lay Buddhist capable of magical performances, such as requesting rice from the fragrant earth and seats from Sumeru Lamp King, he belonged to the upper classes, and he possessed excellent rhetorical skills and often chose to ignore social protocol, such as hanging around the wine shops and brothels. The rich meaning inherent to this figure facilitated its transformation in different cultural and temporal contexts. The image in the original sūtra provided a degree of continuity, but local political and historical influences led to significant changes in style and content.

Owing to limitations of space and availability of materials, this thesis has not pursued certain questions: first, after the Song dynasty, the Vimalakīrti theme remained popular among lay Buddhist literati paintings, such as works by Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106). This thesis has only considered relevant images until the mid-tenth century. Second, numerous materials, including information on the income and expenses associated with temple building and maintenance could disclose vital aspects of ongoing rituals. I hope to pursue this question further in my future research. Third, current publications on the Dunhuang images do not include the layout of the caves, nor do they touch on themes related to the Vimalakīrti themes. A further discussion of the rituals and spatial arrangement of these images would necessitate on-site research.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Chapters of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*²²¹

Number	Chapter	品
1	The Buddha Land	佛國品
2	The Expedient Method of Teaching	方便品
3	The Disciples' Reluctance to Visit Vimalakīrti	弟子品
4	The Reluctance of the Bodhisattvas	菩薩品
5	Mañjuśrī's Consolation of the Invalid (Vimalakīrti)	文殊師利問疾品
6	The Inconceivable Liberation	不思議品
7	Looking at Living Beings	觀眾生品
8	The Buddha Path	佛道品
9	Initiation into the Non-Dual Dharma	入不二法門品
10	The Feast Brought by the Emanated Incarnation	香積佛品
11	The Conduct of the Bodhisattva	菩薩行品
12	Seeing Akṣobhya Buddha	見阿(門+眾) 佛品
13	The Offering of Buddha	法供養品
14	Injunction to Spread this Sūtra	囑累品

²²¹ The English translations were based on the editions of Robert Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*.

Appendix 2: Translations of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*²²²

A) Chinese Translations

No.	Date of Translation	Translated by	Title
1	188	Yan Fodiao 嚴佛調	<i>Gu Weimojie jing</i> 古維摩詰經
2	222-229	Zhiqian 支謙	<i>Weimojie jing</i> 維摩詰經
3	291 or 296	Zhu Shulan 竺叔蘭	<i>Yi Weimojie jing</i> 異維摩詰經
4	303	Dharmarakṣa 竺法護	<i>Weimojie suoshuo famen jing</i> 維摩詰所說法門經
5	290-307	Zhi Mindu 支敏度	<i>He Weimojie jing</i> 合維摩詰經
6	Eastern Jin (317-419)	Gītāmītra 祇多蜜	<i>Weimojie jing</i> 維摩詰經
7	406	Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什	<i>Weimojie suoshuo jing</i> 維摩詰所說經
8	650	Xuanzang 玄奘	<i>Shuo Wugoucheng jing</i> 說無垢稱經

B) Translations into Other Languages

Language	Date	Translated by	Title
Tibetan	The first quarter of the ninth century	Chos ŋid tshul khrims	
Tibetan	Before the Cave Library was closed in 1035		(Four fragmentary manuscripts from Dunhuang)
Sogdian	Before the Cave Library was closed in 1035	Translated from Kumārajīva's Chinese version	(Fragment of a manuscript found at Dunhuang)
Khotan	Before the Cave Library was closed in 1035		(Fragment of a manuscript found at Dunhuang)

²²² The sources for Appendix 2 come from Étienne Lamotte, *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa)* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1962), pp. 2-14.

Appendix 3: Northern Representations of the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra* in Sculpture

Date	Original Place	Media	Publishing information
420	Bingling Cave 169, Gansu	Mural	Gansu sheng bowuguan et al. comp., <i>Binglingsi shiku</i> , fig. 3.
500	Shanxi	Stele	Renmin meishu chubanshe comp., <i>Ancient Relics of China</i> , pl. 184
504	Unknown	Stele	Osvold Sirén, <i>Chinese Sculpture</i> , pl. 96.
516-28	Southern Wall, Guyang Cave, Longmen	Lintel Relief	Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., <i>Longmen shiku</i> , pls. 35- 36.
516-683?	Northern Wall, Zhao Keshi Cave, Longmen, Henan	Lintel Relief	Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., <i>Longmen shiku</i> , pl. 112.
516-28	Southern Wall, Lianhua Cave, Longmen, Henan	Lintel Relief	Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., <i>Longmen shiku</i> , pl. 86.
516-28	Northern Wall, Guyang Cave, Longmen, Henan	Lintel Relief	Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., <i>Longmen shiku</i> , pl. 29.
518-24	Longmen Cave 13, Shanxi	Inscription	Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., <i>Longmen shiku</i> , pl. 53.
517-28	Gongxian Cave 1, Henan	Sculpture	Lu Xiuwen comp., <i>Zhongguo shiku tuwen zhi</i> , vol. 1, p. 99.
520	Henan	Stele	W. Perceval Yetts, <i>Catalogue of the George Eumorfopoulos</i> , vol. 3, pp. 43-50 (pls. 8-13).
Ca. 525		Stele	Osvold Sirén, <i>Chinese Sculpture</i> , pls. 139-40.
533		Stele	Wenwu, 1959, 2 p.4.
Northern Wei (386-534)	Stele 10, Maijishan Cave 133, Gansu	Stele	Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., <i>Maijishan shiku</i> , pl. 95.
Western Wei (535-56)	Maijishan Cave 102, Gansu	Sculpture	Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., <i>Maijishan shiku</i> , pl. 134
Western Wei	Maijishan Cave 123, Gansu	Sculpture	Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., <i>Maijishan shiku</i> , pl. 139
Western Wei	Maijishan Cave 127, Gansu	Mural	Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., <i>Maijishan shiku</i> , pl. 160
Western Wei	Maijishan Cave 135, Gansu	Mural	Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., <i>Maijishan shiku</i> , pp. 193-94.

535-540	Ruicheng, Shanxi		Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
551	Shanxi		Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
554	Shanxi		Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
536 Eastern Wei (534-50)	Henan		Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
551	Henan		Osvold Sirén, <i>Chinese Sculpture From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century</i> , pl. 233.
557	Henan		Osvold Sirén, <i>Chinese Sculpture From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century</i> , vol. 3, pls. 235.
562-64		Rubbing	Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
Northern Qi (550-557)		Carved stone base	Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
575		Stele	Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.
Northern Qi		Stele	Davidson, <i>Lotus Sutra</i> , fig. 6.
Northern Qi		Stele	Osvold Sirén, <i>Chinese Sculpture From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century</i> , vol. 1, pl. 79.
579	Henan	Stele	Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," pp. 49-52.

Appendix 4: Dunhuang Caves Containing the Vimalakīrti *bianxiang*²²³

Dynasties and Periods		Cave Number (#)	Number	
Sui (581-617)		262, 276, 277, 314, 380, 417, 419, 420, 423, 425, 433	11	
Tang (618-906)	Early Tang (618-704)	68, 203, 206, 220, 242, 322, 332, 334, 335, 341, 342	11	34
	High Tang (705-780)	103, 194	2	
	Mid Tang (781-847)	133, 159, 186, 231, 236, 237, 240, 359, 360, 365 ²²⁴	9	
	Late Tang (848-906)	9, 12, 18, 85, 94, 132, 138, 139, 143, 150, 156, 369	12	
Wudai (907-959)		5, 6, 22, 44, 53, 61, 98, 100, 108, 121, 146, 261, 342, 334, 335, 454, (Y)32	17	
Song (960-1279)		7, 25, 172, 202, 203, 264, 437,	7	
Total			69/65 ²²⁵	

²²³ Data between the Sui and Song dynasties comes from He Shizhe, "Weimojie jingbian," in *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, pp. 181-249.

²²⁴ Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoshi yanjiu*, p. 98.

²²⁵ The total number should be sixty-nine. Since *Weimobian* were created a second time during the Wudai and Song dynasties in four caves (#203, #334, #335, #342), there are sixty-five caves in total.

Appendix 5: Table of Caves with Their Corresponding Inscriptions

Cave	Date	Patron	Source Credits
5	957	Du Yansi 杜延思	<i>Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji</i> , p. 228.
61	950	Cao Yuanzhong 曹元忠	Dunhuang yanjiuyuan comp., <i>Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji</i> , p. 225.
85	862-867	Farong 法榮 (Zhai sengtong 翟僧統)	“Zhai jia bei” 翟家碑. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan comp., <i>Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji</i> , p. 210.
94	880	Zhang Huaishen 張淮深	“Zhang Huishen gongde ji” 張懷深功德記. Pelliot No. 3720.
98	923-925	Cao Yijin 曹議金	“Hexi jiedushi shangshu juan ku fayuanwen” 河西節度使尚書鑄窟發願文; “Hexi jiedushi shangshu zao daku gongde qiyuan wen” 河西節度使尚書造大窟功德祈願文. Pelliot No. 2762; Pelliot No. 3781.
100	939	Cao Yuande 曹 元德 et al.	“Gongde ji” 功德記. Stein No. 4245.
108	935-939	Zhang Huaiqing 張懷慶	“Duya juan dakan fayuanwen” 都衙鑄大龕發願文 Pelliot No. 3550.
143		Wang Sengtong 王僧統	“Changxin sinian Hexi dusengtong Dangquan jianku shangliangwen 長興四年河西都僧統宕泉建窟上梁文” Pelliot No. 3302.
220	642	Zhai Tong 翟通	“Zhai jia bei” 翟家碑 Pelliot No. 4640.
231	839	Yin Jiazheng 陰家政	“Dabo gu Dunhuang jun Mogaoku Yin chushi gong xiu gongde ji” 大蕃故敦煌郡莫高窟陰處士公修功德記. Pelliot No. 4638; Pelliot No. 4660.
332	698	Li Da 李達; Li Kerang 李克讓	“Li jun Mogaoku xiu foka bei” 李君莫高窟修佛龕碑, in Su Bai 宿白, <i>Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu</i> 中國石窟寺研究 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), pp. 264-69.
454	940-942	Cao Yuanshen 曹元深	Hexi jiedushi sikong zao daku gongde zan 河西節度使司空造大窟功德讚. Pelliot No. 3457.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Bo Juyi 白居易 (772-846). *Bo Juyi ji jianjiao* 白居易集箋校. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1988.
- Daoxuan 道宣 (596-667). *Xu gaoseng zhuan* 續高僧傳, in *DZJ*, T50.
- Dazheng xinxiu dazangjing* 大正新修大藏經. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1980-1992.
- Dong Hao 董浩 (1740-1818) comp. *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文. Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990.
- Duan Chengshi 段成式 (d. 863). *Si ta ji* 寺塔記, in *DZJ*, T51.
- Fang Xuanling 房玄齡 (578-648). *Jin Shu* 晉書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
- Faxian 法顯 (ca. 337-422). *Gaoseng Faxian zhuan* 高僧法顯傳, in *DZJ*, T51.
- Fei Zhangfang 費長房 (dates unknown). *Lidai sanbao ji* 歷代三寶紀, in *DZJ*, T49.
- Feizhuo 非濁 (?-1063). *Sanbao ganying yaolue lu* 三寶感應要略錄, in *DZJ*, T51.
- Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844-96) ed. *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961.
- Huang Binhong 黃賓虹 (1865-1955) et al. comps. *Zhonghua meishu congshu* 中華美術叢書. Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1998.
- Huang Yongwu 黃永武 ed. *Dunhuang baozang* 敦煌寶藏. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chuban gongsi, 1981.
- Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554). *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, in *DZJ*, T50.
- Huijue 慧覺 (fl. 5th cent.) trans. *Xianyu jing* 賢愚經, in *DZJ*, T4.
- Huili 慧立 (615-?). *Da Tang Daci'en si Sanzang fashi zhuan* 大唐大慈恩寺三藏法師傳, in *DZJ*, T50.
- Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (ca. 385-409) trans. *Jingang boruo boluomi jing* 金剛般若波羅蜜經 (Vajracchedika Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra), in *DZJ*, T8.
- trans. *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經 (*The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*), in *DZJ*, T14.
- Jizang 吉藏 (549-623). *Jingming xuanlun* 淨名玄論, in *DZJ*, T38.
- . *Weimo jing yishu* 維摩經義疏, in *DZJ*, T38.
- Jñānagupta 闍那崛多 (523-600) trans. *Yueshang nü jing* 月上女經 (*Candrottārā Dārikā Vyākaran Sūtra*), in *DZJ*, T14.
- Li Yanshou 李延壽 (618-76). *Nan shi* 南史. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.

- Liu Xu 劉昫 (887-946). *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.
- Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007-72) et al. *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1975.
- Qing Shengzu 清聖祖 (1654-1722) comp. *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960.
- Sengyou 僧祐 (445-518). *Chu sanzang ji ji* 出三藏記集, in *DZJ*, T55.
- Sengzhao 僧肇 (384-414). *Zhu Weimojie jing* 注維摩詰經, in *DZJ*, T38.
- Shansi tongzi jing* 善思童子經, in *DZJ*, T14.
- Shen Yue 沈約 (441-513). *Song shu* 宋書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
- Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-ca. 86 B.C.E.). *Shi ji* 史記. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964.
- Wang Qi 王琦 (fl. 1758) comp. *Li Taibo quanji* 李太白全集. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977.
- Wang Shumin 王叔岷 (1914-). *Liexian zhuan jiaodian* 列仙傳校箋. Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan Zhongguo wenzhe yanjiusuo chouben, 1995.
- Wang Yunwu 王雲五 (1888-1979) comp. *Congshu jicheng chubian* 叢書集成初編. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985.
- Wei Shou 魏收 (506-72). *Wei shu* 魏書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1974.
- Xu Zhen'e 徐震堦 ed. *Shishuo xinyu jiaodian* 世說新語校箋. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984.
- Xuanzang 玄奘 (596-664). *Da Tang xiyu ji* 大唐西域記, in *DZJ*, T51.
- trans. *Shuo Wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經 (*The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa Sūtra*), in *DZJ*, T14.
- Yao Silian 姚思廉 (557-637). *Liang shu* 梁書. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1973.
- Zanning 贊寧 (919-1001). *Da Song seng shilue* 大宋僧史略, in *DZJ*, T54.
- Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (ca. 9th cent). *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1964.
- Zhipan 志磐 (ca. 13th cent). *Fozu tongji* 佛祖統紀, in *DZJ*, T49.
- Zhiqian 支謙 (ca. 219-ca. 259). *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經, in *DZJ*, T14.
- Zhisheng 智昇 (ca. 8th cent). *Kaiyuan shijiao lu* 開元釋教錄, in *DZJ*, T55.
- Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄 (ca. 8th cent). *Tang chao minghua lu* 唐朝名畫錄, in Huang Binhong et al. comps., *Zhonghua meishu congshu*, vol. 8: 2.6.

Secondary Sources

- Acker, William, trans. *Some T'ang and Pre-T'ang Texts on Chinese Painting*. Westport: Hyperion Press, 1979.
- Bai Huawen 白化文 and Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良 eds. *Dunhuang bianwen lunwenlu* 敦煌變文論文錄. Taipei: Mingwen shuju, 1985.
- . "Shenme shi bianwen" 什麼是變文, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 429-45.
- . Victor Mair trans. "What is Pien-wen 變文?" *HJAS* 44.2 (1984): 493-514.
- Barnhart, Richard M., et al. comp. *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting*. New Haven: Yale University Press; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1997.
- Beal, Samuel, trans. *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World*. Calcutta: Susil Gupta, 1957-58.
- Bunce, Fredrick. *A Dictionary of Buddhist and Hindu Iconography*. New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997.
- Bunker, Emma. "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," *Artibus Asiae*, 30.1 (1968): 28-52.
- Ch'en, Kenneth. *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964.
- Chen Mingda 陳明達 comp. *Gongxian Tianlongshan Xiangtangshan Anyang shiku diaoke* 鞏縣天龍山響堂山安陽石窟雕刻, in *Zhongguo meishu quanji diaosu bian* 中國美術全集雕塑編. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1989.
- Chen Qingxiang 陳清香, "Dunhuang bihua zhong de Weimo jingbian" 敦煌壁畫中的維摩經變 in *Di er jie Dunhuang xue guoji yantaohui lunwenji* 第二屆敦煌學國際研討會論文集, *Zhongguo wenhua daxue Zhongguo wenxuexi* 中國文化大學中國文學系 et al. eds. Taipei: Hanxue yanjiu zhongxin, 1991, pp. 373-93.
- Chen Yinke 陳寅恪. "Dunhuang ben 'Weimojie jing Wenshushili wenjipin' yanyi ba" 敦煌本《維摩詰經文殊師利問疾品》演義跋, in *LWL*, vol. 2, pp. 447-53.
- Cheng Yizhong 程毅中. "Guanyu bianwen de jidian tansuo" 關於變文的幾點探索, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 373-96.
- Conze, Edward, trans. *Buddhist Wisdom Books, Containing the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1958.
- Davidson, Leroy. *The Lotus Sutra in Chinese Art: A Study in Buddhist Art to the Year 1000*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954.
- Duan Wenjie 段文傑 et al. comps. *Dunhuang shiku quanji* 敦煌石窟全集. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe; Shanghai shiji chubanshe, 2000.
- . "Gongyangren huaxiang yu shiku 供養人畫像與石窟," in *KGJC*, vol. 4, pp. 2292-94.

- Dunhuang Wenwu yanjiusuo 敦煌文物研究所 comp. *Dunhuang Mogaoku neirong zonglu* 敦煌莫高窟內容總錄. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982.
- comp. *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji* 敦煌研究文集. Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1982.
- . "Dunhuang bihua zhong de yiguan fushi" 敦煌壁畫中的衣冠服飾, in *BNWK*, vol. 5, pp. 35-50.
- . "Zhang Yichao shiqi de Dunhuang yishu" 張議朝時期的敦煌藝術, in *BNWK*, vol. 5, pp. 54-76.
- Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院 comp. *Dunhuang Mogaoku gongyangren tiji* 敦煌莫高窟供養人題記. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986.
- Fairbank, John K., ed. *Chinese Thought and Institutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩 et al. comps. *Zhongguo Dunhuang xue bainian wenku* 中國敦煌學百年文庫. Lanzhou: Gansu wenhua chubanshe, 1999.
- Fang Guangchang 方廣錫 and Xu Peiling 許培玲. "Dunhuang yishu zhong de Weimojie suo shuo jing ji qi zhushu" 敦煌遺書中的《維摩詰所說經》及其注疏, in *KGJC*, vol. 4, pp. 2430-35.
- Fraser, Sarah. *Performing the Visual: The Practices of Buddhist Wall Paintings in China and Central Asia, 618-960*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.
- Gansu sheng bowuguan 甘肅省博物館 et al. eds. *Bingling si shiku* 炳靈寺石窟. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982.
- Gernet, Jacques. *Buddhism in Chinese Society: An Economic History From the Fifth to the Tenth Centuries*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1995.
- Gray, Basil. *Buddhist Cave Paintings at Tun-huang*. London: Faber and Faber, 1959.
- Guan Dedong 關德棟, "Tan 'bianwen'" 談變文, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 165-70.
- Guojia wenwuju jiaoyuchu 國家文物局教育處 comp. *Fojiao shiku kaogu gaiyao* 佛教石窟考古概要. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993.
- He Shizhe 賀世哲. "Dunhuang Mogaoku bihua zhong de Weimojie jingbian" 敦煌莫高窟壁畫中的維摩詰經變, in *BNWK*, vol. 9, pp. 27-48.
- . "Weimojie jingbian" 維摩詰經變 in *Fahua jing hua juan* 法華經畫卷 in Duan Wenjie 段文傑 et al. comps., *Dunhuang shiku quanji* 敦煌石窟全集 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe; Shanghai shiji chubanshe, 2000), pp. 182-251.
- Hu Jinggui 胡景桂 comp. *Guangping jinshi lue* 廣平金石略, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 石刻史料新編. Taipei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1986.
- Hopkirk, Peter. *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1959.

- Ji Xianlin 季羨林 comp. *Dunhuang xue da cidian* 敦煌學大辭典. Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1998.
- Jin Weinuo 金維諾. *Zhongguo meishu shilun ji* 中國美術史論集. Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1981.
- Lamotte, Étienne, trans. *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrti (Vimalakīrtinirdeśa)*. Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1962.
- Legge, James, trans. *A Record of Buddhistic Kingdoms: Being an Account by the Chinese Monk Fā-hien of His Travels in India and Ceylon (A.D. 399-414) in Search of the Buddhist Books of Discipline*. New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corp., 1965.
- Lin Baoyao 林保堯. *Dunhuang yishu tudian* 敦煌藝術圖典. Taiwan: Yishujia chubanshe, 1991.
- Liu Shufen. "Art, Ritual, and Society: Buddhist Practice in Rural China during the Northern Dynasties," *Asia Major* 3.8 (Jan., 1995): 19-49.
- Longmen wenwu baoguan suo 龍門文物保管所 comp. *Longmen shiku* 龍門石窟. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1980.
- Lou Yulie 樓宇烈. *Zhongguo lizhi fengsu mantan* 中國禮制風俗漫談. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1986.
- Lu Xiuwen 盧秀文. *Zhongguo shiku tuwen zhi* 中國石窟圖文志. Lanzhou: Dunhuang wenyi chubanshe, 2002.
- Lu Xun 魯迅. *Lu Xun quanji* 魯迅全集. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1997.
- Ma De 馬德. *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu* 敦煌莫高窟史研究. Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996.
- . "Mogaoku yu Dunhuang fojiao jiaotuan" 莫高窟與敦煌佛教教團, in *BNWK*, vol. 25, pp. 296-304.
- Mair, Victor, trans. "What is Pien-wen 變文?" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 44.2 (1984): 493-514.
- . *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and its Indian Genesis*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.
- . *T'ang Transformation Texts: A Study of the Buddhist Contribution to the Rise of Vernacular Fiction and Drama in China*. Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies; Harvard University: Distributed by Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Mather, Richard, trans. *A New Account of Tales of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976.
- Ning Ke 寧可 and Hao Chunwen 郝春文 comps. *Dunhuang sheyi wenshu jijiao* 敦煌社邑文書輯校. Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1997.
- Ning Qiang 寧強. "Shangshi dengxiantu yu Weimojie jingbian" 上士登仙圖與維摩詰經變 *Dunhuang yanjiu* 敦煌研究 1 (1990): 30-37.

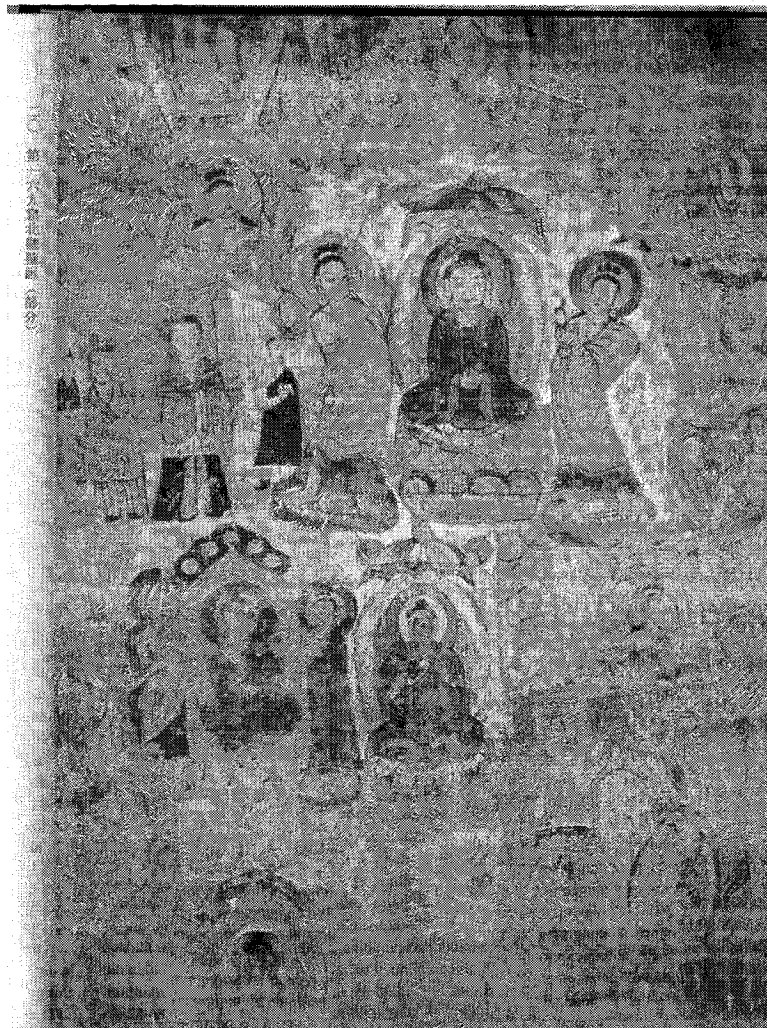
- . "Buddhist-Daoist Conflict and Gender Transformation: Deciphering the Illustrations of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa in Mediaeval Chinese Art," *Orientalia* (Nov., 1996): 50-59.
- . *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Caves of the Zhai Family*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- Qian Nanxiu. *Spirit and Self in Medieval China: The Shih-shuo hsün-yü and its Legacy*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001.
- Ren Jiyu 任繼愈. *Zhongguo fojiao shi* 中國佛教史. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1981.
- Renmin meishu chubanshe ed. *Ancient Relics of China*. Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1962.
- Rhie, Marilyn. *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia*, 3 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1999.
- Rong Xinjiang 榮新江. *Zhongguo Zhongguo yu wailai wenming* 中古中國與外來文明. Beijing: Sanlian shidian, 2001.
- Russell-Smith, Lilla. *Uygur Patronage in Dunhuang: Regional Art Centres on the Northern Silk Road in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*. Leiden: Brill, 2005.
- Saunders, Dale. *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1960.
- Shanxi sheng wenwu gongzuo weiyuanhui 山西省文物工作委員會 et al. comps. *Yungang shiku* 雲岡石窟. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1977.
- Shi Shouqian 石守謙. *Fengge yu shibian* 風格與世變. Taipei: Yunchen wenhua shiye gufen yuoxian gongsi, 1996.
- Shi Weixiang 史葦湘. *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji: Dunhuang lishi yu Mogaoku yishu yanjiu* 敦煌研究文集: 敦煌歷史與莫高窟藝術研究. Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002.
- . "Sichou zhilu shang de Dunhuang Mogaoku 絲綢之路上的敦煌莫高窟," in Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo comp., *Dunhuang yanjiu wenji* 敦煌研究文集 (Lanzhou: Gansu renmin chubanshe, 1982), pp. 68-75.
- Sirén, Osvald. *Chinese Sculpture From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, 2 vols. Bangkok: SDI Publications, 1998.
- Soper, Alexander. "Life Motion and the Sense of Space in Early Chinese Representational Art," *Art Bulletin* 30.3 (Sept., 1948): 167-86.
- Stein, Aurel. *The Thousand Buddhas: Ancient Buddhist Paintings from the Cave-temples of Tun-huang on the Western Frontier of China*. London: B. Quaritch, Ltd., 1921.
- Su Bai 宿白. *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* 中國石窟寺研究. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996.

- Sun Kaidi 孫楷第. "Tang dai sujiang guifan yu qi ben zhi ticai" 唐代俗講軌範與其本之體裁 in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 71-128.
- . "Mantan bianwen de qiyuan" 漫談變文的起源; in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 239-48.
- Tang Yiming 唐翼明. *Wei Jin qingtan* 魏晉清談. Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 2002.
- Tang Yongtong 湯用彤. *Sui Tang fojiao shigao* 隋唐佛教史稿. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982.
- . *Han Wei liang Jin Nanbeichao fojiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史. Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1992.
- Thurman, Robert, trans. *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture*. New York: Pennsylvania State University, 1976.
- Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo 天水麥積山石窟藝術研究所 comp. *Maijishan shiku* 麥積山石窟. Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998.
- Teiser, Stephen F. "Picturing Purgatory: Illustrated Versions of The Scripture on the Ten Kings," in Jean-Pierre Drège et al eds., *Images de Dunhuang : dessins et peintures sur papier des fonds Pelliot et Stein* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 1999), pp. 169-98.
- Sun Jinji 孫進己 et al. comps. *Zhongguo kaogu jicheng Xibei Juan* 中國考古集成西北卷. Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1997.
- Twitchett, Denis, ed. *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 3. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Wang, Eugene. *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.
- Wang Guowei 王國維. "Zuijin ersanshinian Zhongguo xin faxian zhi xuewen" 最近二三十年中國新發現之學問, in *BNWK*, vol. 1, pp. 49-52.
- Wang Zhimei 王志楣. "Weimojie jing yu Zhongguo wenren wenxue yishu" 維摩詰經與中國文人文學藝術, *Zhonghua foxue xuebao* 中華佛學學報 5.7 (1992): 263-98.
- Watson, Burton, trans. *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*. New York; London: Columbia University, 1968.
- trans. *The Vimalakīrti Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.
- Weinstein, Stanley. *Buddhism under the T'ang*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Whitfield, Roderick, et al. *Cave Temples of Mogao Art and History on the Silk Road*. Los Angeles: The Getty Conservation Institute and the J. Paul Getty Museum, 2000.
- Williams, Paul. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. London; New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 1989.

- Wright, Arthur. "The Formation of Chinese Ideology, 581-604," in John K. Fairbank, ed., *Chinese Thought and Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 71-104.
- Wu Hung. "What is *Bianxiang*? ---On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang Literature," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52.1 (1992): 111-92.
- Xiao Mo 蕭默. *Dunhuang jianzhu* 敦煌建築研究. Beijing: Jixie gongye chubanshe, 2003.
- Xiang Da 向達. "Tang dai sujiang kao" 唐代俗講考 in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 41-70.
- Yetts, Perceval. *The George Eumorfopoulos Collection Catalogue of the Chinese and Korean Bronzes, Sculpture, Jade Jewellery and Misc. Objects*. London: Benn Ltd., 1932.
- Yi Cunguo 易存國. *Dunhuang yishu meixue* 敦煌藝術美學. Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2005.
- Zheng Shan. *A History of Development of Tibet*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2001.
- Zhou Mi 周密. *Yunyan guoyan lu* 云煙過眼錄, in Huang Binhong et al. comps., *Zhonghua meishu congshu*, vol. 6: 2.2.
- Zhou Shaoliang 周紹良. "Tan Tang dai minjian wenxue: du *Zhongguo wenxue shi* zhong bianwen jie shu hou" 談唐代民間文學---讀《中國文學史》中變文節書後, in *LWL*, vol. 1, pp. 405-23.
- Zürcher, Erik. *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*. Leiden: Brill, 1959.

Figures

Fig. 1-1



Cave 169: Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Bingling si 炳靈寺, Gansu province.
Date: 420.

Gansu sheng bowuguan et al. comp., *Binglingsi shiku*, fig. 3.

Fig. 1-2

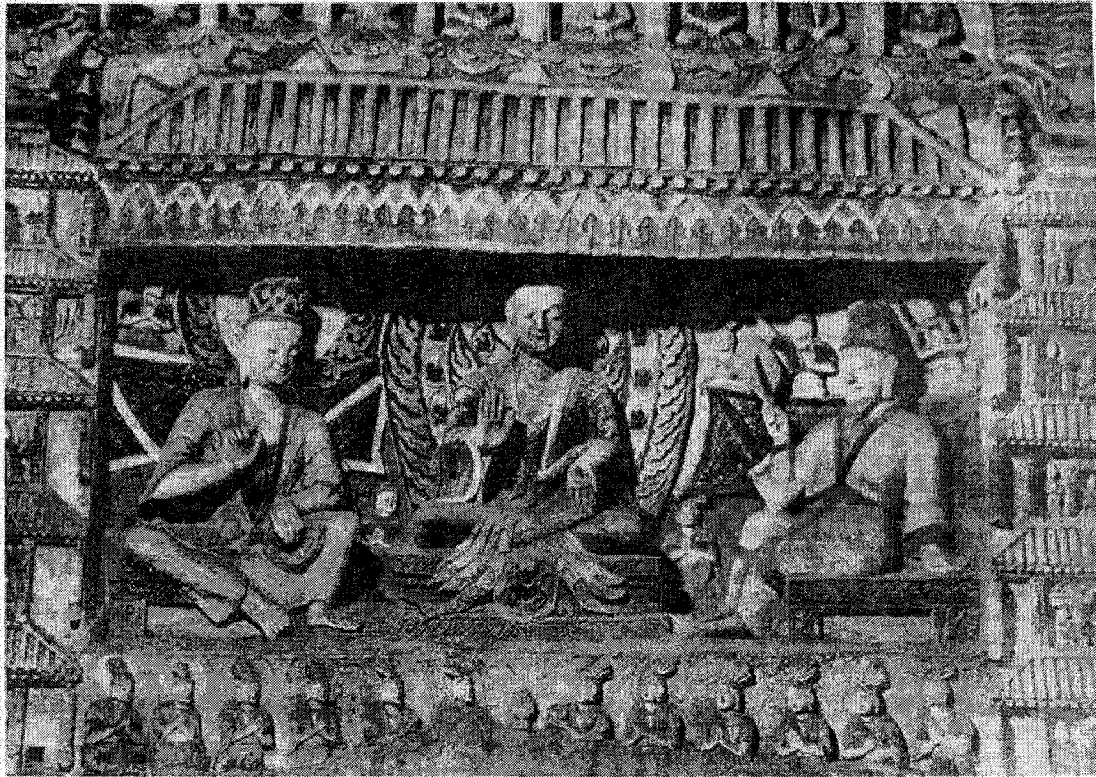


Fig. 1 Yün-kang, Cave VI. (Mizuno, *Yün-kang*, vol. III, plates, pl. 31)

Cave 6: Vimalakīrti, Buddha, and Mañjuśrī, relief. Yungang 雲岡, Shanxi province;
Date: 477-83.
Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," *Artibus Asiae* 30. 1
(1968): 35.

Fig. 1-3

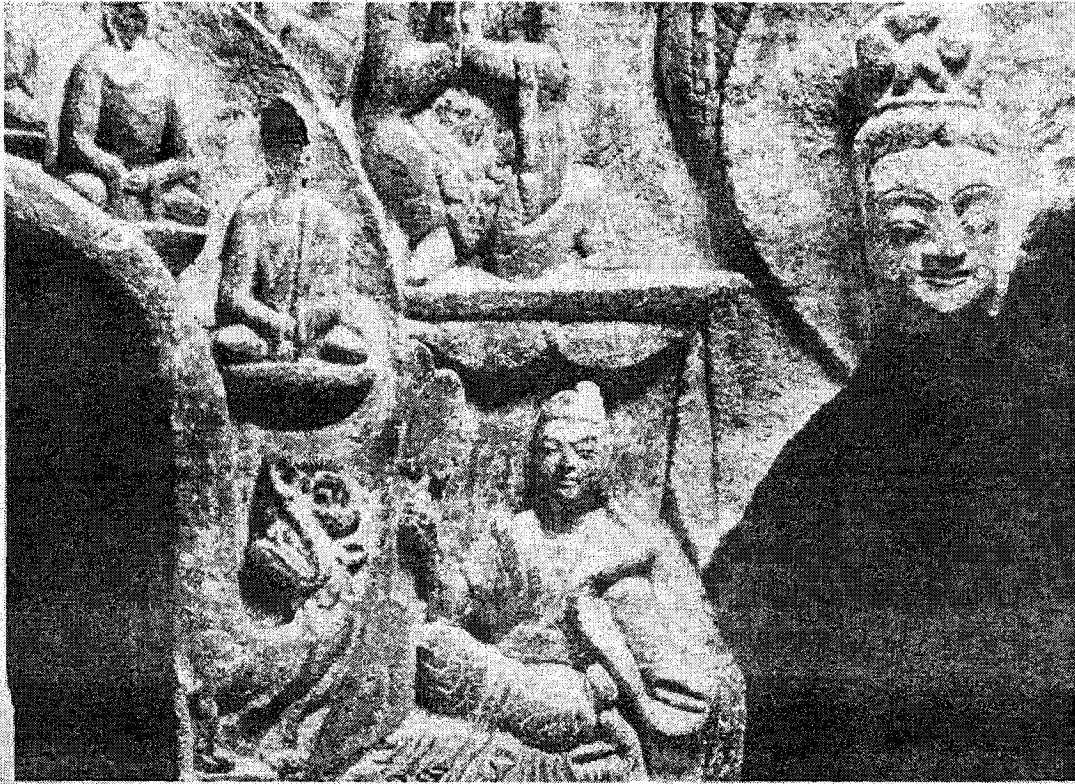


Fig. 2 Yün-kang, Cave VA. (Mizuno, *op.cit.*, vol.II, pl. 75B)

Cave 5A: Vimalakīrti, relief. Yungang, Shanxi province. Date: 465-94.
Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," *Artibus Asiae* 30.1 (1968): 35.

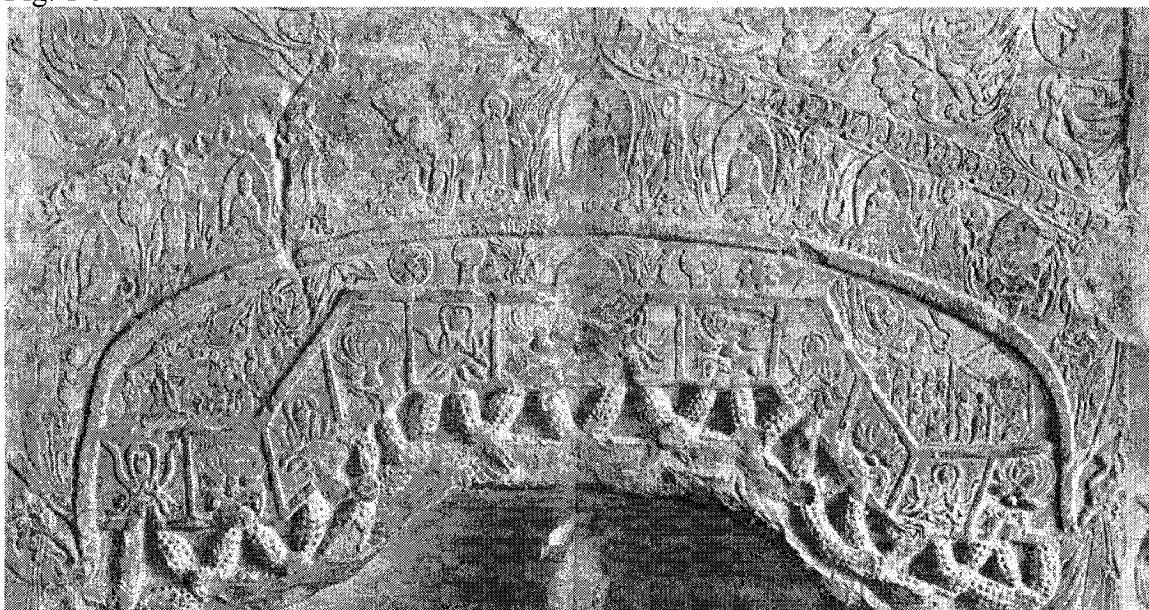
Fig. 1-4



100 第四十五窟南壁维摩像

Cave 45: Vimalakīrti, relief. Yungang, Shanxi province. Date: 495-524.
Shanxi sheng wenwu gongzuo weiyuanhui et al. comps., *Yungang shiku*, fig. 100.

Fig. 1-5



Guyang 古陽 Cave: Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, relief. Longmen 龍門, Henan province.

Date: 516-28.

Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., *Longmen shiku*, fig. 29.

Fig. 1-6



八六 龕額浮羅維摩變《部分》

Cave Lianhua 蓮花: Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, relief. Longmen, Henan province. Date: 516-28.

Longmen wenwu baoguansuo comp., *Longmen shiku*, fig. 86.

Fig. 1-7

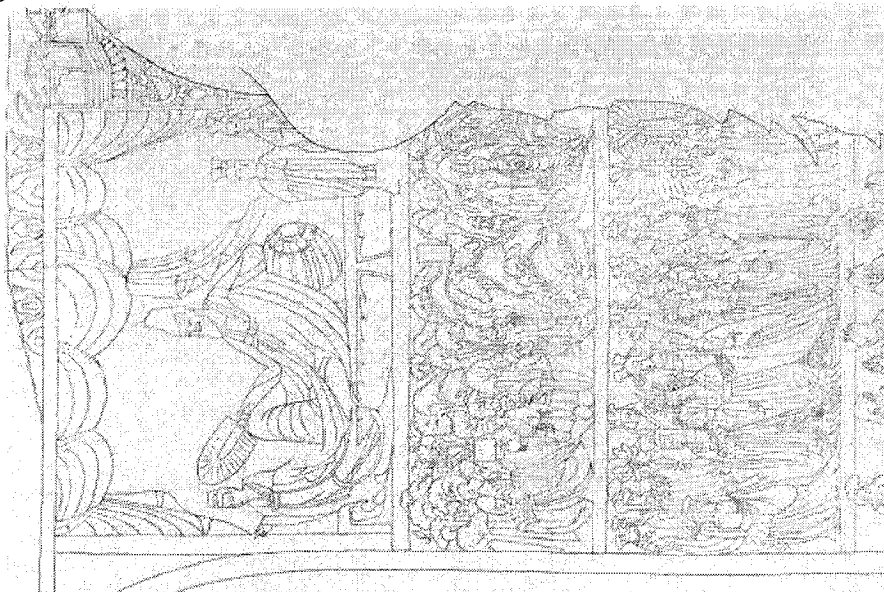


Fig. 4 Longmen, Pingyang Cave III. (Mizuno, *ibid.*, fig. 17)

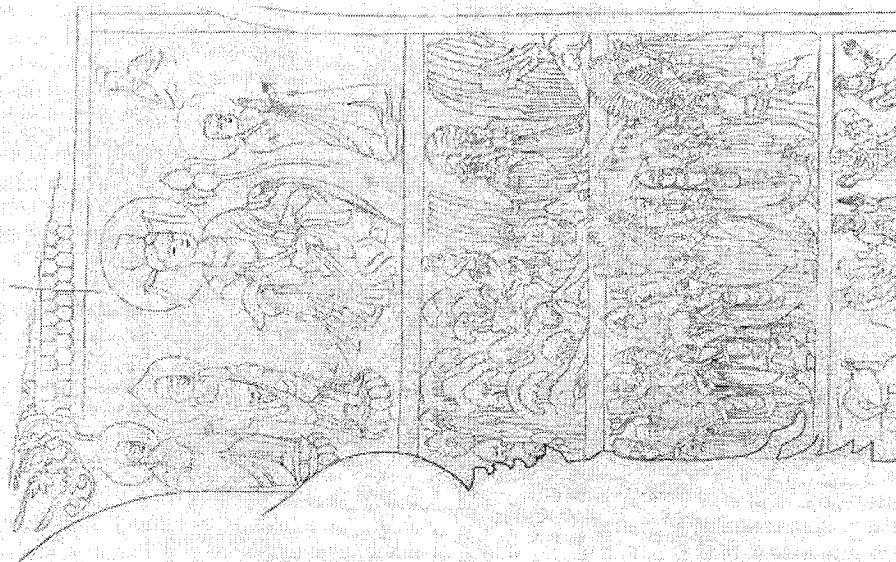


Fig. 5 Longmen, Pingyang Cave III. (Mizuno, *ibid.*, fig. 18)

Binyang 賓陽 Cave III: upper---Vimalakīrti; lower---Mañjuśrī, relief. Longmen, Henan province. Date: 508-523.

Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," *Artibus Asiae* 30.1 (1968): 36.

Fig. 1-8

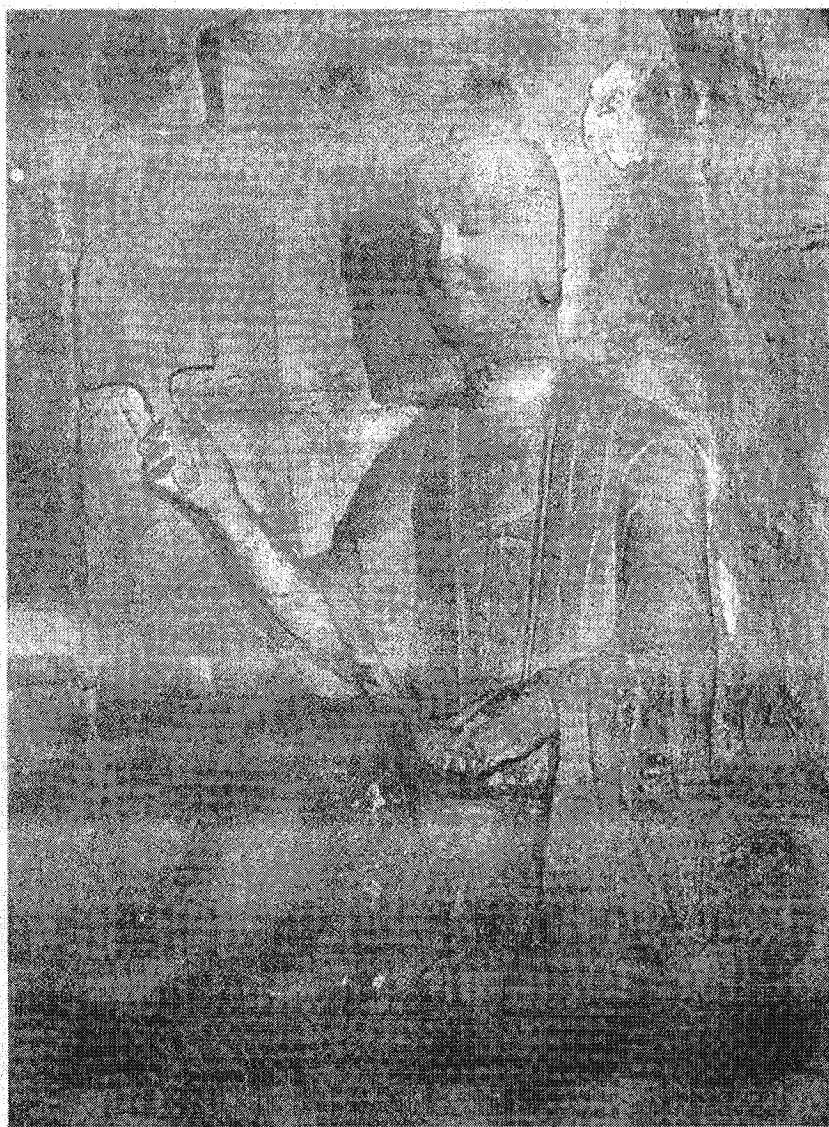


图 242 巩义市巩县石窟·第 1 窟 维摩诘像

Cave 1: Vimalakīrti, sculpture. Gongyi 鞏義, Henan province. Date: 386-534.
Lu Xiuwen comp., *Zhongguo shiku tuwen zhi*, vol. 1, p. 99.

Fig. 1-9

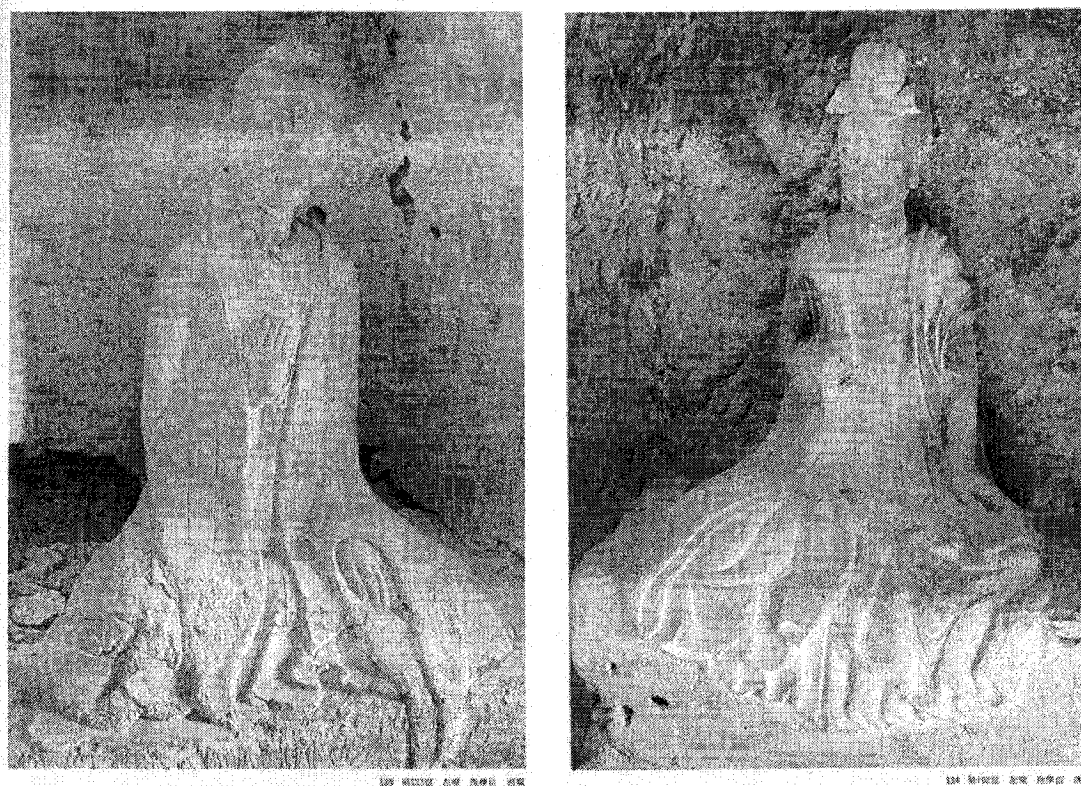


160 第127窟 左壁龕上 維摩詰經變 西魏

Cave 127: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Maijishan, Gansu province. Date: 535-56.

Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., *Maijishan shiku*, fig. 160.

Fig 1-10



Cave 102: Vimalakīrti; Cave 123: Mañjuśrī. Sculpture. Maijishan, Gansu province. Date: 535-56.

Tianshui Maijishan shiku yishu yanjiusuo comp., *Maijishan shiku*, figs. 134; 139.

Fig. 1-11

NORTHERN WEI DYNASTY (386-534)

CHILI



Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, stele. Zhili 直隸, Hebei province. Date: 527.
Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture From the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, vol. 1, fig. 153.

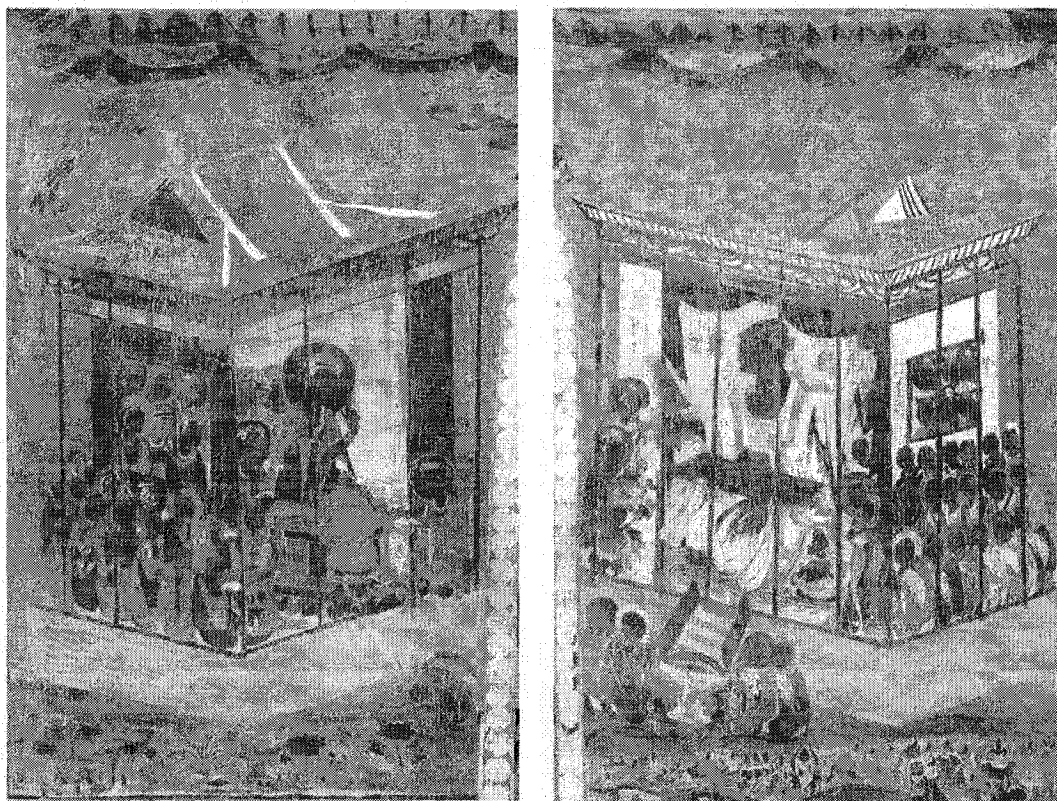
Fig. 1-12



Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, stele. Northern China. Date: Eastern Wei (534-50).

Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakīrti," *Artibus Asiae* 30.1 (1968): 40.

Fig. 2-1:



Cave 420, western wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting.
Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: Sui (581-618).
He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 191.

Fig. 2-2:



Cave 433, ceiling: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: Sui (581-618).

He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 193.

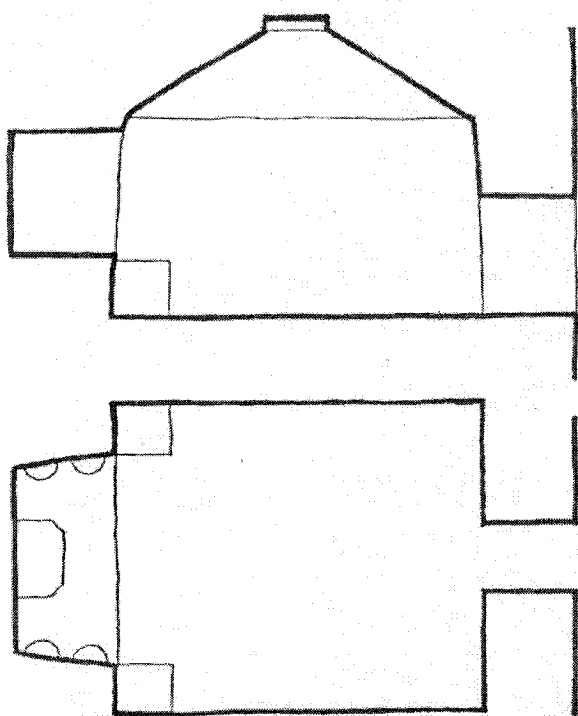
Fig. 2-3



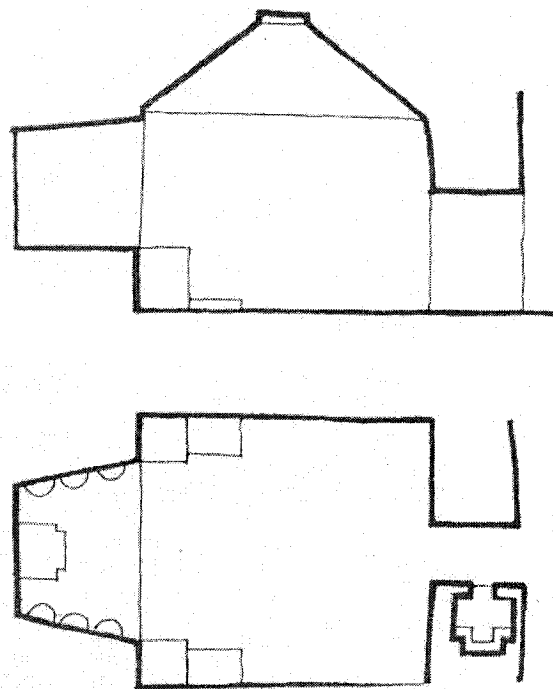
Cave 276, wall painting. Left: Mañjuśrī; right: Vimalakīrti. Dunhuang, Gansu province.
Date: Sui (581-618).

He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 192.

Fig. 2-4



Cave 220



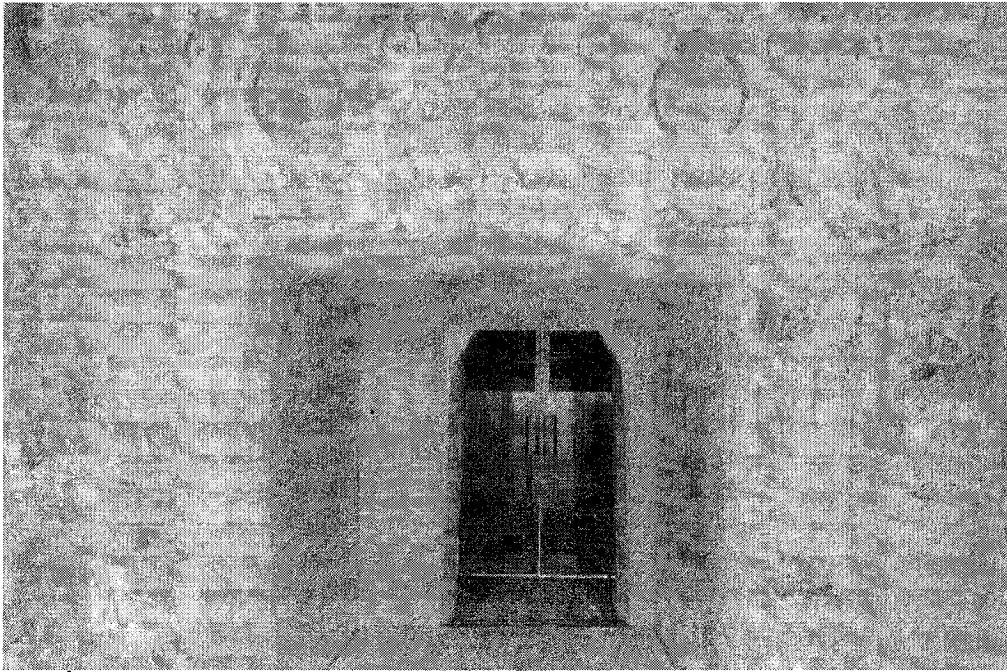
Cave 172

Floor Plan and Cross Section of the Canopy Ceiling Caves

Cave 220. Date: Early Tang (618-704). Cave 172: High Tang (705-80). Dunhuang, Gansu province.

Xiao Mo, *Dunhuang jianzhu shi*, p. 309.

Fig. 2-5



Upper: Śākyamuni
Lower Left: Mañjuśrī
Lower Right: Vimalakīrti

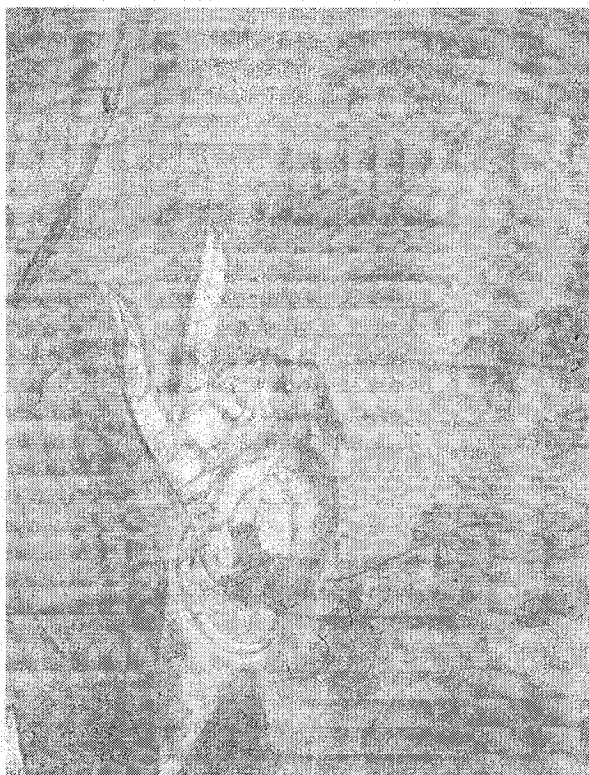
Cave 220, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting.
Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: Early Tang (618-704).
Ning Qiang, *Art, Religion, and Politics in Medieval China: The Dunhuang Caves of the Zhai Family*, p. 57.

Fig. 2-6



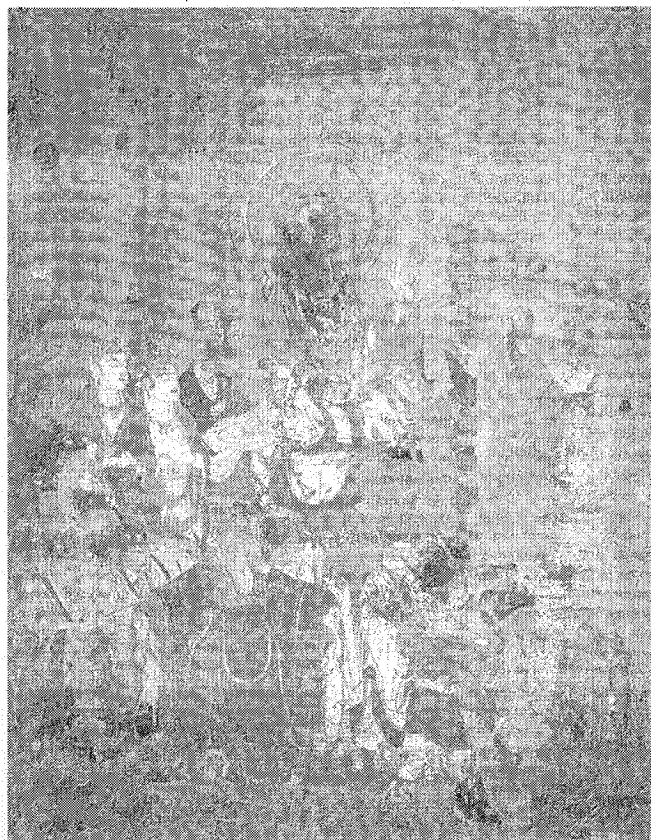
Cave 220, detail of eastern wall: Vimalakīrti, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province.
Date: Early Tang (618-704).
He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 204.

Fig. 2-7



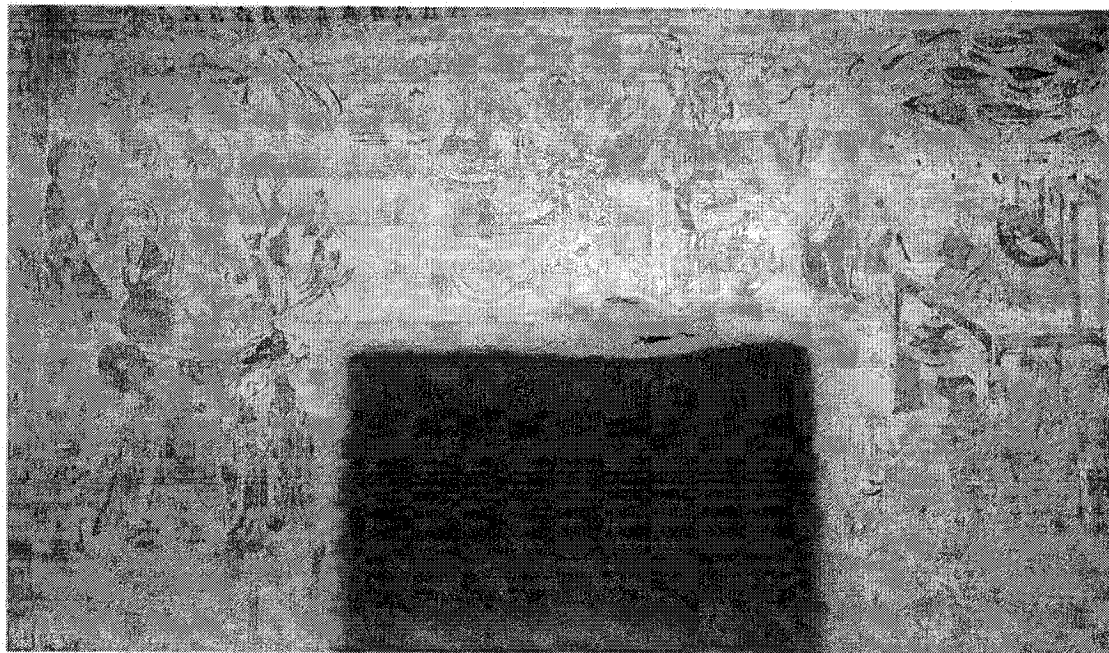
Cave 220, detail of eastern wall: Non-duality Hand Gesture of Mañjuśrī, wall painting.
Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: Early Tang (618-704).
He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 210.

Fig. 2-8



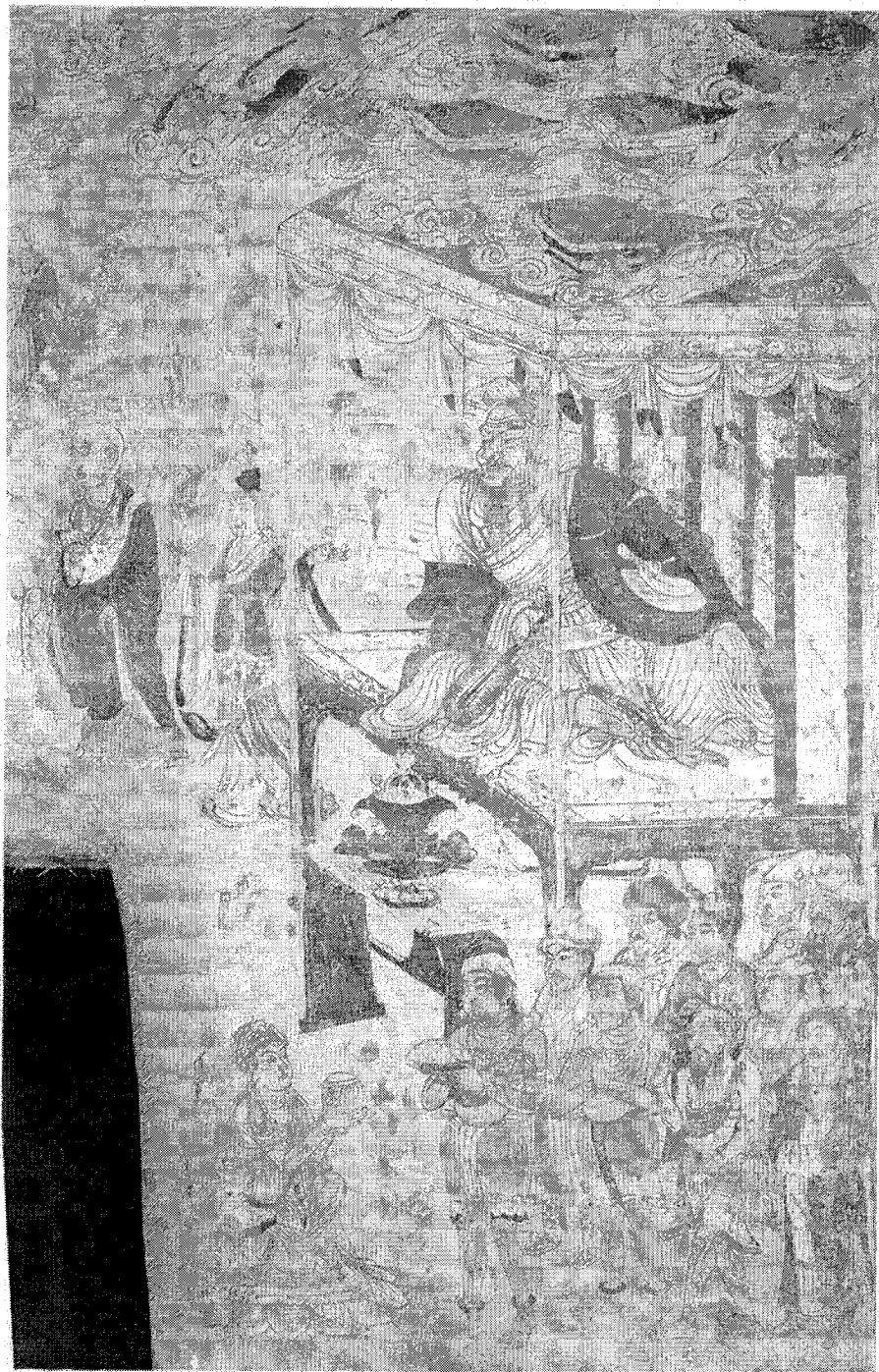
Cave 220, detail of eastern wall: Mañjuśrī and the Chinese emperor, wall painting.
Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: Early Tang (618-704).
He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 210.

Fig. 2-9



Cave 103, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting.
Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: High Tang (705-80).
He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 212.

Fig. 2-10



Cave 103, eastern wall: Vimalakīrti, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: High Tang (705-80).

He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 214.

Fig. 2-11

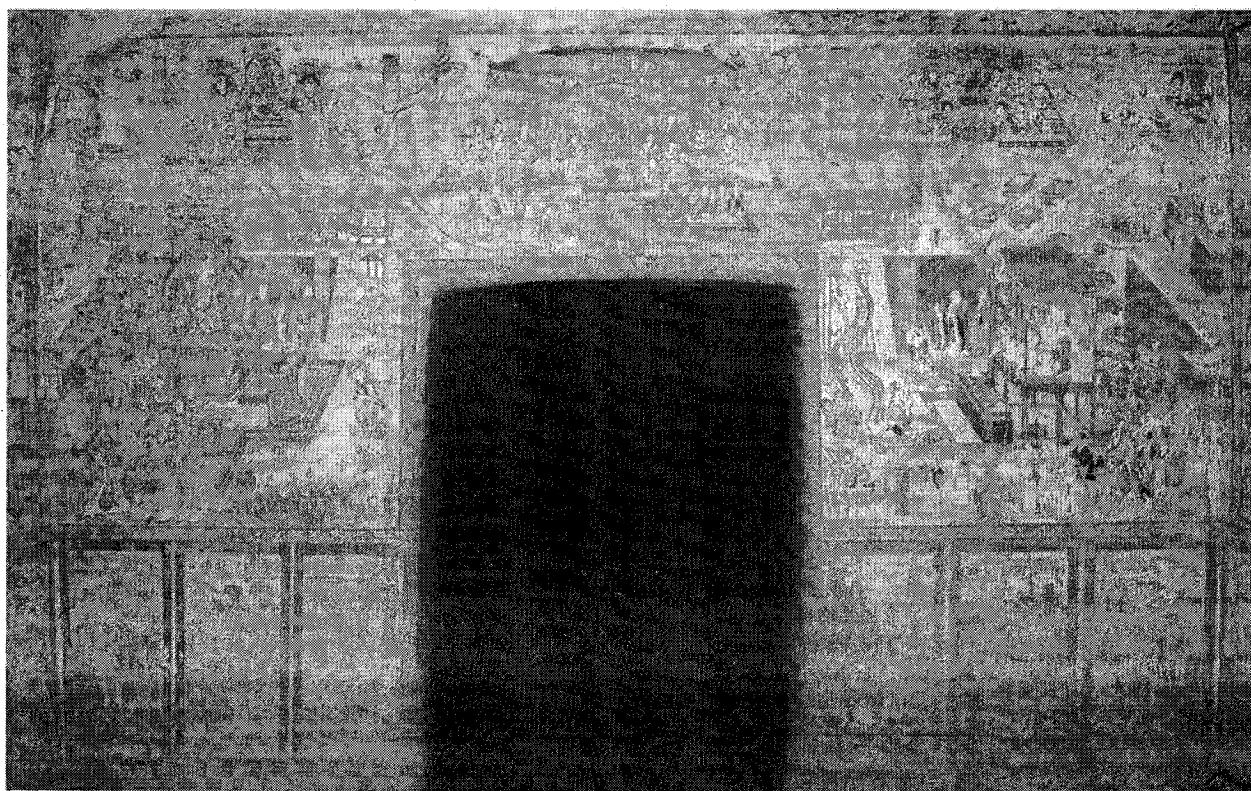


Section of “Lidai diwang tu” (Emperors of the Successive Dynasties), Emperor Wudi of the Northern Zhou and Chen Houzhu 陳後主 (r. 582-89)

Attributed to Yan Liben (?-673). Handscroll, ink and color on silk. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, U.S.

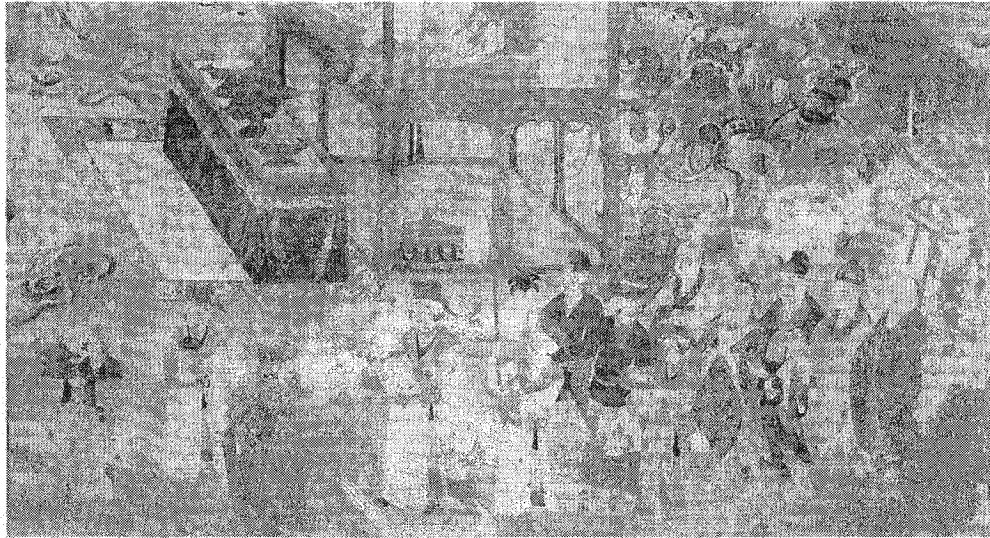
Richard M. Barnhart, et al. comp., *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press; Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1997), p. 62.

Fig 2-12



Cave 159, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting.
Dunhuang, Gansu province. Date: Tibetan Occupation (777-848).
He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 228.

Fig 2-13

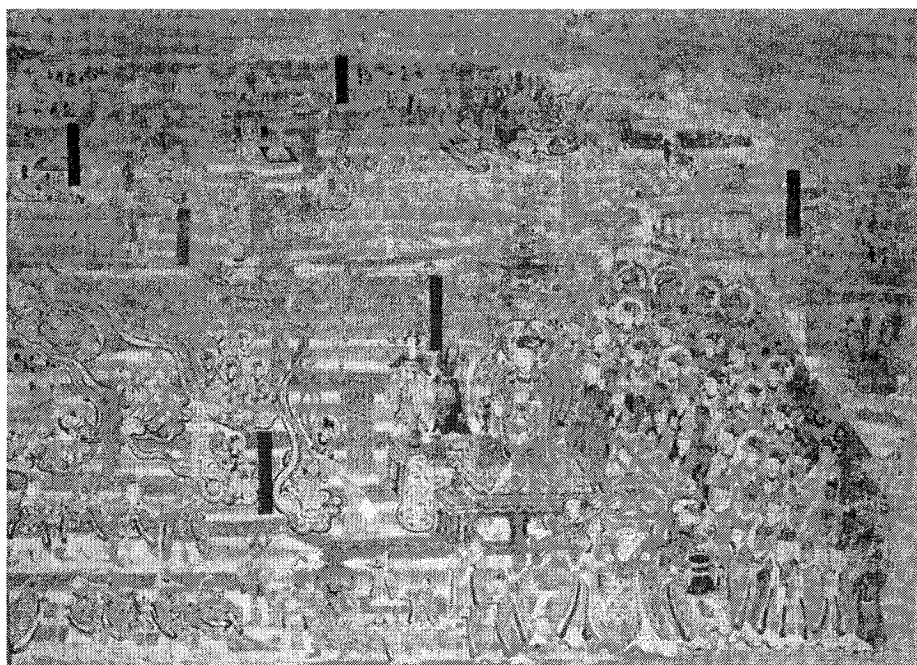
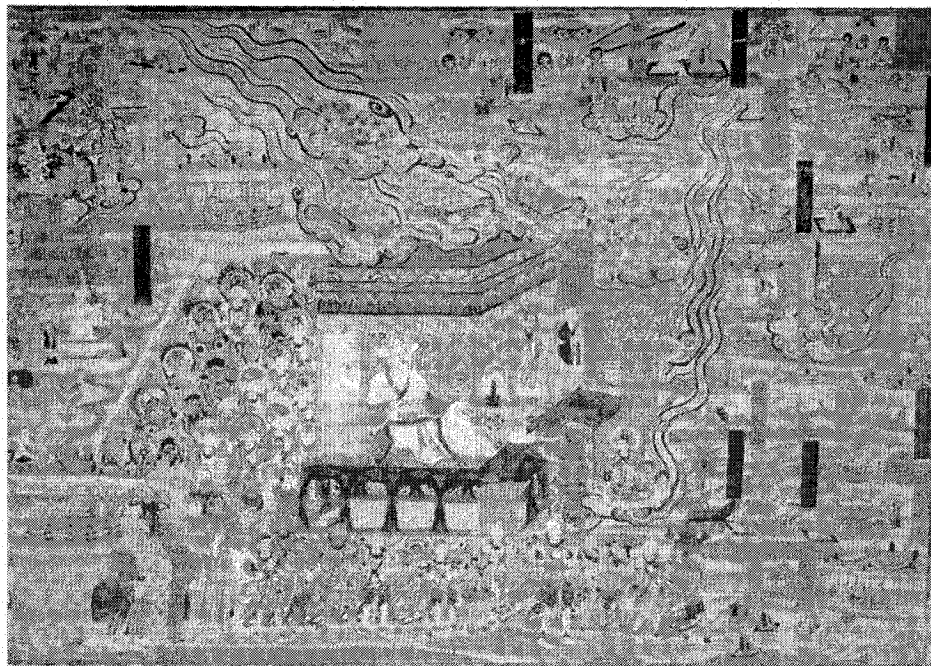


Cave 159, detail of eastern wall: Tibetan ruler, wall painting. Dunhuang, Gansu province.

Date: Tibetan Occupation (777-848).

He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, p. 228.

Fig 2-14



Cave 61, eastern wall: Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, wall painting. Date: Five Dynasties (907-59).

He Shizhe, *Dunhuang shiku quanji: Fahuajing huajuan*, pp. 241-42.