

BIJUTSUSHI

Journal of Japan Art History Society

185 Vol. 68 No. 1 pp. 1–17

ORIYAMA, Keiko. Pictorial Representations of Maitreya's Pure Land at the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang during the Early Tang Period

Pictorial representations of Maitreya's Pure Land depict either Tusita Heaven where Maitreya Bodhisattva resides, or Jambudvīpa where Maitreya Buddha will preach sermons in the future, or both in the same scene. Works dating from the Sui Dynasty are still extant today at the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang. Whereas only the description of Tusita Heaven appears during the Sui Dynasty, starting from the Early Tang period, representations of Maitreya's Pure Land begin to include Jambudvīpa where Maitreya Bodhisattva becomes a Buddha. Since this change begins in the Early Tang period and Maitreya is depicted in Jambudvīpa, some scholars maintain that it is due to the fact that Empress Wu proclaimed herself Maitreya. However, this statement has not been proven, since the scholars' opinion is not based on solid grounds; in other words, the exact production date of the Early Tang period pictorial representations of Maitreya's Pure Land and the works of the transitional period are not known. In order to discuss the change occurred in the Early Tang period pictorial representations of Maitreya's Pure Land, I identify works of the first period of transition and their creation dates by arranging them in chronological order. In addition, I examine the existing belief system at the time they were created and their meaning within the context of pictorial representations of Maitreya's Pure Land created from the Sui to Early Tang periods.

I determine the chronological order by examining the decorative patterns of the caves in which these works appear and how motifs are expressed in these depictions. More specifically, I focus on the decorative patterns of the ceiling, comparing the ceilings of caves whose date of construction is known and the ceilings of caves in which the pictorial representations of Maitreya's Pure Land appear. For the dates of caves which cannot be determined by this method, I estimate the date by examining the motifs and the way in which Maitreya Buddha is portrayed in the scenes. This process reveals that the pictorial representation of Maitreya's Pure Land in Cave 329 is the earliest version of this theme from the Early Tang period.

Moreover, to further narrow down the date in which the work in Cave 329 was created, I compare its features and decorative patterns with the pictorial representation of Amitabha's Pure Land depicted in Cave 220, which carries two inscriptions dating 642 C.E. and 662 C.E. (both within the Early Tang period). As a result, I argue that the pictorial representation of Maitreya's Pure Land in Cave 329 still retains many pictorial elements of the Sui Dynasty, some of which appear to be earlier than the ones seen in Cave 220.

Finally, I examine the religious background at the time the painting in Cave 329 was created by focusing on specific features of the work. It is known that most high priests longed for rebirth in Tusita Heaven. However, reexamining the details of their faith reveal the combined wish of rebirth in Tusita Heaven with the wish to descend to Jambudvīpa with Maitreya. This shows that the representation of Maitreya's Pure Land in Cave 329 is a visual expression of this type of belief.

As stated above, this paper has two purposes. First, to chronologically arrange the Early Tang period paintings of Maitreya's Pure Land at the Mogao Grottoes. This process reveals that the depiction of this theme in Cave 329 is the earliest among the works of the Early Tang period at the Mogao Grottoes, and that it belongs to the transitional period between Sui and Tang.

The second purpose is to clarify the meaning of the pictorial representation of Maitreya's Pure Land in Cave 329 among the works of same subject in the Mogao Grottoes by examining the background beliefs at that time.

THE JAPAN ART HISTORY SOCIETY

October 2018

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