



How Images Meditate in Caves?

Professor Dr. Eugene Y. Wang

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Aula, Rämistrasse 59, 8001 Zurich (RAA-G-01)



People meditate; walls do not. It is hard to think the otherwise. However, wall paintings in Buddhist caves force us to dispense with this commonplace. Meditation *is* the subject of the murals of some Buddhist caves at Dunhuang, as the lecture will demonstrate. Here is the paradox. With inward mental focus its primary activity, meditation rarely involves looking at paintings. Meditation depicted in these caves was therefore *not* a visual aid for teaching meditation; nor were the embellished caves primarily created for the practice of meditation. So, that leaves us with a quandary. If meditation *is* the pictorial event taking place in the caves, *who* meditates? *How* does that meditation program work? *Why* create such a meditation program without a real-time meditator in the first place? And, all things considered, what is meant by saying that images meditate in a cave?

Eugene Y. Wang is the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Professor of Asian Art at Harvard. His extensive publications range from early Chinese art and archeology to modern and contemporary art and cinema. He has received Guggenheim, Getty, and ACLS Fellowships. His book *Shaping the Lotus Sutra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China* garnered the Academic Achievement Award (2006) from Japan. He is the art history editor of the *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* (2004). His research encompasses issues of visual intelligence and inter-subjectivity. His current projects include the research and development of digital virtual caves that provide structured immersive guidance to Buddhist meditation.

This lecture is open to the public and will be followed by an apéro. For questions, please contact the Section for East Asian Art History: kgoa@khist.uzh.ch