

# A Study of the Temporal and Geographical Characteristics of Chinese Buddhist Temples with Maitreya as the Theme

Xiaofeng Zhao<sup>1,a,\*</sup>, Ziyang Li<sup>1,b</sup>

<sup>1</sup>School of Architecture and Artistic Design, Hebei University of Technology, Tianjin, 300131, China

<sup>a</sup>xf\_zhao020112@126.com, <sup>b</sup>1217575704@qq.com

\*Corresponding author

**Abstract:** As an important element of early Buddhist culture, Maitreya had a significant impact on the evolution of Chinese Buddhist architectural forms. This paper combs and categorises the Buddhist temples directly related to Maitreya as objects of study. Utilizing statistical and archaeological methods, this study systematically examines temple chronicles, county gazetteers, and related historical documents. Through data analysis, it investigates the spatiotemporal distribution patterns of Buddhist temples to construct a chronological and geographical framework for Maitreya-themed temples.

**Keywords:** Maitreya, Chinese Buddhist Temples, Spatial and Temporal Distribution, Regional Characteristics

## 1. Introduction

Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples are an important type of Chinese architecture, the construction of which has spanned thousands of years, showing significant geographical variation and stage characteristics in spatial and temporal distribution and architectural form. However, much of the current academic research focuses on the buildings themselves, and there are still some gaps in the overall distribution of the buildings. Based on this, this study aims to fill some of the gaps in the study of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples and to provide an empirical basis for the study of historic architectural heritage conservation.

## 2. A Typological Examination of Buddhist Temples Related to the Maitreya Type in China

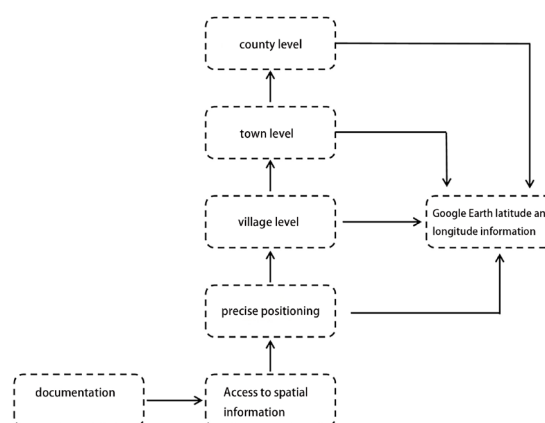


Figure 1: Principles of Spatial Positioning of Temples

Most of the information extracted from historical sources about the empty layout of the temple is textual descriptions. In order to ensure the accuracy of the location of the temples, this paper uses the internet and other literature to check and finalise the location of these temples. As shown in Figure 1. Based on the spatial information of the temples extracted from the historical sources, the author will replace the latitude and longitude of the centre of the most detailed administrative unit for those

temples whose precise location cannot be determined. Taking into account the changes in historical eras, the determination of the spatial location of the temple also involved the conversion of ancient and modern place names to ensure the accuracy of the positioning. In this paper, the building construction or restoration time for the standard statistical collation and related categories of Buddhist temples are divided into Maitreya itself type - Maitreya Temple, Cishi Temple, Shangsheng type - Shangsheng Temple, Doushuai Temple, Tiangong Temple, Xiasheng type - Xiasheng Temple, Longhua Temple, three categories.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 2.1 Maitreya itself type of Buddhist temple - Maitreya Temple, Cishi Temple

Maitreya, written in Sanskrit as Maitreya, is also transliterated into different forms, such as Milete, Maitreya, Maitreya, Maitreya, Mezreya, and so on, depending on the pronunciation.<sup>[2]</sup> Maitreya Temple is a Buddhist temple building named after the image of Maitreya himself. According to the historical data collection, there are 27 cases of Maitreya Temple construction, of which 13 cases are new construction, 4 cases are rebuilt, and 10 cases are unknown or undocumented. The temporal and spatial distribution of the Maitreya Temple is organised into a chart as follows. Maitreya temples are mainly located in Fujian, Jiangsu, Shandong, Yunnan and other regions. There were 6 cases in Fujian, 3 cases in Jiangsu, 3 cases in Shandong, 3 cases in Shanxi, 2 cases in Henan, 2 cases in Sichuan, 6 cases in Yunnan, and 1 case in Hebei. The overall trend is more in the south and less in the north, more in the east and less in the west. (Fig.2)(Tab.1)

Table 1: Status of construction of Buddhist temples of Maitreya itself type

dynasty	Jin Dynasty	Northern and Southern Dynasties	Sui Dynasty	Tang Dynasty	Five Dynasties	Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties	Yuan Dynasty	Ming Dynasty	Qing Dynasty	Not available or not documented
times	266-420	386-598	581-618	618-907	907-960	960-1279	1271-1368	1368-1644	1616-1912	
Number of constructions	1	4	0	3	1	8	3	1	0	14
Number of repairs	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	6	2	
percentage share of total number	0.021	0.085	0	0.063	0.021	0.255	0.063	0.148	0.042	0.297

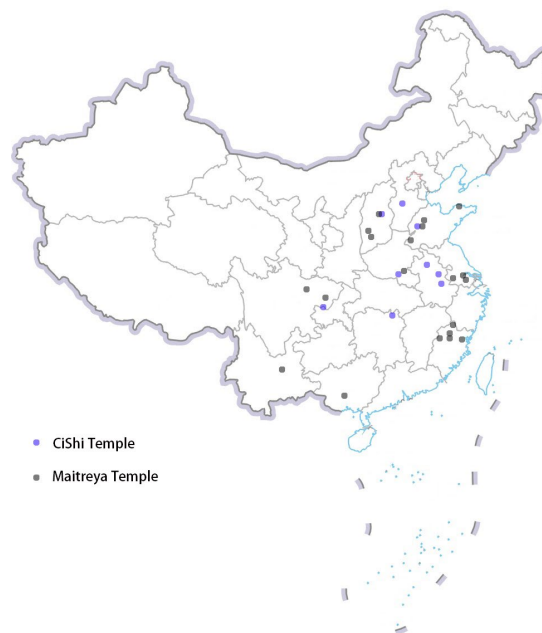


Figure 2: Regional distribution of Buddhist temples of Maitreya itself type

Loving-kindness is the translation of Maitreya. According to Mr Ji Xianlin, the earliest Chinese translations of the Buddhist texts consisted of the ancient language of Central Asia, the Tuvulan script, together with a few Gandhara scripts, and the translators added the word-final -ak to Maitri, which became the Compassionate One, and it became the Bodhisattva CiShi<sup>[3]</sup>. This statement has also been followed in current academic circles. The number of camps in the CiShi Temple is not very large. According to the history of combing, Cishi temple related to Buddhist temple camping status and location information is as follows. There are 17 cases of camping, 8 cases of new construction, 8 cases of remodelling, and 1 case of unknown or undocumented time in the Cishi Temple. The Cishi Temple is

mainly distributed in the Anhui region, with 1 case in Shanxi, 1 case in Hebei, 1 case in Shandong, 3 cases in Anhui, 1 case in Henan, 1 case in Hunan, and 1 case in Sichuan. The overall distribution shows an even, centripetal pattern. (Fig.2)(Tab.1)

## 2.2 Shang Sheng type of Buddhist temple - Shang Sheng Temple, DouShuai Temple, TianGong Temple

Shangsheng Temple is named after the act of Maitreya's ascension to Doushuai Heaven, and is a representative of the Shangsheng type of Buddhist temples. According to the historical data, the status of the construction and location of the related Buddhist temples in Shangsheng Temple are shown in the following charts and statistics. Shangsheng Temple has 20 cases of construction, 11 cases of new construction, 5 cases of restoration, and 4 cases of unknown or undocumented time. There were 1 case in Beijing, 1 case in Hebei, 3 cases in Shanxi, 3 cases in Henan, 1 case in Jiangsu and 6 cases in Fujian. The distribution of Shangsheng Temple shows a clear north-south imbalance and a clear polarisation. (Fig.3)(Tab.2)

DuShuai Heavenly Palace is the heavenly palace where Maitreya resided during his last life as a mendicant Bodhisattva<sup>[4]</sup>, and thus Buddhist temples named after DuShuai also belong to the Shang Sheng type of Buddhist temple. According to the historical data, the status of the construction and location of the related Buddhist temples in DuShuai Temple are shown in the following charts. DuShuai Temple has a total of 19 cases of camping, 12 cases of new construction, 3 cases of remodelling, time is unknown or not recorded 4 cases. There were 2 cases in Beijing, 1 case in Shanxi, 2 cases in Sichuan, 2 cases in Hunan, 1 case in Yunnan, 1 case in Jiangxi, 2 cases in Fujian and 4 cases in Zhejiang. The overall distribution is also more dispersed on average, showing relatively more in the South and less in the North. (Fig.3)(Tab.2)

Table 2: Status of construction of Buddhist temples of Shang Sheng type

dynasty	Jin Dynasty	Northern and Southern Dynasties	Sui Dynasty	Tang Dynasty	Five Dynasties	Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties	Yuan Dynasty	Ming Dynasty	Qing Dynasty	Not available or not documented
times	266-420	386-598	581-618	618-907	907-960	960-1279	1271-1368	1368-1644	1616-1912	
Number of constructions	3	5	3	12	3	6	1	2	0	13
Number of repairs	0	0	0	1	0	2	1	4	2	
percentage share of total number	0.051	0.086	0.051	0.224	0.051	0.137	0.034	0.103	0.034	0.224

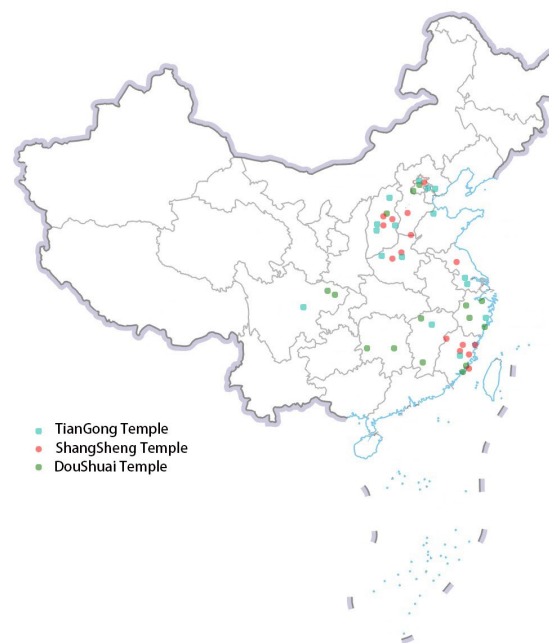


Figure 3: Regional distribution of Buddhist temples of Shang Sheng type

The other temple named after DouShuai is Tiangong Temple. Combining through the statistics, there are 16 cases of camping in Tiangong Temple, 11 cases of new construction, 3 cases of remodelling, and

5 cases of unknown or undocumented time. There were 1 case in Fujian, 2 cases in Jiangsu, 1 case in Hebei, 4 cases in Shanxi, 2 cases in Henan, 1 case in Zhejiang, 1 case in Beijing, 1 case in Sichuan, 1 case in Jiangxi, 1 case in Tianjin and 1 case in Shandong. The distribution was more in the north and less in the south. (Fig.3)(Tab.2)

### 2.3 Xia Sheng type of Buddhist temple - Xia Sheng Temple, LongHua Temple

Compared to the Shangsheng type, the Xiasheng type of Buddhist temples includes Xia Sheng Temple and Longhua Temple.<sup>[5-9]</sup> Compared with other Buddhist temples, the number of XiaSheng temples is very few, and according to historical records, there are only six cases. There are 4 cases of new construction of Buddhist temples, 1 case of restoration, and 1 case of unknown or undocumented time. However, there are obvious geographical features in the distribution of XiaSheng temples. Among them, there are 3 cases in Shanxi and 2 in Shaanxi. (Fig.4)(Tab.3)

Compared to other Buddhist temples, Longhua Temple is relatively rich in camping. According to statistics, there are 64 cases of camping in Longhua Temple, 32 cases of new construction, 16 cases of remodelling, and 16 cases of unknown or undocumented time. There were 2 cases in Beijing, 6 cases in Yunnan, 2 cases in Shanxi, 4 cases in Jiangxi, 4 cases in Guangdong, 3 cases in Jiangsu, 7 cases in Fujian, 8 cases in Zhejiang, 2 cases in Anhui, 2 cases in Sichuan, 2 cases in Shanghai, 1 case in Hubei and 1 case in Guangxi. Longhua Temples were predominantly constructed in the southwestern Jiangnan region, while only scattered instances were found in northern China. (Fig.4)(Tab.3)

Table 3: Status of construction of Buddhist temples of Xia Sheng type

dynasty	Jin Dynasty	Northern and Southern Dynasties	Sui Dynasty	Tang Dynasty	Five Dynasties	Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties	Yuan Dynasty	Ming Dynasty	Qing Dynasty	Not available or not documented
times	266-420	386-598	581-618	618-907	907-960	960-1279	1271-1368	1368-1644	1616-1912	
Number of constructions	2	2	2	8	5	9	1	6	0	17
Number of repairs	0	0	0	0	0	7	3	5	2	
percentage share of total number	0.028	0.028	0.028	0.115	0.072	0.231	0.057	0.159	0.028	0.246

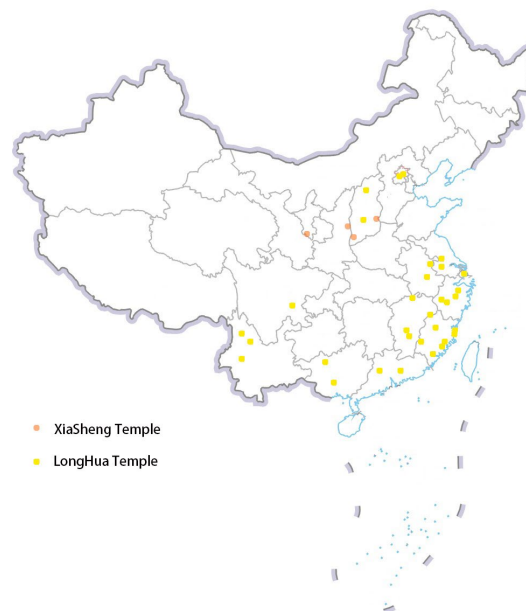


Figure 4: Regional distribution of Buddhist temples of Xia Sheng type

## 3. Temporal and geographical characteristics

### 3.1 Temporal characteristics of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temple construction

Statistics on the construction of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples in different historical dynasties

in ancient China show that the dynamics of the overall construction of Buddhist temples shows a growth, followed by a decline, followed by a rapid increase and then a decline. (Fig.5) The total number of Buddhist temples built in the North and South Dynasties, Tang Dynasty, Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties, Ming Dynasty formed four peaks. Based on the peaks and troughs in the total number of newly constructed Buddhist temples, the entire period can be divided into four phases: Jin to North and South dynasties (266 – 598), Sui to Tang dynasty (581 – 907), Five Dynasties to Song, Liao and Jin dynasties (907 – 1279), and Yuan to Qing dynasty (1271 – 1912).

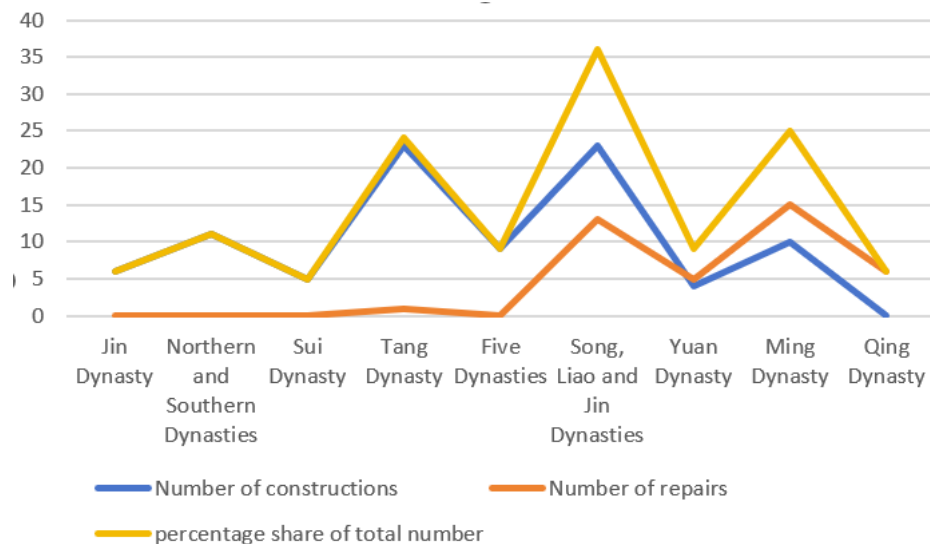


Figure 5: Changes in the number of new and renovated Buddhist temples

#### 1) Jin to North and South dynasties(266—598)

Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples originated in the period from Jin to the North and South Dynasties, and the number of Buddhist temples built is relatively small compared to other periods, with 6 cases built in the Jin Dynasty and 11 cases built in the North and South Dynasties, accounting for a combined ratio of 12.9 per cent.

#### 2) Sui to Tang dynasty(581—907)

The first high point in the construction of Buddhist temples with Maitreya as the theme was the Sui to Tang period, of which 5 cases were built in the Sui Dynasty, 23 cases in the Tang Dynasty, and 1 case was rebuilt, accounting for 22.1 per cent of the total number of cases.

#### 3) Five Dynasties to Song, Liao and Jin dynasties(907—1279)

The period from the Five Dynasties to the Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties was a period of rapid growth in the number of Buddhist temples, with the number reaching 45 cases. In addition, the phenomenon of Buddhist temple restoration during the Song, Liao and Jin Dynasties also implies a resurgence of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temple. Among them, 9 cases were built in the Five Dynasties, 23 cases were built in the Song, Liao and Jin periods, and 13 cases were rebuilt, accounting for 34.3 per cent of the total.

#### 4) Yuan to Qing dynasty(1271—1912)

From Yuan Dynasty to Qing Dynasty is a stable period for the construction of Buddhist temples. From Yuan Dynasty to Qing Dynasty, the number of Buddhist temples being rebuilt is greater than the number of new ones, among which there are 4 cases of new construction and 5 cases of rebuild in Yuan Dynasty, 10 cases of new construction and 15 cases of rebuild in Ming Dynasty, and 0 cases of new construction and 6 cases of rebuild in Qing Dynasty, which is a combined percentage of 30.5 percent.

The construction of Buddhist temples varies according to different types of beliefs. (Fig. 6) Temples related to the Shangsheng type reached a peak of 35.5 per cent of the total number of temples built during the Sui to Tang periods, and 22.2 per cent of the total number of temples rebuilt during the Yuan to Qing periods. (Fig. 7) The construction of temples related to the Xiasheng type reached its peak in the Five Dynasties-Song period, accounting for 44.64 percent of the total number of temples. (Fig. 8) The number of temples related to Maitreya itself type reached a peak in the Five Dynasties-Song period and

a peak in the Yuan-Qing period, and the combined number of temples in the Five Dynasties-Song period is the largest, accounting for 39.39 percent of the total. Judging from the construction of Buddhist temples alone, the belief in the Shangsheng type was more popular in the Sui to Tang and Yuan to Qing periods, and the belief in the Xiasheng type and the Maitreya itself type was more popular in the Five Dynasties-Song period.

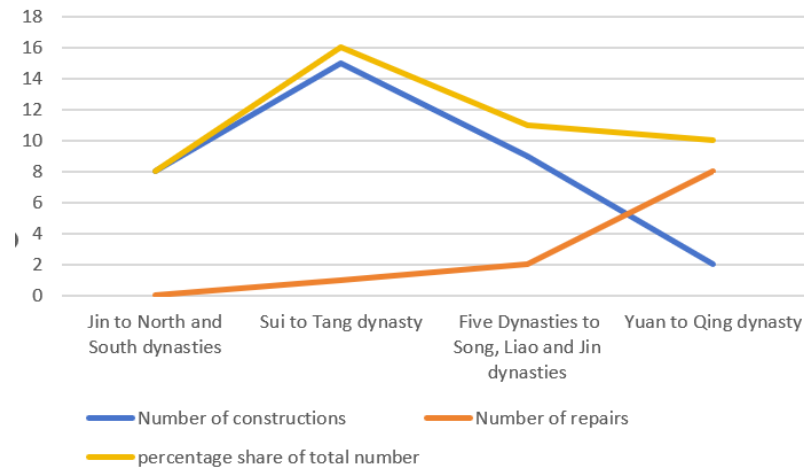


Figure 6: Changes in the Number of Newly Built and Restored Buddhist Temples of the Shang Sheng type

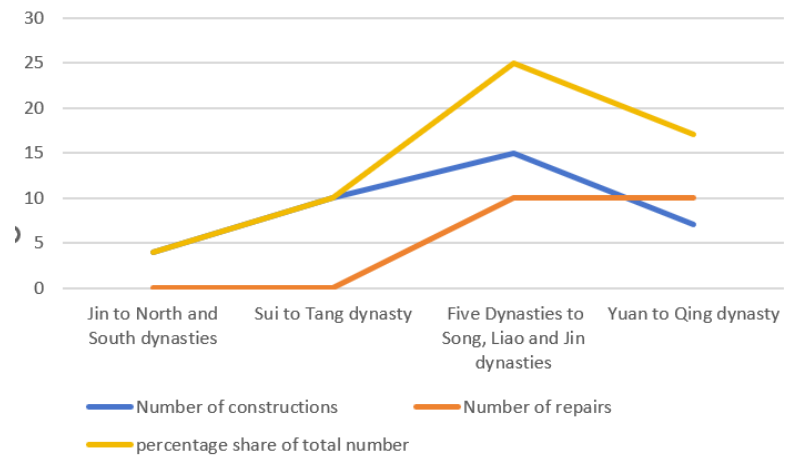


Figure 7: Changes in the Number of Newly Built and Restored Buddhist Temples of the XiaSheng type

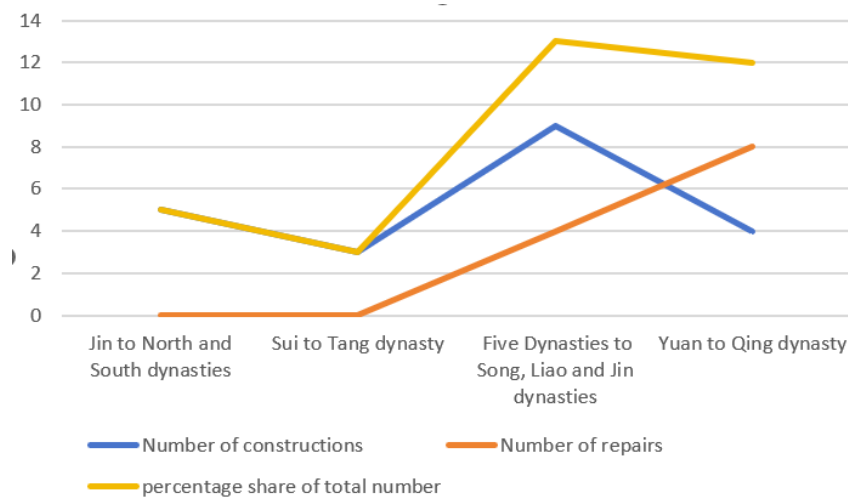


Figure 8: Changes in the number of new and renovated Buddhist temples of Maitreya itself type



### 3.2 Spatial characteristics of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temple construction

Comprehensive overall distribution of Buddhist temples distribution graphic rules and density of Buddhist temples can be found (Fig. 9), the distribution of Buddhist temples is vaguely Jiangnan - Southwest - North of the three-legged situation, the overall presentation of the development of the three major regions based on the dispersion of the centre of Buddhism or convergence of the development of the situation.

Based on belief types, Buddhist temples associated with the Shangsheng type show a bipolar distribution: one cluster centered in northern Shanxi and Hebei, and another in southern Fujian and Zhejiang, with sporadic point distributions elsewhere. This pattern reflects North-South opposition (Fig. 10). Meanwhile, most temples of the Xiasheng type concentrate around the Jiangnan Buddhist center, comprising Fujian, Jiangxi, and Zhejiang (Fig. 10). Maitreya itself type was concentrated around the northern Buddhist centres constructed in the regions of Shanxi, Shandong, Henan and Anhui (Fig. 10). Although there is a communion of different types of beliefs, when taken together, the Shangsheng type are prevalent in the north and south, the Xiasheng type are mostly prevalent in the south, and the Maitreya itself type are mostly prevalent in the north.

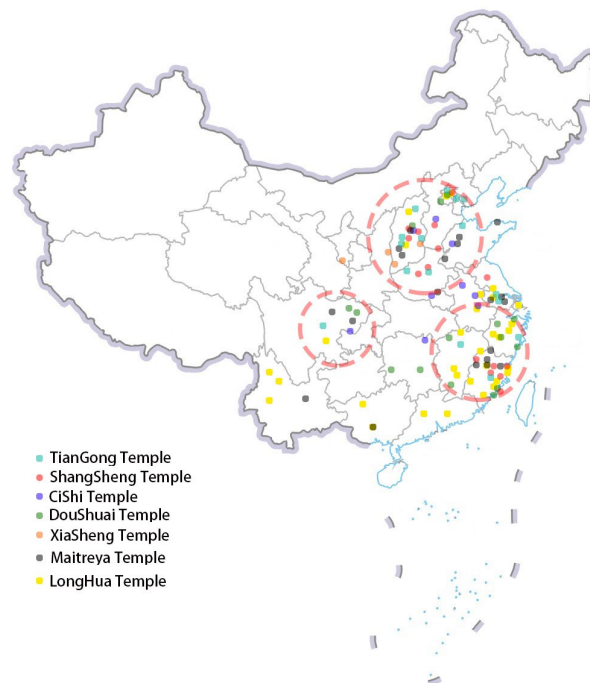


Figure 9: Overall distribution of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples

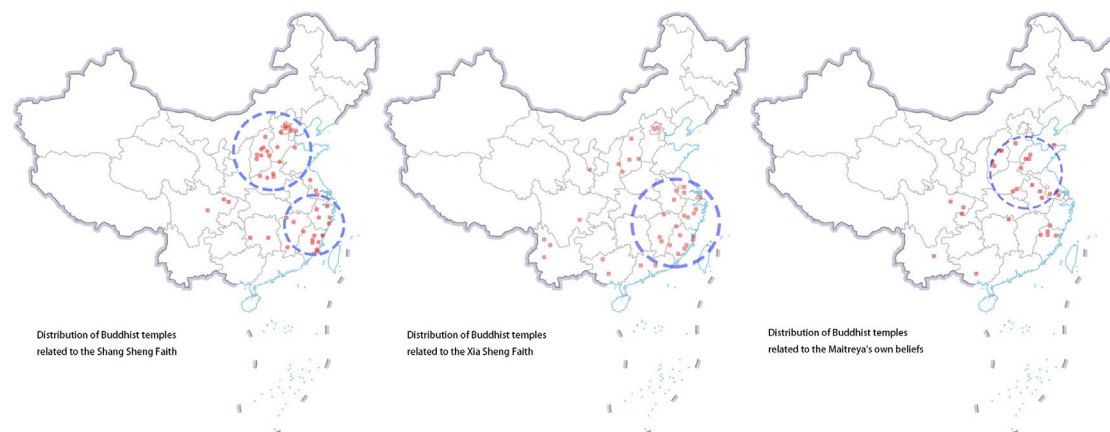


Figure 10: Distribution of different types of related Buddhist temples

### 3.3 Shifting centre of gravity and evolving patterns

The number of Buddhist temples was disassembled and kernel density statistics were compiled for different periods in accordance with the phased approach described above.<sup>[10]</sup>(Fig. 11)It can be found that during the Jin-North-South Dynasties period, Buddhist temples were mostly concentrated in the Southeast, mainly in Jiangsu and Fujian, while Buddhist temples in other regions showed a point-like distribution. To the Sui and Tang dynasties, Buddhist temple construction is still north less south more, the centre of the density of Buddhist temples to the south-west to shift, new Buddhist temples are concentrated in the Fujian area, the northern region hidden in Shanxi as the centre of the convergence of the trend. The Five Dynasties-Song, Liao and Jin periods were the peak of Maitreya-themed Buddhist temple construction, with the spatial aggregation of the number of Buddhist temples in Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Fujian rising to form the Buddhist centre of the Jiangnan region. Yuan to the Qing Dynasty, the northern region of the peak of the construction of Buddhist temples, the southern region of the main repair, the north and south of the region has a hidden connection, the overall distribution of the belt.

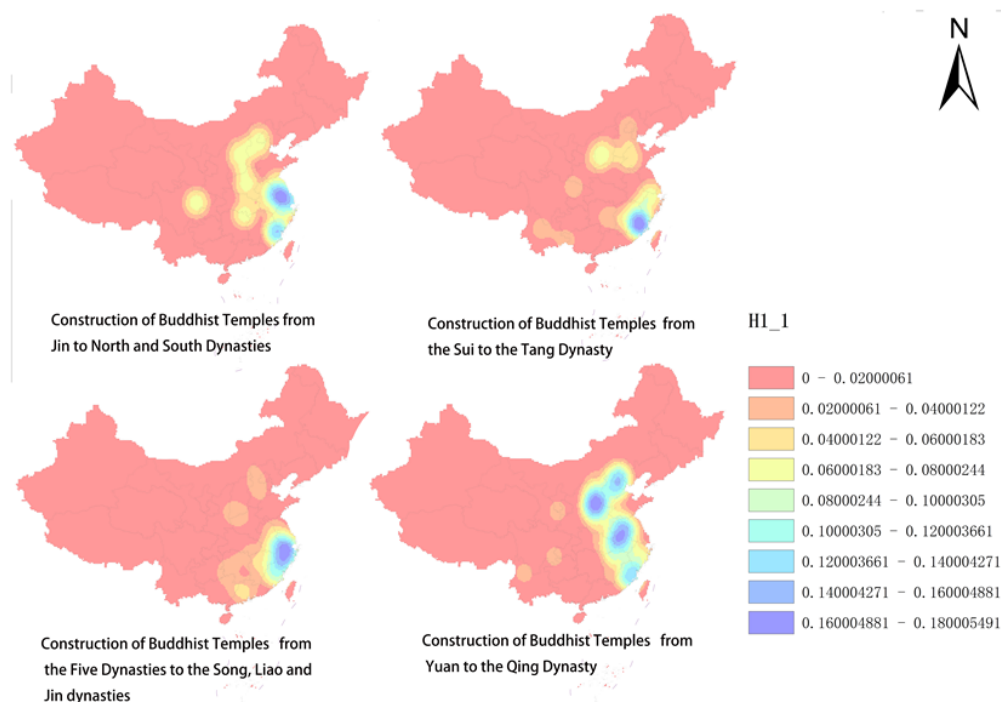


Figure 11: Distribution of relevant Buddhist temples in different periods

The construction of Buddhist temples with Maitreya Buddha as the theme, its manifestation was initially concentrated in Jiangsu and Fujian Provinces, then firstly shifted to the south, and then from the south to the north, and finally showed the distribution characteristics of multi-point gathering in the north and south.

## 4. Conclusions

(1) Systematically collate the literature and historical materials of the relevant Buddhist temples with Maitreya as the theme through the ages, and construct the temporal and spatial genealogy of the Buddhist temples with Maitreya as the theme. The Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples are divided into three major categories and seven subcategories, and the peak of the temple construction is used to divide the era layers, and the temporal and spatial evolution of the relevant Buddhist temples is analysed, presenting the rise and fall of the Maitreya-themed Buddhist temples in a quantitative manner.

(2) In terms of spatial and temporal characteristics, in terms of the number of Buddhist temples, the Shangsheng type was popular in the Sui-Tang and Yuan-Qing periods, and Buddhist temples were concentrated in the north and south. Xiasheng type was popular in the Five Dynasties-Song, and Buddhist temples were concentrated in the Jiangnan region, while Maitreya itself type was popular in



the Five Dynasties-Song, and Buddhist temples were concentrated in the northern region. The overall number of Buddhist temples shows a shift from south to north and a north-south convergence.

### Acknowledgments

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