

Śākyamuni Buddha World Depicted in Vimalakīrti Scenes in Dunhuang Mogao Caves: The Expansion of Buddha Land to China*

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Abstract: Many *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* scenes remain among the murals of the Dunhuang Mogao Caves. Most of the scenes from Sui to early Tang dynasties are painted in and outside the niche on the front-facing western wall. Stucco figures of the Śākyamuni Buddha is placed inside the niche as the principal icon of the cave, and the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* scene provides supplementary information that the *sahāloka* in which the Buddha exists is in fact an immaculate Buddha-land.

On the other hand, after Tang, *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* scenes relocate to the eastern and the northern walls. Simultaneously, the iconography becomes more complex with the inclusion of multiple Buddha-lands of the present Buddhas. This paper will consider how Śākyamuni's Buddha-land was perceived in Tang China by examining the differences between the depiction of the Buddha-lands of the three present Buddhas and that of Śākyamuni Buddha. In addition, the paper will bring attention to the placement of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* scene on the northern wall, explaining how 'north' in the Mogao Caves would actually be perceived as the 'east', and that the placement

* Translated by Suijun RA 羅翠恂. This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number [JP19K00182].

of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* scene towards the ‘east’ connotes the notion that China—located to the east of India—inherits India’s status as Śākyamuni’s Buddha-land.

Keywords: *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* 維摩經, Mogao Caves 莫高窟, Buddhist iconography 佛教圖像, *sabhā* world 娑婆世界, Tang dynasty 唐代

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.15239/hjbs.04.01.02>

Introduction

In Dunhuang cave temples, many murals after Sui Dynasty depict scenes from the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*¹ and there is a large body of studies on the iconography of these works.² The typical composition of a *Vimalakīrti* scene features *Vimalakīrti* and Mañjuśrī Bodhisattva facing each other. Also shown in the murals are the scenes from the discussion taking place between the two, among which miracles caused by the secular Buddhist *Vimalakīrti* are presented in an especially impressive manner. Here, the Indian *Vimalakīrti* is portrayed with an appearance of a Chinese nobleman. Such representation would have allowed the Chinese audience to experience a sense of affinity towards him. It is almost as if the murals are deliberately

¹ There are 68 examples in Mogaoku, 4 in Yulinku, and 1 in Wugemiao Cave Temples. See Dunhuang yanjiuyuan, *Dunhuang shiku neirong*.

² Regarding *Vimalakīrti* scenes in Dunhuang, see, for examples, Matsumoto, *Tonkō ga*; Fujieda, ‘Yuimahen no ichibamen’, ‘Yuimahen no keihu’; Jin, ‘Dunhuang bihua’, ‘Dunhuang wanqi’; He, ‘Dunhuang Mogaoku’, ‘Dunhuang bihuazhong’; Dunhuang yanjiuyuan and He, *Dunhuang shiku quanji*; Ishimatsu, ‘Yuima Monjuzō’; Ning, ‘Buddhist-Daoist’; Sha, ‘Weimojiejingbiangao’; Yu, ‘Dunhuang Weimojiejingbian’; Zou, ‘Mogaoku di 61ku’; Lu, ‘Beichao Suidai’, ‘Hexidiqi’; Pan, ‘Dunhuang Suitang shiqi’; Kim, ‘The Iconography and Meaning’; Hamada, ‘Shisen Kyōrai’, ‘Tangdai Dunhuang’, ‘Tonko Bakkokutsu’, ‘Guanyu Mogaoku’, ‘Dunhuang shiku bihua’, ‘Tonkō Sekkutsu’.

creating the illusion that Vimalakīrti is in China instead of Vaiśālī, India as explained in the *sūtra*.

In the Mogao Caves, the position of Vimalakīrti scenes within the cave as well as their iconography change between Sui dynasty and early Tang. Most of these murals are painted in relatively simple manner on the walls around and within the niche on the main (western) wall. The main object of veneration in these caves is the stucco statue of Śākyamuni Buddha in the niche. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the Vimalakīrti scenes painted close to the statue are primarily shown as motifs that accompany Śākyamuni Buddha and are entrusted with the role of providing additional explanation regarding Śākyamuni's Buddha Land.³

After early Tang, the location of Vimalakīrti scenes change from the niche on the main wall. Most of them move to the eastern wall and some to the northern or southern wall. Partially due to the larger surface on which the murals were painted, their iconography became more complicated, evolving to include depictions of the lands of some present Buddhas (Akṣobhya Buddha, Sumeru Light King Buddha, and Fragrance Accumulated Buddha). Additionally, towards the end of Early Tang (during the reign of Wuzutian), Śākyamuni's Buddha Land appears for the first time in the Vimalakīrti scenes painted on the northern wall. Thereafter, Śākyamuni's Buddha Land becomes one of the primary motifs in Vimalakīrti scenes. Śākyamuni Buddha Land is also known as *sabāloka* or Jambudvīpa, and by the expression 'the motif of Śākyamuni Buddha Land', I am referring to a group of figures consisting of Śākyamuni Buddha and surrounding deities.

Based on my previous studies on Vimalakīrti scenes,⁴ this paper will further the discussion to focus on the depiction of Śākyamuni Buddha Land in Vimalakīrti scenes. It will examine how the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* describes the Śākyamuni Buddha Land and consider the role of Vimalakīrti scenes based on the Chinese elements within the scene. Furthermore, it will decipher what the Śākyamuni Buddha Land within the scene implies, mainly through the analysis of the

³ Hamada, 'Chūgoku Nanbokuchōki', 'Guanyu Mogaoku'.

⁴ See Notes 2 and 3.

iconography of Early Tang Vimalakīrti scenes painted on the northern wall. Lastly, based on the hypothesis that the location of the murals follows a program governing the spatial usage of the caves, I will attempt to explain the reason why in the Mogao Caves, Vimalakīrti scenes with Śākyamuni Buddha Land first appear on the north wall.

1. The Role of Vimalakīrti Scenes

1.1. Śākyamuni Buddha Land is a Pure Buddha-land

The central message of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* is that Śākyamuni Buddha's *sabāloka* (impure land) is in fact a pure land. This message is present in the introductory section of the *sūtra*, the 'Chapter on Buddha Lands'. Kumarajiva himself who translated the *sūtra* into Chinese emphasizes that this remains the central theme throughout the *sūtra*.⁵ Nishino Midori also states that '*Vimalakīrti Sūtra* is in its essence a "*sūtra* on pure Buddha land", with its central theme being the creation of a Buddha land that seeks to save all sentient beings'.⁶

In the 'Chapter on Buddha Lands', Śākyamuni responds to Śāriputra who suspects that *sabāloka* where Śākyamuni resides is impure. He replies that *sabāloka* as it is always pure, and that it only appears to be impure due to the vileness of the human mind that perceives it. Thus, a pure-hearted perceiver would be able to see how the land is adorned with merit.⁷ Additionally, the 'Chapter on Seeing Akṣobhya Buddha' reveals that Vimalakīrti is a bodhisattva who was born unto impure land in order to vanquish the darkness of the afflictions of all sentient beings.⁸ Thus, the *sūtra* explains that Vimalakīrti is the one who purifies the minds of sentient beings and shows them that this land is actually a pure land.

⁵ *Zhu Weimojie jing*, T no. 1775, 38: 1.328a10–11; Ōshika, 'Yuimagyo', 173; Kimura, 'Chū Yuimagyō', 169–170.

⁶ Nishino, 'Ashukubukkokukyō', 405.

⁷ *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 1.538c25–29.

⁸ *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 3.555b5–14.

Taking such theme of the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* into consideration, one may assume that the purpose of Vimalakīrti scenes is to visually explain how the seemingly impure Śākyamuni Buddha Land is in fact an immaculate Buddha land.

1.2. The Succession of Buddha Land

I would like to point out that another purpose of Vimalakīrti scenes is the succession of Buddha land after the death of Śākyamuni Buddha. The ‘Chapter on Entrustment’ explains how the *sūtra*’s understanding of the world will be entrusted and succeeded after the death of Śākyamuni Buddha to and by Maitreya bodhisattva.⁹

This purpose is reflected in the combination of Vimalakīrti scenes with other motifs. There are examples in Sui dynasty caves where Maitreya Bodhisattva in Tuṣita Heaven is depicted above the main niche or on the ceiling. In many of them, the Vimalakīrti scene is placed on either side of or below the bodhisattva (caves 262, 417, 419, 423, 425 and 433 of Mogaoku). There is also an example where Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī flanks either side of two Buddhas seated side by side (cave 277). Such combinations are also found in Early Tang caves where a Vimalakīrti scene is depicted on the niche wall and the ceiling of the niche is adorned either with two Buddhas seated side by side (caves 68 and 341) or Maitreya Buddha (cave 334). Both Maitreya and two Buddhas seated side by side represent the succession of dharma from the past to the future. Other examples include the combination of Vimalakīrti scene with an image of Buddha in Nirvana and Nirvana Sūtra scene (cave 332). In Mogao cave 332, a central pillar cave, the viewer will see the Vimalakīrti scene after the Nirvana Buddha statue, as he or she performs the Buddhist traditional clockwise worship. It would be reasonable to understand the Vimalakīrti scenes shown in these combinations in the context of the succession of Śākyamuni’s Buddha Land.

⁹ *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 3.557a7–11.

1.3. Presenting China as the Buddha-land

Vimalakīrti portrayed as a Chinese nobleman is an element that suggests that the scene takes place in China. Another motif that confirms this is the inclusion of the Chinese emperor in Vimalakīrti scenes.

Cave 220 (CE642) (Figure 1) is one of the earliest examples in Dunhuang where the Chinese emperor wearing the traditional *mianguan* 冕冠 (the imperial crown) appears in a Vimalakīrti scene.¹⁰ In the mural, the Chinese emperor proceeds from one direction, and rulers and ministers of other countries from the opposite. This suggests that the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī took place in a location where the Chinese emperor and rulers and ministers of various non-Chinese ethnic groups gather. Considering how neighboring countries paid tribute to Tang empire at the time the, it



FIG. 1 Vimalakīrti Scene Mural in Mogao Cave 220, East Wall. CE642. Plate 30, Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, *Zhongguoshiku*.

¹⁰ Secular audience in Chinese attire also appear in the Vimalakīrti scene in the western niche (caves 334, 341), but they do not wear the *mianguan*, which would be the indication of the Chinese emperor.

is highly likely that the situation depicted within the Vimalakīrti scene where the Chinese emperor faces the foreign rulers and ministers was shown as taking place in China rather than Vaiśālī as is explained in the *sūtra*.

Vimalakīrti scene in cave 220 is painted on the eastern wall where the entrance is located. An entrance of a cave is the boundary between the cave and the outside world. If one were to understand the space within the cave as the Buddha land, then the procession of the emperor, rulers, and ministers in the Vimalakīrti scene depicted on the cave's boundary with the outside secular world would have been entrusted with the function of connecting the Buddha land with the secular world. Additionally, since the eastern wall directly faces the western niche on the main wall, there may be correlation between the two. The Vimalakīrti scene on the eastern wall of cave 220 seems to suggest that the immaculate land of China ruled by the Chinese emperor will succeed the Śākyamuni Buddha-land depicted in the western niche. Additionally, it also implies that China's status as Buddhist pure land is achieved by the emperor.

Furthermore, the Chinese emperor is also shown beside Mañjuśrī.¹¹ Mountains are painted in the background of Mañjuśrī, which at the time would have reminded the viewers of Wutai shan 五臺山 in China. If this was the case, Mañjuśrī with the backdrop of a mountain scape depicted in the Vimalakīrti scene would also have implied that the scene takes place in China, and emphasized this point further together with the image of the Chinese emperor.

¹¹ Regarding the reason for showing the image of the emperor beside Mañjuśrī, He Shizhe suggests that this is because the painter deemed Mañjuśrī and the Chinese emperor as the legitimate side in the debate. See He, 'Dunhuang Mogoku', 68.

2. Emergence of Śākyamuni Buddha-land in Vimalakīrti Scenes on the Northern wall

2.1. Iconographic Characteristic of the Śākyamuni Buddha Land: Difference from the Lands of Other Present Buddhas

Vimalakīrti scenes depicted in or around the western niche from Sui to Early Tang do not contain the Śākyamuni Buddha Land. This may be because it is merged with the Śākyamuni Buddha Land featured in the niche. Vimalakīrti scenes started to incorporate the Śākyamuni Buddha Land after they were relocated to the other walls. However, Śākyamuni Buddha Land was not the only Buddha land depicted in these Vimalakīrti scenes.

Three Buddha lands are shown in the upper section of the Vimalakīrti scene in cave 12 (Late Tang) (Figure 2). In the central Buddha land, a large, jeweled canopy is placed over a seated Buddha. This was depicted as part of the ‘Chapter on Buddha Lands’ in the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* where Ratnakūṭa who was a son of a rich man together with 500 others offers canopies decorated with seven treasures to Śākyamuni Buddha. Śākyamuni used his power to merge these into one enormous canopy that covers the great trichiliocosm.¹² Thus the viewer is informed that the seated Buddha is Śākyamuni, and the land in the center is his. In the Buddha land to the right (from the view point of the viewer), three flying lion seats appear towards the bottom, indicating that this is the Sumeru Lamp King Buddha’s Land introduced in *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*’s ‘Beyond Comprehension’ chapter.¹³ Around the bottom of the Buddha Land to the left, bodhisattvas flying in with bowls in hand can be seen towards the bottom, conveying that this is the land of Fragrance Accumulated Buddha described in the ‘Chapter on Fragrance Accumulated’.¹⁴ The grounds of the three Buddha lands are square-shaped, and each land is surrounded by clouds.¹⁵ Regarding the expression of clouds

¹² *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 1.537b25–28.

¹³ *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 2.546a3–547a27.

¹⁴ *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 3.552a5–553b10.



FIG. 2 Vimalakīrti Scene Mural in Mogao Cave 12, East Wall. Ninth century. Plate 158, Dunhuang yanjiuyuan, *Dunhuang shiku yishu*.

¹⁵ Relatively early example of Śākyamuni Buddha Land in *Vimalakīrti* scene shown with clouds is from High Tang (cave no. 103). On the other hand, there are cases after Mid Tang where the Śākyamuni Buddha Land does not accompany clouds.

in *bianxiang* 變相 (transformation scenes), Hida Romi 肥田路美 has pointed out that they are used for the purposes of indicating heaven and sky, showing spirituality, adding liveliness, and expressing surrealistic movement in time and space and manifestation.¹⁶ If this was the case, the three Buddha lands were perhaps shown above clouds in order to emphasize the materialization of worlds different from ours. In addition, because the three lands are placed in the upper section of the mural, viewers are given the impression that they exist far from where they are.

Another Buddha land often featured in Vimalakīrti scenes is that of the Akṣobhya Buddha, or Abhirati, the realm of profound joy. Abhirati is shown in the shape of Mount Sumeru and appears inside or above the clouds rising from Vimalakīrti's palm.

These realms of the present Buddhas begin to appear in Vimalakīrti scenes after Early Tang. In Mogaoku, Akṣobhya Buddha Land appears in Vimalakīrti scene for the first time in cave 220. Before cave 220, although flying lion seats and bodhisattvas bringing fragrant rice were regularly featured in Vimalakīrti scenes, Fragrance Accumulated Buddha or Sumeru Lamp King Buddha themselves were not depicted, nor the Śākyamuni Buddha Land. However, in caves 332 and 335 around the end of Early Tang, the realms of Fragrance Accumulated Buddha and Śākyamuni Buddha are depicted along with the Akṣobhya Buddha World.

In the Vimalakīrti scene in cave 332, Śākyamuni Buddha Land is shown in large portion in the upper centre of the mural. In the upper right section, the lands of Sumeru Lamp King Buddha, Medicine King Buddha (described in the 'Chapter on the Offering of the Law'¹⁷), and Akṣobhya Buddha Land are shown flying in, and on the left, the land of Fragrance Accumulated Buddha is depicted. The difference between the Śākyamuni Buddha Land and that of the other Buddhas is the presentation of the clouds. While realms of other Buddhas are shown above the clouds, Śākyamuni Buddha Land is depicted in a square section, and is not surrounded by clouds. In this way,

¹⁶ Hida, 'Hen to Kumo', 133–134.

¹⁷ *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 3.556a1–557a5.



FIG. 3 Vimalakīrti Scene Mural from Mogao Cave 335, North Wall. Late seventh century. Plate 61, Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo, *Zhongguoshiku*.

Śākyamuni's realm is differentiated from the others. Thus, the clouds are used to visually explain the difference between the other worlds and Śākyamuni's realm or this world.

The Vimalakīrti scene in cave 335 also shows Śākyamuni Buddha Land in the upper left, Fragrance Accumulated Buddha's land in the upper centre, and Akṣobhya Buddha Land to the right (Figure 3). While the latter two realms are shown with clouds, here too, Śākyamuni Buddha's is not. Furthermore, here, Śākyamuni Buddha Land is depicted as if it exists beyond the mountains in the background of Mañjuśrī. This expression was probably chosen to emphasize that the Śākyamuni Buddha Land is physically connected with the location where Vimalakīrti is debating Mañjuśrī. This shows that the debate is taking place within Śākyamuni's land, the *sahāloka*, as is explained in the *sūtra*.

On the other hand, the placement of Śākyamuni Buddha Land in the two caves—side by side with the other Buddha lands in the upper section—gives the viewers the impression that Śākyamuni Buddha exists in a place distant from China where the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī are taking place. This visual, as if to show

that the land of Śākyamuni Buddha is contiguous with and yet distant from China is perhaps the reflection of the contemporary awareness that in terms of Buddhism, China is on the eastern outskirts far from the centre.

2.2. The Positioning of Śākyamuni Buddha Land in Vimalakīrti Scenes

In the earliest two Vimalakīrti scenes with depiction of Śākyamuni Buddha Land, the placement of Śākyamuni Buddha Land within the composition differs between the two. While in cave 332, the Śākyamuni Buddha Land is placed in the centre of the upper section, in cave 335 it is placed on the left side of the upper section. Although both scenes are positioned on the north wall, one should note the difference in the type of the cave. While 332 is a central pillar cave, 335 is a square cave.

I would like to propose that the position of the Śākyamuni Buddha Land within the Vimalakīrti scenes is influenced by the image of Śākyamuni Buddha shown elsewhere within the cave. In cave 332, the Vimalakīrti scene is depicted on the left (from the viewpoint of the viewer) portion of the northern wall which faces the central pillar. The image on the northern surface of the central pillar is that of the auspicious image of Liangzhou 涼州. In the mural on the southern wall of cave 72 (ninth to tenth century, during the *Guiyi jun* 歸義軍 regime) that depicts the miraculous tale of this image, the wall inscription describes the image as ‘*shengrong xiang*’ 聖容像 (image of the sacred appearance) or ‘*Shijia shengrong xiang*’ 積迦聖容像 (image of the sacred appearance of Śākyamuni)¹⁸ therefore confirming its identity as Śākyamuni Buddha, which proves that the Vimalakīrti scene in cave 332 is facing the image of Śākyamuni Buddha. Thus, it is possible that Śākyamuni Buddha Land in the Vimalakīrti scene in cave 332 was positioned in the upper centre section in correspondence to the Śākyamuni Buddha image across the corridor.

On the other hand, in cave 335, Śākyamuni Buddha Land is shown on the upper left portion of the scene. This is the western end of

¹⁸ Huo, ‘Mogaoku di 72 ku’, 41.

the north wall. The cave's main niche on the western wall venerates a seated stucco Buddha, with two Buddhas seated side by side in a stupa painted on the ceiling of the niche. The contest between heretic Raudrākṣa and Buddha's disciple Śāriputra is painted on the niche wall. The stucco Buddha most likely is Śākyamuni, judging from the position in which it sits, and the themes painted inside the niche. Thus, one can assume that Śākyamuni Buddha Land was depicted on the western end of the Vimalakīrti scene on the northern wall in correspondence with the Śākyamuni Buddha image venerated in the cave's main wall. This shows that the iconographic manifestation of the Vimalakīrti scene in this cave considers and reflects the theme of the cave's main niche. Keeping this in mind, it is significant that after the Vimalakīrti scene left its original location in the main niche and evolved iconographically to include the depiction of Śākyamuni Buddha Land, the scene first relocated to the northern wall.

3. The Positioning of the Vimalakīrti Scene on the North wall

3.1. The North Wall in Mogaoku Represents the East

The paper will now consider the representation of direction inside the caves in Mogaoku. In cave 220, Amitābha's pure land is shown on the south wall and Bhaiṣajyaguru's pure land on the north. In other words, the western and eastern pure lands are shown on the left and right walls of the cave. If this sense of direction was commonly adopted throughout the Early Tang caves in Mogaoku, perhaps Vimalakīrti scenes were painted on the northern wall on the premise that it is intended as the eastern wall.¹⁹ The fact that Vimalakīrti is originally from Akṣobhya Buddha Land of the east may contribute to the reason it was placed on the northern wall. However, I propose that the most important reason for placing the Vimalakīrti scene on the northern

¹⁹ Stucco *Vimalakīrti* scene on the first floor of the five-story pagoda in Hōryūji (Nara prefecture, Japan) also faces east. See Hamada, 'Tangdai Dunhuang'.

wall was the sense of geography that China, here depicted as the main setting of the Vimalakīrti scene, is located to the east of India.

3.2. Northern Wall as Allusion of the Future

The northern wall of the caves in Mogaoku may represent another concept. In cave 335, Amitābha pure land is painted on the southern wall, opposite the Vimalakīrti scene. In cave 220, Amitābha pure land was painted on the south wall and Bhaiṣajyaguru pure land on the north. However, there are no other examples of Early Tang Bhaiṣajyaguru pure land scenes in Mogaoku, and in High Tang, there is one example. It seems that the theme was hardly ever chosen during the first half of Tang Empire. What later took the place of Bhaiṣajyaguru pure land on the north wall were the Vimalakīrti scenes and Maitreya *sūtra* scenes.

Examples where Amitābha pure land (including those known as ‘*Guan Wuliangshou jing* 觀無量壽經變 scene’, with sixteen contemplations and scenes from the life of Ajātaśatru placed on the periphery) and Maitreya *sūtra* scenes are juxtaposed on the southern and northern walls facing one another are commonly seen during the first half of Tang. There are five examples (caves 71, 78, 329, 331, and 341) from Early Tang, of which three (caves 78, 329, and 341) show Amitābha pure land on the southern wall and Maitreya *sūtra* scene on the north. The remaining two place Maitreya *sūtra* scene on the southern wall and Amitābha pure land scene on the north. During High Tang, there are ten caves (caves 33, 91, 113, 116, 123, 208, 215, 218, 445, 446) with combination of Amitābha pure land and Maitreya *sūtra* scene. Of these, all except for caves 33 and 215 show Amitābha pure land on the southern wall and Maitreya *sūtra* scene on the north. He Shizhe 賀世哲 explains this juxtaposition based on the concept of the Buddhas of three generations. He suggests that Amitābha pure land was shown as the past world, and Maitreya *sūtra* scene as the future.²⁰ As in the examples mentioned above, many caves from the first half of Tang dynasty place Maitreya

²⁰ He, ‘Guanyu Dunhuang’.

sūtra scene that depicts the future on the northern wall. There is also the example of cave 254 (Northern Wei) where towards the back half of the cave, past thousand Buddhas are shown on the southern wall and the southern section of the western wall, and the northern wall features thousand Buddhas of the future. Another example is cave 158 (cave featuring a giant image of Buddha in Nirvana, Mid Tang), which shows a standing Buddha image on the southern wall and Buddha sitting with both legs pendant (Maitreya) on the northern wall. These examples present the possibility that it was common practice to use the northern wall to present the future, or the land of the next Buddha who will succeed Śākyamuni.

3.3. The Chinese Buddha Land as Successor of Śākyamuni Buddha Land in India

Considering that the northern wall was used to represent both the east and the future, one can assume that the examples such as those discussed in the previous chapter were trying to convey the Chinese message behind the Vimalakīrti scenes through the spatial layout within the caves. The message would be that Buddhism propagated from India to China in the east, and that China will sturdily continue to prosper into the future as the land of Buddha protected by the emperor. Here, the space within the cave is used to visualize how Śākyamuni's Buddha land expands to China and the notion that Buddhism will be passed on to China, rather than India.

The theme, relocation of the Buddha land, is represented symbolically in the Vimalakīrti scene. The first example would be the scene where Vimalakīrti shares a glimpse of the Akṣobhya Buddha Land with the people. This clearly portrays Vimalakīrti as someone with the ability to bring the pure land into the defiled human world.²¹ Another is the scene where Vimalakīrti brings the debate audience to pay respect to Śākyamuni Buddha (the 'Chapter on the Actions of the Bodhisattvas').²² Here, a miniature scene of the debate between

²¹ Nishino, 'Ashukubukkokukyō'.

²² *Weimojie suoshuojing*, T no. 475, 14: 3.553b11–554c26.

Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī is recreated amidst the cloud that appears magically from Vimalakīrti's hand. Here, Vimalakīrti who is bringing a world over from another time and space is portrayed as a Chinese man. The miracle he causes may be suggesting that the transformation of China to Buddha land will be realized by the hands of a Chinese secular Buddhist, as well as the Chinese emperor.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the appearance of the Śākyamuni Buddha Land motif in the Vimalakīrti scenes in Dunhuang Mogaoku, and its implications. Śākyamuni Buddha Land was included in the Vimalakīrti scenes most likely because it was necessary to clearly present using only the contents of the Vimalakīrti scenes that the *sahāloka* (impure land) is in fact a pure land. This need would have arisen when the Vimalakīrti scene left its original location inside the niche.

The appearance of Śākyamuni Buddha Land within Vimalakīrti scenes reminds the viewer of the continuity and the distance between China, where Vimalakīrti is debating with Mañjuśrī, and the Śākyamuni Buddha Land in India. This effect is enhanced even more in the cave 335, where the Śākyamuni Buddha Land is shown in the far corner of the composition. This may be reflecting how India was perceived in contemporary Chinese Buddhism, as well as the geographic understanding of India's location. In addition, visualization of the image of Vimalakīrti as a Chinese man who brings the pure-land, and the image of the Chinese emperor as a protector of Buddhism clearly presents a development that is not included in the *sūtra* and yet important to the Chinese, that Buddha land will realize in the eastern land of China.

Regarding the placement of Vimalakīrti scenes on the northern wall, I have explained how in Mogaoku the northern wall represents the east and the future. Taking this into account, the Vimalakīrti scene on the northern wall would be an effective measure to visually explain that Śākyamuni Buddha Land will be passed on to the eastern land of China. This also validates the hypothesis that the subjects of stucco images and murals are chosen according to the spatial program within the cave.

Since the end of Early Tang, Śākyamuni Buddha Land (‘Chapter on Buddha Lands’) became an essential motif in Vimalakīrti scenes. Its standard position is the centre of the scene’s upper portion. Although the land may or may not be accompanied by clouds depending on each piece, the upper centre position where Śākyamuni Buddha Land is depicted is important within the composition. It shows that the place where Vimalakīrti is debating with Mañjuśrī amongst secular audience is in fact part of the Śākyamuni Buddha Land covered by the great jeweled canopy.

Bibliography

Abbreviation

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