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February 5, 2005

Dear Colleagues,

My presentation for this week's Faculty-Graduate Student Colloquium [**Friday, February 11, 11am, Kresge 3-430**] addresses the interactions between two painters in Republican-period (1912-1949) China: a Tibetan artist, Shawo Tsering (1922-2004), and a Chinese artist, Zhang Daqian (1899-1983).

### **Reading**

•Essay (a field report, follows below); images may be downloaded from the Art History department website: <http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/arthistory/news/index.htm>.

•Please watch in advance 3 short videos featuring artist interviews I conducted in 1999-2002 (*Guan Youhui, interviews 1 and 3* and *Shawo Tsering* interview). These are available on my website:

[http://buddhist-art.arthistory.northwestern.edu/buddhistweb/interviews\\_modern.html](http://buddhist-art.arthistory.northwestern.edu/buddhistweb/interviews_modern.html).

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### **Introduction to Essay**

Zhang and Shawo's encounters took place in 1941-1943 when Zhang traveled to northwest China in search of the stylistic origins of Chinese painting. He 'discovered' Shawo and other Tibetan painters at Taersi (Kumbum Monastery), the home temple of the current 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, just outside of Xining, the capital of Qinghai Province. Zhang practiced a kind of research called artistic archaeology (*meishu kaogu*)—a popular method of inquiry among painters in the early 1940's that paralleled archaeological excavations conducted by scholars. In search of the roots and meaning of China's earliest figure painting, Zhang discovered that Tibetan painters still worked in a tradition consistent with medieval murals (5<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.). First he studied coloring and iconography with them at the monastery in the winter of 1941-42, he then hired five artists to assist in a massive two-year project to copy Buddhist wall paintings at Dunhuang—approximately 1000km to the northwest in Gansu Province. Their

interaction took place against the backdrop of dramatic changes in China's cultural institutions. Ethnographers, archaeologists, and painters were obsessed with the definition and meaning of what it meant to be 'Chinese' during the Republican period. The culturally ambiguous, ethnically-diverse regions of the northwest were fertile ground for answering these questions. Once a frontier zone, from 1928-1947 intellectuals along with government officials and military personnel were in the process of identifying the borders of the newly-emerging nation (imperial China having ended in 1911). It was precisely in the areas where Buddhist Tibetans, Muslim Hui, and Mongols, Qiang, Miao, etc. lived that scholars set about defining what it meant to be 'Han' and therefore to be 'Chinese.'

Military incursions on China's coast were an important catalyst in encouraging scrutiny of the geography, cultures, and technological capabilities of the western provinces. Pushed closer to China's interior due to the advancing Japanese army, the Chinese government moved the capital to Chongqing, Sichuan in 1937. During the wartime years (1937-1945) all government officials moved west. (Some parts of the east coast were semi-colonial—occupied by French, British, American, and German communities; large sections were occupied by the Japanese.) The Imperial Collection of the Qing court (once stored in the Forbidden City, Beijing) was crated onto trains circulating the interior as the nationalist government shifted positions (the Communists were positioned in north central China). Quite literally, what it meant to be Chinese at this moment was mobile, fluid and decidedly unstable. As a result, intellectuals increasingly turned their attention to art that put into relief the relationship between the heartland and the periphery. Archaeologists studied closely the virtues of Silk Road artifacts, Tibetan painting, and Buddhist art.

Archaeology began in China in 1928 with the excavation of Bronze Age sites (ca. 2000 BCE) in Anyang. Against the backdrop of diffusionist models of world culture, emerging nationalist pride motivated scholars to locate Chinese cultural origins within its borders. The bronze discoveries were coded as 'Han.' Sites anchoring the western boundaries of this mythical heartland were the other half of the equation. Scholars stationed in the interior began a Silk Road archaeology in the early 1940's. The arts of the 'western minorities' in Sichuan, Gansu Qinghai and Xinjiang provinces underwent a Sinicization (i.e., a process of

being made 'Chinese' despite linguistic evidence of multicultural communities since the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE.).

Zhang, Wang Ziyun, and others, made rubbings of stelae, traced copies of medieval murals, and surveyed the motifs of imperial tombs and other ruins. They noted corresponding connections, real and imagined, with dynastic period styles. Often it was the exotic and foreign—elements that could be safely identified as different from 'Han' Chinese dress and physical features in figure painting--that attracted attention and curiosity. Hence a kind of ethnically-bound art history and archaeology was born.

Zhang's copying activities at Dunhuang fit into this larger trend. Visiting Tibetan temples near Xining (see fig. 1, Fraser colloquium <http://www.wcas.northwestern.edu/arhistory/news/index.htm>) he transported specialized technical knowledge of Buddhist art common among Tibetan painters to his nationalist project. In this paper I discuss ways to complicate our understanding of Zhang's appropriation of Tibetan culture. I illuminate the technical and artistic features of Shao's art and that of his home village, aiming to demonstrate the continuity of Tibetan impact on this region over a millennium. The Tibetan name for Shao's region is Amdo—one of four cultural regions of historic Tibet. It was the staging ground for the Tibetan attack on China in 781; after its forces were pushed back in 848, the region remained an important Tibetan center until the present-day. Zhang's appropriation of Tibetan art in 1941 only demonstrates the Tibetan cultural legacy in the region. The irony is that, artistically and culturally, scholars in China today do not recognize this Tibetan art history. In fact during the Cultural Revolution, there was a nearly successful campaign of destroying it completely. My essay recovers the debates in Chinese art in the 1940's in pre-Cultural Revolution China.

This paper, which is a field report on my research in Qinghai over the last twelve years, is part of a larger book project entitled. *Chinese Modernism? Ethnic Difference and National Identity in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art and Archaeology*.

I look forward to your comments and to a lively exchange.

Sarah E. Fraser  
Associate Professor and Chair (847/467-3953)

*Essay follows.*

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**Shawo Tsering, Zhang Daqian and Sino-Tibetan Cultural Exchange, 1941-43:  
Defining Research Methods for A mdo Regional Workshops  
in the Medieval and Modern Periods**

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Painting in A mdo, ethnic Tibet's easternmost center located in the Yellow River Valley in Qinghai Province, is undergoing an important renaissance today. Since the early 1990's, funds from private individuals and the central government are pouring into temple restoration, largely to rebuild works, buildings and monuments that were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). During that decade, almost every object was targeted for destruction: murals, thangkas, portable paintings, sculptures, monastic structures, and sacred manuscripts were violently torn apart and destroyed. The iconoclastic efforts to curb the power of Buddhist establishments in western China actually began in 1958 in measured government efforts during the Peaceful Liberation Campaign. Teams were sent to partially dismantle temple structures (to reduce their visual impact and corresponding clout) and to confiscate temple icons, which had been assembled in lists for removals. Lists of monks and nuns accompanied property surveys; their communities were partially disbanded. After a brief thaw in the early 60's, teams arrived again in the mid-1960's and the destruction was less systematic, more chaotic and thorough. . By the 1980's art production had come to screeching halt. Since then, with infusions of government funds (as ironic as that may be) the patronage system appears to be functioning again. This is evident in projects underway at the two major dGe lugs monasteries, the Kumbum and Labrang Gompa (**fig. 1**), scores of smaller village temples, and in the large number of orders placed by domestic and foreign individuals. Without question, this revival seems to be restoring art and cultural practices that predate the twentieth century. But what is that exactly? How can a regional art history

of eastern Tibet/western China be written when so much of its evidence has been destroyed and no longer exists? This paper argues that artistic production lies as much in behavior, cognition, and process as it does in the object.

Most scholars acknowledge that the artistic traditions visible in Reb gong (the region of A mdo in eastern Qinghai province known for its artistic production) painting, sculpture, and appliqué predate eighteenth-century renovations at the Drostang Gompa (Qutansi) completed in the Qianlong period (ca. 1782).<sup>1</sup> Among Tibetans and scholars internationally, Reb gong is widely acknowledged to preserve artistic techniques that all too often have been ripped from their roots in other parts of Tibet to the west (where artists fled and have not returned, the majority of A mdo artists stayed put). Evidence of this is the revival of robust workshop production since the early 1990's; once workshops were permitted to reopen, artists began training with the essential tools and procedures of painting. In my tours of workshops over the last twelve years, I regularly I have seen assistants learning to make sketches, pounces, painting frames, executing and measuring icons according to grids, preparing and burnishing the painting ground, and completing fine-line overdrawing in gold. The master-pupil relationship endures; students learn by tracing designs and applying color (**fig. 3 and 6**). And the social fabric and network that gives painting meaning endures. Artists and their families are connected in complex ties to local monasteries, both lay practitioners and monks train to be artists, and the temples preserve iconographic knowledge. Through painting, Reb gong is connected to a regional and greater Tibetan world. Its artists are in the enviable position of working in an artistic environment that has close links to its social matrix. Tibetan exiles have discovered that artistic process and craft production, which relies so much on place, site and process, does not transplant so easily to other contexts. As such, Reb gong art holds a special place among Tibetan artists embodying a precious artistic legacy.

But what about the relationship of these post-eighteenth century, modern practices to the past? What kind of legacy can we trace from modern cultural activities in A mdo to the early period from 781 to the late ninth century where there was a pervasive Tibetan presence

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<sup>1</sup> Xie Zuo, *Qutan si*, 3 cited in Rob Linrothe 2001, "Creativity and Freedom": 55. Linrothe also provides an important first attempt at the region's contemporary art history.

in eastern Tibet (Qinghai and Gansu provinces)? There are plentiful examples of Tibetan compositional programs in the region: 1) Dunhuang silk banners, prints, documents, and cave-shrines (nos. 14, 156, 158, 159, 365, etc.) dating to 781-848; 2) caves 3 and 4 at Yulin created in the late eleventh century-mid-twelfth century; 3) cave 465 at Dunhuang built by Mongol patrons ca. 1225-1250; and 4) the spectacular Drostang Gompa (Qutansi) where work commenced in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. But without plentiful examples of Tibetan painting from ca. 1400 to the late 17<sup>th</sup>-early 18<sup>th</sup> century remaining in the region, is it possible to propose a continuity of practice that links modern to medieval or even to talk of an Amdo art history that pre-dates the eighteenth century?<sup>2</sup> Does the systematic destruction in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century of nearly every painting housed in freestanding temples in Amdo mean that an art history of the region is impossible? This paper argues that it is indeed feasible to provide such an account by analyzing comparatively methods, tools, and processes of production in both medieval and modern periods. Taking advantage of the research methods used in ethnoarchaeological research to construct cultural traditions where similar gaps exist, such as in Turkey and Mexico, a regional history of Amdo art is certainly worth the effort.<sup>3</sup> At the core of ethnoarchaeological work is the premise that if the technological conditions are consistent and geography proximate between past and present, then one can create a linked history using elements of material culture of both periods. This essay expands upon earlier work I published regarding mural production with pounces (stencils) in the medieval and modern period; I will not review this research here.<sup>4</sup> Instead I focus primarily on thangkas and banner paintings on cloth. Given space limitations I can only offer a general overview and will omit many areas of correspondence including extensive evidence for printing practices, design management, and painting production.

The other purpose of this article is to provide a preliminary account of an exchange between artists in the 1940's that sheds light on how modern practices inform the study of the

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<sup>2</sup> Bianca Horlemann's excellent paper in this conference volume, "Buddhist Sites in Eastern Amdo/Longyou," is the first systematic attempt to identify the existence and location of sixty temples in the region over from the eighth to thirteenth centuries. Most, if not all, of the temples do not exist in their original state now thus Horlemann turns to both Tibetan and Chinese written sources. Logic would argue that wall paintings and thangkas would be produced along side the architectural compounds of these temples.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Gibbs 1991, *Nomads of Archaeology*; Carol Kramer 1979, *Ethnoarchaeology*.

<sup>4</sup> Fraser 1996, "Régimes of Production."

past. During the winter of 1941-1942 to the summer of 1943, well before the destruction of Amdo paintings and temples, a well-known Chinese artist, Zhang Daqian (1899-1983) sought the expertise of Reb gong artists to rediscover and reclaim the riches of medieval Buddhist art. When Zhang hired five Reb gong artists who were working at the Kumbum Gompa in the spring of 1941 to accompany him to Dunhuang he tapped into a flourishing tradition and channeled an expertise that reached back to the medieval period. One of these artists, Shawo Tsering (1922-2004), went on to become a nationally recognized “Master Painter of the Fine Line Painting Style” [gongyi meishu huashi] in 1988. He maintained an extensive workshop in Sengeshong yaotsang (Upper Village of Wutun, near Tongren) with his sons until his death this January 2004.<sup>5</sup> In a photograph taken of Shawo Tsering at the end of his long, distinguished career, he stands in his courtyard atelier displaying a painting of Sakyamuni executed in the style typical of his workshop characterized by the overdrawing (**fig. 2**, right). Copious amounts of fine-line gold detailing are applied to the surface adding highlights to other precise lines that define buildings surfaces, clothing, and landscape. In general, the final stage or layer of thangka painting distinguishes an average painting from a great one; overdrawing adds value to a thangka because, done well, it can represent almost half of the work and time expended in the painting process. I had many occasions to view a representative range of techniques in the workshops of Amdo during ten research trips taken

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<sup>5</sup> The certificate was awarded from the Beijing government in April 1988. Some clarification is needed regarding his name, sons, and followers. He is known as Shawo Tsering the Elder. He had a student, known as Shawo Tsering the Younger, who worked closely in his style (a slight difference in local pronunciation allows people to differentiate between them); this artist is now retired and lives in Xining. The spelling and pronunciation of Shawo Tsering has several different variations. Phonetically the written form should read: Shapo Tsering, yet the “po” syllable is transliterated as “wo” rendering the first two syllables as Shawo. Additionally, in the local Tu ethnic dialect used by residents in Sengeshong (Wutun Upper Temple village) his name is pronounced Shawo Tserang, replacing the “i” of the last syllable with an “a.” Differences in oral pronunciation from written Tibetan are common and change often drastically from village to village. From the Chinese, his name is romanized Xiawu Cairang (夏吾才让); in materials associated with his activities in the 1940’s, his Chinese name is given as Xiaowu Gelang (小乌格郎). Shawo Tsering’s two sons are Gendun Dargay (Gendeng Daji) and Suo Nan. The former is his blood son; in order for Dargay to take monastic vows and enter the village temple a second son, a relative, was adopted in order to have one ‘son’ outside of the monastic order. Both are artists. Dargay maintains an affiliated workshop in his quarters at the temple often overseeing the day-to-day operations in his father’s workshop. Suo Nan is associated with the Huangnan Art Center in town, Rongwo (Tongren); when his adopted father was still alive, Suo Nan often went to his home and participated in workshop projects. For my July 2002 videotaped interview with the master painter see <http://buddhist-art.arthistory.northwestern.edu/buddhistweb/>.

over twelve years from 1992-2004.<sup>6</sup> I will argue that the consistency in technological skill between medieval Dunhuang and the techniques that endure in A mdo coupled with their geographical proximity of both regions enables us to link past and present. But it is important to understand the historical context of both these areas to gain perspective on how we might creatively retool our understanding of the area. The interaction between Zhang Daqian and Shawo Tsering in 1941-1943 sheds light on period of immense change in the A mdo region. Together these artists and another four painters from Reb gong copied hundreds of Dunhuang wall paintings dating from the fifth to thirteenth century. By 1949, the techniques they developed to transfer compositions from mural to cloth and paper became the basis on which Chinese scholars studied the Dunhuang site until 1980. Over a thirty-year period, with government support artists made thousands of copies of Dunhuang murals, turning the 1941-1943 experiment into a pervasive nationalistic enterprise in which copying Buddhist art of the past was used to bolster an emerging nationalistic pride. ‘Folk’ and ‘minority’ designs have come to symbolize a modern proletariat agenda drawing on traditions perceived as primitive and therefore authentic. While Chinese artists, scholars and government officials were ‘discovering’ Buddhist culture in A mdo in the 1940’s, traditions had actually never been lost or radically broken. Zhang’s efforts, albeit in ways that he himself did not recognize, demonstrates that by the 1940’s, while Han Chinese artists had ‘forgotten’ the Buddhist compositions and techniques of the medieval period, these critical cultural institutions, practices and techniques in fact had survived in regional workshops and were still in use by modern Tibetan painters in A mdo.

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<sup>6</sup> I conducted ten research trips from 1992 to 2004 to investigate Reb gong artistic practice: 1992 (Kumbum, Tongren (Rongwo), Sengeshong yaotsang and maotsang, and Labrang Gompa); 1993 Labrang Gompa; 1997 (Tongren (Rongwo), Sengeshong yaotsang and maotsang, Nyentok, Gomar Chorten); 1999 (Kumbum, Tongren (Rongwo); Sengeshong yaotsang; Nyentok and Labrang Gompa); June and July 2002 (Kumbum, Tongren (Rongwo), Sengeshong yaotsang, Nyentok, Gomar, Gashari); 2003 (March and November, Tongren (Rongwo), Sengeshong yaotsang and maotsang, Nyentok, Tsongkha Taktser (Ping’an, birthplace of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama), Drostang Gompa, and Wendo Gompa (Wendusi and birthplace of the 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama); and 2004 (August), Tongren and 15 area temples which texts indicate have connections to the 8<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.. My primary objective was to visit painters, sculptors, printers, and embroiders working in both residential workshops and in monasteries. While taking into account a range of enterprises over this twelve-year period, I concentrated on the workshops and projects of 1) Shawo Tserang and his sons in Sengeshong village and temple (yaotsang); 2) Nyentok’s Jokmeng Nyema (Jiumei Nima, see **fig. 4**), his son and nephew at Labrang Gompa, Nyentok, and Jokmeng’s artistic direction of the 500+ meter-long thangka project financed by Tsong zhe rab rgyal executed in Tongren town from 1996-2000; 3) the Reb gong art museum; and 4) the restoration of the Reception Hall of Aja Rinpoche’s compound at the Kumbum by a team of artisans. Initial research findings were published in Fraser 1996, “The Artist’s Practice,” 280-97; fig. 162-89 and *Idem.* 1996, “Régimes.”

A photo taken in the spring of 1943 at Yulin Caves in Anxi, Gansu ca. 94 km east of Dunhuang and approximately 1000 km northwest of A mdo (Qinghai) documents the interaction between Zhang Daqian and Shawo Tsering (**fig. 2**). Both artists (Zhang left, Shawo, right highlighted by circles) stand with the other artists that also accompanied Shawo from the Kumbum Gompa to the Gansu caves. Zhang's family and officials from the Northwest Investigative Team sent by the Republican government based in Chongqing stand alongside them. Zhang's agenda was distinct from any government survey group dispatched to study silk road art history and culture and establish the Dunhuang Art Institute. Zhang first set out from Chengdu in 1940 to investigate Dunhuang but turned back upon hearing the news of his brother's death. He turned back in Guangyuan, a town in north central Sichuan province where Zhang stopped to view some of the hundreds of cave shrines at the Thousand Buddha Cliff [qianfo ai] and Huangzi Temple).<sup>7</sup> He left Sichuan for Dunhuang again in May 1941, and paid a visit to the Kumbum Gompa, the important dGe lugs monastery where the current Dalai Lama studied before moving to Lhasa to assume power; it is also the birthplace of Tsongkapa (1357-1419).<sup>8</sup> There Zhang met the Reb gong artists for the first time at work in the monastery. Zhang would return at the end of the year to learn techniques from these artists he observed during this first visit. Among the procedures he noted as being radically different from his own were stretching and preparing canvases, adding bright minerals colors, and applying gold detailing. Zhang was not the only one interested in A mdo at this time. Many explorers and government officials were mounting expeditions to Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia and western Sichuan—all regions that are part of Eastern and Central Tibet (A mdo and Khams) from 1928 to 1948. Among them was the 'archaeologist of art' Wang Ziyun who lead the Northwest Art and Relics Research Team; Wang and his team also went to the Kumbum in late 1941 and again in late 1943 to visit these painters and study Tibetan art.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Li Yongqiao 1998, 1:180-81.

<sup>8</sup> According to members of the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama's family who still lives in his birthplace village Taktser, when the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama (1876-1933) was travelling between the Labrang and Kumbum Gompa in the late 1920's-early 1930's, he spent the night across a ravine from Taktser. He had a dream that the next Dalai Lama (his reincarnation) would be born here; the lion-shaped mountain face is a symbol of this incarnation.

<sup>9</sup> Wang Qing, "Wang Ziyun nianbiao [Biographical chronology of Wang Ziyun]," *Xibei meishu* (1995), no. 4.

After Zhang's initial encounter with Shawo and the other Reb gong artists at the Kumbum, he spent the summer and fall at Dunhuang, dispatching his son in October 1941 to return to the monastery to inquire about the possibility of the Reb gong painters coming west to the Dunhuang caves to help with the enormous copying project he envisioned. During this period, Zhang realized that if he were going to try and copy a sizeable number of wall paintings—eventually he identified over 300 of the 492 caves now known at the site—he would need extra hands to proceed with any efficiency. But his return to the Kumbum in late 1941 for a three-month stay in the Xining area demonstrated that Buddhist painting was entirely new to him and that he sought more than just technical expertise. Zhang realized the Reb gong artists' vast knowledge of Buddhist art and iconography could illuminate and unlock the meaning of medieval paintings at Dunhuang.<sup>10</sup> According to Xie Zhiliu, a painter who worked with Zhang on the stylistic periodization of the grottoes, Zhang recognized that both the technical and iconographic elements of the Reb gong practice seemed similar to Dunhuang--as if Reb gong art provided some kind of key to understanding what made Dunhuang painting work both in terms of style and meaning.<sup>11</sup> Zhang hired Shawo and his fellow painters as assistants and they left the Kumbum with Zhang for Dunhuang in March 1942. The photograph depicts them at the end of their fifteen-month long stay in May or June of 1943 just before they returned to Xining (**fig. 2**, left).<sup>12</sup>

Judging by the number of copies of Dunhuang murals that are now in three major collections, the team worked quickly and prolifically over a fifteen month period despite the extremely rough conditions. At least two hundred copies were made; they isolated, distinct

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<sup>10</sup> Zhang's intentions, though, were entirely self-serving. He was eventually asked to leave Dunhuang in May of 1943 because he treated the site like his own, peeling away layers of later reconstructions dating to the eleventh-thirteenth centuries to look for eighth century murals. Later he went on to forge many Tang dynasty (618-907) paintings selling them for needed cash by drawing on his knowledge of Dunhuang figures.

<sup>11</sup> Xie Zhiliu in Chen 2001, *Zhang Daqian linmo*, 204.

<sup>12</sup> The artists are as follows (from right to left in figure 2): Shawo Tserang (fourth figure from right) at age 21, pSam Gyup (fifth from right), tPhang rKyu' (sixth), and Ngo Tima Chen (held by Zhang Daqian). One artist, Ngo Je Kyams, who was also part of their team, does not appear in this photo but he is present in other pictures, *Dunhuang tushi*, (2000), 122-23. [My transliterations of these Tibetan names are provisional.] The Chinese names of the five artists: Xiawu Gelang, An Ji, San Zhi, Luozang Waci, and Dujie Linqie are listed in Li Yongqiao 1998, 1:186.

sections of the wall paintings making copies onto paper.<sup>13</sup> According to Shawo, Zhang identified which sections he wished to transfer from the murals onto paper. On the instructions of Zhang, the team of Reb gong artists soaked paper in diesel fuel, which made the paper translucent and placed the treated paper over the wall to copy the specified designs. They then traced the outline of the figures with the paper over the figures in the wall painting. Off to the side, Zhang made sketches on smaller paper of key compositional features including color, period style, and notes of unusual details. Zhang then used these tracings to produce more polished copies, transferring or recopying them yet again onto silk. These final versions were executed in the studio that Zhang had established in the Upper Temple (Shangsi) at the base of the caves. According to the Director of the Sichuan Provincial Museum Wei Xuefeng, if Zhang felt he had all the artistic information he needed, the copies were completed and signed. Other compositions, especially the paintings dating to the earliest periods from the N. Liang to the N. Zhou (fourth to sixth centuries), were left unfinished omitting key features that should be added last, such as the pupils and other facial features. He left many of these unfinished works in Chengdu when he departed Hong Kong for India in 1949. Although he fully intended to return to China, in the end he never did for fear of persecution. Nonetheless, his family was persecuted in his absence. His first wife was pressured into donating Zhang's unfinished paintings to the Sichuan Provincial Museum collection.<sup>14</sup> At the Zhang Daqian museum in his home town, Neijiang, Sichuan, not one of his paintings is on display for they own none; Zhang's art remaining in Sichuan was either destroyed or donated to provincial and national museums.

Zhang went to the South Asian subcontinent in the belief that the origins or roots of the early Dunhuang paintings were in Indian wall painting—there was little or no understanding of the relationship between objects across Asia in Tibet, India, China, Afghanistan, and Central Asia at this stage in Buddhist studies in China. Zhang spent

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<sup>13</sup> Zhang presented sixty-two of the Dunhuang copies to the Taiwan National Museum in 1967 (where his eventually built his residence and garden Moya jingshe). Another sixty Dunhuang copies are in the Sichuan Provincial Museum along with sketch notes (approximately forty) Zhang made on site. Also, he later produced scores of paintings in the style of his Dunhuang copies for various patrons. This latter type appears to comprise the majority of Zhang's Dunhuang paintings in the National History Museum, Taipei.

<sup>14</sup> Examples of these unfinished paintings are the paintings reproduced in plates 1, 2, 15, 17, 22, and 48 in Chen 2001, *Zhang Daqian linmo*.

approximately three months copying Buddhist wall paintings at Ajanta moving between his base in Darjeeling, to Delhi and Maharashtra State. Zhang also held an exhibition in New Delhi of some sixty Dunhuang copies he brought with him (exhibitions were how Zhang paid for his travels and those of his companions).<sup>15</sup> These were the only ‘original’ copies he had in his possession from the Dunhuang project. After he left India these Dunhuang copies were subsequently incorporated into series of shows mounted in his succession of adopted homes, including Argentina, Brazil, and California; later, when he retired to Taiwan, the Taiwan National Museum acquired the sixty Dunhuang copies that traveled the globe with Zhang. The copies and forgeries Zhang made and sold based on the Dunhuang paintings is the topic of another essay and much larger book project.

In this essay I focus on the artistic tradition that Zhang connected with when hiring Reb gong assistants. Few recognize the importance of the A mdo painting tradition and its medieval roots. These roots are different than the understanding of Buddhist painting origins Zhang sought in India. Here I argue not for the origins of A mdo art in Dunhuang, rather for a homology of practice that has strong regional ties. Based on draft materials extant from both medieval and modern cultures, I pursue a comparative analysis of material culture, technology, artistic behavior, and the painter’s spatial relationship to works of art under production.

When the five Reb gong artists parted with Zhang in June 1943, they each presented him with a painting of their own creation using Dunhuang elements; according to Shawa Tsering they added their signatures on the back of the painting as it customary in the Tibetan tradition. One of these paintings survives; the image of Avalokitesvara is executed in the Dunhuang manner with strong contour lines and pale wash. It is not a direct copy of a medieval figure but a personal rendition in that style that introduces Reb gong elements to a medieval model.<sup>16</sup> The cartouche is in Chinese but the long inscription above, a sūtra excerpt, is in Tibetan. Combining these two linguistic systems in a Dunhuang-style painting demonstrates that the Buddhist traditions these Reb gong artists encountered in Dunhuang

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<sup>15</sup> Chen 2001, 190; Li Yongqiao 1998, 2:329-30.

<sup>16</sup> Chen 2001, 118, pl. 43.

could be easily integrated into their own tradition and vice versa. In fact, the artist's facility in moving between past and present in his parting gift to Zhang was recognition that the medieval paintings he copied were not that distant from his own tradition in Amdo. These paintings by each of the artists make it clear that it was largely through Reb gong interpretations of the past that Buddhist painting of Dunhuang could be understood in mid-twentieth century China. That is, without Tibetan mediators the history of Buddhist art on the empire's borders, or where Sino-Tibetan traditions interweave, would be lost to Chinese scholars and artists.

The interaction between Zhang, Shawa, and the other four Reb gong painter provides important artistic information about the region. It tells us that painting was active and flourishing in Reb gong during the 1940's and that artists deployed iconographic models, which linked back to a long history of practice and production. For Zhang it was a lens through which he was able to grasp and access Silk Road culture—a topic that became popular during the 1930's and 1940's. Zhang's interest in Amdo art and culture was part of a larger, systematic investigation by explorers and visitors with decidedly modern implications and his activities should be viewed in light of this larger picture (albeit only briefly here).

The northwest regions of China and eastern Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia were the focus of heightened military, economic, and scientific investigations that linked to national security. In addition to dispatching art and archaeological research trips from 1940-1944 in which scholars identified and analyzed important artistic remains, the Nationalist government launched economic, geological, military, agricultural and natural resource experts to this region on a regular basis from 1932-1948. Largely the interest stemmed from a concern about the vulnerability of national borders in the northwest and the Russians that were beyond the porous borders, the potential threat from a population largely dominated by non-Han Chinese ('minorities') who shared an ethnic history with groups in western Russia, available natural resources that could be exploited in order to dominate the region economically, and the ways that transportation such as rail and road lines could be extended

throughout the region including lines to Tibet in order to better control this vast region.<sup>17</sup> In some ways, the intellectual interest in Buddhism and links to China's past were secondary but a thorough knowledge of the cultures of this region through archaeological digs, geographical surveys, and preservation of artistic remains provided an historical framework and rationale for reconquering and exploiting the region for modern political purposes. Keen interest linked religious practice, geography, artistic ruins, and national security. Collectively, scholars and government officials set out to know everything about Qinghai, Gansu, Shaanxi, Ningxia and Sichuan, how Tibetan Buddhism and Islam were practiced, and the social customs of the Tibetans, Huis, Mongolians, and others living in the region.

Zhang's interest in A mdo painting must be seen against this backdrop. He recognized that in order to truly access the past he had to rely on modern artists in the region. Instinctively, if not for the right reasons, Zhang saw that the history of regional Buddhist art was embodied in the modern painting ateliers operating alongside the great regional monasteries.<sup>18</sup> This is evident in the technology that Reb gong artists used. Although there is no evidence to suggest that in his brief trips to Europe, Zhang Daqian would have the access or inclination to investigate the artist's preparatory drafts from Dunhuang, which entered European collections in 1907-1910 after the discovery of the Sûtra Cave in 1900, Zhang was an artist who could gauge artistic technology. In my analysis of Dunhuang's technical regimes used to paint fixed murals and portable banners, it is clear that both modern A mdo and medieval Dunhuang artists employed many of the same tools, such as pounces, tracings, printing blocks for sutras and dharani, and sketchbooks for iconographic notes and ritual practice. Painting formats are also consistent between periods. For our purposes here let us focus specifically on several examples that demonstrate the consistency of artistic technology from medieval Dunhuang and present-day A mdo. The first example comes from a painting session during 2002 in the courtyard workshop of Shawo's son, Gendun

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<sup>17</sup> One such trip was conducted from June 7 to December 17, 1943. Guoshi guan, ed. [National History Academy], *Xibei jianshe kaocha tuan baogao* [Report of the Northwest Construction Investigative Team], (Taipei: National History Academy Printers, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> In fact, it is said that the ancestors of the Tu ethnic group are the Tanguts or Xi Xia who were devout Buddhists and controlled Dunhuang from 1035 until the arrival of the Mongols in ca. 1225.

Dargay, who is the Assistant Manager of Administrative Affairs for the Senggeshong yaotsang (Upper Temple, Wutun village).

Learning to execute underdrawing is a fundamental skill in a painting atelier. An artist-in-training is set up outside where copious light will shine through the painting surface (**fig. 6**, center) illuminating the design on the reverse. A line drawing on paper is attached face down on the suspended canvas so the black lines are visible to the artist through the cloth canvas on the front. Direct tracing serves several functions in the workshop. It allows a new artist to rely directly on the drawing of his teacher and more accomplished artists. Chiefly, it provides a foundation for the artist's composition; with a basic outlines established, layers of color can be applied. But in addition to being useful to the trainee, tracing is the easiest way to transfer a design and more established artists use it under specific conditions to expedite the painting process.

Two primary types of design transfer are used the painting workshop.<sup>19</sup> One is to make an exact copy, which almost by definition has to be done by tracing visible in this reproduction; the other involves placing the original alongside the fresh painting surface and capturing the composition's most salient features. Estimating size and shape, the artist consults the original and executes a freehand interpretation on the new painting surface. Examples of both types can be found in both modern and medieval painting in the region. A set of banners produced in the ninth century surely was executed using the tracing technique. Two banners of bodhisattvas are reproduced flanking the modern Reb gong painter; one holds a cintamani, the other a censer (**fig. 6**, left, right). Their measurements, less than 2 centimeters difference in either width or length indicate the closeness of the design and format.<sup>20</sup> Closer scrutiny of the compositions reveals that the position of the arms, twist of the torso and head, the direction of long, white sacred thread, and the cascading of the drapery are identical. These two paintings are mirror images of each other traced from the same design in a manner undoubtedly similar to the method used by the artist in the A mdo courtyard. In the Dunhuang banners tracing was used efficiently, allowing the painter to

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<sup>19</sup> See Fraser, *Performing the Visual*, chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>20</sup> Since the triangular section at the top, which usually holds the loop from which to hang the banner, is missing, the measurements are of the main, rectangular portions of both banners only.

quickly establish a design to create a paired set. Among the extant Dunhuang paintings other themes appear to be created using the same sketch to effect the appearance of a related set of paintings, including the devârajas of the four directions.<sup>21</sup> The artist simply changes the color, details, and textile patterns to alter the appearance to suggest variation.

Executing new paintings and temples artists participant in the constant process of constructing and renovating the Buddhist temple. Gendun Dargay oversaw the making of building dedicated to Maitreya at the Sengeshong yaotsang; work began in 1999 and took almost three years (**fig. 5**, lower and upper left). The extensive timber pillars remain visible during the construction process. Once completed they were embellished with an elaborate façade and a massive stone plinth. The roofline reflects a hybrid architectural style typical of the A mdo region that combines eaves from the Chinese system with the massive, solid wall structure of the Tibetan architectural tradition. Inside, in addition to the colossal, golden image of Maitreya (**fig. 5**, lower right), over forty-five paintings embellish the interior. These were donated by different families in the Sengeshong (Wutun) village who made them specifically for this hall according to the elaborate iconographic program. Since many of its inhabitants are artists by trade, the interior is in a sense a record of recent regional painting history and a survey of distinct local painting styles. Each thangka contain an inscription of the donor family's name. As a group, one also recognizes the areas of commonality which places them squarely in the Reb gong lineage including the telltale bright pastel palette, which even at its most saturated or wrathful effects a light, airy quality. There are no muddy colors, and each figure is executed with a crisp precision delineated in fine overdrawing and copious amounts of gold.<sup>22</sup>

The process of creating and remaking art and copying older works to incorporate them into new programs is another process intrinsic to both the modern Reb gong and medieval Dunhuang traditions. It is part of the millennium-old system used by Dunhuang artists who painted hundreds of cave shrines containing thousands of compositions and regularly over a four-century period from the sixth to tenth centuries. In Reb gong particular

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<sup>21</sup> Fraser 1996, "Artist's Practice" and Idem. 2004, *Performing the Visual*.

<sup>22</sup> Linrothe summarizes the general features of the regional style (2001): 17-27.

circumstances in the last half-century substantially increased demand for works of art. As with other persecutions of Buddhism, the destruction effected during the Cultural Revolution was comprehensive in Amdo. But two decades after the majority of regional art was destroyed, new replacement sets of important works were ordered. The two largest monasteries in the region, the Kumbum and Labrang Gumpa, patronized large art construction projects in the early 1990's. During this period I encountered the rebuilding of a Reception hall for the quarters of Aja Rinpoche at the Kumbum Gumpa. At the Labrang Gumpa another large project of 108 thangkas ordered by Rinpoche Gyang tang sang was underway in 1992-1994. The primary painter for this latter project was Jokmeng Nyema of Nyentok, the village just across the river from Sengeshong where Shawo Tserang's family lives. Jokmeng was assisted in the large, multiyear project by his son, Gar She, and nephew (**fig. 4**, center). He sits confidently between two paintings representing the distinct stages of the painting process ranging from underdrawing (right, sketch of rDorje Phak mo) to finished work (left, painting of mKa' s Kyo ma). The deity tips a skull bowl of blood to her face; the typical placid, serene Reb gong sky of linear, white clouds and a gradient, blue frames the wrathful figure enveloped in fire. Jokmeng worked out of temporary painting quarters next to the chorten where the paintings, once finished, were rolled up and secured upon their dedication.

The artist was very well established at the time of this commission. He started painting when he was nine and, like Shawo, was forced to leave the monastery during the Cultural Revolution, hang up his monastic robes, and lead the life of a layman. Both artists married and established extensive families. Jokmeng's resides in an impressive residential compound in Nyentok newly fitted in 1999 with scarce timber, carved and painted in a grand manner. As Jokmeng recounts, he was one of nearly a hundred students of the famous Nyentok painter Gegan Chos IDan (Chidan). In turn Chos IDan studied with another famous painter, Jiayang, of the same village. We would find a similar pattern of training if it were possible to compile a complete oral history of regional painting. The famous painters take on the best students who, by virtue of their high level training, become talented and in turn take on gifted students. Before the Cultural Revolution seriously disrupted this pattern of master-pupil training, hundreds if not thousands of young men in Reb gong

became apprentices to the well-known painters, worked on the frequent commissions that would come to these masters, and eventually took on their own students. This type of tradition is not established precipitously and given the conservative nature of the training—tracing the hand of the master and imitating his style, working on commissions in a collaborative environment, and reproducing important iconographic programs that are central to area temples—it reflects a professional system long in place. As this training modality suggests, painting has been one of the most important livelihoods in Reb gong for at least three generations; and, based on the correspondences to older medieval art, one may extrapolate a continuum that reaches back to or is coherent with practices needed to produce the same kind of painting in the medieval period. Today these production practices are trying to reassert themselves once again as they are a key factor in the social and economic fabric of the region.

One of the important tasks of Jokmeng and his assistants at Labrang in 1992-1993 was to copy older paintings and incorporate them into the larger sets of *thangkas*. In their studio they propped up a painting of Maitreya's paradise; judging from its condition it was made in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>23</sup> Consulting the original, the nephew drew a sketch on a fresh, new canvas freehand. The older painting provided the model for a modern version. For other compositions in the *thangka* set of 108, Jokmeng worked with the patron to develop programs by consulting *sûtras*. This iconographic material was pulled together to form the basis of works that had been destroyed. His son holds the sketchbook in which they drafted these compositions (**fig. 3**, upper left); two pages inside are reproduced in details (lower left). In the two mandala diagrams, not all the details are executed, instead circles and representative details provide approximations. In upper left corner of the Kalachakra mandala (**fig. 3**, lower left) organized around a wheel of eight spokes, descriptive notes indicate that number twelve is Vajravarahi.<sup>24</sup> The second mandala (**fig. 3**, lower left, right side), contains a red marker referencing Vajravali after the number 2.<sup>25</sup> In the opposite corner after the number 42, the inscription indicates another (unidentifiable) deity (*rdo rje*

<sup>23</sup> 'Cham tPyang byang ko. See Fraser 1996, "Artist's Practice," figures 185-87.

<sup>24</sup> rDorje phag gdong. Thanks to Jeff Watt, of the Himalayan project, Rubin Foundation, for the transcriptions and deity references.

<sup>25</sup> rNam snang 'jam rdor lha ma'i nang.

phreng ba). This manner of keeping notes for artistic production and ritual practice has roots in the medieval period (only two examples are explored below).

Two sketches from the tenth century found in Dunhuang's Sûtra Cave demonstrate an homologous system of iconographic notation. While the contents are not the same, the works represent a continuity of practice. In a sketch for the Diamond Mandala, instead of using written instructions the medieval artist added color notations in yellow, blue, and brown for each of the five directions (**fig. 3**, upper right). The animals associated with each Buddha, the lion of Vairocana, the elephant of Akshobhya, bottom, the horse of Ratnasambhava in the south (left), are noted in a cursory hand approximating shapes. The lines approximating shapes rather than squarely defining them indicate that it was probably not used for tracing but for reference much like the Jokmeng sketches were in 1992-1993. In the medieval example, the unusual addition of palette marks suggests that the drawing may have been used to make mandalas in sand rather than on cloth.<sup>26</sup> Below is another ink monochrome diagram for reciting the Ushnisha vijaya dharani (**fig. 3**, lower right). Notations in Chinese are written next to two-dimensional depictions of basins and vases indicate the items to be placed inside the containers, such as water, incense, and lamp oil. The orientation of ritual space is further marked out noting the four cardinal directions, the location of ritual master's seat (bottom center), the stove or burner, and the Buddha's image. The sketches from both periods correspond in conceptual framework; correspondences are evident in terms of spatial orientation, materials used, and references to the technology (tools, formats, and materials) that will be used to execute the final product.

Sketches, despite that they often do not survive the production process and are rarely deemed worthy of preservation in the Buddhist atelier, provide a great deal of information about process and the occupation of space experienced and projected by the painting practitioner.<sup>27</sup> In this context, a consistency in workshop production is evident and, by extension, we can imagine artists conducting their craft during the intervening centuries between the medieval and modern periods in much the same way. Extrapolating from this

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<sup>26</sup> Fraser, *Performing*, chapter 3.

<sup>27</sup> M. de Certeau discusses sketches and production in *Practice of Everyday Life*, 1984; Gibbs analyzes spatial occupation of production and residential environments, *Nomads*, 1991.

method of analysis, one could compare and contrast compositions of like themes from past and present including guardian figures, bodhisattvas, Sakyamuni and other Buddhas, paradises, and narratives. Identifying like examples would be the next logical step in an Amdo art historical analysis based on an ethnoarchaeological framework. While Zhang Daqian's copying enterprise was outside the monastic production system and a Tibetan patronage structure, he seems to have intuitively tapped into an authentic, ongoing tradition of Buddhist painting technical expertise that existed in the region over a millennium. In consulting and collaborating with Shawo and other Reb gong painters, he unwittingly worked to reincorporate this painting tradition into the mainstream. These Tibetan painters functioned as interpreters to a painting practice that Zhang and others who eventually set up the government-supported Dunhuang Art Institute (now the Research Academy), no longer had access to. That is, while Buddhist painting had been widespread through the late tenth-early eleventh throughout East Asia, by the thirteenth century the technical expertise required to execute complex paintings with the necessary finesse was primarily in the hands of painters of the Tibetan-Mongolian lineage of Buddhist art. Zhang emerged from a radically different painting background based on the literati ideal of the expressive artist. His was predicated on the genius model where the cult of personality was perhaps more important than actual content. In Reb gong, master painters are celebrated but they rely on an extensive collaborative workshop system requiring the hands of many assistants and consulting with monks on elaborate iconography. The Reb gong tradition is central to understanding workshop painting throughout cultural Tibet in the past and present. Birthplace to both the current 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama and the recent reigning 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, Reb gong is a cornerstone in regional Tibetan Buddhist history; its artistic practices endure with international implications despite recent efforts to erase them from the historical record.

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