

Analysis of the Pure Land Transformation in the Western Xia Classic Paintings

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Abstract: The Western Xia period saw the most prosperous period of Dunhuang grotto art development, including the Pure Land Transformation, Manjusri Transformation, Samantabhadra Transformation, Guanyin Sutra Transformation, and Chisheng Guangfo Transformation, with the Pure Land Transformation being particularly popular. The transformation of Pure Land in Jingbian painting continued from the Sui and Tang dynasties to the Western Xia dynasty, highlighting its unique artistic characteristics in terms of composition, shape, and color. With the continuous development of Jingbian paintings, the number and scale of Jingtū transformations continued to increase, making Jingtū transformations particularly important during the Western Xia period.

Keywords: Western Xia; Sutra Paintings; Pure Land Transformation

1. Introduction

During the Western Xia period, due to wars, great damage was caused to the social economy, and people's lives could not be guaranteed. Therefore, the Maitreya Pure Land depicted in the Maitreya had infinite yearning and longing for a happy life. The Pure Land Transformation in the Western Xia Grottoes' Classic Paintings is closely related to the real life of the people in both content and form. As excellent artistic treasure of the Western Xia Dynasty, the Pure Land Transformation perfectly presents beautiful images to the world.

According to Mr. Shi Pingting's statistics, there are a total of 33 types of Jingbian paintings, with approximately 800 existing. Among them, there are more than 400 Jingtū paintings. Jingtū paintings collectively referred to as Maitreya Jingtū paintings, Eastern Jingtū paintings, Western Jingtū paintings, and Ten Directions Jingtū paintings. The Western Jingtū paintings include the Infinite Life Sutra paintings, Amitabha Sutra paintings, and Guanwu Life Sutra paintings; The Eastern Pure Land Transformation, also known as the Eastern Medicine Buddha Pure Land Transformation; The Ten Directions Pure Land Transformation refers to the Pure Land Transformation of the "Ten Directions": East, West, South, North, Upper, Lower, Southeast, Northeast, Southwest, and Northwest.^[1]

2. The emergence of the Pure Land Transformation in Western Xia

In the late Eastern Han Dynasty, the Pure Land Classic began to be introduced into China.^[2] During the Eastern Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, with the promotion of Huiyuan, Tanluan, and others, the Pure Land faith quickly spread in society. In the Sui and Tang Dynasties, the Pure Land Sect was officially established by Daozhuo and Shandao. The Pure Land Sect has a simple way of practice, promoting the practice of reciting Buddha's name and quickly becoming a Buddha. With its simple and practical way of practice, the Pure Land Sect has opened the door to the people and is widely spread among the Chinese people. The Pure Land Transformation inherited the cultural connotations of the Tang, and Song dynasties. With the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism during the Western Xia period, continued to expand and spread, and sentient beings gained further understanding and mastery of religious beliefs and ideas. They constantly practiced and honed themselves, gradually fading negative concepts in their hearts and facing life with a positive and optimistic attitude. This not only had an important impact on the Western Xia period, but also had a profound impact on the Yuan and Ming dynasties, enabling people to face everything positively and optimistically in the future, maintaining a positive and optimistic attitude.

3. The connotation of the transformation of the Western Xia Pure Land

The Pure Land Transformation is an important theme in the Dunhuang scriptures, including the Maitreya Pure Land Transformation, the Eastern Medicine Buddha Pure Land Transformation, the Western Pure Land Transformation, and the Ten Directions Pure Land Transformation. The so-called 'Pure Land' refers to the Buddhist world, which is described in the Pure Land Sutra as the 'Pure Land', 'Pure Land', 'Land of Bliss', 'Land of Peace', and so on. On the one hand, due to people's belief in the Pure Land and longing for a comfortable and beautiful life; On the other hand, Maitreya faith, Medicine Buddha faith, and Western Pure Land faith emerged, making them important works with a large number, long duration and high artistic achievements in the Dunhuang scriptures.

Maitreya faith was also extremely popular in Western Xia, especially in the context of constant wars and famines. Maitreya faith was very popular and popularized from the royal family to the common people. For example, in the first and third caves of the five temples in northern Suzhou, the first cave describes the "old man entering the tomb" in the Maitreya Nativity Sutra, while the third cave depicts the "Maitreya Three Meetings" and "Shaving Diagram" in the Maitreya Nativity Sutra, expressing the beauty of life in the world, enjoying prosperity and wealth, living a happy life of peace and contentment, and having no worries about food and clothing.

From the Tangka of Medicine Buddha unearthed in Heishui City, one of the centers of Buddhism in Western Xia, it can be seen that the Medicine Buddha faith was also extremely popular in Western Xia. From the perspective of religious belief, it promotes the elimination of negativity and a positive and optimistic attitude towards real life. In the face of birth, aging, sickness, and death, we should not pay too much attention to our own illnesses and aging. This is an unavoidable problem that everyone will encounter, and it is not a chance encounter but a problem that will eventually be faced. Excessive and intense attention will only cause greater harm to the body and mind. The belief in pharmacists is widely spread, hoping that sentient beings can continuously cultivate themselves, recite Buddha with one heart, and face life, aging, sickness, and death with an optimistic attitude. Even if life passes away, there will be no sorrow.

The belief in the Pure Land of the West was widely spread in the Western Xia Dynasty, firstly manifested as early birth to the Pure Land and constant enjoyment. Secondly, it is for personal visualization and contemplation, for the purpose of practicing and reciting the Three Realms of Buddha. From this, it can be concluded that the Western Pure Land faith hopes that all sentient beings can hold an optimistic and positive attitude, face negative past events correctly, and only with one heart to Buddha and faith, will they face any situation with an optimistic and positive attitude. It is most prominent in the Amitabha Sutra and the Infinite Life Sutra. It is precisely because of such faith that exquisite and unparalleled paintings are depicted.^[3]

4. Characteristics of the Pure Land Transformation in Western Xia

4.1 Various shapes with different appearances

The Pure Land Transformation is composed of Maitreya Buddha statues, Bodhisattvas, palaces, pavilions, and cloud patterns, all of which have different shapes and vivid images. The screen features Maitreya Bodhisattva as the main character, with Maitreya sitting dignified and steady in the center of the palace; Bodhisattvas have sitting and standing positions, upright and sideways, with graceful postures. For example, in the first cave of the five temples, Maitreya underwent a transformation. He crossed his feet and sat on a lotus platform, with a long and round face, curved eyebrows like willow leaves, small eyes, a straight nose, and a realistic and vivid appearance. Also, on the east wall of Cave 29 of Yulin Cave in the Western Xia Dynasty, there is a transformation of the Medicine Buddha sitting in the center of a lotus throne. The Medicine Buddha is often characterized by holding a bowl, a tin cane, and holding a precious pearl. On both sides of , there are Sun Bodhisattva and Moonlight Bodhisattva, with vivid and varied character designs, including sitting, standing, stationary, and moving. Their personalities are distinct and full of vitality, with a slight smile on their faces, upturned corners of their mouths, a high and straight nose bridge, long eyebrows like willow leaves, and a plump and realistic face. Their facial designs are exquisitely detailed, and they are dressed in gorgeous clothing with clear and organized clothing patterns. Through the depiction of clothing patterns, the unique charm of dynamic and artistic beauty of the characters is highlighted. The Medicine Buddha statue in Cave 310 of the Western Xia Dynasty has a plump face, slender willow leaves and eyebrows, a tall figure, standing in the middle of a lotus platform with both feet, holding a tin cane in one hand

and dragging a medicine bowl in the other hand. The unique shape of the Medicine Buddha statue makes the character gloomy and full of infinite charm. For example, in the 29th cave of Yulin Cave, the Amitabha Sutra is transformed. Amitabha Buddha sits upright in the main hall, dignified and elegant, with a kind face. His left hand is lightly lifted and his right hand is lowered, and his eyes are always annotated below. On both sides, there are bodhisattvas who look at each other, as well as those who look at each other. The characters in the Western Pure Land Transformation are arranged in an "X" shape in front of the palace, with the main Buddha and Bodhisattva distributed in the main hall or long corridor. Especially the music and dance performers in the Heavenly Palace above the picture are simplified in number and arranged at the front of the picture, with beautiful music and dance postures and exquisite depictions. The overall structure of the picture is clear, with appropriate density and mature expression techniques, highlighting the images of characters and scenery, making the picture more artistic.^[4]

The Pavilions, palaces, majestic and spectacular with a grand scenes. For example, in the transformation of Maitreya's Upper Life Sutra, the lines of pavilions, palaces, pavilions, water pavilions, gate towers, and corridors, whether parallel or vertical, are dense, repeated, and interwoven in an orderly manner, without disorder. The transformation of the Infinite Life Sutra showcases the magnificence and exquisite design of the palaces and pavilions in the Pure Land, reducing the proportion of people in the buildings and placing them in large numbers in the courtyard in front of the palace, replacing the previous layout structure of Bodhisattvas, Heavenly Kings, and Servants in the Pure Land. Above the painting of the Pure Land in the West, the architecture of the Heavenly Palace and pavilions is depicted, which is magnificent and exquisite, with a grand and majestic atmosphere. The supporting structures of the attic and palace form a magnificent scene, with various yet orderly shapes, highlighting the beauty and joy of the Pure Land in the West. For example, in the Amitabha Sutra Transfiguration (Western Pure Land Transfiguration) (X-2421), this building is a grand hall on the top of a heavy hill^[5]. This is one of the few architectural drawings from the late Western Xia period, and although it is incomplete, it is very precious. On the three lotus pedestals in front of the main hall are seated the main Buddha Amitabha and Bodhisattva, respectively. Bodhisattvas have Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. There are numerous figures in front of the palace, highlighting its grandeur and spectacular scene. The main hall is intricately depicted, with a certain degree of decorative and artistic beauty. The West Pure Land Transformation of Cave 7 in Dongqianfo Cave features a building with an expressive roof. Through artistic re creation, the corners of the eaves without any decoration extend outwards and slowly lift up, greatly reducing the heaviness of the roof and making the eaves very light. The raised corners break the rigid style of the roof, and the lines and surfaces become curved, light, and flexible, showing rhythm and vitality. For example, in Cave 7 of the East Thousand Buddha Cave, the Eastern Medicine Buddha Sutra is transformed, with the roof eaves and corners rising upwards, forming a unique curved beauty. The gatehouse and corridor are connected to the corner towers on both sides, and the building is symmetrical and balanced on both sides. For example, in the third cave of Yulin Grottoes, the view of infinite life has changed. The palace pavilions are very exquisite, with arch of wooden architecture protruding, cornices rising, and glazed tiles covering the whole roof. The details of the building are delicately portrayed. The column heads are decorated with exquisite carved patterns. The patterns are rich in layers, unique in shape, and representative. For example, the Maitreya Sutra transformed the building into a magnificent tower with a high viewpoint. It features a two courtyard style with glazed tiles covering the top, which is very beautiful and bright. The spine at both ends of the building is decorated with dragon head and fish tail shapes, which are very fierce and powerful. The dragon head shaped mouth bites the spine of the building, and the fish tail is raised high, with large curves that are free and arbitrary. The shape is prominent, majestic and dignified, and has a sense of sacredness.^[6]

The auspicious cloud pattern is freely flowing, with beautiful curved lines that present a sense of rhythm and melody, as if colorful clouds are drifting, giving people a feeling of relaxation and joy, as if they have arrived at a fairyland on earth. For example, the Eastern Medicine Buddha Transformation on the north wall of Cave 7 of the Eastern Thousand Buddhas Cave features flame shaped auspicious cloud patterns distributed along the edge of the roof. The flame shaped auspicious cloud patterns have fluidity and rhythm, making the palaces and pavilions of the Eastern Pure Land more splendid and beautiful.^[7] The unique style of auspicious clouds is layered and layered, giving them a three-dimensional sense and highlighting their texture.

4.2 Clever and versatile composition

The Pure Land Transformation in the Jing Bian painting depicts the solemn and imposing palace

architecture, diverse rare birds and treasures, grand scenes of heavenly saints, gorgeous and exquisite martial arts, and the scene of lotus flowers transforming into a treasure pool in composition.

4.2.1 The Maitreya Sutra

It is divided into the upper and lower stages of Maitreya's transformation. The upper part describes palaces and pavilions, which have diverse styles and numerous quantities. There is no similarity in architectural style and form, showing magnificent scenes and majestic momentum. The composition is clever, the density is appropriate, and the proportion distribution is reasonable. Large scale sutra paintings are usually created to depict the magnificent scenes of the Buddhist world, and also extensively depict the life scenes of secular people in murals, presenting different characters in a real, realistic, and realistic way. By combining rich imagination and the unique expressive power of painting, the entire picture is ingeniously and realistically drawn, giving it its unique artistic beauty and charming charm. Maitreya Sutra Transformation in Cave 148 of Mogao Grottoes, depicts Maitreya Bodhisattva sitting upright in the center of the palace, with a stable and peaceful posture. Groups of Bodhisattvas are drawn on the left and right sides, some sparse and dense, some sitting and standing, freely and freely. Pavilions are arranged around the characters, with different styles of houses arranged in a staggered manner. The overall picture is embellished and decorated with cloud patterns and other decorative patterns, creating a graceful and beautiful scene that resembles a fairyland on earth.^[8]

4.2.2 Yaoshi Jing Bian

Taking the Yaoshi Jing Bian in Cave 400 of the Western Xia Dynasty in Mogao Grottoes as an example, the composition is exquisite. The Yaoshi Buddha sits in the center of the picture, with a graceful and vivid posture. The bodhisattvas on both sides sit symmetrically and evenly. The composition of the picture is clear and rigorous, accurately depicting the proportion and posture of the characters, highlighting the image of the Yaoshi Buddha. The background depicts the Heavenly Palace and pavilions, with the aim of highlighting the majestic and grand scene. The structure of the buildings is complex, the composition is full, the depiction is fine, and the lines of varying thickness accurately express the structural layout of the palaces and pavilions. At the same time, exquisite patterns are used to decorate the columns, fences, and roofs, adding a charm and vitality to the ordinary buildings. The composition styles of the picture are diverse, the scenes are colorful, and the scene is grand and imposing. The images of Bodhisattvas on both sides are relatively consistent, simple, and symmetrical, with the Medicine Buddha as the center. The depiction is exquisite and rigorous, and people and objects sit on the lotus platform, calm and harmonious. The Medicine Buddha is surrounded by auspicious clouds, with the meaning of good luck and good fortune. It holds a tin cane and drags a medicine bowl, showing its heart. I have a desire to cure diseases and eliminate disasters, and I yearn for everything in the world to be peaceful. The layout of the Medicine Buddha Sutra adopts the principles of symmetrical and balanced characters and consistent character shapes centered on Medicine Buddha, highlighting the main theme. Medicine Buddha is closely related to the Bodhisattvas, palaces, and pavilions around him, and the Bodhisattvas and palaces serve as supporting structures to highlight the main theme; The second is to decorate the picture, making it full of infinite vitality and energy, and making it more majestic.^[9] The grand scene can highlight infinite charm. In terms of composition, the five temples in Subei absorb the traditional forms of expression, inherit and innovate on this basis.

4.2.3 Western Sutra Transformation

Taking the Amitabha Sutra Transformation in Cave 29 of Yulin Grottoes as an example, the composition is very flexible and beautiful. The cleverness lies in the fact that Amitabha Buddha sits upright in the main hall, surrounded by bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, and disciples with varying proportions, distinct personalities, and diverse postures. They sit, stand, stand, and stand in groups of three gathered in the courtyard in front of the palace, and the groups are relatively free. From a visual perspective, the characters are arranged in a staggered manner, with ups and downs, large amplitudes, and unique forms. The various postures give the characters a strong sense of dynamics. The similarity is that they are all fixedly annotating the front. The picture structure is complex, and the statues of Amitabha Buddha and other bodhisattvas are decorated with intricate patterns, which are very exquisite and refined. From the layout analysis, Amitabha Buddha sits upright in the middle of the picture, surrounded by bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, and disciples, highlighting the image of Amitabha Buddha and highlighting the main theme. The characters are concentrated in pairs and threes, with appropriate density and layout. Each group of characters is distributed with bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, and Amitabha Buddha, dressed in exquisite and gorgeous costumes, with delicate and delicate lines, decorative and expressive, and unique charm in their effects.

The varied images of the Western Xia Jing Bian Painting are mainly formed through diagonal layout and various combinations of Jing Bian compositions, forming a unique style of composition for the Western Xia Jing Bian Painting. Painting is influenced by Tibetan Buddhism, with full composition, clear layers, and rarely the phenomenon of blank space in the picture.^[10]

4.3 Colorful colors

Color, as one of the painting languages, depicts specific contexts. Using lines to outline painted objects, rendering them with colors to make the picture more rich and textured. The Western Xia mural Pure Land Transformation mainly uses stone green, ochre, earth red, and black colors. Mr. Chen Bingying believes that Western Xia murals often use stone green, earth red, and black colors, with earth red lines and stone green as the color characteristics of Western Xia murals; Mr. Han Xiaomeng believes that the Western Xia wall paintings have unique characteristics in terms of color application: firstly, the murals are mostly made of stone green and light purple blue as the ground, giving the picture a cool tone, also known as the Western Xia "green murals"; secondly, the wall decorations are mostly made of gold. 275 Jingbian paintings usually emphasize the tension of contrasting colors, using a large amount of stone green, stone green, and red background colors to form contrast. Red is used as the background color of the picture, making the entire picture appear lively, solemn, harmonious, and unified. In terms of color application, contrasting colors with strong decorative effects are used. Among them, the Maitreya Sutra is wearing a white monk's robe inside, a green long robe, and a reddish brown robe outside, presenting a clear contrast of warm and cold colors in the clothing. The Amitabha Sutra uses vivid, bright, and contrasting colors to depict mountains, rocks, trees, figures, and buildings in green and green. The main statue is dominated by warm red and yellow tones, creating a strong contrast and decorative effect with cool and warm tones. The Medicine Master transforms into a red robe, with red and green halos shining on his head and body respectively, and a background of radiating red, white, and green striped flames. The above results indicate that in the Pure Land Transformation, Maitreya, Medicine Buddha, and Amitabha in the Western Pure Land mainly use red and green cool and warm colors, forming a strong contrast and outstanding effect.^[11]

5. The Impact of the Western Xia Pure Land Transformation

The transformation of the Pure Land in the Jingbian paintings had a significant impact throughout the Western Xia period. The concept of Pure Land provided artists with rich content and life, allowing them to freely express their unlimited imagination and creativity. They left behind numerous representative works of Pure Land Jingbian with rich content, diverse types, vivid images, and unique charm, becoming immortal classics and templates for future creations.^[12]

The changes in the Medicine Buddha Sutra, Maitreya Sutra, and Amitabha Sutra in the Western Xia Dynasty have preserved the clothing, calligraphy, architecture, medicine, music, dance, social customs, and other aspects of the Western Xia Dynasty for future generations; In other sutra variations such as the Chishengguang Buddha Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra, there are also depictions of astronomy, brewing, and iron smelting in the Western Xia ethnic group, which have significant historical value for studying the history of ancient Chinese ethnic groups and technology.

The art of transforming Western Xia scriptures into paintings not only provides sufficient support for the study of Dunhuang murals, but also plays an important role in supplementing the history of ethnic minority art and Chinese painting.

6. Conclusion

The Pure Land Transformation in the Western Xia Classic Paintings, with its unique artistic style, decorates and records the artistic scenes of Western Xia murals, and can better express the splendid culture of China for thousands of years. The Pure Land Transformation has inherited and developed from its origin, shape, composition, and color, and constantly innovates. We should continue the Pure Land Transformation of Western Xia and seek development through inheritance; Emphasize inheritance in development. Only in this way can Pure Land transform into art and form its own unique charm.

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