

**Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery:
A Pictorial Program in Religious Space**

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Abstract

This thesis explores issues concerning iconography, style, material, and patronage of a pictorial program in the Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery which was built during the Jin period (1115-1234). This thesis provides detailed descriptions for murals in Amitābha Hall and reconstructs the original mural program as planned in the Jin period. The visual culture of Chongfu Monastery was characterized by dialogue among different schools of Buddhism. By virtue of religious convergence, it seems that interdependence of Pure Land tradition, Esoteric Buddhism, and Chan Buddhism has been well established as evidenced in the case of Chongfu Monastery. By investigating central iconic images, illustrations of sūtra, and *maṇḍala*, this thesis helps shed some light on viewing experiences, ritual activities, and practice of visualization, and enriches understandings of a religious space through embracing academic shifts from texts to practices, identity to spatiality, and fixed objects to their fluid environments. This thesis also situates a long-neglected Northern Wei stone pagoda into perceivable religious and visual contexts of the Amitābha Hall. In addition to the interior architectural structures, mural paintings, and statues, the stone pagoda was introduced as a fourth level of vision within Amitābha Hall. This research compares murals of Amitābha Hall and Mañjuśrī Hall of Yanshan Monastery to cast light on themes, patronage, and artists of monastic mural, which might have been informed by various aspects of contemporary society.

Résumé

Cette thèse explore l'iconographie, le style, les matériaux et le mécénat d'un programme pictural dans la salle Amitābha du temple de Chongfu, construit pendant la dynastie Jin (1115-1234). Cette thèse fournit des descriptions détaillées des peintures murales de la salle Amitābha et reconstruit le programme mural original tel qu'il était prévu à la dynastie Jin. La culture visuelle du temple de Chongfu était caractérisée par le dialogue entre les différentes écoles du bouddhisme. En vertu de la convergence religieuse, il semble que l'interdépendance de la tradition de la Terre pure, le bouddhisme tantrique et le chán ait été bien établie, comme en témoigne le cas du temple de Chongfu. En étudiant les images iconiques centrales, les illustrations de sūtra et le maṇḍala, cette thèse contribue à éclairer les expériences visuelles, les activités rituelles et la pratique de la visualisation, et enrichit la compréhension d'un espace religieux en embrassant les glissements académiques des textes aux pratiques, de l'identité à la spatialité, et des objets fixes à leurs environnements fluides. Cette thèse met également dans les contextes religieux et visuels perceptibles de la salle Amitābha une pagode en pierre du Wei du Nord, longtemps négligée. En plus des structures architecturales intérieures, des peintures murales et des statues, la pagode en pierre a été introduite comme un quatrième niveau de vision au sein de la salle Amitābha. Cette recherche compare les peintures murales de la salle Amitābha avec celles de la salle Mañjuśrī du temple de Yanshan pour mettre en lumière les thèmes, le mécénat et les artistes de la peinture murale monastique, qui pourraient avoir été informés par divers aspects de la société contemporaine.

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Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery:

A Pictorial Program in Religious Space

Introduction

Since Buddhism reached China after the Eastern Han dynasty (25-220), mural paintings intended for adorning various monastic settings have been produced on commission by elites, court officials, or monks. This thesis divides murals featuring Buddhist art into two categories: the grotto mural and the monastic mural.¹ We know from written sources that the monastic mural reached its zenith during the Tang period.² In contrast to the well-preserved grotto mural at Dunhuang Caves, most monastic murals of the Tang period have not survived. Two sections of mural in the East Hall 東大殿 of Foguangsi 佛光寺 at Wutai Mount 五臺山 in Shanxi (857) survive today. While the mural in Foguangsi allows a glimpse into the style of the Tang monastic wall painting, its incompleteness nevertheless makes understanding the

¹ The term “grotto mural” in this thesis refers to murals painted inside caves which were excavated into a cliff face, and the “monastic mural” refers to murals preserved in timber Buddhist halls. But it should be noted that wooden architectural remains can be found in front of the entrance of many caves of Yungang Grottoes and Dunhuang Grottoes, see Peng Minghao 彭明浩, “Zhongguo shikusi kuqian jianzhu de faxian yu yanjiu 中國石窟寺窟前建築的發現與研究,” *Zhongguo wenhua yichan* 中國文化遺產 5, 2018, 7.

² Records about monastic mural can be found in diverse written sources, such as poems or hagiographical collections. But the most important sources for monastic paintings of the Tang are three texts specialized on paintings and one text on monasteries: *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠(815-877), *Tangchao minghua lu* by Zhu Jingxuan 朱景玄(fl. 841-846), *Yizhou minghua lu* by Huang Xiufu 黃休復(fl. 998), and *Sita ji* 寺塔記 by Duan Chengshi 段成式(803-863). See Susan Bush, and Hsio-yen Shih, *Early Chinese texts on painting*. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012); Wang Lin 王霖, “Tangchao siguan bihua zhaji 唐朝寺觀壁畫札記,” *Xinmeishu* 新美術 3, 1999, 17-22.

visual logic of this whole pictorial program a difficult task. If we expand the scope of investigation to Japan, a relatively well-preserved mural in the Kondō Hall 金堂 of Hōryū-ji 法隆寺 (ca. 700) gives a clue as to how mural paintings may have been planned in the image halls of monasteries which were influenced by the East Asian international Buddhist art style.

Although it will require some further explanation of how “painting of literati” and “painting of professionals” were differently perceived and practiced during the Song period (960-1279), professional artists who worked on temple murals during the Song, Liao (916-1125), and Jin period (1115-1234) were usually despised by literati and their works and voices were marginalized.³ For instance, it is astonishing that we know very little about the life and training of Guo Fa 郭發, the painter of the mural of Kaihua Monastery 開化寺 in Gaoping 高平 in the Northern Song period.

Thanks to the dry climate and relatively isolated location, many timber and brick architectures above the ground have been well preserved in Shanxi province.⁴ A few temple and pagoda murals in good condition in Shanxi provide us with valuable opportunities to reconstruct pictorial programs in the monastic environments of the Liao and Jin periods. The Jueshan Monastery Pagoda 覺山寺塔 in Lingqiu County 靈丘縣, Shanxi, is a brick pagoda built in 1090, during the reign of the Liao period. The interior wall of the ground floor of the pagoda is decorated with a mural depicting

³ Chai Zejun 柴澤俊, “Shanxi gudai siguan bihua zhi yishu jiazhi 山西古代寺觀壁畫之藝術價值,” *Wenwu shijie* 文物世界 1, 1999, 57-65.

⁴ Shanxi sheng wenwu ju 山西省文物局, *Zhongguo wenwu dituji: Shanxi fence* vol. 1, 中國文物地圖集: 山西分冊, 上卷, (Beijing: Zhongguo ditu chubanshe, 2006), 11.

bodhisattvas, heavenly kings, and apsaras, which is considered to be works from the Liao period.⁵ The mural depicting large Buddhas is also found on the interior wall of the ground floor of the Pagoda of Fogong Monastery 佛宮寺 of Ying County 應縣, Shanxi. Commonly known as the “Timber Pagoda of the Ying County 應縣木塔”, this pagoda was built in 1056.⁶ It is widely recognized that Yanshan Monastery 岩山寺 of Fanzhi 繁峙 and Chongfu Monastery 崇福寺 of Shuozhou 朔州 possess the best-preserved monastic murals of the Jin period.⁷ Furthermore, the mural of Dayun Monastery 大雲寺 of Hunyuan 渾源 might also be based on a sketch of the Jin period.⁸ Recognizing the significance of murals which have been left in their original places does not necessarily mean that the thesis would ignore fragmentary murals now scattered in museums around the world.⁹ By examining the motifs and themes of fragmentary murals preserved in museums, my thesis helps shed some light on practices of wall painting shared among artists who worked in Northern China during

⁵ See Wang Chunbo 王春波, “Shanxi Lingqiu Jueshan si Liaodai zhuanta 山西靈丘覺山寺遼代磚塔,” *Wenwu* 2, 1992, 53-55; Yang Junfang 楊俊芳, “Lingqiu Jueshan si Sheli ta bihua 靈丘覺山寺舍利塔壁畫,” *Shanxi Datong Daxue xuebao (Shehui kexue ban)* 1, 2019, 43-45.

⁶ See Chen Mingda 陳明達, *Yingxian muta 應縣木塔*, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1966), 5.

⁷ Chai Zejun, “Shanxi gudai siguan bihua zhi yishu jiazhi,” 54.

⁸ In an investigation report, the year of construction of Daxiong bao dian 大雄寶殿 of Dayun Monastery is identified to be around the late Liao or early Jin. See Chang Xuewen and Sun Shupeng 常學文 and 孫書鵬, “Hunyuan Jingzhuang Dayun si Daxiong bao dian kance baogao 渾源荊莊大雲寺大雄寶殿勘測報告,” *Wenwu shijie* 6, 2004, 25; Although this report does not provide analysis for the year of the mural on the back wall, I propose this mural may be based on a sketch from the Jin period.

⁹ Several fragmentary murals now preserved in the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology are reported to be part of a Buddhist temple wall painting in Henan. The reported time period of these murals is from the Song to the Yuan period.

the Jin period.¹⁰

The art of Chongfu Monastery during the Jin period was characterized by dialogue among different schools of Buddhism. By virtue of religious convergence, it seems that interdependence of Pure Land tradition, Esoteric Buddhism, and Chan Buddhism has been well established as evidenced in the case of Chongfu Monastery.

In the past ninety years, the literature has extensively examined the architectures of Chongfu Monastery and its Amitābha Hall, while limited work has been done to analyse murals and sculptures of Amitābha Hall. This research explores issues concerning iconography, style, material, and patronage of the pictorial program in Amitābha Hall. The methodology employed by this research bears resemblance to some previous works on similar topics: the identification of iconography based on textual sources and the focus on ritual functions.¹¹ However, remaining alert for tensions between text and image, this research does not favor prescriptive scriptures and liturgical texts over the actual pictorial programs in Amitābha Hall. Instead, my approach is to treat these materials equally and encompass stele *in situ*, cartouche, historical literature, and picture in its entirety.

Unlike in gloom crypts, dark tombs, narrow pagodas, or dim grottoes where the practice of viewing a picture is almost impossible, the pictorial program in Amitābha

¹⁰ For discussions on the concept of fragment in Chinese art, see Zheng Yan 鄭岩, “Tie Jiasha yu suipian de qixiang ‘鐵袈裟’與碎片的氣象,” *Dushu* 3, 2021, 42-52.

¹¹ For instance, methodology employed by Ursula Toyka in her work on Fahai Monastery in Beijing. See Ursula Toyka, *Splendours of Paradise: Murals and Epigraphic Documents at the Early Ming Buddhist Monastery Fahai Si* Volume 1&2, (Routledge, 2014).

Hall is designed to be viewed by visitors.¹² Specifically speaking, it calls for the participation of monks, lay believers, and other visitors within a religious space. Though the mural of Amitābha Hall was created by a group of unknown artists rather than literati painters, it is useful to quote an observation on the Ming painting made by Craig Clunas: “It is viewing that makes painting as a practice into painting as a discourse.”¹³

The term “pictorial program” in the title of this thesis encompasses not only murals and sculptures in Amitābha Hall, but also any other objects within viewing range of visitors. As Richard Vinograd suggests, “Buddhist and Daoist temples could serve as other kinds of proto-museum spaces, with more or less permanent collections of sculptures and paintings on display to public audiences within often historically significant architectural structures.”¹⁴ Among a large number of stone sculptures and *dhāraṇī* pillars stored in Chongfu Monastery since the Liao period, a stone pagoda of the Northern Wei period (386-534) which was once installed inside the Amitābha Hall deserves special attention. I suggest that this stone pagoda, though being long neglected, should be considered as part of perceivable religious experiences of

¹² Eugene Wang suggests the *dhāraṇī* print functions in an automated liturgical process within the reliquary in a pagoda, see Eugene Wang, “Ritual Practice Without a Practitioner? Early Eleventh Century *dhāraṇī* Prints in the Ruiguangsi Pagoda.” *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* (2011): 127-160. Robert Sharf and Wei-Cheng Lin also discuss some certain situations of what can pictures do in places where visibility is close to zero. Robert Sharf, “Art in the dark: the ritual context of Buddhist caves in western China.” *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and its Conservation* (2013): 38-65; Wei-cheng Lin, “Performing Center in a Vertical Rise: Multilevel Pagodas in China’s Middle Period.” *Ars Orientalis* 46 (2016), 101-134.

¹³ Craig Clunas, *Chinese painting and its audiences*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 57.

¹⁴ Richard Vinograd, “Classification, Canon, and Genre.” in *A Companion to Chinese Art* ed. Martin J. Powers and Katherine R. Tsiang (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 268.

Amitābha Hall.

By investigating central iconic images, illustrations of *sūtra*, and *maṇḍala*, my thesis helps shed some light on the concept and practice of visual aids for both ritual activities and visualization. This thesis also enriches understandings of a religious space by embracing academic shifts from texts to practices, identity to spatiality, and fixed objects to their fluid environments.

The first chapter starts with a brief review of the literature of the past ninety years concerning Chongfu Monastery and Amitābha Hall. Employing the approach of formal analysis, this chapter provides descriptions of murals in Amitābha Hall and rebuilds the original mural program as planned in the Jin period. Chapter 2 analyses the ritual functions of murals, sculptures, and pagoda. This chapter focuses on how users and visitors are guaranteed access to images in a religious space. Chapter 3 compares the pictorial programs of Amitābha Hall and Mañjuśrī Hall of Yanshan Monastery to shed light on the themes, patronage, and artists of monastic mural, which might have been informed by various aspects of contemporary society. The conclusion chapter suggests the importance of situating architecture and mural in a broader social and artistic context and reflects on some questions related to viewing experiences.

Chapter One

This chapter provides a brief history of Chongfu Monastery and the Amitābha Hall. I will review scholarship on Chongfu Monastery of the past ninety years. I will examine material, iconography, and style of mural of the Amitābha Hall in detail and rebuild the original mural program as planned in the Jin period.

1.1 Chongfu Monastery and Amitābha Hall

Chongfu Monastery 崇福寺 (Monastery of August Blessings), located in Shuozhou 朔州, Shanxi, was originally a monastery built by the famous Tang general Yuchi Gong 尉遲恭 (585-658). Under the Liao dynasty, it was transformed into a government residence referred to as “the administration of Lin Taishi” (Lin Taishi Fushu 林太師府署). At the end of the tenth century, it served as a monks’ residence once again and was called “Linya Cloister” (Linya Yuan 林衙院). During the Jin dynasty 金代 (1115-1234), the architectural centerpiece of Chongfu Monastery, Amitābha Hall 彌陀殿, was built in the third year of Huangtong period 皇統三年 (1143) under the orders of Zhai Zhaodu, the Duke of Kaiguo 開國侯翟昭度. This building and the murals painted in it are both identified as the original works of the Jin period by scholars.¹⁵

After the Jin dynasty, this monastery has been restored for several times during the Ming and Qing periods.¹⁶ During the reign of Zhengde (1506-1521), a general of

¹⁵ Chai Zejun 柴澤俊, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu Shuozhou Chongfusi* 中國古代建築朔州崇福寺, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996), 5-6, 78, 402.

¹⁶ See Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 404.

Shuozhou (Shuozhou wei zhenfu 朔州衛鎮撫) named Xue Qi 薛琦 composed an epitaph named “*Record of Chongfu Monastery on Stele* 崇福寺碑記,” which provides a detailed account on the history of Chongfu Monastery from the Tang period to the Ming dynasty. Although this stele did not survive today, its inscription was recorded in *gazetteer of Shuozhou* (*Shuozhou zhi* 朔州志) of Qianlong edition. According to *Shuozhou zhi*,

Zhai Zhaodu, the Duke of Kaiguo initially built the Amitābha Hall during the reign of Huangtong (1141-1149), Emperor Xi of Jin dynasty. During the reign of Tiande (1149-1153), the monastery was given a new name as ‘Chongfu Chan Monastery’ by Wanyan Liang (also known as Hailing wang). 至金熙宗皇統年間，開國侯翟昭度始建彌陀大殿。天德年間賜額崇福禪寺。

This record encourages us to rethink some seemingly inconsistent terminologies. On the one hand, the name of the main architecture, “Amitābha Hall,” shows its affinity with the Pure Land tradition. On the other, the name of the monastery “Chongfu Chan Monastery” unmistakably indicates connections with Chan Buddhism. To resolve the conflict, I propose to situate Chongfu Monastery within the religious landscape of twelfth-century north China. During the Liao period (907-1125), Pure Land schools enjoyed great popularity in north China. The teachings of Huayan School 華嚴宗 (Avatamsaka, or “Flower Garland”) and Esoteric teachings received

considerable attention among scholar monks and elite patrons during the Liao period.¹⁷ In general, Buddhism was strongly promoted by Liao rulers.¹⁸

After the Jurchen conquered the Liao, Pure Land continued to thrive in regions that had once been under the reign of Liao rulers, while the Huayan School waned in influence. In the meantime, with some Chan monks coming from the south, the first half of the twelfth century witnessed the establishment of some Chan monasteries.¹⁹ Therefore, the case of Chongfu Monastery reflects a blending of the Pure Land tradition and Chan Buddhism.²⁰ The two traditions coexisted in Chongfu Monastery rather than displacing one another. To sum up, the granting of the title “Chan Monastery” might have evinced the institutional dominance of the Chan school during the Jin period.

The present-day Chongfu Monastery is orientated on a south-north axis and

¹⁷ See Nogami Shunjō 野上俊靜, *Ryō Kin no Bukkyō* 遼金の仏教, Kyoto, 1953.

¹⁸ Liu Pujiang 劉浦江 suggests Liao’s policy on religion allowed the number of monks to grow rapidly and caused damage to national economy, see Liu Pujiang 劉浦江, “Liao Jin de fojiao zhengce jiqi shehui yingxiang 遼金的佛教政策及其社會影響,” *Foxue yuanjiu* 1996, 234.

¹⁹ See Lin Hang, “A Sinicised Religion Under Foreign Rule: Buddhism in the Jurchen Jin Dynasty (1115–1234).” *The Medieval History Journal* 22, no. 1 (2019), 25, 27. Lin Hang also noticed that “the Jin witnessed a crucial period during which Chan Buddhism, which later became the most popular Buddhist school in China, came into dominance.”

²⁰ As early as in the Northern Song period, a monastery located in the present-day Hangzhou was given a name “Pure Land Chan Monastery.” It is possible that the naming method of monasteries in the Jin was influenced by its neighborhood in the south. See Li Jingjie 李靜傑, “Mingchao Tianshun nianjian beike Mituo chansi ji yu xifang jile shijie tu shulun 明朝天順年間碑刻彌陀禪寺記與西方極樂世界圖述論.” 故宮博物院院刊 *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 4 (2014), 10; Nancy Steinhardt perceived that the identity of Chongfu Monastery has been transformed from a Pure Land to a Chan during the Wanyan Liang reign (1149-1161). See Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, “A Jin Hall at Jingtusi: Architecture in Search of Identity.” *Ars Orientalis* 33 (2003), 80.

measures a distance of 200 meters from south to north and 180 meters from west to east. Chongfu Monastery consists of five groups of buildings from the south to the north: the Gate 山門, Vajra Hall 金剛殿, Thousand Buddha Pavilion 千佛閣, Three Jewels Hall 三寶殿, and Amitābha Hall together with Guanyin Hall 觀音殿. Most of these architectures were built or rebuilt during the Ming and Qing periods. The focus of this study is Amitābha Hall and its murals. Amitābha Hall is located on a foundation 2.53 meters above the ground. In front of the hall is a platform that is 2.13 meters in height. Amitābha Hall sits in the north and faces south. It is a seven-bay building, measuring 41.32 meters in width and 22.7 meters in depth (進深 *jinshen*).²¹

1.2 Early and Modern Scholarship

The first systematic study on Chongfu Monastery was published in *Essays of the School of Architecture 17* (建築學會論文集 17) in 1940, written by Japanese architectural historian Murata Jirō (村田治郎, 1895-1985).²² In this work, Murata provided a reconstruction of the history of this monastery from the Tang to the Qing period by using both historical documents and epigraphic sources preserved in Chongfu Monastery. Murata concentrated on architectural characteristics of Amitābha Hall and Guanyin Hall but paid little attention to murals. In 1939, Murata published an essay discussing a Northern Wei (386-534) stone pagoda preserved in Amitābha

²¹ Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 19.

²² Murata Jirō 村田治郎, “Sansei hokubu Saku no Ringa-ji (Linya Chongfu Monastery of Shuo County in North Shanxi 晉北朔縣の林衙崇福寺),” *Kenchiku gakkai ronbunshū 17* (*Essays of School of Architecture 建築學會論文集*), 1940, 65-72.

Hall, which I will give a contextual analysis in relation to the murals of Chongfu Monastery in this thesis.²³

The Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery continued to attract some scholarly attentions after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. From July 21 to August 31, 1949, a group organized by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC for the investigation of cultural relics conducted a field survey on ancient architecture and archaeological sites in north Shanxi, including Chongfu Monastery. In this investigation, the murals and sculptures of the Amitābha Hall were reported to be original works of the Jin period, although the coloring may have been refurbished during the Ming period.²⁴ In 1959, Li Liangjiao 李良姣, a member of the ancient architecture group of the investigation, published an article about the Amitābha Hall in a journal only for internal reference.²⁵

But it is only after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that studies on Chongfu Monastery flourished. Chai Zejun 柴澤俊, a renowned architecture historian, conducted numerous extensive fieldwork studies and meticulous *in situ* examinations of Chongfu Monastery and published one comprehensive study of the monastery and

²³ Murata Jirō 村田治郎, "Hokuji no Senbutsu sekitō (The Small Stone Pagoda of Northern Wei 北魏の千佛小石塔)," *Kokuhō* 2-10 (*National Treasures* 國寶), 1939. This essay was mentioned in Murata's "Sansei hokubu Saku no Ringa-ji," 5.

²⁴ Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhuabu wenwuju 中央人民政府文化部文物局, "Shuoxian Chongfusi Mituodian he Guanyindian 朔縣崇福寺彌陀殿和觀音殿," in *Yanbei wenwu kaochatuan baogao* 雁北文物考察團報告, (Beijing: Zhongyang renmin zhengfu wenhuabu wenwuju, 1951), 157-159.

²⁵ Li Liangjiao 李良姣, "Shanxi Shuoxian Chongfusi Mituodian jianzhu chubu fenxi 山西朔縣崇福寺彌陀殿建築初步分析." *Lishi jianzhu* issue 1 歷史建築 1, 1959. Li's essay was introduced by Zhang Shi 張史 in a short article published in *Wenwu* journal, see Zhang Shi 張史, "Lishi jianzhu 1959 nian diyiqi jieshao 歷史建築 1959 年第一期介紹," *Wenwu* 6, 1959, 23.

one report discussing maintenance work conducted on the monastery.²⁶ This significant work done by Chai made this present discussion on the Chongfu Monastery murals possible. Jin Weinuo 金維諾 proposes that the faces and accessories of the bodhisattvas in the Chongfu Monastery murals exhibit artistic features of the Jin period.²⁷ In her MA thesis, Shih-shan Susan Huang suggests the impact of the Liao art style on the murals of Amitābha Hall is perceivable in the rounded face of Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva on the east wall. Huang also notes some aspects of artistic tradition in the Chongfu murals that she referred to as “Tibetan style.” Huang proposes that this may be accounted for artistic exchanges between Gansu under Western Xia’s rule and Shanxi under the control of Jin during the twelfth century.²⁸ In this thesis, I will further consider the iconography of Esoteric Buddhism in Chongfu Monastery and how the thoughts of different Buddhist schools were mediated in one monastery.

1.3 Murals: Iconography and Style

I will conduct a close visual analysis in this section by employing an art-historical methodology of “three stage/strata” proposed by Erwin Panofsky.²⁹ Specifically, in

²⁶ Chai Zejun 柴澤俊, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu Shuozhou Chongfusi* 中國古代建築朔州崇福寺, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1996); Chai Zejun and Li Zhengyun 柴澤俊, 李正雲. *Shuozhou Chongfusi Mituodian xiushan gongcheng baogao* 朔州崇福寺彌陀殿修繕工程報告. (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1993).

²⁷ Jin Weinuo 金維諾, “Siyuan bihua de kaocha 寺院壁畫的考察與研究,” *Wenwu* 4, 1998, 44.

²⁸ Shih-shan Susan Huang, “Cong Yonglegong bihua tan Yuandai jinnan zhiye huafang de bihua zhizuo 從永樂宮壁畫談元代晉南職業畫坊的壁畫製作.” M. A. thesis, National Taiwan University, 1995, 37-38.

²⁹ Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the*

the first place, I will provide descriptions and illustrations for the murals in Amitābha Hall, emphasizing both their medium and content. Secondly, I will employ both cultural and iconographic knowledge, especially from Buddhist scriptures and other textual sources, to examine the subjects of the murals. Lastly, by conducting a contextual analysis, I will endeavor to reconstruct the pictorial program of Amitābha Hall in its architectonic environment.

The remaining murals in Amitābha Hall occupy an area of 321 square meters in total (Fig. 1.1). It is reported that all the four walls of Amitābha Hall were originally painted, except five doors in the south wall and three doors in the north wall. However, most of the murals on the north wall and a quarter of the murals on the east wall were destroyed when the wall foundation collapsed. The artists applied a layer of coating made from straw to the surface of the mud interior walls. After the surface was polished, plaster was applied to the wall to as a background for the paintings. As is usual in the preliminary stage of wall paintings, the artists first sketched on the wall with monochrome ink lines. They also indicated the names of the pigments that would later be used to fill different blocks of the original sketches with charcoal. The main pigments are minerals, including cinnabar, azurite, ocher, and malachite.³⁰ Therefore

Renaissance, (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 5-9.

³⁰ Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 76; According to studies by Jiao Yuanyuan, pigments used in murals of Chongfu Monastery are similar to pigments recorded in two works. One is the fourteenth volume of twentieth century technical treatise on architecture and craftsmanship *Building standards and methods* (*Yingzao fashi* 營造法式, written by Li Jie). The other is an instruction book published in 1331: *Record on painting and sculpture of the Yuan Dynasty* (*Yuandai huasu ji* 元代畫塑記, author unknown). Pigments mentioned in the two works are mainly minerals, which make murals more vivid. See Jiao Yuanyuan 焦媛媛, “Jindai zhongcai bihua yanliao yu shise jifa de tansuo ji fuyuan linmo shiyan: yi Shuozhou Chongfusi Mituodian bihua

red and green are the two main colors found in the murals of Amitābha Hall. The background green color and the red color contrast sharply. By comparison, another contemporary mural in Mañjuśrī Hall 文殊殿 of Yanshan Monastery 岩山寺 in Fanzhi 繁峙 mainly features the color green.³¹ The method of applying powder and gilding (*lifen duijin*, 瀝粉堆金) is broadly employed in the murals of Chongfu Monastery. Jewel Garland (*Yinglu*, 瓔珞) and instruments held by attendant bodhisattvas are rendered with *lifen duijin*. *Lifei duijin* refers to dripping wet putty made of glue and flour to the surface of the mural to give it a three-dimensional form. When the putty half-dried, artists applied gold leaf to the putty.³² The technique of *lifen duijin* can be seen in murals and sculptures of the Tang period in the Dunhuang Grottoes.³³ In the case of the Chongfu Monastery murals, *lifen duijin* makes decorations of the clothing and instruments of bodhisattvas distinct from other parts of wall paintings, reflecting a luxury taste.

I will start from the westernmost section of the south wall and follow a clockwise direction to describe the content and scale of the murals (Fig. 1.2). The west section of the south wall depicts a Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin with four attendants. On the left of the Guanyin is an elder and a guardian. On the right is a

weili 金代重彩壁畫顏料與施色技法的探索及復原臨摹實驗：以朔州崇福寺彌陀殿壁畫為例，” M. A. thesis, Capital Normal University, 2011, 21-26.

³¹ See Chai Zejun and Zhang Chouliang 柴澤俊 and 張丑良, *Fanzhi Yanshansi* 繁峙巖山寺, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), 150-177.

³² Wenwu baohu kexue jishu yanjiusuo 文物保護科學技術研究所, *Zhongguo gudai jianzhu xiushan jishu* 中國古代建築修繕技術, (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 1983), 268-273.

³³ Gao Qian 高啓安, “Dunhuang shiku huasu cailiao zhong de mianfen he you 敦煌石窟畫塑材料中的麵粉和油,” *Dunhuang xieben yanjiu nianbao* 2 敦煌寫本研究年報 2, 2008, 1-21.

heavenly maid and a guardian (this section is hereafter designated as Mural A). The scale of the mural of this section is 5.73 meters high and 5.54 meters wide. The subject of mural on the west wall is three *pu* (舖, layout or composition) of images depicting the scene of Buddhas preaching dharma. Each of the three Buddhas is flanked by two attendant bodhisattvas and two groups of small Buddhas on two sides (this section is hereafter designated as Mural B). This section measures 5.72 meters in height by 21.53 meters in width. The west section of the north wall depicts one *pu* of Buddha preaching dharma (Mural C). The Buddha is not believed to be the original work of the Jin period, while the two attendant bodhisattvas are thought to be originals. The two attendant bodhisattvas are painted on the north wall on the backs of the west and east doors respectively (Mural D and E).³⁴ One attendant bodhisattva can be seen on the easternmost section of the north wall (Mural F). The lintel above the west door on the north wall illustrates a part of the “Sixteen Visualization” as recorded in the *The sūtra On Contemplation Of Amitayus* 觀無量壽佛經 (Mural G). On the lintel above the east door on the north wall illustrates the first eight of the “Sixteen Visualization” in the *The sūtra On Contemplation Of Amitayus* (Mural H). On the east wall, like the west, are again three *pu* of images depicting the scene of Buddha preaching dharma as we have seen on the west (Mural I), except the main Buddha and one attendant Bodhisattva of the north *pu* have been destroyed. The last part of the mural is drawn on the easternmost section of the south wall (Mural J). Its subject is three Buddhas and three bodhisattvas arranged in two rows. The upper part

³⁴ There are three doors on the north wall in total: the west door, middle door, and east door.

depicts three Buddhas and the lower part three bodhisattvas.

1.3.1 The Mural on the West Section of the South Wall (Mural A)

The Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin is in a standing posture (Fig. 1.3). The Guanyin has a round face, and wears a green shawl and red skirt. The Guanyin has one face in the middle, two faces on both sides, and fifteen faces on top of its head. The fifteen faces are divided into five rows, with five faces on the lowest row and one face on the top. Each of the eighteen faces has one eye between the eyebrows. On top of the Guanyin is a small Buddha dressed in a red robe and green shawl and seated on a lotus platform. The Guanyin has countless arms. Six hands are positioned in front of the chest of Guanyin. Other hands surround the body as if forming a nimbus behind the back. Many hands hold a variety of objects, including scriptures, bells, bowls, swords, clouds, pagodas, mirrors, and more. According to the *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa guangdayuanman wuai dabeixin tuoluoni jing* (千手千眼觀世音菩薩廣大圓滿無礙大悲心陀羅尼經, *sūtra of a Thousand Arms* for short), translated by the Tang monk Bhagavadharma (translated in 650), there should be forty objects held in the hands of the Guanyin.³⁵ The types of objects depicted in the mural mostly match those described in *sūtra of a Thousand Arms*. On the left side is an elder and a guardian. The elder holds a scepter with his two hands and has a halo on his back. This elder might be *posouxian* or *posoutian* (婆藪天, or 婆藪仙), who usually appears as one of the two attendants of Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed

³⁵ See T. 1060, 20: p. 111a4-b12.

Guanyin.³⁶ The guardian has four hands, two of which are held together in apparent worship of the Guanyin, while the other two hold two swords, as if protecting the dharma. The guardian wears a hat in the shape of pig head. On the right side is a heavenly maid and a guardian. This heavenly maid holds her hands together. She might be *gongdetian* (功德天).³⁷ The guardian's weapons are a spear and a whip. The guardian wears a hat in the shape of an elephant head. This pair of guardians is *Vinayaka*, which usually appears in the lower part of *Guanyin bianxiang* (illustrations for Guanyin sūtra) in Dunhuang. According to *Dashi zhoufa jing* 大使咒法經 translated by Bodhiruci (d. 535), *Vinayaka* has different forms, including the pig head and the elephant head.³⁸

Different scriptures provide contrasting descriptions for visual features of the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin.³⁹ Moreover, Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyins vary in appearance in different mediums and contexts.⁴⁰

³⁶ According to a study by Wang Huimin, Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin in Cave 144 and Cave 234 of Dunhuang grottoes are accompanied by *posouxian* and *gongdetian*. Wang Huimin 王惠民, "Dunhuang qianshou qianyan Guanyinxiang 敦煌千手千眼觀音像," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 1, 敦煌學輯刊 1, 1994, 69.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *Dashi zhoufa jing* 大使咒法經 translated by Bodhiruci, T. 1268. Wang Huimin 王惠民, "Dunhuang Pinayejia xiang 敦煌毗那夜迦像," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 1 敦煌學輯刊, 2009, 72.

³⁹ For example, according to *Qianshou qianyan Guanshiyin pusa lao tuoluoni shen jing* 千手千眼觀世音菩薩姥陀羅尼身經 (translated by Bodhiruci), Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin shall be depicted as having one face, three eyes, and one thousand arms, see T. 1058, 20: p.101b3-4; As stated by *She wuai dabeixin datuoluoni jing yigui* 攝無礙大悲心大陀羅尼經儀軌 (translated by Amoghavajra), Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin shall be depicted as having five hundred faces and one thousand arms. See T. 1067, 20: p.130b2-4.

⁴⁰ According to research by Wang Huimin, a large number of images of the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin do not match descriptions from scriptures. See Wang Huimin, "Dunhuang qianshou qianyan Guanyinxiang," 64.

However, the composition of Mural A is similar to the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin depicted on the north wall of Mogao Cave 3: a standing Guanyin is flanked by *posouxian*, *gongdetian*, and a pair of *Vinayaka*.⁴¹ What would be considered as distinctive is that the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin of Mural A has eighteen faces, which is very rare. Since no scriptural or pictorial evidence I could offer to explain the origin of the eighteen-headed Guanyin, local artistic traditions may account for the specific type of Guanyin.

1.3.2 The Murals on the West and East Wall (Murals B and I)

Representation of the scene of Buddha preaching dharma, or *shuofa* 說法, is a long artistic tradition going back to the emergence of the Greco-Buddhist art in the Gandhara region. The prototype of the imagery of Buddha preaching dharma is as one seated Buddha flanked by attendants.⁴² Numerous images of Buddha delivering his teachings have been produced and venerated by laypeople and monastic communities across East Asia.

The murals of *shuofa* on the west and east wall are designed symmetrically. Mural B and Mural I each consist of three *pu* images of Buddha preaching dharma. From south to north on the west wall, I will refer to the three sections as Murals B1 (Fig. 1.4), B2 (Fig. 1.5) and B3 (Fig. 1.6). From north to south on the east wall, I will

⁴¹ This Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin is a work of the Yuan dynasty, see Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo 敦煌文物研究所, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku* 中國石窟: 敦煌莫高窟, vol. 6 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 171;

⁴² See Kurt A. Behrendt, *The Art of Gandhara in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 39, 42, 48.

refer to the three sections as Murals I1 (Fig. 1.7), I2 (Fig. 1.8), and I3 (Fig. 1.9). Each of the six sections features a Buddha seated on a lotus platform who is preaching dharma accompanied by two bodhisattvas. With each leg crossed and foot placed on the opposite thigh, the right foot of the Buddha is revealed. The clothing of the Buddha consists of three main pieces: an inner robe, which is green and decorated with flower patterns along the edges; a shawl covering the upper body, which is red; and an outer robe, which is also red. The edge of the halo of the Buddha is ornamented with red flames. The main Buddha of Murals B1, B3, I1, and I3 has a moustache, while the two Buddhas in the middle of the west and east walls (B2 and I2) do not have moustaches.

A woodblock print of Tejaprabha Buddha 熾盛光佛 discovered in 1974 in the Timber Pagoda of the Ying County demonstrates stylistic features almost identical to those of the main Buddha in the Chongfu Monastery murals, indicating the two types of images of Buddha share the same original sketch with only minor changes (Fig. 1.10).⁴³ It is worth noting the Tejaprabha Buddha also has a similar moustache. This woodblock is thought to have been produced during the Liao period (916-1125).⁴⁴ Attendant bodhisattvas of the six sections are all richly decorated and bejeweled: their crowns are made of flowers, and their green robes are embellished with red tassels

⁴³ The Timber Pagoda is located 70 kilometers from the Chongfu Monastery. Guojia Wenwuju wenwu baohu kexue jishu yanjiusuo 國家文物局文物保護科技研究所, "Shanxi Yingxian fogongsi muta nei faxian Liaodai zhengui wenwu 山西應縣佛宮寺木塔內發現遼代珍貴文物," *Wenwu* 6, (1982), 1-8.

⁴⁴ Yang Junfang 楊俊芳, "Yingxian muta Liaodai mucang zhi fohua yanjiu 應縣木塔遼代秘藏之佛畫研究," *Journal of Shanxi Datong University (Social Science)* 5, (2011), 41-43.

and jewel wreaths.⁴⁵

To perform a close reading of these murals, compositional features of these two sections of murals can be considered in light of the use of a “modular system,” as suggested by Lothar Ledderose. Ledderose wrote, “All this was feasible because the Chinese devised production systems to assemble objects from standardized parts. These parts were prefabricated in great quantity and could be put together quickly in different combinations, creating an extensive variety of units from a limited repertoire of components.”⁴⁶ Murals on the west and east wall reveal modular structures in iconography, including mudrā of the main Buddha, objects held by attendant bodhisattvas, postures of attendant bodhisattvas, and other attendant deities on the two sides of the main Buddha. Although many of these characteristics may be understood as interchangeable motifs and patterns, it is still meaningful to ask why the artists chose to paint specific motifs to fit within particular visual contexts to fulfill the agenda of Buddhism and impress the viewers.

The main Buddha of B1 is shown with its lowest-left palm facing upward and middle and ring finger bent, while the raised right palm faces downward and points outward. The right hand of B2 shows a standard preaching mudrā (Dharmachakra Pravartana Mudrā, or “Mudrā of Turning of the Wheel”) and left palm facing upward. B3 suggests both hands positioned in a standard preaching mudrā. The mudrā of the

⁴⁵ For studies on “bejeweled Buddha” or “crowned Buddha,” See Dorothy C. Wong, *Buddhist Pilgrim-Monks as Agents of Cultural and Artistic Transmission: The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia, ca. 645-770*. (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2018), 57-79.

⁴⁶ Lothar Ledderose, *Ten thousand things: module and mass production in Chinese art*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 1.

main figure of I2 is identical with that of B1. Hand gestures of I3 are identical with those of B2, but the right hand of I3 is positioned more outwardly and the left hand in a lower place. In summary, the buddhist hand gestures of the main Buddha of all the five sections (B1, B2, B3, I2, and I3) exhibit some variants of the preaching mudrā. Although in many cases the historical Buddha is shown making the preaching mudrā as the first turning of the wheel of dharma at Deer Park in Sarnath, the identity of the painted Buddha is not necessarily the historical Buddha. Furthermore, these variants of the preaching mudrā may not denote any differences in terms of Buddhist doctrines. It is possible that the artists used their own discretion to highlight the grace of Buddha by creating diverse hand gestures. A set of Buddhist murals with similar variants of the preaching mudrā can be found on the ground floor of the Timber Pagoda in the Ying County, which further confirms that Chongfu Monastery and the Timber Pagoda in the Ying County share the same iconographical design.

Another modular component is small figures that flank the main Buddha. These small figures can be classified into two types. One is a pair of flying apsaras. The other is ten small Buddhas. The main figures of B1, B3, and I3 are flanked by a pair of flying apsaras. The main figures of B2 and I2 are flanked by ten small Buddhas. The flying apsaras of B1 are dressed in red robes and bejeweled crowns, and each holds a vessel in its left hand. The two flying apsaras are surrounded by auspicious clouds. The flying apsaras of B3 also hold a vessel, while the two flying apsaras of I3 are holding a red sun and a white moon respectively. In the red sun there is a three-legged crow, and in the white moon there is a jade rabbit who is preparing

medical substances. The small Buddhas depicted in B2 are dressed in red robes and surrounded by auspicious clouds. On each side of the main Buddha are two groups of small Buddhas. One group includes two small Buddhas and the other group three. All the ten small Buddhas are putting their palms together and facing towards the main Buddha, as if they are listening to him preaching dharma.

The type of object held by attendant bodhisattvas also varies. The bodhisattva on the right side of the main Buddha of B1 holds a flower with two hands. The bodhisattva on the left holds a flower with the left hand, while the right hand rests by his side. Their faces are depicted in frontal view. Their eyes are half closed and look slightly down, suggesting a pensive mood and giving an impression of serenity.

The two bodhisattvas of B2 show intriguing and extraordinarily nuanced features and are worth some detailed observation. Their faces are represented in three-quarter view. The bodhisattva on the left of the main Buddha holds a paged scripture with the left hand, and the finger of the right hand appears to be touching the page of the scripture. The bodhisattva, his eyes concentrated, seems preoccupied by the content of this paged scripture. Although the facial features of attendant bodhisattvas of Amitābha Hall murals are nearly identical, the artists put unusual effort into depictions of the facial characters of the left bodhisattva of the B2 (Fig. 1.11). Orderly white teeth can be observed in the slightly opened mouth of the bodhisattva. We can even sense the rhythm of the carefully rendered tongue of the bodhisattva, which may be a representation alluding to either of two types of widespread practice in monastic environments: *nianfo* 念佛, and *songjing* 誦經. In the tradition of the Pure Land

practice, *nianfo* can be interpreted as “mindful recollection (*nian*) of the Buddha (*fo*).” This term can also take on an implied sense of “intonation (*nian*) of the Buddha’s name (*fo minghao*).”⁴⁷ While *nianfo* may serve as a simple way of accumulating merits, *songjing* refers to reading or reciting Buddhist scriptures, which is more linked with studying profound Buddhist doctrines. It seems that the bodhisattva is chanting his scripture.⁴⁸ The paged scripture held by the bodhisattva is represented as a real book to be opened, read, and recited.⁴⁹ This unusual rendering brings the static Buddhist icon to life and publicly transforms the material form of scripture into an imaginary scene of reciting sūtra, which thus gets incorporated into the soundscape of the actual reciting of sūtra in the monastery.

The bodhisattva on the right of B2 holds a scripture in the form of a scroll in his hand and looks to the main figure as if listening to Buddha preaching dharma (Fig. 1.12).⁵⁰ Since the Tang period, Buddhist scriptures have been treated and worshiped

⁴⁷ See Daniel B. Stevenson, “Pure Land Buddhist Worship and Meditation in China,” in *Buddhism in Practice: Abridged Edition*. Edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 272.

⁴⁸ Such details as teeth and tongue of Bodhisattva barely appear in Buddhist images which are focal points of worship in monastic environments. However, these details can be witnessed in Guan Xiu’s Luohan paintings. Although there is not a single piece of original work of Guan Xiu survived, works attributed, or derived from Guanxiu still exist in Japan. For example, A set of wall-scrolls representing the Sixteen Luohan is in the Imperial Household collection in Tokyo. The teeth of five of these sixteen Luohan are carefully depicted, in order to achieve the “typology of the religious individual.” See Max Loehr, “Guan Xiu,” in *The Great Painters of China*, (Cambridge and London: Harper and Row, 1980), 58.

⁴⁹ Archaeological works reveal some tomb murals depicting the scene of preparing scriptures in the course of twelfth century. East wall of the rear chamber of No. 1 Xuanhua Liao tomb (built in 1116) depicts eight paged scriptures in ritual use, see Zheng Shaozong 鄭紹宗, “Hebei Xuanhua Liao bihuamu fajue jianbao 河北宣化遼壁畫墓發掘簡報,” *Wenwu* 8, 1975.

⁵⁰ During the Liao and Jin period, preparing scroll scriptures is a popular motif in tomb art of north China. Northeast wall of the rear chamber of No. 4 Xuanhua Liao

as if they were relics of the Buddha. John Kieschnick suggests that “Buddhist scriptures were a source of merit—credits for a better life and a higher rebirth.”⁵¹ According to Katherine R. Tsiang, in early Mahayana texts, the worship of scriptures is equal with the worship of the body of the Buddha.⁵² The depiction of Buddha preaching dharma in conjunction with bodhisattva holding a scripture is widespread in Buddhist art of the twelfth century. A fragment of a mural painting from a Buddhist monastery in Henan in the thirteenth century shows that a bodhisattva in emerald green robes and red halo stands holding a scripture.⁵³

Cave 136 from the Beishan Grottoes, Dazu 大足北山石窟 also provides a reference for this choice of theme (Fig. 1.13). Based on donor inscriptions, we know that Cave 136 was excavated from 1142 to 1146. This cave was sponsored by local officials and lay believers.⁵⁴ The main statue on the east wall is of Shakyamuni Buddha preaching dharma flanked by attendants. In the center of this cave is a stone revolving sūtra repository. On the south wall is the sculpture of Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva holding a scripture in the left hand and seemingly listening to the Buddha delivering

tomb shows four scriptures in the form of scroll, see Li Qingquan 李清泉, “Xuanhua Liaomu bihua zhong de beicha tu yu beijing tu 宣化遼墓壁畫中的備茶圖與備經圖,” *Yishushi yanjiu* 4, 2002: 373-374.

⁵¹ John Kieschnick, *The impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 165.

⁵² Katherine R. Tsiang, “Embodiments of Buddhist Texts in Early Medieval Chinese Visual Culture.” In *Body and Face in Chinese Visual Culture*, ed. Wu Hung and Katherine R. Tsiang (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 49-78; A culture that renders Buddhist scriptures and the devotional body an equal thing also permeated in medieval Japan, Charlotte Eubanks, *Miracles of book and body: Buddhist textual culture and medieval Japan*. Vol. 10. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2011), 2.

⁵³ Fresco fragment, C451, Asia Galleries, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

⁵⁴ See Venerable Master Hsing Yun 星雲大師, *Encyclopedia of Buddhist Arts* 世界佛教美術圖說大辭典, Vol. 5, (Kaohsiung: Foguangshan zongweihui, 2013), 58.

the teachings (Fig. 1.14). It is known that in Mahayana Buddhism, Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva is associated with transcendent wisdom and insight. The scripture held by Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva may represent the embodied wisdom. The scripture held by the bodhisattva and the stone revolving sūtra repository jointly emphasize the significance of scripture cult in the making of the image of Buddha preaching dharma, which echoes with the murals of Chongfu Monastery in north China.

The two bodhisattva of B3 are depicted in frontal view. The left bodhisattva holds a golden *boshan* incense burner (Boshan lu, 博山鑪) on a golden plate; the right bodhisattva holds a golden instrument. This two bodhisattvas have their attention drawn to the objects they hold. The only bodhisattva of I1 holds a long stem of a lotus in the shape of *ruyi* 如意 (*ruyi* can be used as ceremonial scepter in Chinese Buddhism). The end of this lotus is attached to a scripture, an unmistakable reference to preaching dharma and holding lectures and debates.⁵⁵ Some scholars argue that the position of “holding a long stem of a lotus supporting a scripture” is an attribute of Mañjuśrī.⁵⁶ The two bodhisattvas of I2 are depicted in three-quarter view. The left bodhisattva holds a red coral on a golden plate. The right bodhisattva holds a long-handled *boshan* incense burner in his left hand. He seems to be brushing the dust off the incense burner with his right hand. The two Bodhisattvas of I3 are shown in frontal view. The left bodhisattva holds a gold-rimmed water basin, and the right one

⁵⁵ For discussions on the practical usage and symbolic meanings of *ruyi*, see John Kieschnick, *The impact of Buddhism on Chinese material culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 138-153.

⁵⁶ See Marilyn Leidig Gridley, *Chinese Buddhist Sculpture Under the Liao: Free Standing Works in Situ and Selected Examples from Public Collections*. Sata-Pitaka Series, V. 368. (New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan, 1993), 51.

holds a golden plate on which a bundle of scroll scriptures wrapped in silks are placed.

1.3.3 The Murals on the North Wall (Murals C, D, E, F, G, and H)

As mentioned, the six sections of mural on the north wall can be divided into two groups. Murals C (Fig. 1.15), D, E, and F are painted on the north wall. Murals G (Fig. 1.16) and H (Fig. 1.17) are painted on the lintel above the west and east door of the north wall.

Mural C depicts a main Buddha flanked by two bodhisattvas (Fig. 1.15). Murals D, E, and F are of three more attendant bodhisattvas. Although the mural on the north wall has been seriously damaged, it is likely that there were originally at least four *pu* of Buddha preaching dharma on the north wall: Murals C (the intact one), D, E, and F.

As mentioned above, Mural G illustrates a part of the “Sixteen Visualization” in *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus*. No cartouches can be found in Mural G. Many details of Mural G cannot be recognized due to its poor condition. Only two parts are still visible in Mural G. One is a large building that occupies the center of the mural. The other is a square blanket in the top left with some objects placed on it. A similar type of blanket can be seen in two mural paintings on the south and north wall of Cave 172 in Dunhuang (Fig. 1.18). These two mural paintings illustrate *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus* and were created around the mid-eighth century. Wu Hung categorizes the composition of the murals of Cave 172 into three different pictorial modes. The first mode is “dominant iconic image as the object of worship”;

the second is “a pictorial story as a ‘commentary’ on the sūtra”; and the third is “a narrative of Queen Vaidehi’s actions as a visual guide for meditation.”⁵⁷ The first mode is the central theme of the mural, while the other two modes are side scenes. Wu Hung further argues that “the sides scenes depict events in a narrative and are thus ‘self contained’ pictures — the significance of each scene is realized in its own pictorial context. The viewer is a witness, not an active participant in the events.”⁵⁸ Similar blankets in the mural of Cave 172 in Dunhuang can be found in the the third pictorial mode suggested by Wu Hung. Different ritual objects are placed on different blankets. There is always one worshipper in front of one blanket (Fig. 1.19). It is unmistakable that these worshipers are practicing visualization by focusing their mind on the objects on the blankets. In parallel to the “worshipper and blanket” image on the mural of Cave 172, the blanket depicted in Mural G may have a similar pictorial function of guiding believers in practices of visualization and meditation, although the image of the worshipper is faded or blurred. I suggest Mural G was meant to encourage believers to imagine that they are the worshippers depicted in this mural and practice visualization.

Mural H illustrates the first eight of the “Sixteen Visualization” in the *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus*. We have eight pieces of vertical cartouches on Mural H, which can help with identifying different themes of the first eight visualization. We read Mural H from the right to the left. It starts with the Queen Vaidehi visualizes the

⁵⁷ Wu Hung, “Reborn in paradise: a case study of Dunhuang sūtra painting and its religious, ritual and artistic context.” *Orientalism* 23 (1992), 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

setting sun. The cartouche is “一落日懸鼓觀 (yi luori xuangu guan, first: the setting sun in the West and the hanging drum).” Then follows a ground and a pond. The cartouche is “二湛水凝溜觀 (er zhanshui ningliu guan, second: pellucid water in the West).” The third and fourth visualizations are the ground and the tree, with cartouches of “三[an unrecognizable character]地圓成觀 (san diyuancheng guan, third: the perfect ground in the Pure Land) and 四寶樹寶嚴觀 (si baoshu baoyan guan, fourth: the jewel trees).” In the left section of the Mural H depicts eight ponds, decorated buildings, the lotus seat, and image of one main Buddha and two attendant Bodhisattvas. The corresponding cartouches are “五寶池德水觀 (wu baochi deshui guan, fifth: the eight ponds of merit all in the Pure Land); 六惣前諸寶觀 (liu zongqian zhubao guan, sixth: the comprehensive contemplation of the Pure Land with decorated buildings, deities, musical instruments, and so on); 七寶蓮花座觀 (qi baolianhuazuo guan, seventh: the lotus flower serving as the Buddha’s seat in the jewel pond of the Pure Land); 八三聖寶像觀 (ba sanshengbaoxiang guan, eighth: visualization of the holy images of the Three Saints).”

1.3.4 The Mural on the East Section of the South Wall (Mural J)

Mural J consists of two rows of images (Fig. 1.20). The upper row depicts three Buddhas seated on a lotus platform. The rims of their halos are decorated with flames. With each leg crossed and foot placed on the opposite thigh, the right foot is revealed. The left Buddha is dressed in a green shawl, red inner robe, and green outer robe. His two hands are placed in his lap, suggesting the dhyāna mudrā (“meditation mudrā”).

The middle Buddha is dressed in a red shawl, blue inner robe, and red outer robe. The right hand of the middle Buddha shows a preaching mudrā, and the lower left palm faces upward. The right Buddha is dressed in a blue shawl, red inner robe, and blue outer robe. His two hands are held together. The background of Mural J is filled with auspicious red and green clouds. Chai Zejun suggests the left Buddha is Vairocana Buddha, the middle one is Shakyamuni Buddha, and the right one is Bhaiṣajyaguru, but without offering any supporting evidence or proof.⁵⁹ Chai Zejun also proposes that the three Buddhas are the works of artists of the Ming period. I agree with the latter opinion of Chai: the artistic styles of the three Buddhas of Mural J and the murals on the west and east walls varies widely. Brushwork of the three Buddha of Mural J is unsmooth compared with works of the Jin period.

The lower row of this mural depicts three bodhisattvas with cartouches next to them identifying who they are. The cartouche for the left Bodhisattva reads: “地藏王菩薩, Dizangwang pusa, Kṣitigarbha,” the middle one “除蓋障菩薩, Chugaizhang pusa, Sarvanivāraṇaviṣkambhin,” and the right one “妙吉祥菩薩 Miaojixiang pusa, Mañjuśrī.” These three bodhisattvas are all heavily bejeweled and crowned with flowers and jewels. They are each dressed in a red inner robe and green shawl. They hold a water vessel, staff, and lotus respectively. The artistic style of the three bodhisattvas is similar with that of attendant bodhisattvas painted on the west and east walls. Therefore, we may suppose the lower part of Mural J represents an original work of the Jin period, or at least is a result from the redrawing based on original

⁵⁹ Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 79.

designs.

1.3.5 Reconstructing the Mural Program

Originally, all the walls of Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery were covered with murals except for the five front doors on the south wall. In this section, I will attempt to reconstruct the original mural program.

The dominant theme of the murals of the Amitābha Hall is the scene of Buddha preaching dharma. Although only five *pu* of Buddha preaching dharma have been preserved intact on the west and east walls, it is not a difficult task to catch a glimpse of the original whole picture that is now gone by considering the fragmentary remains of mural on the north wall that we have discussed above. There might have been ten *pu* of Buddha preaching dharma in total: three painted on the west wall (Mural B), three on the east wall (Mural I), and four on the north wall (Mural C, D, E, and F). However, this proposed reconstruction may be flawed: the traces of four *pu* of images that can be detected on the north wall do not necessarily mean there were originally exactly four *pu* of images. The surface of the north wall could have accommodated a maximum of six *pu* of images. It is worth noting images of Buddha preaching dharma on the west and east walls also add up to six in total. We may comfortably take the twelve images of *shuofa* as an isolated visual program in its entirety without having any reference to Buddhist doctrines. But interpretation cannot stop here. The iconographical significance of the twelve images is only manifest when considered with the sculpture program in this hall.

On the center of the main altar of Amitābha Hall is seated Amitābha Buddha, flanked by two bodhisattvas: Guanyin on the east and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Dashizhi pusa 大勢至菩薩) on the west. The central sculpture of Amitābha Buddha participates in two dialogues with the six *shuofa* images on the west and east walls (Mural B and I) and another six *shuofa* images on the north wall (Mural C, D, E, and F). Therefore there exist two groups of “seven Buddhas” formed by murals and sculptures in the Amitābha Hall. The cult of “seven Buddhas” is first mentioned in *Zeng yi Ahan jing* 增一阿含經 translated by Gautama Samghadeva 瞿曇僧伽提婆 (383-398).⁶⁰ According to *Foshuo Qifo jing* 佛說七佛經, translated by Fatian 法天, the seven Buddhas keep preaching dharma and help sentient beings.⁶¹ The cult of seven Buddhas was very popular in Buddhist art during the Liao and Jin periods. The “seven Buddhas” in the first floor of the Timber Pagoda of Ying County is one central colossal sculpture of a Buddha surrounded by six seated Buddhas painted on the inner wall (Fig. 1.21).⁶²

⁶⁰ See *Zeng yi Ahan jing* 增一阿含經. Translated by Gautama Samghadeva 瞿曇僧伽提婆 (383-398), T. 125, 2: p. 791, a23-27; According to Wei-Cheng Lin, “there are different combinations of the seven Buddhas of the past; the most commonly referenced set includes Vipasyin, Śikhin, Viśvabhū, Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kāśyapa, and Śākyamuni.” See Wei-cheng Lin, “Performing Center in a Vertical Rise: Multilevel Pagodas in China’s Middle Period.” *Ars Orientalis* 46 (2016), 134. This set of names of the seven Buddhas mentioned by Wei-Cheng Lin can be found in *Zeng yi Ahan jing*, T. 125, 2: p. 791, a23-27.

⁶¹ *Foshuo Qifo jing* 佛說七佛經. Translated by Fatian 法天 (d. 1001), T. 2, 1: p. 152, a8-12.

⁶² Some scholars notice the cult of seven Buddhas in Buddhist art exhibits new features during the Liao period. The seven Buddhas shown in stone pagodas and grottoes of the Sixteen Kingdoms, Southern and Northern dynasties, Sui, and Tang periods are usually arranged in parallel. But in the case of Timber Pagoda of Ying County and the Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery, the iconography “seven Buddhas” is one Buddha (in sculpture) surrounded by six Buddhas (in mural). See Yu Bo 于博, “Cong Liaota zaoxiang kan Mijiao dui Liaodai Qifo zaoxiang de yingxiang

I propose to consider the mural on the west, east, and north walls to be part of an illustration for *The sūtra On Contemplation Of Amitayus*. Mural of Cave 172 at Dunhuang consists of (1) a central iconic Buddha and (2) side scenes telling stories of the “sixteen visualizations” of Queen Vaidehi. If the images of *shuofa* are perceived as “central iconic Buddha,” the two murals depicted on the lintels of the north doors (Mural G and H) serve the same narrative function as “side scenes” as in the Dunhuang case. The two surfaces of wall and lintel play an important role in creating a large pictorial program.

As discussed above, the upper row of “three-Buddhas” in Mural J on the east section of the south wall could not be the original design. Apart from differences in artistic styles, the size of the two sections of mural also varies: the upper row of Mural J occupies about two-thirds of the whole wall, while the three-bodhisattvas on the lower row occupies only one-third. It seems plausible to assume an original design of three rows of bodhisattvas in the Mural J. The three cartouches “Kṣitigarbha,” “Sarvanivāraṇaviṣkambhin,” and “Mañjuśrī” allude to a potential textual source for our reconstruction of this section of mural: the *sūtra of the Maṇḍala of Eight Great Bodhisattvas* (*Bada pusa mantuluo jing* 八大菩薩曼陀羅經). This sūtra is attributed to the Chinese esoteric master Amoghavajra (705-774). The eight bodhisattva in this sūtra are Kṣitigarbha, Sarvanivāraṇaviṣkambhin, Mañjuśrī, Ākāśagarbha (Xukongzang pusa, 虛空藏菩薩), Maitreya (Mile pusa, 彌勒菩薩), Vajrapāṇi (Jingangzang pusa, 金剛藏菩薩), Avalokiteśvara, and Samantabhadra (Puxian pusa,

從遼塔造像看密教對遼代七佛造像的影響,” *Beifang wenwu* 3, 2015, 68.

普賢菩薩).⁶³ The *sūtra of the Maṇḍala of Eight Great Bodhisattvas* encourages practitioners to visualize the Vairocana Buddha and the eight bodhisattvas in order. It is possible that the original design of Mural J in the Jin period is a typical three-row maṇḍala: Vairocana Buddha in the center surrounded by eight bodhisattvas. It is noteworthy that the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin on the west section of the south wall (Mural A) is associated with the *Dhāraṇī sūtra of a Thousand Hands*, which is the earliest text in China that uses the term maṇḍala to refer to the space used for ritual.⁶⁴

Chapter Two

From an architectural historian's standpoint, Nancy Steinhardt writes, "The lack of monumental construction distinguishes Jin not only in China but also among conquest dynasties. It is suggested that architecture was not fundamental to Jin imperial goals."⁶⁵ This thesis may apply to most Buddhist complexes built during the Jin period. But Amitābha Hall of the Chongfu Monastery would not concord with this statement. The construction of Amitābha Hall employs special treatment of interior columns and the seven-*puzuo* bracketing, which suggests the very high rank of this building.⁶⁶ Architectural components including door, column, and the interior space

⁶³ See The *sūtra of the Maṇḍala of Eight Great Bodhisattvas*, T. 1167: 20, p. 679, b13-c29.

⁶⁴ See Michelle C. Wang, *Maṇḍala in the Making: The Visual Culture of Esoteric Buddhism at Dunhuang*, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 23.

⁶⁵ See Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, "A Jin Hall at Jingtusi," 77.

⁶⁶ According to Alexandra Harrer, the bracketing of the Amitābha Hall is so brilliant that "no other building of Shanxi province pre-Yuan dynasty architecture shows a higher number of fan-shaped bracket sets than the seven-by-four-bay wide,

created by rings of column are important in configuring a religious space. By situating iconic images, *maṇḍala* and illustrations of sūtra in their architectonic settings, this chapter helps shed some light on the concept and practice of visual aids for both ritual activities and visualization. This chapter also explores a stone pagoda of the Northern Wei period (386-534) that was once installed in the southeast corner of Amitābha Hall. Previous scholarship on this stone pagoda is often concentrated on historical and artistic significance on their own without reference to the pagoda's contextual settings. The spatial relation between the pagoda and mural of the Amitābha Hall has hardly been studied. I argue that, though long neglected, this stone pagoda should be considered as part of the visual and religious experiences of the Amitābha Hall.

2.1 Architectural Features of the Amitābha Hall

It is noteworthy that two innovative construction techniques have been employed in Amitābha Hall. One is called *jianzhu* 減柱 (column omission), which refers to the practice of “omit[ting] two interior columns that would have been positioned at the outer sides of the side bays;”⁶⁷ The other is known as *yizhu* 移柱 (column shift), which means “the central bay columns, are shifted sideways onto the midpoints of the flanking side bays.”⁶⁸ In addition, there is no conventional ceiling in Amitābha Hall:

eight-rafter deep, hip-and-gable roofed Amitābha Hall.” Alexandra Harrer, “*Fan-shaped bracket sets and their application in religious timber architecture of Shanxi province.*” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2010), 111.

⁶⁷ See Fu Xinian, *Traditional Chinese Architecture: Twelve Essays*, Edited by Nancy S. Steinhardt, Translated by Alexandra Harrer, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 268.

⁶⁸ Ibid. The two terms *jianzhu* and *yizhu* should be interpreted in the light of design patterns recorded in *Yingzao fashi*: the number of columns used in *tingtang* structure

nearly all of the beams and struts are visible to visitors (Fig. 2.1). This construction method of revealing beams and struts is called *qishang mingzao* 砌上明造 in Li Jie's *Yingzao fashi*.⁶⁹ Once entering Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery, viewers would be shocked by a horizontally and vertically spacious interior space created by a combination of methods of *jianzhu* and *yizhu* and the no-ceiling plan, which keeps the main sculptures positioned in the center of this hall from being obstructed or intersected by columns.⁷⁰ By reducing the number of columns between the main sculptures and the murals depicted on the four walls, pictorial programs would be more clearly shown to worshipers. Wen Jing notes that nearly all main Buddhist halls constructed in the Jin period employed *jianzhu* and *yizhu*. Wen argues large Buddhist rituals frequently held during the Jin period required more space to accommodate monks and lay believers.⁷¹ The Amitābha Hall could provide both monks performing Buddhist rituals and lay believers worshipping the Buddha with a broad divine space full of iconographic materials for particular visualization practices. A cluster of miniatures in the corner of the ceiling of Amitābha Hall is positioned right above the mural (Fig. 2. 2). According to Di Luo, these miniatures probably belonged to a larger

should be prescribed. When formulations concerning numbers of columns in *Yingzao fashi* was violated, *jianzhu* and *yizhu* became visible.

⁶⁹ See Li Jie *et al* 李誠, *Yingzao fashi zhushi* 營造法式注釋, annotated by Liang Sicheng 梁思成, (Beijing: Zhongguo jianzhu gongye chubanshe, 2001), 126; A few extant architectures of the Liao and Jin periods adopted the method *qishang mingzao*: the Daxiong dian 大雄殿 of Fengguo Monastery 奉國寺 at Yi County, Liaoning 遼寧義縣 is a typical case. See Du Xianzhou 杜仙洲, "Yixian Fengguo si Daxiong dian diaocha baogao 義縣奉國寺大雄殿調查報告," *Wenwu* 2, 1961, 9.

⁷⁰ Lala Zuo, *Diversity in the Great Unity: Regional Yuan Architecture*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019), 5.

⁷¹ Wen Jing 溫靜, "Luelun Liaojin fojiao siyuan jianzhu tese 略論遼金佛教寺院建築特色," *Fayin* 1, 2009, 51-54.

group called the “Tower Pavilion of the Heavenly Palace”(tiangong lounge 天宮樓閣) that is now lost.⁷² The close spatial relationship between the structure *tiangong lounge* and the Buddha depicted on the wall encourages us to take wooden miniatures and the murals as a whole plan: the Buddhas are supposed to be residing in the “Tower Pavilion of the Heavenly Palace.”⁷³

The architectures and images of the Amitābha Hall adopted many Tang and Liao styles. Hōryū-ji of Japan is widely recognized as a compound surviving from the pre-eighth century and embracing the styles of the Chinese early Tang period.⁷⁴ Therefore the monastery compound in Hōryū-ji is often mentioned as evidence for the introduction of Chinese Buddhist architecture to Japan during the sixth and seventh centuries.⁷⁵ The mural in the Kondō Hall of Hōryū-ji gives a clue about what temple wall paintings in the early Tang period might look like. Scholarship on murals in the Kondō Hall of Hōryū-ji is often focused on brushworks and the identities of figures.⁷⁶ But the relationship between the murals and architectonic features of Kondō Hall deserves attention. The murals consist of four large and eight small mural panels

⁷² Di Luo, *A Grain of Sand: Yingzao Fashi and the Miniaturization of Chinese Architecture*, PhD dissertation, University of Southern California, 2016, 161.

⁷³ Following Jeehee Hong’s discussion on the Bhagavat sūtra Repository, while the divine structure *tiangong lounge* may belong to the other world inhabited by the Buddha, ordinary people on the ground are rewarded to take a glimpse of the heavenly world beyond their everyday life. See Jeehee Hong, “Crafting Boundaries of the Unseeable World: Dialectics of Space in the Bhagavat sūtra Repository.” *Art History* 40, no. 1 (2017): 10-37.

⁷⁴ See Penelope Mason, *History of Japanese Art*, 2nd Edition, revised by Donald Dinwiddie, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, 2004), 62.

⁷⁵ See Dorothy Wong and Eric Field, eds., *Hōryūji Reconsidered*, (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 49-97.

⁷⁶ Seiichi Mizuno, *Asuka Buddhist Art: Horyu-ji*, trans. Richard L. Gage Vol. 4. (Art Media Resources, 1974), 123-128.

painted on the four walls of Kondō Hall. Each of these mural panels is framed by two pillars, creating an impression of a set of hanging scrolls which was probably popular during the Tang period (Fig. 2. 3).⁷⁷ Although the six *pu* paintings of Buddha preaching dharma on the east and west walls of Amitābha Hall are not framed by tangible frames, the distance between the two pillars in front of the east and west walls approximately corresponds to the width of one *pu* of wall painting. When sunlight penetrates into Amitābha Hall, it projects the shadows of pillars precisely on the two sides of the individual *pu* of murals, creating the pictorial illusion of the triad framed by a niche of two columns of shadow (Fig. 2.4 and Fig. 2.5). Whether the width of the individual *pu* of murals was determined to intentionally create such a phenomenon still remains a question. However, experiences of contemporary visitors highlight the capacity of this illusionary niche as an awe-inspiring sight of Buddha preaching dharma in the divine light.⁷⁸ This effect is only visible in halls where natural light is adequate: five doors opened on the south wall and three doors opened on the north wall make this optical illusion possible. Otherwise it would be difficult to view the murals in natural light. For instance, the Hall of Mingying Wang of the Water God's Temple of the Guangsheng Monastery is very dark.⁷⁹ Moreover, Robert Sharf

⁷⁷ The project digital images of the photographic plates of the murals makes the spatial relationship between mural panels and pillars more perceptible: see “Glass Photographic Plates of the Murals in the Kondō Hall of Hōryū-ji Temple,” Hōryūji Temple, accessed October 25, 2020, <https://horyuji-kondohekiga.jp/>.

⁷⁸ Dorothy Wong wrote, “Light imagery in Mahāyāna Buddhism, however, is associated with visionary, transcendent, mystic experiences of truth.” See Dorothy C. Wong, “Miraculous Images in Asian Traditions: Introduction.” *Ars Orientalis* 50 (2020), Permalink: [https://doi.org/10.3998/ars.134].

⁷⁹ According to Anning Jing, “there is no window in the walls, leaving large areas of uninterrupted surface for painting. The only source of light therefore is the door in the south wall, and the hall is very dark.” Anning Jing, *The Water God's Temple of the*

even refers to murals in Buddhist caves as “art in dark,” nearly ruling out the possibility that the murals and icons could be seen by living people.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, capitalizing on the spatial connection between architectural components, iconography, and optical illusions created by natural light is not an uncommon phenomenon. In *Shaping the Lotus sūtra*, Eugene Wang discusses the visual logic of medieval Chinese Buddhism and analyzes a large number of examples in designs of Buddhist caves in medieval China. Eugene Wang writes, “The window may have been designed to let in light to illuminate the face of the Buddha, which is otherwise shrouded in the darkness of the inner cave.”⁸¹ With regard to the case of Amitābha Hall, the Buddhas on the mural are illuminated by the light, and the Buddhas are framed by the shadows of pillars.

2.2 Aids for Ritual and Visualization

Although the link between the sculptures and murals and liturgical practices conducted in Amitābha Hall cannot be firmly established due to a lack of written sources, I will attempt to consider the role of murals and sculptures as visual aids with regards to a ritual, namely the Great Compassion Repentance 大悲懺.⁸² The “Great

Guangsheng Monastery: Comic Functions of Art, Ritual, and Theater, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 42.

⁸⁰ Robert Sharf, “Art in the dark: the ritual context of Buddhist caves in western China.” *Art of Merit: Studies in Buddhist Art and its Conservation* (2013), 60.

⁸¹ Eugene Wang discussed the function of cave window of letting in light to illuminate the face of the colossal Buddha in the case of Cave 5 at Yungang. See Eugene Yuejin Wang, *Shaping the Lotus sūtra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 10.

⁸² The Great Compassion Repentance is one of the repentance rituals appearing in China after the fifth century, see Chün-fang Yü, *Chinese Buddhism: A Thematic History*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020), 112.

Compassion One” refers to the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin. According to Chün-fang Yü, it was the Tiantai master Zhili 知禮 (960-1028) in the early Song who composed the first manual formulating the procedure of this repentance.⁸³ It should be borne in mind that the ritual of the Great Compassion Repentance varies in different monasteries and different periods. In practice, monks and laypeople may not strictly adhere to procedures formulated by Zhili or other masters. Chün-fang Yü cites a simplified version of the original ritual by the Song master Zhili as follows:

The ritual begins with three invocations of the Great Compassion Bodhisattva Guanyin, followed by the hymn of incense offering. The congregation then reads a passage explaining the reason for performing the ritual. This is followed by prostrations to Śākyamuni Buddha, Amitābha Buddha, the Great Compassion Dharani, The Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin, Dashizhi (Mahātsthāmaprāpta), Maitreya, Wenshu (Mañjuśrī), Puxian (Samanthabhadra), and many other bodhisattvas. The congregation kneels and prostrates after each title is called out.⁸⁴

Three main sculptures are placed on a rectangular altar in the middle of Amitābha Hall (Fig. 2. 6). In the middle is Amitābha Buddha, in the east is Guanyin, and in the west is Mahātsthāmaprāpta, together known as the “Three Saints of the West 西方三聖.” The three main sculptures are flanked by four attendant bodhisattvas and two heavenly kings. Chai Zejun held the opinion that all the three

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 114.

main statues are original works from the Jin period, though without giving evidence to support it.⁸⁵ Even though the three main statues may not be the original ones, it is reasonable to assume that sponsors and sculptors of Chongfu Monastery in the Jin period followed the established norm that the “Three Saints of the West” should be worshiped in a monastery in the Pure Land tradition. Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin is painted on the westernmost part of the south wall (Mural A). The Guanyin statue in the east part of the altar in the center of the hall and Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin depicted on the westernmost part of the south wall (Mural A) allow those who practice the Great Compassion Repentance to use them as a visual aid. As indicated in the text of the procedure cited above, liturgy of this ritual requires practitioners to offer incense and prostrations to Buddhas and bodhisattvas, including the Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin.

Amitābha Hall supplies other decorations that can be associated with the Great Compassion Repentance or other Buddhist rituals. It is reported that on the upper part of the back screen of the altar there was originally a bronze mirror, which was lost during the Second World War.⁸⁶ From a Buddhist perspective, it may not only allude to the “karma mirror” that reflects all the sins people have committed during their

⁸⁵ Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 76. Zhang Zong 張總 agrees with Chai by concluding that “the primary icons are of the three saints of the western pure land and their various attendant protectors, all of which are Jin works.” Zhang Zong, “Buddhist Arts: A Survey of Sites, Paintings, and Iconography,” in *Modern Chinese Religion I Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan (960-1368 AD)*, edited by Pierre Marsone and John Lagerwey, (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 858.

⁸⁶ Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 77. Eugene Wang examined various roles of mirror in visual culture of medieval China and suggested mirror can be interpreted as reflection of Buddha’s image. See Eugene Yuejin Wang, *Shaping the Lotus sūtra: Buddhist Visual Culture in Medieval China*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 247-255.

lives, but may also be construed as shedding light on the path to pure land in the west. In *The sūtra On Contemplation Of Amitayus*, the Buddha used a mirror as a literary trope: “It is by the power of Buddha only that one can see that pure land of Buddha as clear as one sees the image of one’s face reflected in the transparent mirror held up before one.”⁸⁷ In the ritual of the Great Compassion Repentance, after making vows and chanting the *dharani*, practitioners shall “make confession and repentance.”⁸⁸ When monks and lay believers made confession and repentance towards the three main statues on the altar in Amitābha Hall, the bronze mirror positioned above the statues would have been overlooking them, reflecting the sins and kindling the path to pure land in the west. Therefore it is possible that the painted and sculptural Guanyin was meant as the subject of veneration and prostration.

Let us revisit Murals G and H which are painted on the lintel above the west and east doors of the north wall. As analyzed above, Murals G and H in conjunction with images of Buddha preaching dharma illustrate *The sūtra On Contemplation Of Amitayus*. Just as Wu Hung writes, “As integral parts of cave chapels, these paintings were created for devotional purposes rather than for popular entertainment.”⁸⁹ Images depicting the “Sixteen Visualization” of Queen Vaidehi on the lintel of doors of Amitābha Hall were not likely intended to be created only for decorative purposes. Every time monks and lay believers walked through the two back doors to pay a visit

⁸⁷ J. Takakusu, *The Amitāyus-dhyāna-sūtra*, in *Buddhist Mahāyāna Texts*. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969), 166.

⁸⁸ Chün-fang Yü, *Chinese Buddhism*, 114.

⁸⁹ Wu Hung, “What is bianxiang? On the Relationship between Dunhuang Art and Dunhuang literature.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 52, no. 1 (1992): 111-192. 169.

to the Guanyin Hall next to Amitābha Hall, they might see the “Sixteen Visualization” when looking up and be reminded of the importance of visualization practices, which may be one of the functional purposes of this mural.

2.3 Ignored Object: A Stone Pagoda in Amitābha Hall

Art historians have long been aware of spatial interactions between tall Buddhist monuments and nearby lower ones in the Liao period.⁹⁰ It is common that the tall monument and the lower architecture are owned by the same monastery: a pagoda in tenth- to thirteenth-century East Asia was always built together with a Buddhist hall. In some circumstances, a connection between a pagoda and an adjacent monastery can be observed.⁹¹ Though the function of such relations must be interpreted contextually, builders and users of one Buddhist monument could not have been completely ignorant of a nearby architectural work. By expanding this line of inquiry on spatiality and visibility, this section focuses on a structure that is enclosed by a larger architecture: the Cao Tiandu stone pagoda (hereafter designated as “stone pagoda”) of the Northern Wei period (386-534) that was once installed inside the Amitābha Hall (Fig. 2. 7).

The installation of a pagoda inside a Buddhist hall is not an uncommon practice in late imperial China. In the twenty-second year of the reign of the Qing emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1683), a seven-storey iron pagoda was established inside the Hall of

⁹⁰ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, “The Pagoda in Kherlen-Bars: New Understandings of Khitan-Period Towering Pagodas.” *Archives of Asian Art* 66, no. 2 (2016): 187-212; Wei-cheng Lin, “Performing Center in a Vertical Rise.”

⁹¹ Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt, “The Pagoda in Kherlen-Bars,” 197.

Pagoda (Futu dian, 浮圖殿) of Qingyun Monastery 慶雲寺 in Zhaoqing, Guangdong.⁹² Inside this pagoda four śarīras were preserved. In the fortieth year of the reign of Kangxi (1701), a white stone pagoda was built inside the Hall of Śarīra (Sheli dian, 舍利殿) of Hualin Monastery 華林寺 in Guangzhou. Some Buddhist relics were stored in the white stone pagoda.⁹³ We may reach the conclusion that during the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), some pagodas installed inside Buddhist halls served a practical purpose: enshrining Buddhist relics. Another intriguing case of a “pagoda inside a Buddhist hall” in the Qing dynasty is the seven-storey iron pagoda installed in the Buddhist hall of Taping Monastery 塔坪寺 in Beibei 北碚. This hexagonal iron pagoda was cast in the twenty-first year of the reign of the Qing emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶 (1816). Each of the points of the eaves of the pagoda is attached to an iron bell. When the wind blew through the Buddhist hall, these iron bells would ring. It is reported that Buddha images attached to the surface of this pagoda were originally covered with gold leaf, which would glow at night from the candlelight.⁹⁴ The iron pagoda served as a spectacle in the eye of believers in this case.

Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery only served as a temporary home for the Cao Tiandu stone pagoda. The story of the stone pagoda started in 466 CE, when a low-level official Cao Tiandu 曹天度, who was serving at the court of Northern Wei

⁹² Yang Quan 楊權, “Guangzhou Hualin si tayi sheli laili kao 廣州華林寺塔瘞舍利來歷考,” *Wenhua yichan* 5, 2018, 144.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁹⁴ See Mei Qiongyu 梅瓊宇, “Beibei Taping si: yili 800nian Songdai shita de mizong daochang 北碚塔坪寺: 屹立 800 年宋代石塔的密宗道場,” *Chengshi dili* 5, 2012, 124.

(Pingcheng 平城, present-day Datong 大同) exhausted his savings to make a stone pagoda in order to honour his late father and late son.⁹⁵ The date, location, and purpose of making of this stone pagoda are provided by the epigraph inscribed on the back side of the pagoda foundation. Not surprisingly, textual records from the Northern Wei to the Qing period ignore the existence of this stone pagoda: it has nothing to do with big events or moral exemplars that might have attracted official or private historical writing. However, some scholars have tried to map the trajectory of this stone pagoda and managed to answer questions that are fundamental to my research on when and by whom this stone pagoda was installed in Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery.

Oral accounts and discursive narratives concerning Chongfu Monastery in stele may help piece together a picture of the history of the stone pagoda. It may be speculated that the stone pagoda was kept in a monastery of Datong since it was commissioned by Cao Tiandu. During the Jin period, this pagoda was moved from Datong to the newly rebuilt Chongfu Monastery.⁹⁶ After eight hundred years, the main body of this stone pagoda was looted by the Japanese Army in 1939 and sent to the Tokyo National Museum. But the parasol-finial (*chattra*) was secretly hidden by a

⁹⁵ Shi Shuqing 史樹青, “Beiwei Cao Tiandu zao Qianfo shita 北魏曹天度造千佛石塔,” *Wenwu* 文物 1, 1980, 70.

⁹⁶ In an investigation report based on oral survey and field studies, Lin Yijun 林宜君 proposes the stone pagoda stored in a monastery of Datong was plundered by a general named Yelü Honggu 耶律弘古 and it is Yelü Honggu who transported it to Shuozhou. After the first year of Zhenyuan (貞元元年, 1153), the stone pagoda was installed in the Amitābha Hall of Chongfu Monastery. Lin Yijun 林宜君, “Shanxi Chongfusi suocang Beiwei jiuceng shita tacha zhi shidi kaocha yu yanjiu 山西崇福寺所藏北魏九層石塔塔刹之實地考察與研究,” National Museum of History, Taipei 臺北國立歷史博物館, 2013, 8.

worker named Ding Kecheng 丁克成. Ding returned the parasol-finial to the administration of Chongfu Monastery in 1951.⁹⁷ In 1951, the main body of the pagoda was sent to Taipei and has been preserved in Taipei's National Museum of History ever since.

The stone pagoda is made of sandstone. It consists of three parts: the foundation (Fig. 2. 8a), the main body (Fig. 2. 8b), and the parasol-finial (Fig. 2. 8c). It is about three meters in height. The foundation is 63 centimeters in width, 63 centimeters in length, and centimeters in height. The front side of the foundation depicts two monks worshipping a Cintāmaṇi stone placed in a lotus plate (Fig. 2. 9). Two lions are roaring on each side. The left side of the foundation depicts nine male donors, while the right shows ten female donors. All the donors are facing toward the center, holding their hands together and leaning forward, as if they are paying homage to the two monks. The female and male donors all wear a kind of hat with back flaps and jackets that overlap the shoulders (Xianbei chuiqun mao, 鮮卑垂裙帽). The female donors are dressed in a jacket with narrow sleeves and a long skirt. The male donors are dressed in a jacket with narrow sleeves with a folding left collar. These indicate a dress code associated with the clans of Xianbei in the north. The main body of the pagoda is 42 centimeters in width, 42 centimeters in length, and 129 centimeters in height, and gradually diminishes from the bottom to the top. It is divided into nine upper levels, resembling a traditional Chinese multistory timber structure. Each of the nine levels

⁹⁷ Guang Meihong 光梅紅, "Shuozhou Chongfusi Beiwei qianfo shita 朔州崇福寺北魏千佛石塔," *Guobao dangan* 國寶檔案 5, 2012, 16; Ge Gang and Ge Shimin 葛鋼 and 葛世民, "Beiwei Cao Tiandu shita kao 北魏曹天度石塔考," *Wenwu shijie* 文物世界 4, 2008, 22.

consists of three or four rows of small Buddhas. There are ten large Buddhas and 1,332 small Buddhas in bas-relief in total. The first level has four niches on the four sides framed by two pillars. The front niche depicts the twin Buddhas seated side by side: Śākyamuni and Many Treasures (Prabhūtaratna). In the back niche is a Maitreya seated on the back of a lion flanked by two bodhisattvas. The left and right niches depict a seated Buddha flanked by two bodhisattvas. Small Buddhas and twin Buddhas occupy the surface of the rest of the space of the main body. The parasol-finial consists of four parts: the finial platform, the body, discs, and the pole. The twin Buddhas, the most dominant motif of the stone pagoda, can also be observed in the niche on four sides of the finial platform. The doctrinal basis for creating the twin Buddhas is in the eleventh chapter of the Lotus sūtra.⁹⁸ This motif is also entangled in the political situation of the Northern Wei dynasty. Faguo 法果, the chief of monks of the Northern Wei dynasty, identified the monarch as a living Buddha.⁹⁹ The twin Buddhas seated side by side allude to the fact that Empress Dowager Feng 馮太后 (442-490) shared the power with the emperor.

This stone pagoda no longer stands inside Amitābha Hall. But a photo which was taken in the early 1930s permits us to have a glimpse of what it once looked like inside (Fig. 2. 7). It indicates the stone pagoda was placed in the southeast corner. It is important to note the stone pagoda was partly surrounded by the *shuofa* image on the

⁹⁸ *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 (translated by Kumārajīva), T. 262, 09: p. 33b23-c5.

⁹⁹ Scott Pearce, “A King's Two Bodies: The Northern Wei Emperor Wencheng and Representations of the Power of His Monarchy.” *Frontiers of History in China* 7, no. 1 (2012), 101.

east wall and the *maṇḍala* on the east section of the south wall. The stone pagoda is a movable object and seemingly not an architectural component of Amitābha Hall. However, the physical presence of the stone pagoda made changes to the spacious interior of this Buddhist hall. We should be heedful of what Jeehee Hong writes about the interior of an architecture, “The interior’s fundamental relationship to the architecture itself as an inseparable body is just as significant in that it engaged directly with the gaze, movement, and activities of its occupiers,”¹⁰⁰ it was thus difficult for users of Amitābha Hall to ignore the existence of the stone pagoda owing to its large size and height. The imagery of the pagoda engaged different types of viewers in multiple ways.

From the Tang dynasty on, displaying paintings in monasteries has been a common practice.¹⁰¹ James Cahill proposed that monasteries became cultural center during the Tang period: many citizens would enjoy viewing wall paintings and scroll paintings in monasteries.¹⁰² During the Jin period, the attention of literati visitors was drawn more to appreciating the visual art stored in monasteries, particularly painting and calligraphy.¹⁰³ Whether the stone pagoda in Amitābha Hall can be the focus of

¹⁰⁰ Jeehee Hong, “Crafting Boundaries of the Unseeable World,” 10.

¹⁰¹ In his diary of travels in China, Ennin (Ch. 圓仁, Jp. 円仁, 793 - 864) recorded that Kaiyuan Temple of Yangzhou 揚州開元寺 exhibits Buddhist paintings. See Ennin, *RuTang qiufa xunli xingji jiaozhu* 入唐求法巡禮行記校注. Proofread by Bai Huawen, Li Chunxia, Xu Denan, et al. (Shijiazhuang: Huashan wenyi chubanshe, 1992), 98.

¹⁰² See James Cahill, “Some Aspects of Tenth Century Painting as seen in Three Published Works,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology*, Section on History of Art, (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1982), 1-36.

¹⁰³ Jesse D. Sloane, “Connoisseurship in the monastery: Discerning a distinctive identity for Jin elites in sacred precincts.” *Studies in Chinese Religions* 1, no. 4 (2015): 357-374.

connoisseurship during the Jin period remains uncertain and hard to prove. It is widely accepted that Jin literati culture is heavily influenced by its Northern Song precedent. So it is possible that the *jinshixue* 金石學 (study of bronze and stone [inscriptions]) that flourished among the literati of the Northern Song may have exerted influence on its Jin counterpart and mediated the relationship between literati viewers and the stone pagoda. Notwithstanding that visitors of Chongfu Monastery may not be as familiar with the concept and practice of antiquarianism as well-trained scholars of *jinshixue*, they may nevertheless be able to appreciate the significant artistic style of Yungang Grottoes and the importance of the donor inscriptions on the stone pagoda.

In addition to the interior architectural structures, mural paintings, and statues, the stone pagoda was introduced as a fourth level of vision within Amitābha Hall. On the one hand, the physicality of the stone pagoda disturbed the atmosphere of homogeneity and solemnity of the Buddhist hall created by its spacious interior. On the other, together with murals and sculptures, the imagery of the thousand Buddhas of the stone pagoda strengthened a religious aura. The stone pagoda may also support the practice of circumambulation that is also popular in middle-period China: “In a great number of occasions, the activities taking place are combined: chanting and circumambulation; chanting, meditation and circumambulation; worship and confession.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Julian F. Pas, “Six Daily Periods of Worship: Symbolic Meaning in Buddhist Liturgy and Eschatology.” *Monumenta Serica* 37, no. 1 (1986), 54.

Chapter Three

Rethinking the Mural: Theme, Patronage, and Artists

Who was the main sponsor of the mural of Amitābha Hall? As far as we know from a stele *in situ* written by a scholar named Zhang Yonghao 張永灝 in 1775, one Jin emperor and one nobleman were associated with the construction of Amitābha Hall:

In the third year of Huangtong of Emperor Xizong of the Jin (1143), the emperor advocated Buddhism. The emperor ordered Zhai Zhaodu, the Duke of Kaiguo built the seven-bay-width Amitābha Hall behind the Daxiong Hall.

至金熙宗皇統三年，崇奉佛法，敕命開國侯翟昭度于大雄殿后又建彌陀殿七間。¹⁰⁵

The Jin rulers continue to attach importance to Chongfu Monastery: Wanyan Liang, the fourth emperor and successor to Emperor Xizong, gave a new name to Chongfu Monastery in 1150. So far we know very little about designers of the pictorial program of Chongfu Monastery. The nominal sponsors, two Jin emperors and the high official Zhai Zhaodu did not necessarily instruct on the making of the sculptures and murals of Amitābha Hall directly. Though some artists would decide to sign their works during the Jin period, scholars have not found any inscriptions about

¹⁰⁵ *Shuozhou Linyasi Chongxing beiji* 朔州林衙寺重興碑記, written by Zhang Yonghao 張永灝 in 1775. The stele is preserved in Thousand Buddha Pavilion 千佛閣 of Chongfu Monastery.

the creators of the mural of Amitābha Hall.¹⁰⁶ It is hypothesized that some painters who served in the Jin court may have been involved in the making of the mural of Amitābha Hall.

How are we to interpret the relation between the specific mode of representation and the intentions of sponsors in the case of Chongfu Monastery? Is it possible to discern a shared visual logic of adorning the wall of an image hall in the Jin period? To what extent was the theme of the mural influenced by the makers' use of discretion? Examining comparative pictorial programs in monasteries of Shanxi area is crucial to answering to these questions. Despite the loss of many monasteries and murals of the Jin period, Yanshan Monastery provides an excellent focus for such a comparative study. It is recognized that in addition to the wall paintings in Chongfu Monastery, the murals in Mañjuśrī Hall 文殊殿 of Yanshan Monastery in Fanzhi are among the best preserved temple murals from the Jin period.

Yanshan Monastery is located at the present-day Fanzhi County, on the north slopes of Wutai Mountain 五臺山. Yanshan Monastery is located to the west of Chongfu Monastery; the distance between them is approximately 105 kilometers. During the twelfth century, Yanshan Monastery served as a temporary stop on the journey to Wutai Mountain by pilgrims from other places. Inscriptions on a stele dated the third year of Zhenglong 正隆三年 (1158) attest to the fact that major

¹⁰⁶ Some inscriptions provide information about the name and hometown of artisans of the *liuli* glazed ceramics 琉璃 of Amitābha Hall. We know the *liuli* glazed ceramics used as decoration of the roof of Amitābha Hall are made by Liu Jiuding 劉九鼎 from Chun County 崞縣, see Chai Zejun, *Shuozhou Chongfusi*, 68.

construction work had been done in 1158.¹⁰⁷ The only surviving structure from the Jin period is the secondary hall dedicated to Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva, which is a five-bay-width hall with a single eaved, hip roof.¹⁰⁸ Inside the Mañjuśrī Hall is a rectangular altar platform measuring 6.35 meters in width, 8.96 meters in length, and 0.55 meters in height. The main icon of this altar is a Mañjuśrī group including flanking bodhisattvas and guardian kings. On the back of the Mañjuśrī group is a seated Water-moon Guanyin (Fig. 3.1).¹⁰⁹

Originally all four walls of Mañjuśrī Hall were covered with murals. Murals on the north and south walls are heavily damaged. The murals on the east and west walls are in a relatively good condition. Specifically speaking, the mural on the east and west walls measures about 3.5 meters high and 11.1 meters broad. The remaining mural on the north wall is about 11 square meters. The west wall depicts scenes from the life of the historical Buddha Śakyamuni (Fig. 3.2). An imperial palace placed on the central part is surrounded by episodes in the life of the Buddha. The east wall can be divided into two parts. A large preaching Śakyamuni and entourage occupy about one-third of the whole mural (Fig. 3.3). The rest of east wall depicts jātaka, which are stories about earlier incarnations of the Buddha. Among what can be recognized from the mural on the north wall are some architectural structures, two rows of donors, and the story of five hundred merchants who were saved by Guanyin.

¹⁰⁷ This stele is a very fundamental source for studying Yanshan Monastery. Hereafter I call it ‘stele’ if not specified. Chai Zejun and Zhang Chouliang 柴澤俊 and 張丑良, *Fanzhi Yanshansi* 繁峙巖山寺, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1990), 214-215.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 10.

According to the stele, the name of the head painter of the mural is Wang Kui 王逵, whose title is “painter at court” (*Yuqian chengying huajiang* 御前承應畫匠). An ink inscription found in the upper part of the west wall of Mañjuśrī Hall further confirms that the mural was finished in the seventh year of Dading 大定七年 (1167) when Wang Kui was sixty-eight years old. Therefore, it is highly possible that when the Jingkang Incident (*Jingkang zhibian* 靖康之變) occurred, the twenty-eight-year-old Wang Kui was one of the Northern Song painters who was taken into captivity by the Jurchen. Considering his age, Wang Kui would have learned the artistic style of the Northern Song and remembered the street view of large cities of his motherland. The same ink inscription also provides a list of names of donors.¹¹⁰ The thirty-one names suggest that most of the donors were female with children. It is possible that these women donors would have been delighted by the genre depiction of their everyday life by Wang Kui.¹¹¹ Li Ling, however, disagrees with the opinion that Wang Kui painted the mural simply because he was invited to do the job by donors. Based on a close reading of motifs and the cartouche of the mural of Yanshan Monastery, Li Ling argues that the real purpose of the principal painter Wang Kui was to comfort the souls of the Northern Song soldiers who died in warfare against the Jurchen intruders.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 210.

¹¹¹ Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky notes that the painter Wang Kui’s interest mainly lies in depictions of everyday details such as street scenes, commercial markets, and wine shops which are created in an observant and natural style. See Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, “The recently discovered Chin dynasty murals illustrating the life of the Buddha at Yen-shang-ssu, Shansi.” *Artibus Asiae* 42, no. 4 (1980): 245-260.

¹¹² Li Ling further argues that the mural of Yanshan Monastery may represent an anti-Jin ideology, see Li Ling 李翎, “Zhengzhi de yinyu: Yanshansi Jindai guizimu

After examining the painted architectures and composition methods of the east and west walls, Fu Xinian suggests the sketch of the mural on the east wall may have been one that was well-received and circulated among artists of the Northern Song, while the mural on the west wall was probably invented by Wang Kui himself. According to Fu Xinian, the architectures depicted on the mural of the east wall recalls the style of the Liao period, which is earlier than the buildings of the Jin dynasty depicted on the west wall. The composition of the east wall bears some similarities to many murals illustrating *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus* in the Dunhuang caves of the High Tang period: a central iconic Buddha flanked by jātaka stories on both sides.¹¹³ By contrast, the mural on the west wall reflects a compositional innovation: the imperial palace at the center provides a fundamental architectonic setting for various episodes.¹¹⁴

Although Yanshan Monastery is in the neighborhood of Chongfu Monastery and the times of creation of the two murals are very close, their themes and compositions are distinct from each other. I propose that there are two basic compositional modes in

jingbian 1&2 政治的隱喻：巖山寺金代鬼子母經變(上，下),” *Tulufanxue yanjiu* 2015(2) and 2016(1) 吐魯番學研究 2015 年第二期, 2016 年第一期, 71-78, and 48-63.

¹¹³ Mural on the north wall of Mogao Cave 217 depicts *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus*, see Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo 敦煌文物研究所, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku* 中國石窟：敦煌莫高窟, vol. 3 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 103; Mural on the north wall of Mogao Cave 320 and murals on the south and north walls of Mogao Cave 172 also depict *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus*, see Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku*, vol. 4 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1999), 4, 9, and 10.

¹¹⁴ Fu Xinian 傅熹年, “Shanxisheng Fanzhixian Yanshansi nandian Jindai bihua zhong suohui jianzhu de chubu fenxi 山西省繁峙縣巖山寺南殿金代壁畫中所繪建築的初步分析,” in *Fu Xinian jianzhushi lunwen ji* 傅熹年建築史論文集, (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1998), 282-313.

the making of monastic murals: the iconic mode and the narrative mode. In *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*, Wu Hung explains what is “iconic” in terms of religious art: “Pictures possessing these two features, compositional symmetry and the frontality of the central icon, are common in religious art. For convenience, I term this type of composition ‘iconic’, in contrast to another type of composition termed in this study ‘episodic’. An episodic composition is usually organized asymmetrically, and the major character is always portrayed in profile or in a three-quarters view and is always performing an action.”¹¹⁵ Narrative mode is usually associated with depictions of the life of the historical Buddha, jātaka stories, and *bianxiang*. In practice, some designers of pictorial programs in monastic settings of the Song, Liao, and Jin period employ a mixed mode. In addition to the mural of Yanshan Monastery discussed above, the mural in the main hall (Daxiongbaodian 大雄寶殿) of Kaihua Monastery at Gaoping City, Shanxi, also indicates such a mixed mode (Fig. 3.4). The mural was finished in 1096. Four *pu* of *shuofa tu* (Buddha preaching dharma) depicted on the west and north walls serve as the main icons. Eight jātaka stories on both sides of the four *shuofa tu* illustrating the *Dafangbian fo bao'en jing* 大方便佛報恩經 are narrative.¹¹⁶ The iconic mode dictates the design of the mural of Chongfu Monastery. Only a fraction of the mural painted on the lintel of the back doors can be categorized as belonging to the narrative

¹¹⁵ Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: The Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 133.

¹¹⁶ Gu Dongfang 谷東方, “Gaoping Kaihuasi Beisong Dafangbian fo bao'en jingbian bihua neirong kaoshi 高平開化寺北宋大方便佛報恩經變壁畫內容考釋,” *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 142 故宮博物院院刊, 2009, 89-161.

mode. The majority of images, including the repeated *Shuofa tu* on the west, east, and north walls, and the *maṇḍala* on the south wall are of the iconic mode.

In his *Building a Sacred Mountain*, Wei-Cheng Lin writes, “Chiming bells, smoking incense, and monastic buildings were all part of the sacred landscape of Mount Wutai, creating a religious aura and aspiring to the inconceivable.”¹¹⁷ The mural of Yanshan Monastery might also encourage viewers to imagine themselves living in the scenario they have seen in the wall paintings.¹¹⁸ The burning incense, hymning of *nianfo*, and overflowing lay believers in Mañjuśrī Hall in the Jin period resonate with the painted world of Buddhist stories and icons, creating an ineffable religious experience. Therefore the mural of Yanshan Monastery demonstrates the artist’s effort to mediate between the mundane and supramundane.¹¹⁹ The Chongfu Monastery murals, by comparison, are mainly intended to impress the viewers with magnificence and inspire religious feelings.

If the murals of Yanshan Monastery should be read as a combination of everyday life of the Jin period and the nostalgic memory of the sophisticated Song culture of an old painter who immigrated from the south to the north, the style of the murals of Chongfu Monastery represent the grandeur of the Jin dynasty and a vestige of magnificence of the High Tang visual culture.

¹¹⁷ Wei-Cheng Lin, *Building a Sacred Mountain: The Buddhist Architecture of China's Mount Wutai*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 12.

¹¹⁸ Li Weikun 李維琨, “Lingyilei meishushi: Shanxi gudai bihua mantan 另一類美術史: 山西古代壁畫漫談,” in *Bishanguan: xidu Shanxi gudai bihua* 壁上觀: 細讀山西古代壁畫, edited by Shanghai Museum, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2017), 29.

¹¹⁹ Phillip E. Bloom, “Visualizing Ritual in Southern Song Buddhist Painting.” In *Visual and Material Cultures in Middle Period China*, edited by Patricia Buckley Ebrey and Susan Shih-shan Huang, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 82-112.

Conclusions

The significant contribution of the mural of Chongfu Monastery to the religious art of north China in the middle period can be properly recognized if we examine existing monastic murals of the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) in Southern Shanxi. The mural featuring the *Seven Buddha of the Past* 過去七佛 from the south wall of the mid-hall of Xinghua Monastery in Jishan County 稷山興化寺 (ca. 1320) shares a lot of similarities with that of Chongfu Monastery (Fig. 3. 5).¹²⁰ This mural is attributed to Zhu Haogu 朱好古 and his workshop. The main Buddha in *shuofa tu* of the mural of Xinghua Monastery has the same moustache and the same type of mudrā as icons of Chongfu Monastery. The influence of the mural of Chongfu Monastery is also evident in the mural depicting *Assembly of Bhaisajyaguru* 藥師佛會 from the west gable wall of the main hall of Guangsheng Lower Monastery, Hongtong County 洪洞縣廣勝下寺 (ca. 1310) (Fig. 3. 6).

As discussed in chapter 2, the ritual functions of murals should be understood not only through scriptures or liturgical texts, but also within its lived architectonic settings. In the pictorial space of Amitābha Hall, the physical boundaries of a variety of visualized icons are clearly defined. The main sculptural icon of the “Three Saints of the West” is placed on the altar platform, occupying the center of Amitābha Hall. The west, north, and east walls are covered by the dominant icon, *shuofa tu*. The two

¹²⁰ Meng Sihui 孟嗣徽, “Gubi danqing shang youwen: Jishan Xinghuasi Yuandai bihua yicun jiqi yanjiu 古壁丹青尚有文—稷山興化寺元代壁畫遺存及其研究,” in *Bishanguan: xidu Shanxi gudai bihua* 壁上觀: 細讀山西古代壁畫, edited by Shanghai Museum, (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2017), 267.

esoteric images of Thousand-armed and Thousand-eyed Guanyin and the *maṇḍala* are respectively assigned to the west and east sections of south wall. On the lintel of the north door are illustrations for *The sūtra on Contemplation of Amitayus*, guiding people to the Pure Land. A Northern Wei stone pagoda stood amongst sculptures and murals, creating an archaic aura. Visitors of the mid-twelfth century might have chosen to view and worship the sculptural icon, different sections of the mural, and the stone pagoda by following particular procedures. However, the sculptural icon and six *shuofa tu* on the west and east walls might have been worshiped together, provided the visitors had knowledge of the cult of seven Buddhas. Literati or monks who were interested in antiquities might have found themselves entwined in multiple layers of vision created by a dialogue between painted and sculptured icons of the Jin period and a stone pagoda that had survived from the past ages.

Abbreviations

T. *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. Chinese Buddhist Electronic Texts Association version.

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