

Emperor Qianlong's Pictorial and Physical Sites for Western Paradises

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**Abstract**

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In the twenty-second year of his reign, Emperor Qianlong, an ardent devotee of Tibetan Buddhism, commissioned his court artist Ding Guanpeng 丁觀鵬 (active 1708-1771) to create a work modeled after Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912)'s painting of the Western Paradise. Ding's painting, *Supreme Bliss World* (1758), was later sent to the Imperial Weaving Bureaus in Jiangning (modern Nanjing) and Suzhou as the source painting for various copies in kesi 縉絲 (cut-silk tapestry), embroidery, and Songjin 宋錦 (Song brocade). Ding's painting and the textile reproductions of the same subject can be seen as part of the Qianlong Emperor's larger project of incorporating jile shijie anyang daochang 極樂世界安養道場 (bodhimaṇḍas for the World of Supreme Bliss) into the imperial palace. Envisioning the World of Supreme Bliss across the Forbidden City, the emperor regarded the Pure Land Western Paradise both as a carrier of the cherished wish for longevity and an essential component of a unified Buddhist system. This study means to explore Ding's *Supreme Bliss World* and the various textile copies in light of the transformation of the imperial palace into the sacred site of the Western Paradise during Emperor Qianlong's reign. While Qing scholars have made great contributions to the

understanding of the political significance of Tibetan-inspired visual culture at the Qing court, Emperor Qianlong's commissions of art works in the Pure Land tradition have received little scholarly attention. This study attempts to provide an alternative perspective in illuminating Emperor Qianlong's interest in and his engagement with Pure Land Buddhism.

# Emperor Qianlong's Pictorial and Physical Sites for Western Paradises

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## Introduction

In the twenty-second year of his reign, Emperor Qianlong, an ardent devotee of Tibetan Buddhism, commissioned his favourite court artist, Ding Guanpeng 丁觀鵬 (active 1708-1771), to create a work modeled after Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912)'s painting of *Jile tu* 極樂圖 (Supreme Bliss World) (fig.1). Ding's painting was later sent to the Imperial Weaving Bureau in Suzhou and Jiangning (modern Nanjing) as the source painting for textile copies in multiple media. Three *kesi* 縵絲 (cut-silk tapestries), three embroideries, and one Song brocade reproduction of Ding's painting were registered in the imperial inventory *Midian zhulin shiqu baoji, xubian* 秘殿珠林石渠寶笈續編 (Beaded Grove of the Secret Hall and Precious Book Box of the Stone Drain, Supplement, hereafter *Midian zhulin*), the catalogue of outstanding Buddhist and Daoist art in Qing imperial collection.<sup>1</sup>

This series of art commissions of the same subject has drawn attention in the field of Chinese art history, yet these related works have not yet been closely studied on their own. In Berger's fundamental work on Tibetan-inspired artifacts in the Qing court context, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (2003), she briefly mentions *Supreme Bliss World* and the textile copies as examples of imperial commissions of pious copies.<sup>2</sup> In this book, Berger also drew attention to the large number of sculptures of Buddha Amitābha, the central deity in *Supreme Bliss World*, commissioned by Qianlong to earn merit for his biological mother's and his own longevity.<sup>3</sup> Berger's recognition of the importance of Ding

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<sup>1</sup> *Midian zhulin, Shiqu baoji, xubian* 秘殿珠林石渠寶笈續編 [Beaded Grove of the Secret Hall and Precious Book Box of the Stone Drain, Supplement] (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1971), 23.

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Ann Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 42–43.

<sup>3</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 80.

Guanpeng as a court artist specializing in Buddhist subjects reveals the larger trend of the “New Qing History,” which has challenged the Sinicization model and conceptualized the success of the Qing in its multicultural polity, representatively the Manchu patronage of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>4</sup> Among the issues that have piqued scholarly interest among art historians represented by Berger are the Manchu rulers’ interest in Tibetan Buddhism and their use of Buddhist images as a way of consolidating themselves as religiously legitimate kings and their engagement with the translation of secular and Taoist sites into iconographically Buddhist-centered spaces across the Qing imperial space. Berger did not particularize the details of *Supreme Bliss World* or its related textile reproductions. Nor did she discuss these works and the large quantities of sculptures of Buddha Amitābha in light of Qianlong’s larger project of transforming the imperial palaces into the Buddha Amitābha’s Western Paradise. The potential scale of such a project was revealed by Wang Zilin’s 2008 article, in which he provided a list of *jile shijie daochang* 極樂世界道場 (Bodhimaṇḍa of the Supreme Bliss World) in the Buddhist Temples across all imperial spaces.<sup>5</sup>

In 2009, Ding’s *Supreme Bliss World* and a *kesi* copy were displayed in Gallery 202 of National Palace Museum in Taipei (fig.2). The label for *Supreme Bliss World* briefly introduced Ding’s role as court artist to Emperor Qianlong and his specialization in figure paintings. The theme of the painting was identified as the Western Paradise of Pure Land Buddhism and the central figure as Buddha Amitābha in the meditative gesture (*dhyāna mudrā*), with light radiating

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<sup>4</sup> The notorious Sinicization model in which the Qing’s success in maintaining political dominance is attributed to its cultural and political assimilation to the ways of the Han Chinese has gradually fallen short of self-justification since sources in Manchurian and Mongolian have become publicly accessible. The so-called New Qing Historians are typically represented by the works of Mark Elliot, Pamela Crossley and Evelyn Rawski. See Mark Elliott, *The Manchu Way: the Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Pamela Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); and Evelyn Rawski, *The Last Emperors: a Social History of Qing Imperial Institutions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> Wang Zilin 王子林, “Qinggong fotang zhong de jile shijie daochang” 清宮佛堂中的極樂世界道場 [Bodhimaṇḍa of the Supreme Bliss World in Qing Palace Buddhist Temples], *Fayuan* 法源 [Source of Law] 26 (2008): 305–323.

to signify Buddhas of the ten directions. The label also identified the attendant bodhisattvas of Buddha Amitābha as Avalokiteśvara (or Guanyin 觀音 in Chinese) on the left and Mahāsthāma (often referred to as Dashizhi 大勢至 in Chinese sources) on the right, and briefly mentioned the bodhisattvas, arhats, other heavenly figures present in Buddha Amitābha's realm, with the palatial complex above enveloped by auspicious clouds, as well as the lotus pond with incarnated figures below. The label of the *kesi* copy identified Ding's painting as its source. It also noted that the facial features and drapery lines were painted rather than woven. The label further commented on the potential date and level of craftsmanship of the *kesi* work. The dating of the *kesi* copy must have been earlier than the forty-seventh year of Qianlong's reign (1782), the year when the inscription in the four Qing official languages, mounted onto the work at a later date, was drafted by the imperial hand. The richness in color and the exquisite craftsmanship in executing the details made the *kesi* copy a masterpiece of Emperor Qianlong's reign.

In 2016 *Supreme Bliss World* was published in the exhibition catalogue *Emperors' treasures: Chinese art from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* with a full image and a detailed excerpt with a short introduction by Li He and Jie Xu.<sup>6</sup> He and Xu gave an iconographical analysis of *Supreme Bliss World* and identified this painting as an honest illustration of a scene from *Foshuo Guan Wuliagshoufo jing* 佛說觀無量壽佛經 (*The Sutra on Contemplation of Buddha Amitāyus*).<sup>7</sup> He and Xu's analysis of Ding's style and training incorporated the

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<sup>6</sup> Li He and Jay Xu, *Emperors' treasures: Chinese art from the National Palace Museum, Taipei* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 2016), 189.

<sup>7</sup> "The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitāyus," in *The Three Pure Land Sutras* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2003). Purported to be translated from the Sanskrit, yet no Sanskrit original has been found; the Visualization Sutra is one of the three most important Pure Land sutras. The other two are known as the Longer Sukhavativyuhah Sutra and Shorter Sukhavativyuhah Sutra. The different conventions for the pictorial illustration of the three Pure Land sutras provide important hints on the iconography of Ding's painting. According to Bai Wen (2010), only in the illustration of the Visualization Sutra, the two bodhisattvas accompanying the central Amitābha are present. While the distinction is not clear cut, and occasionally artisans can draw inspiration from the

scholarship of Zheng Guo (1987) and Lin Huansheng (1994).<sup>8</sup> While Ding carried on the court style characterized by a richness in color and details as exemplified by the works of earlier court artists Jiao Bingzhen 焦秉貞(1689-1726) and Leng Mei 冷枚(1669-1742), Ding received training in western-style perspective and chiaroscuro from the Jesuit painter Giuseppe Castiglione.

As for the textile reproductions of *Supreme Bliss World*, considerable effort has been made to recover the lost technique of *Weaving a Brocade Scroll of the Supreme Bliss World on an Azurite-colored Ground* (*Shiqing di jile shijie zhichengjin tuzhou* 石青地极乐世界织成锦圖軸) now in the collection of Palace Museum in Beijing (fig.3). Qian Xiaoping, the founder and former director of the Suzhou Silk Museum, recovered the lost technique of Song brocade production and successfully duplicated this Song brocade work in 2014.<sup>9</sup> No progress has been made, however, in the published scholarship of the Song brocade copy of *Supreme Bliss World* since Chen Juanjuan's articles first appeared in 1984 and 1986. In Chen Juanjuan's 1984 article "Song Brocade in Ming and Qing" in the *Palace Museum Journal*, she outlined the major course of change and development and the main types and characteristics of Song brocade.<sup>10</sup> In this article, Chen cited this Song brocade work as a masterpiece of Song brocades in hanging scroll format, which usually depicted Buddhist or bird-and-flower subjects and which were reserved

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illustrations of other sutras, when portraying the one Pure Land sutra, they can incorporate details from more than one sutras. Moreover, the nine souls reborn in the Lotus pond in Ding's painting correspond to the nine grades of rebirth in the Visualization Sutra.

<sup>8</sup>See Zheng Guo 鄭國, *Ding Guanpeng* 丁觀鵬 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987) and Lin Huansheng 林煥盛, "Ding Guanpeng de mogu huihua yu Qianlong yuanhua xin fengge" 丁觀鵬的摹古繪畫與乾隆院畫新風格 [Ding Guanpeng's archaic paintings and the new style of Qianlong's art academy] (Master's thesis, National Taiwan University, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> Luo Yongping 羅永平, *Jiangsu sichou shi* 江蘇絲綢史 [The History of Silk in Jiangsu] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2015), 61.

<sup>10</sup> Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟, "Ming Qing Songjin" 明清宋錦 [Song brocade in the Ming and Qing dynasties], *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan gu* 故宮博物院院刊 [Palace Museum Journal] 4 (1984): 15–25.

for the imperial family. In Chen's 1986 article published in *Gugong bowuyuan cangbao lu* 故宮博物院藏寶錄 (*Catalogue of collection of treasures in Palace Museum*), she provided a detailed analysis of the complex process and the exquisite craftsmanship required to make the over-sized Song brocade piece with 278 figures and other detailed motifs.<sup>11</sup> While Chen identified its theme as a Western Pure Land *bianxiang* 西方淨土變 (transformation tableaux), she made certain mistakes with regard to the iconography.<sup>12</sup> She did also transcribe the imperial seals on this Song brocade work and provided the original location of its display. According to Chen, the Song brocade copy was originally placed in the Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yangxin dian 養心殿) on the west side of the Palace of Heavenly Purity (Qianqing gong 乾清宮). Chen's scholarship on the Song brocade served as the basis for the catalogue entry of this work in the Palace Museum in Beijing and in later Chinese publications.<sup>13</sup>

In the most recent scholarship on Ding Guanpeng's *Shuofa tu* 說法圖 (The Buddha Preaching) in Ethnologisches Museum, Berlin, Ching-Ling Wang offered a close analysis of the iconography, the style, and the prototype of this work, the theme of which includes the Western Paradise.<sup>14</sup> In Wang's discussion of the iconography of *The Buddha Preaching*, he included *Supreme Bliss World* as an earlier example of the European-inspired fountain as an important

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<sup>11</sup> Chen Juanjuan 陳娟娟, "Zhicheng zhongjin jile shijie tu" 織成重錦極樂世界圖 [Heavy brocade weaving, the image of the Supreme Bliss World], in *Gugong bowuyuan cangbao lu* 故宮博物院藏寶錄 [Catalogue of the collection of treasures in the Palace Museum] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Chen Juanjuan, "Zhicheng zhongjin," 277. Chen incorrectly identified the top figure in the lotus pond as a Buddha, despite the figure appears in princely attire and is therefore a bodhisattva. She also mis-identified some figures in Chinese official costume as Daoist *tianwang shenjiang* 天王神將 [Heavenly Kings] and perhaps the bird-like creatures as *yecha lishi* 夜叉力士 [wrathful deities].

<sup>13</sup> Zhu Jiajin 朱家潛, *Gugong zhenbao* 故宮珍寶 [Treasures from the Palace Museum] (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> Wang Ching-Ling, *Praying for Myriad Virtues: On Ding Guanpeng's The Buddha Preaching in the Berlin Museum* (Berlin: Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2017).

subject in Qianlong's imagination of the Western Paradise.<sup>15</sup> It came to Wang's notice that Qianlong commissioned such a European-style fountain twice for his physical sites representing the Western Paradise.<sup>16</sup> Other issues related to *Supreme Bliss World* were not covered in Wang's book. The present thesis can supplement Wang's scholarship in two ways. On the one hand, Wang offered a clear overview of Ding Guanpeng's activities, especially the patterns of Ding's cooperative works, in the art academy in Qianlong's court.<sup>17</sup> While *The Buddha Preaching* was a cooperative work with only Ding Guanpeng's signature left on the painting, Ding's *Supreme Bliss World* serves as an alternative example of an independent project by the artist, which thereby paves the way for a more historically accurate account of Ding's style.

This thesis is the first attempt to closely study *Supreme Bliss World* and its afterlife in textile reproductions, both from the perspective of Ding Guanpeng and from that of Emperor Qianlong. The two primary sources I rely most heavily on are the *Zaobanchu* archives,<sup>18</sup> which contains detailed records of the series of commissions on the same subject, and *Midian zhulin*, which includes Emperor Qianlong's own account of his intention behind these commissions. The first part gives a close analysis of the composition, iconography, prototype, and style of *Supreme Bliss World*. Based on the *Zaobanchu* archive, Guanxiu's painting of Western Paradise served as the prototype of *Supreme Bliss World*. This painting was, however, lost. The striking visual similarity between *Supreme Bliss World* and *Xifang shengjing* 西方盛景 (Marvellous Scene in the Western Paradise) in the Moni Palace 摩尼殿, of the Longxing Temple 隆興寺 in Zhengding, Hebei, sheds light on one of Ding's sources of inspiration. Longxing Temple was

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<sup>15</sup> Wang, 35–37.

<sup>16</sup> Wang, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Wang, 19.

<sup>18</sup> *Qingong neiwufu zaobanchu dang'an zonghui* 清宮內務府造辦處檔總匯案 [Aggregation of Archives of the Palace Workshop of the Qing Imperial Household department] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2005).

well-known by both Ding Guanpeng and Qianlong, who visited the temple three times, probably accompanied by Ding; the emperor wrote poems for it and constructed a copy of Longxing Temple in Beijing, known as Chanfu Temple, now in Beihai Park.

Part II of this thesis is devoted to the afterlife of Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*, which was sent to Suzhou and Jiangning as the source painting for various textile reproductions. The records in the Zaobanchu archive sheds light on the imperial patron's active involvement in the process of creating these textile copies and the bilateral negotiations between the emperor and local artisans.

In Part III, I explore the impetus behind Emperor Qianlong's commission of Ding Guanpeng's painting of *Supreme Bliss World* (1759). In the eye of Qianlong, the pictorial illustration of Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise served as a visual circuit in the emperor's path to enlightenment. In this section I attempt to explicate this particular series of imperial commissions in light of Emperor Qianlong's own Buddhist practices and the larger project of incorporating the *Jile Shijie Daochang* (Bodhimaṇḍas for the Supreme Bliss World 極樂世界道場) into the imperial space. Emperor Qianlong persisted in this practice of visualizing Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise by means of his various commissions for the purpose of his own and his mother's longevity. This thesis intends to provide an alternative view, of a more private Buddhist practice of Emperor Qianlong.

## Part I

### Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*

In the twenty-second year of Qianlong's reign (1757), Ding Guanpeng received the imperial order to make an inspired copy of Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912)'s *Jile tu* 極樂圖 [Painting of the Supreme Bliss World] (fig.1).<sup>19</sup> Guanxiu's *Jile tu* does not survive today, nor do works other than his groups of *luohan* paintings now in Japan.<sup>20</sup> Guanxiu was a renowned late Tang Buddhist monk, poet, and artist. Born in Zhejiang, Guanxiu was sent to a local Buddhist monastery at the age of nine. He was praised for his extraordinary talent in meditation, his profound poems, free cursive calligraphy, and to a lesser extent his paintings. Guanxiu spent most of his life in the Chan monasteries along the southeastern coast of China and was commissioned to create the famous *Luohans* originally displayed in Shengyin Monastery 聖音寺 (Monastery of Holy Sound) in Hangzhou (fig.4). Emperor Qianlong was probably reminded of the Guanxiu's *Jile tu* in his collection when he encountered Guanxiu's *Luohans* during his southern tour earlier in 1757. When the emperor visited Shengyin Monastery, he was so captivated by Guanxiu's *luohan* paintings that he immediately asked Ding Guanpeng to copy them.<sup>21</sup>

Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World* shows great visual similarity with the mural paintings, often referred to as *Xifang shengjing* 西方盛景 (Marvellous Scene in the Western Paradise), in the Moni Palace 摩尼殿 at Longxing Temple 隆興寺 in Zhengding, Hebei (fig. 5).

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<sup>19</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 22: 516. The entry in the *Zaobanchu* archive reads, “(乾隆二十二年正月)本月初八日持来贯休画极乐图一轴, 李公麟画观音像一轴, 宣纸二张, 太監胡世傑傳旨着丁觀鵬仿画两轴俟宣纸十六罗汉得时仿此二轴欽此。” On the eighth day of this month (in the twenty second year of Qianlong's reign), Eunuch Hu Shijie brought a scroll of Guanxiu's painting of the *Supreme Bliss World*, a scroll of Li Gonglin's painting of *Guanyin* and two pieces of *xuan* paper. In the imperial edict, Ding Guanpeng was commanded to model a work after the two scrolls of painting after he finished the sixteen *luohans* painting.

<sup>20</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 131.

<sup>21</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 128.

Dated to the Ming dynasty, *Xifang shengjing* depicted the Western Paradise of Buddha Amitābha flanked by the Bodhisattva Guanyin and Dashizhi, as illustrated in the Visualization sutra. The oversized mural painting measures 4.36 meters in length and 7.13 meters in height. It is said to be based on the *fenben* 粉本 (master manuscript) of Wu Daozi 吳道子 (680- 740).<sup>22</sup>

In the following section of this chapter, I provide an analysis of the composition and iconography of *Supreme Bliss World* in comparison to the Longxing mural painting. My intention is to provide a close study of *Supreme Bliss World* on its own and to propose its close association with the Longxing mural. My first speculation is that *Xifang shengjing* in Longxing Temple was very likely one of Ding Guanpeng's sources of inspiration, as the mural was well known by both Qianlong and Ding Guanpeng. Qianlong visited Longxing Temple in person three times during his reign, probably accompanied by Ding Guanpeng. During each visit, Qianlong wrote poems to commemorate his experience in the renowned Buddhist monastery.

Another possibility is that both Guanxiu's *Jile tu*, the prototype of Ding's *Supreme Bliss World*, and *Xifang shengjing* in Longxing Temple were drawn from the same source, namely, the master copy of Wu Daozi. Guanxiu's Buddhist paintings would have been informed by the masterpieces of Wu Daozi. He studied and modeled his works upon upon Wu Daozi's Buddhist paintings, and one of his copies after Wu Daozi is registered in *Midian zhulin*.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ni Chunlin 倪春林, "Hebei Zhengding Longxing Si bihua yishu chutan" 河北正定隆興寺摩尼殿壁畫藝術特征初探 [Initial Exploration of Mural Paintings in the Moni Palace, Longxing Temple, Zhengding, Hebei], *Meishu xue* 美術學 [Art Research] 08 (2016): 118-121.

<sup>23</sup> *Midian zhulin*, *Shiqu baoji*, *xubian*, 135. The record reads, "唐僧貫休畫極樂圖一軸。貯乾清宮。素絹本。著色。無款。左角下有貫休印一。高九尺。廣四尺五寸。御筆題籤。籤上有乾隆御筆小璽。" Tang monk Guanxiu's painting *Jile tu* (a scroll). Preserved in Qianqing Palace. Colored on plain silk. No signature. A seal of Guanxiu at the bottom left corner. Nine *chi* in height, four *chi* five *cun* in length. Colophon by the imperial hand. On the colophon there is Qianlong's imperial seal.

## 1.1 Compositional Analysis

The composition of *Supreme Bliss World* consists of three levels, which are broadly divided by the architectural spaces: 1) the upper palatial architecture, 2) the three main figures framed by large pavilion-like canopies with columns and the surrounding figures in the middle level, and 3) the lotus pond on the bottom level (fig.6). The central Buddha locates the central axis. Other figures, relatively smaller in size, are lined up in symmetrical groups on the Buddha's left and right. While there is no single vanishing point in this painting, the main converging points all align with the central axis, which is at the same time the path that the reborn souls in the lotus pond follow to the realm of Buddha Amitābha and finally the Buddha himself. The attention of the groups of figures, the bodhisattvas, arhats and musicians, is addressed to the reborn soul, who is about to step into Buddha Amitābha's wonderland.

*Xifang shengjing* is similarly divided into three levels, the upper palatial complex, the Buddhist trinity and surrounding figures in the middle level and the lotus pond on the bottom level (fig.7). Unlike *Supreme Bliss World*, in which the vertical format allows the palatial architecture on the upper level to hang over in space with the architectural details fully displayed, in *Xifang shengjing*, the Buddhist trinity overlaps the architectural backdrop while the distance between the levels is shortened because of the horizontal format. Other than the difference in spatial layout, *Supreme Bliss World* and *Xifang shengjing* share the same principle of perspective. The artist of *Xifang shengjing* employed a scattered perspective. As in *Supreme Bliss World*, the major converging points all lie on the central axis, which aligns with the path from the lotus pond to Buddha Amitābha. Similarly, following the perspectival lines, the attention of the different groups of figures on the mural is addressed to the reborn soul who is read for Buddha Amitābha's realm.

## 1.2 Iconographical Analysis

There are 278 figures in *Supreme Bliss World*, and they can be identified as follows, based on iconography (fig.8).

A: In the center of the middle level is Buddha Amitābha, the central figure of the painting. He wears a greenish inner garment enveloped by a plain red robe, leaving his chest bare. He is framed by two circular halos, *yuanguang* 圓光 (circular light) behind his head and *beiguan* 背光 (back light) behind his back (fig.9). With his palms facing upward, his right hand rests atop his left hand; this can be identified as the *dhyani* mudra, the mudra of contemplation. He is seated on a fabulous white lotus throne on a multi-layered terrace beneath a canopy, with the tips of the lotus petals tinted blue. The large pavilion-like canopy is supported by four columns and decorated with jewels and patterns of auspicious clouds in gold. Emanating from the head of Buddha Amitābha are the *shifang fo* 十方佛 (buddhas of the ten directions); this corresponds to a moment in the *sutra* when a golden ray from the eyebrow of the Amitābha extended to ten realms, in each of which dwells a Buddha.

The depiction of the central Buddha in *Xifang shengjing* closely coincides with that of the *Supreme Bliss World* (fig. 10). The two Buddhas Amitābha both wear nearly identical green inner garments veiled by red robes. Both gazing directly at the viewer, they sit with their legs crossed, using the same meditative gesture. Radiating from their heads are buddhas from the ten directions dwelling in the clouds. Also framed by the double-ringed halo, Buddha Amitābha in *Xifang shengjing* is seated on a lotus throne with blue petals on a multi-layered terrace flanked by two standing attendant bodhisattvas, all of which strongly echoes *Supreme Bliss World*.

B: On the left of Buddha Amitābha is the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, depicted in a three-quarter profile on a white lotus throne and in the male form. Iconographically,

Avalokiteśvara appears in the trinity of Buddha Amitābha's western paradise as Buddha Amitābha's left attendant. The bodhisattva is dressed in highly ornamented fashion, in a grey robe patterned in gold, a crown, jeweled necklace, earrings, and bracelets, with jewels crossing his attire. He elegantly carries the long, slender stem of a lotus flower leaning toward Buddha Amitābha with his left hand, and holds the end of the lotus stem with his right palm. In *Xifang shengjing*, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is depicted holding a lotus flower with the same gesture, with the lotus flower pointing in an opposing direction (fig. 11).

C: To the Buddha's right, seated on a lotus in three-quarter profile view is the Bodhisattva Mahāsthāmaprāpta dwelling on his lotus throne on a terrace with multiple layers. Iconographically, Mahāsthāmaprāpta appears as Buddha Amitābha's right attendant. Mahāsthāmaprāpta is also depicted in male form and attired in princely fashion. He is dressed in a semi-transparent robe made of beads. He wears a jeweled necklace, red veil, and a crown typically with a jeweled bottle (*baoping guan* 寶瓶冠). With his legs crossed and feet bare, he holds a gold offering vessel in the shape of lotus pointing to Buddha Amitābha. The counterpart in *Xifang shengjing* holds a lotus flower instead, yet the mouth of a vessel can be seen on top of the lotus flower (fig.12).

D1: In addition to Buddha Amitābha, there are two groups of five arhats. They press their palms together in front of their chests, sans attributes, in the gesture of prayer. The arhats are depicted in different ages and appearance. Some are young and some are old, some handsome, others grotesque. Some appear to be Chinese, while some appear to be Indian.

D2: An additional two groups of eleven arhats are found on the lower level. Many hold attributes: a *ruyi* scepter 如意, a bottle, a bowl, a staff, a book, a script scroll, a seal wrapped in cloth and a string of prayer beads. Those who don't carry attributes adopt a gesture of prayer.

E1: In-between Buddha Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara is a group of ten bodhisattvas, four in female form and six in male form. Most display the prayer gesture. The bodhisattva at the lower left corner carries a string of prayer beads. In front of him is a female bodhisattva turning her back to him. Her right hand is in the *shuni* gesture, the gesture of bestowing patience, with the tip of her middle finger touching the tip of her thumb, while her left hand is in the meditation gesture.

E2: Between Buddha Amitābha and Mahāsthāmaprāpta is another group of bodhisattvas. Eight of them display the prayer gesture. The backward-leaning bodhisattva has the same hand gesture as his female counterpart in the leftmost group. A bodhisattva closed to Buddha Amitābha carries a lotus flower pointing towards the Buddha. A similar assembly of bodhisattvas is found in *Xifang shengjing* (fig.13).

E3-4: Awaiting at each side of the central axis are another two groups of bodhisattvas. Some display the prayer gesture, while some carry a variety of objects: a lotus flower, a *ruyi* scepter, an alms bowl and a prayer flag.

E5-6: At the entrance of the lotus pond are two groups of bodhisattvas who bend their torsos to greet the top figure of the group in the lotus pond. In the left group, the bodhisattva near the lotus pond holds a golden basin in the shape of lotus petals. His counterpart in the right group stretches both hands towards the lotus pond. Other bodhisattvas display the prayer gesture. Compared to the aforementioned groups of bodhisattvas, they are dressed in brighter, warmer colors, which guides the viewer to the focus of the various groups of figures in the painting.

F: Below the lower groups of arhats are two groups of musicians with their musical instruments: drum, waist drums, *pipa* 琵琶, *sheng* 笙, *xiao* 簫, *zheng* 箏, and *pan* 磬. The largest instrument in the leftmost group is a drum decorated with dragon, peony and auspicious clouds motifs on a bright red ground. These are not traditionally Buddhist motifs but familiar symbols of imperial interest. Similar sets of instruments can be found in *Xifang shengjing* (fig.14).

G: Of the two immortal creatures with two human heads and a bird torso, the one on the left appears in male form without a crown, while the one on the right appears in female form with a crown; they can be identified as *jivanjiva* (also called *gongmingniao* 共命鳥, *shengshengniao* 生生鳥 and *mingmingniao* 命命鳥).<sup>24</sup> They often appear together with a *kalaviṅka* (In Chinese, *jialingpinjia* 迦陵頻迦), a bird alleged to preach with fantastic voice in Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise. To the right of the female *jivanjiva* in *Supreme Bliss World*, a *kalaviṅka* can be found with a human head and bird torso. In *Xifang Shengjing*, the same combination of *jivanjiva* and *kalaviṅka* can be found to the left of the lotus pond—two on one side and one on the other. On the left are a *jivanjiva* and a *kalaviṅka*, while in the symmetrical group is a *kalaviṅka* (fig.15).

H1: Behind Guanyin's lotus throne is a group of eight figures. The central figure directly facing the viewer is in Chinese official attire; he also stands out because he is sheltered by the slender umbrella and he is larger in size compared to his four female attendants in back. This individual probably represents the patron of the original painting after which Ding Guanpeng modelled his work. In front of the Chinese official are three male figures in Chinese costumes yet with heavenly features denoted by their halos.

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<sup>24</sup> Ching-Ling Wang, *Praying for Myriad Virtues*, note 35.

H2: Central in the opposite group behind the throne of the Bodhisattva

Mahāsthāmaprāpta is the female counterpart of the male patron, probably the female patron.

Behind her are four attendants who hold a fan and umbrellas in their hands. In front of the female patron, there are three female figures with their palms folded and dressed in official costume with their heads enveloped by heavenly halos.

I: On the bottom of *Supreme Bliss World* is a lotus pond surrounded by a carved red stone fence. Nine figures appear in four lines, forming a triangular shape. Each figure stands on a lotus flower. These figures are the devout Buddhist practitioners who are going through the transformation to be reborn in Buddha Amitābha's Pure Land. The artists used the positions and varying sizes of the figures and their lotus bases to differentiate their levels of practice. On the bottom level are four smaller figures whose body proportions are similar to that of children and the lotus flower on which they stand are the smallest in size, which indicates that their level of practice is the lowest in the group. On the second and the third levels, there are three proto-bodhisattvas and one proto-arhat in profile three-quarter view, larger in size in comparison with the figures on the bottom level. They kneel on larger lotus flowers with their palms folded. The top figure of the triangular group is the largest. In a gesture of prayer, he is kneeling on the largest lotus flower in the pond, with his feet supporting his body. Depicted in a back view, he directly faces Buddha Amitābha and is greeted by the two groups of bodhisattvas at the entrance of the lotus pond. A very similar figure appears in *Xifang shengjing*. The counterpart in *Xifang shengjing* kneels down in back view in front of Buddha Amitābha (fig.16); his bodily posture and gestures are identical. Both of them are located on the central axis of their respective pictures.

J: In the lower center of the lotus pond is a marble fountain. It consists of three parts: the base surrounded by a gold dragon, a wave-shaped middle, and a large red jewel on the top. Ching-Ling Wang discussed the European influence of a similar fountain in *The Buddha Preaching*, noting that Emperor Qianlong would have considered such fountains suitable for the idealized space of the Western Paradise, as he commissioned two to be placed in the physical sites replicating the Western Paradise in the Qing palace.<sup>25</sup>

### 1.3 Emperor Qianlong and Longxing Temple

Longxing Temple is an ancient Buddhist monastery located in the east of Zhengding county, Hebei. It was first constructed in the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Wen of Sui 隋文帝 (586 AD), the first emperor of Sui dynasty (581-618 AD). Originally named Longcang Si 龍藏寺 [Temple of the Hidden Dragon], its name was changed in the Tang (618-907 AD).

Longxing Temple has a long history of imperial patronage. In the second year of the reign of Emperor Taizu of Song (969 AD), the emperor ordered the golden body of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara that had been destroyed in the previous Sui dynasty to be recast. During the Yuan dynasty (1271-1368), Longxing Temple received financial support from the imperial household. Until the fifth year of the reign of Temur Khan (1299 AD), Longxing Temple was greatly expanded and the number of monks was increased to 135. In the Ming dynasty, Longxing Temple continued to receive imperial patronage for the renovation of its architecture and Buddhist sculptures. Additional Buddhist halls, such as Yaoshi Dian 藥師殿

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<sup>25</sup> Wang, *Praying for Myriad Virtues*, 48.

(Palace of the Medicinal Buddha) and Mituo Dian 彌陀殿 (Palace of the Buddha Amitābha) were added to the monastery.

In the Qing dynasty, with the support from Emperors Kangxi and Qianlong, extensive renovation work was conducted in Longxing Temple. Kangxi visited Longxing Temple several times in person.<sup>26</sup> In the forty-seventh year of Kangxi's reign (1708 AD), the Xing Gong 行宮 (Travelling Palace), a temporary residence for the emperor's short visits, was built to the west of Longxing Temple.

Longxing Temple was well known by Emperor Qianlong and very likely by Ding Guanpeng himself, who usually accompanied the emperor when he was travelling.<sup>27</sup> In the eleventh year of Emperor Qianlong's reign (1746 AD), the emperor was requested by Empress Xiaoshengxian 孝聖憲 to pay respects at Mount Wutai after the Ceremony of Hunting 搜狩大典. On his journey back to the capital, Emperor Qianlong visited Longxing Temple and wrote *Bingyin shiyue guo zhending longxing si li dafo yin ti changju* 丙寅十月過正定隆興寺禮大佛因題長句 (Long verse in the tenth month of *bingyin* because (I) passed by Longxing Temple and prayed to the Great Buddha-)].<sup>28</sup>

In the same year, Qianlong transformed the Ming dynasty Taoist temple DaiSu Dian 太素殿 [The Palace of the Primary Element] in Beihai, Beijing into a Tibetan Buddhist Lama Temple, renaming it Chanfu Temple. Chanfu Temple was unfortunately burned to the ground in 1919. According to *Qinding rixia jiuwen kao* 欽定日下舊聞考 [Imperial commissioned ancient

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<sup>26</sup> Li Xiuting 李秀婷 and Du Ping 杜平, "Longxing si yu Fengjian Huangshi Ziliao Huibian" 隆興寺與封建皇室資料彙編 [Assembly of Archives on Longxing Temple and The Imperial Household], *Wenwu chunqiu* 文物春秋, 01 (2006): 27–28

<sup>27</sup> For example, Ding accompanied Emperor Qianlong on his southern inspection tours and was ordered by the emperor to copy Guanxiu's *Sixteen Arhats* in Shengyin monastery in Hangzhou.

<sup>28</sup> Li Xiuting 李秀婷 and Du Ping 杜平, "Longxing si yu Fengjian Huangshi Ziliao Huibian," 28.

accounts heard in precincts of the throne], Longxing Temple was the prototype of the Dafo Dian 大佛殿 [Hall of the Great Buddha] in Chanfu Temple. Meanwhile, Jile shijie 極樂世界 was located in the middle level of its three-tiered tower. The record reads,

Chanfu Temple was built in the eleventh year of Emperor Qianlong's reign. At the entrance of the temple was Tianwang Dian 天王殿 [Hall of the Heavenly King]. Behind the hall, there was a horizontal inscribed board, which reads *Zongcheng yuanjing* 宗乘圓鏡. On the vertical couplet..... Behind this was Dafo Dian, the design of which had been modeled upon Longxing Temple in Zhengding. The tower was three-storied, and on each level a horizontal board with the emperor's inscription was hung, Daxiong baodian 大雄寶殿 [The Great Buddha's Hall] on the upper level, Jile shijie 極樂世界 [Supreme Bliss World] on the middle level, and Futian huayu 福田花海 [Blessing field with flower and rain] on the bottom level.<sup>29</sup>

Qianlong revisited Longxing Temple in the fifteenth year of his reign. During this second visit, he wrote *Gengwu chong guo zhengding longxing si diejiu zuo yun* 庚午重過正定隆興寺疊舊作韻 [Rhyme written (when I) passed by Longxing Temple at Zhengding again in the *gengwu* year].<sup>30</sup> In the twenty-sixth year of Qianlong's reign (1761), he visited Longxing Temple for a third time during his return from Mount Wutai, and this time, he wrote *Xinyi muchun zhi chu longxing si li dafo zai diejiu zuo yun* 辛巳暮春之初隆興寺禮大佛再疊舊作韻 [Another rhyme after visiting the Great Buddha in Longxing Temple in the early spring of *xinsi*].<sup>31</sup> Throughout his

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<sup>29</sup> Yinglian 英廉 and Yu Minzhong 于敏中, *Qinding rixia jiuwen kao* 欽定日下舊聞考 [Imperially ordered investigations into old stories of the capital city] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987).

<sup>30</sup> Li Xiuting 李秀婷 and Du Ping 杜平, "Longxing si yu Fengjian Huangshi Ziliao Huibian," 28.

<sup>31</sup> Li and Du, 28.

reign, Emperor Qianlong sent various gifts to Longxing temple and wrote inscriptions for the Travelling Palace as well.<sup>32</sup>

It is unfortunate that the prototype of *Supreme Bliss World* attributed to Guanxiu does not survive, with which a more complete analysis of Ding Guanpeng's direct source of inspiration could have been made. The visual similarities between *Supreme Bliss World* and the mural in Longxing Temple, *Xifang shengjing*, allude to the links between these two works. Longxing Temple would be well known by Ding Guanpeng, who likely accompanied Qianlong during his visits and who should have been quite familiar with Chanfu Temple in Beijing, which had the Longxing Temple as its prototype. Guanxiu's painting of the Western Paradise and the Longxing mural could also have shed insightful light onto the potential sources of Ding Guanpeng when he painted *Supreme Bliss World*.

## 1.4 Style

Conforming to the pictorial tradition of *sukhāvātī*, the Western Paradise of Buddha Amitābha, Ding Guanpeng's painting was steeped in the symbols and style closely associated with the court practices, reflecting imperial interests. In *Supreme Bliss World*, what Ding decide to include and exclude based on the description of the sutra is revealing in understanding the paradise in the artistic mind. The illustration of a sutra requires rigid conformity to the textual description, yet the artist has the freedom to selectively choose what to include in the image and the style she prefers. Although Ding's painting appears to be a detailed visual transcription of the sutra, certain subjects in Ding's painting are not mentioned in the sutra yet recalled the practice

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<sup>32</sup> Li and Du, 30.

of the palace workshop. For example, the palatial architecture included in the upper level of Ding's image visually recalls the architectural style of the Qing imperial palaces. Meanwhile, clouds floating in the Western Paradise are in the shape of *ruyi*, auspicious symbols well established in the Han Chinese tradition and popularized at the Qing court. Moreover, the dragon motif on the musician's drum, which is not a traditional motif in Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise, appears here as the most important symbol of the imperial family, while the European style fountain surrounded by dragons in the lotus pond reveals the interest of the imperial court. Some motifs tally with the pictorial tradition of both the Western Paradise paintings and the court. For instance, the exotic birds, including peacocks and cranes, symbols of longevity, are depicted rambling around the Pond of Seven Precious Jewels, mingling the courtly space of Qing with the divine realm of the Pure Land paradise.

The style of Ding Guanpeng's painting similarly reflects court interests. It is well accepted that western influence on Chinese art during the Qing dynasty is exemplified by the techniques of linear perspective and *chiaroscuro*.<sup>33</sup> Distinctive from the conventional perspective in Chinese landscape paintings that use multiple focal points, linear perspective is characterized by a single vantage viewpoint to create an illusion of recession in space. Linear perspective was first introduced to China in the late Ming dynasty by Jesuit missionaries. This perspectival technique was formally introduced to the Qing court in making maps, forming a part of the emperor Kangxi's project of western learning (*xixue*).<sup>34</sup> Emperor Yongzheng's interest in western material culture as related to technical knowledge shifted the Chinese reception of perspectival techniques. The Qing official Nian Xiyao 年希堯 (1671—1739), with the guidance

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<sup>33</sup> Xin Yang, "Court Painting in the Yongzheng and Qianlong Periods of the Qing Dynasty, with Reference to the Collection of the Palace Museum, Peking," In *The Elegant Brush: Chinese Painting under the Qianlong Emperor 1735-1795* (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1985): 352.

<sup>34</sup> Kristina Kleutghen, "From Science to Art: The Evolution of Linear Perspective in Eighteenth-Century Chinese Art," In *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015): 176.

of Giuseppe Castiglione, studied the use of perspectival techniques. He published a treasure on Shixue 視學 (The Study of Vision) in which he searched for the Chinese origin of what he called *xianfa* 線法 (line method).<sup>35</sup> The popularity of linear perspective reached a climax during Qianlong's reign, both in and outside the court.<sup>36</sup>

The Chinese artists' responses to the technique of chiaroscuro, the use of tonal contrast between light and shadow, was also conditioned and complicated by the indigenous Chinese conception of shadow. Oil pigments can be absorbed into the surface of the canvas, and layers of pigments can be overlaid without spreading. European portrait painters used the attributes of their painting materials to their advantage to visualize shadow as both projected or cast shadows and shading with varying degrees of darkness. The absence of cast shadows was a salient contrast between Chinese painting and its European counterparts.<sup>37</sup> While the water-absorbing quality of *xuan* paper and transparency of color washes limited Chinese artists to painting cast shadows, these factors empowered Chinese artists to create intriguing watery effects with light washes. Accordingly, the chiaroscuro technique was only selectively absorbed by the Chinese.

The Western influences that characterized the Qing court style are witnessed in Ding's painting. The employment of one-point perspective in the portrayal of the lotus pond and the gradation in color on the lotus petals reveals the influence from the Jesuit painters at the Qing court. The inspiration from Giuseppe Castiglione is salient in the attentiveness to detail when comparing the peacock in Ding's painting and that of Giuseppe Castiglione (fig. 17). In the early years of Emperor Qianlong's reign, Ding once practiced oil painting under the direct influence of Castiglione. The zaobanchu archive shows that Ding's first oil painting commission was to

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<sup>35</sup> Claudia Brown, *Great Qing: Painting in China, 1644–1911* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).

<sup>36</sup> Hui-hung Chen, "Chinese Perception of European Perspective: A Jesuit Case in the Seventeenth Century," *The Seventeenth Century* 24, no. 1 (2009): 97–128.

<sup>37</sup> Lihong Liu, "Shadows in Chinese Art: An Intercultural Perspective," In *Qing Encounters: Artistic Exchanges Between China and the West* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2015): 190.

decorate the wall of the theatrical stage in Tongle Yuan, in year three of Qianlong's reign.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps because this project yielded a more than satisfactory result, Ding was asked in the same month to create another oil painting for the theatrical stage in the Palace of Double Glory, one that should emulate his former oil painting in Tongle Yuan.<sup>39</sup> In subsequent years, another nine oil paintings by Ding Guanpeng were documented in the official archive.<sup>40</sup>

The renowned court artist Leng Mei was another important source of Ding's artistic inspiration. Lin Huansheng has argued that Ding learned to synthesize the compositions of ancient Chinese paintings and western techniques from Leng Mei's paintings.<sup>41</sup> Ding had worked closely with Leng Mei. In the second year of Qianlong's reign (1737), Leng Mei was assigned to the Palace Workshop to make paintings with Ding Guanpeng and Zhang Weibang 張為邦.<sup>42</sup> In an imperial commission in the following year, Ding Guanpeng was responsible for adding drapery and domestic interior scenes to Leng Mei's facial portrait of a beauty.<sup>43</sup> In the fourth year of Qianlong's reign (1739), Qianlong requested Leng Mei, Ding Guanpeng, Jin Kun, and Giuseppe Castiglione to model works after the Song painting *Peaceful Spring Market* and make

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<sup>38</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 18, 215. The entry reads, “(乾隆三年) 六月初五日, 催總白世秀來說太監毛團傳旨同樂園戲台上著丁觀鵬畫油畫煙雲壁子一塊欽此 (于本月初八日丁觀鵬進內畫).” On the fifth day of the sixth lunar month (in the third year of Qianlong's reign), Cuizong Bai Shixiu reported that Eunuch Maotuan brought the imperial order which commanded Ding Guanpeng to create an oil painting with the motifs of smoke and clouds for the theater stage.

<sup>39</sup> *Zaobanchu*, 216. The entry reads, “重華宮戲台上的不好看, 讓丁再依造煙雲畫一幅. (于本月二十七日丁觀鵬進內畫訖).” The one on the theater stage in Chonghua Palace is not visually appealing. Ask Ding to create an oil painting based on the earlier one with smoke and cloud motifs.

<sup>40</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 11, 69. The entry reads, “(乾隆七年六月) 本月初三日司庫郎正培面奉諭旨著丁觀鵬畫油畫四張欽此.” On the third day of the sixth lunar month, the seventh year of Qianlong's reign, Siku Lang Zhengpei received the imperial order asking Ding Guanpeng to create four oil paintings.

<sup>41</sup> Huansheng Lin, “Ding Guanpeng de Mogu Huihua yu Qianlong Yuanhua Xinfengge” (Master's thesis, National Taiwan University, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 7, 174. The entry reads, “傳旨將冷枚教回造辦處與丁觀鵬張為邦畫畫欽此.” The imperial order asked Leng Mei to return to Zaobanchu and create paintings with Ding Guanpeng and Zhang Weibang.

<sup>43</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 8, 218. The entry reads, “二十三日催總韓起龍來說太監胡世傑交冷枚開臉像美人一張, 傳旨著丁觀鵬畫衣紋陪屋內景畫欽此.” On the twenty-third day, Cuizong Han Qilong reported that Eunuch Hu Shijie presented to the emperor Leng Mei's face painting of a lady. Emperor Qianlong ordered Ding Guanpeng to paint the drapery and interior setting.

their own copies.<sup>44</sup> The four drafts earned recognition from the great patron, and the drafts of both Leng Mei and Jin Kun were given to Ding Guanpeng to create the final paintings.<sup>45</sup> In the sixth year of Qianlong's reign (1741), Ding was asked to model a work after Leng Mei's paintings.<sup>46</sup> Emperor Qianlong must have been impressed by Ding's ability to reproduce the romantic charm in Leng Mei's archaic paintings. The influence from Leng Mei in *Supreme Bliss World* can be found in the employment of scattering perspective in the overall composition of the image, with the foreground and background portrayed on the same vertical plane. The Western Paradise described in the sutra has been appropriated by the artist and transformed into a heavenly space steeped in symbols and depictions of great interest to the court; such symbols and styles signifying the Qing court were included in the image, making the painting hybrid in style.

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<sup>44</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 8, 381. The entry reads, “(乾隆六年十一月) 十四日司庫劉山久白世秀來說太監高玉等交送蘇漢臣太平春市圖手卷一卷 (隨匣) 傳旨著冷枚丁觀鵬金昆郎世寧等四人按此手卷畫意各另起稿一張呈覽欽此。于乾隆七年四月初五日副領催德鄰持來如意館押帖一件內開本日得手卷稿四張呈覽, 奉旨準畫, 將金昆冷枚所畫的稿俱著丁觀鵬畫欽此。” On the fourteenth day of the eleventh lunar month, the sixth year of Qianlong's reign, Siku Liu Shanjiu and Bai Shixiu reported that Eunuch Gao Yu presented Su Hanchen's scroll painting *Taiping chunshi tu* with its box to Emperor Qianlong. The emperor asked Leng Mei, Ding Guanpeng, Jin Kun and Giuseppe Castiglione to each create a draft based on Su's painting and present the drafts to the emperor for permissions. The emperor approved that the artists could work on the final painting and asked Ding Guanpeng finish both Leng Mei and Jin Kun's drafts.

<sup>45</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 8, 381.

<sup>46</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 8, 381. The entry reads, “(乾隆六年七月) 本月初四日太監胡世傑交冷枚畫稿二張, 手卷稿一件, 傳旨丁觀鵬畫欽此。” On the fourth day of the seventh lunar month, the sixth year of Qianlong's reign, Eunuch Hu Shijie brought two drafts by Leng Mei for imperial review. The emperor ordered Ding Guanpeng to finish the drafts.

## Part II

### From Painting to Textile: Afterlife of *Supreme Bliss World*

Emperor Qianlong's fascination with Guanxiu's painting of Western Paradise did not fade after he commissioned Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*. He recurrently returned to the theme of the Western Paradise in his life and commissioned a series of *kesi*, embroidery and Song brocade copies of Ding's painting. Three *kesi* 縉絲 (cut-silk tapestries), three embroideries, and one Song brocade reproduction of Ding's painting were registered in *Midian zhulin*.<sup>47</sup>

As a great patron and collector of art, Emperor Qianlong was actively involved in the making of the textile copies of Ding's painting. The various records in the Zaobanchu archives document how the imperial will has influenced the translation of Ding's painting into these textile works. In the second month of the twenty-fourth year of Qianlong's reign (1759), Ding's *Supreme Bliss World* was sent to Suzhou as a source painting for a *kesi* tapestry of the same subject. The finished *kesi* copy of Ding's work was received in Beijing during the fifth month of the twenty-sixth year of Qianlong's reign (1761). Emperor Qianlong was taken with the overall composition and the exquisite craftsmanship of the *kesi* version presented to him. However, he was not entirely satisfied with the pale color palette. This *kesi* copy was ordered to be sent back to the Weaving Bureau in Suzhou as the model for another *kesi* reproduction. In this second *kesi* commission, Qianlong specifically noted in the imperial order that the new copy should be bright in color.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *Midian zhulin, Shiqu baoji, xubian*, 23.

<sup>48</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 26, 656. The archive record reads, “(乾隆二十六年五月初一日)郎中白世秀將蘇州製造安寧送到縉絲極樂世界佛像一軸，持進交太監胡世傑呈覽奉，旨著將原樣仍發與安寧，照樣縉絲再縉作一軸，顏色要鮮艷欽此” [The first day of May (in the twenty sixth year of Qianlong's reign), officer Bai Shixiu submitted a *kesi* Paradise Scene from the Imperial Weaving Bureau in Suzhou. Eunuch Hushijie presented the *kesi* work to the emperor. The imperial order requested to send the *kesi* work back to Suzhou and make another copy in *kesi* modeled after the first *kesi* work, and color [in this version] has to be brilliant].

The comparison between the two extant *kesi* copies of Ding's painting in the collection of the National Palace Museum in Taipei (fig.2) and the National Palace Museum in Beijing (fig.18), reveals the adjustments in color made by the local artisans to respond to the imperial order. The exact date of individual textile copies cannot be determined based on official records, yet the difference in the color scheme of the Beijing and the Taipei copies alludes to the effectiveness of imperial authority in the making of these court artifacts. The Beijing copy exhibits greater visual similarity with Ding's painting in the handling of clouds and the colors of the palatial architecture behind the central Buddha, and is therefore more likely to be the initial reproduction. The Taipei copy displays a greater interest in the brightness of color composition. The monochromatic ground in the Beijing copy is replaced with an azure ground in both the sky and the lotus pond. The homochromous halos of the three central deities in the Beijing version were also substituted with halos in light azure. Based on these adjustments in the color scheme, the Taipei copy must belong to the second imperial commission.

Emperor Qianlong, through institutional measures, controlled the production of court artefacts and influenced the development of craftsmanship, yet the effectiveness of the imperial authority was meanwhile influenced by said craftsmanship itself. The duplication of painting on the surface of textiles was complicated by the complex technical process. A straightforward designation of Ding Guanpeng's painting as the original and the various textiles as transparent duplications omits the creativity involved in the process of making these textile works. In fact, the final products are subject to their respective materials, techniques and tools in making textile copies in different medias. Fine weaving paintings would require both the exquisite craftsmanship and the artistic mind of the artisans.

The transcription of a painting onto the surface of a Song brocade, embroidery and *kesi* would involve technical concerns according to their distinctive methods of production. To

reproduce a painting on the surface of Song brocade, the creativity of the artisan was greatly manifested in the making of a *huaben* 花本 (figure harness), the weaving program based on which the actual process of guided would be carried out. The technique of making a *huaben* is called *tiaohua jieben* 挑花結本 (hand-figured technique). It is generally consisted of three steps: *tiaohua* 挑花 (designing the figure harness), *daohua* 倒花 (duplicating the figure harness), and *pinhua* 拼花 (joining the figure harness). The first step involves matching the color of the threads with that of the painting. After Ding's painting was sent to the Weaving and Dyeing Bureau in Suzhou, the *tiaohuajiang* 挑花匠 (hand-figured craftsmen) in Suzhou would start to design the figure harness based on the source painting. Ding's painting would have been transcribed onto a piece of paper and adjusted to the actual size of the Song brocade work. Colors of the threads chosen for each unit would have been closely examined to match the color of the original painting, a process called *fenchuan shese* 分鑪設色 (designing the color by unit).

Song brocade is woven with a drawing loom, which has developed from looms with multiple heddles and treadles. To simplify the process of making complex patterns, a jacquard device is added at the top to control a single thread, called an *erzi* thread 耳子線, which was in turn connected with the warp ends. In the actual weaving process, the *wanhuagong* 挽花工 (draw boy) on the drawing loom lifted certain *erzi* threads in the *huaben* 花本 (figure harness) and the corresponding warps in front of the weaver were raised. Together with the verbal instruction from the draw boy, the weaver is able to weave the selected weft underneath the lifted warps. The information needs to produce the pattern is stored in the ring-shaped figure harness.

As for embroidery, the transcription of an image onto fabric with a needle had more flexibility. The figured sample could be placed under the fabric, so that the needle could penetrate the fabric following the outline on the figured sample, or the outline could be

transcribed onto the fabric directly. Since the orientation of the needle was not fixed, the embroiderer had the freedom to adjust her technique and choice of color accordingly when working in any detailed area.

The loom for making *kesi* tapestry was strung up with vertical warp threads in order, and remained vertical in the finished work. The warp threads in *kesi* textile were mostly undyed silk threads, while dyed weft threads were twined onto shuttles by color. Each time a weaver pulled a single weft thread across a warp thread, she used a *bozi* 撥子, or comb-shaped wooden chip, to brush the weft thread downward so that it became tightly aligned with the woven threads. To reproduce the painting onto a *kesi* tapestry, the pattern sample was placed under the evenly aligned warp threads, based on which the weaver would outline the painting onto the vertical warp threads. When a thread of a particular color was needed, the weaver picked up the corresponding shuttle. The translation of painting into *kesi* therefore involved careful calculation in the use of weft threads. In terms of the color scheme, the combination of vertical warp threads and horizontal weft threads resulted in a more even and finer color gradient.

This feature of *kesi* explains why the local Weaving Bureau proposed to make more *kesi* copies of *Supreme Bliss World* for Qianlong, who showed great concern for the brightness in color in images with Buddhist subjects. An entry in the *Zaobanchu* archive reads:

On the twenty-seventh day of the first lunar month in the forty eighth year of Qianlong's reign (1783), a letter from the Weaving Bureau in Suzhou was received, which reads, (we) received Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World* from the imperial court with the inscription on the paper attached, and were asked to make two embroidery copies. Now our craftsmen are respectively making the embroidery copies (fig.12), yet only Ding Guanpeng's painting is fantastic. The inscription in four official languages by the imperial hand should endure ten thousand years, and it

will be particularly bright and beautiful if it is made in *kesi*. Now our Weaving Bureau respectively plan to make two *kesi* copies for imperial preview, yet the *xiuxian* 繡線 (Embroidery) characters seem to specifically refer to embroidery, which is different from *kesi*. We plead for changes in certain characters in the inscription so that we can make *kesi* copies conforming to the rules.<sup>49</sup>

This record in the official archive of Palace Workshop offers an alternative perspective for understanding the relationship between the emperor and Weaving Bureau in Suzhou. Rather than exerting absolute imperial power, the involvement of emperor in the creative process can be better characterized as a bilateral interaction between the patron and the local Weaving Bureau, which exhibited a large degree of initiative in the imperial commissions.

The Weaving Bureau in Suzhou, rather than unconditionally executing the imperial patron's order, proposed that the *kesi* copy of Ding Guanpeng's painting would serve a better end and certain characters in Emperor Qianlong's inscription should be changed accordingly. Berger has argued that the inscription drafted by the emperor in sutra format proclaims the emperor's authenticity in his understanding of Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> The established format in the Qing of the four official languages was of political significance and has been understood as closely associated with imperial authority.<sup>51</sup> The room for negotiations on the particular media on which Ding's painting was reproduced and the specific content of the emperor's inscription, therefore,

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<sup>49</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol 45, 396. The Chinese text reads, “于四十八年正月二十七日員外郎五德催長大達色舒典為蘇州織造來文內開前經奉旨由內庭交出丁觀鵬畫極樂圖一軸，隨白紙樣字圖替文一張，照樣綉做二軸，現在飭匠敬謹綉做外，惟丁冠鵬繪畫精妙絕倫。御摯四體字題替應傳萬禩，若以縹絲織成尤為明麗，現在本織造謹擬捐縹做二軸呈進，但讀圖替本文綉線字樣似專指針工，與縹絲有別，懇請酌換數字發交縹做以符體制，謹將原發圖替本文一張咨送貴處轉呈御覽等情 聲明前來相應將圖替本文持進交太監鄂魯里呈覽。旨圖替本文准交懋勤殿將漢字內綉線二字改寫縹工其餘三樣字俱不必改寫，發交四德縹做二軸送來欽此。(於四十九年十二月二十六日蘇州送到綉極樂圖佛像二軸，做樣畫極樂圖佛像一軸。呈進交啟祥宮做樣佛像交玉壺水訖。

<sup>50</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 46.

mitigates the absoluteness of imperial authority in the imperial commissions of art, and renders a more comprehensive picture of the emperor's participation in artistic production.

The artistic combination of painting, calligraphy and weaving is a unique Manchu creation. The development of *kesi* craftsmanship reached its peak in the reign of Emperor Qianlong. Qing craftsmen invented the technique of *sanse jin* 三色金 [three-color gold], using dark gold threads in conjunction with light gold and silver threads to create the effect of color gradation.<sup>52</sup> Later craftsmen created new methods of production by combining *kesi* with embroidery and painting.<sup>53</sup> Zhang Qiong argued that Qianlong's personal interest in *kesi* as a medium accounts for the series of *kesi* painting and calligraphy commissions, something rarely seen in former dynasties.<sup>54</sup> Most *kesi* paintings produced in Qianlong's reign have religious and festival subjects, while the *kesi* calligraphic works, mostly duplications of the calligraphy done by the imperial hand, were commissioned after the fifty-eighth year of Qianlong's reign.<sup>55</sup> This record stands as a piece of evidence testifying to the role of artisans in influencing, and even cultivating, the emperor's artistic taste.

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<sup>52</sup> Sun, Jiyan. "Seeing Chinese Silk Tapestry Art of Qing Palace Workshop." *Collections*, 07 (2016): 107.

<sup>53</sup> Sun, 107.

<sup>54</sup> Sun, 107.

<sup>55</sup> Zhang, Qiong. "Qingding Buke Duanshi Lantingtu Kesi" *Quanjian Kaolue - Jianxi Qinggaozong Shiqi de Kesi Shufa*. *Journal of National Museum of China*, 06 (2005): 37.

## Part III

### From the Pictorial to the Physical Sites of the Western Paradise

This part of the thesis explores Ding's *Supreme Bliss World* and the various textile reproductions with the same subject from the perspective of Emperor Qianlong. It questions into Emperor Qianlong's intention behind the series of commissions. The larger issue here is how would Emperor Qianlong perceive *Supreme Bliss World* and the textile copies. In the preceding part, we have seen how Qianlong was once actively involved in the creative process of making the textile copies by giving instructions. However, were these works merely aesthetically appealing objects in the eye of the emperor and therefore these commissions were informed by the Chinese tradition of acquiring multiple copies? Or were these commissions meanwhile thematically important for the emperor? As the following part will show, for Qianlong, images of Western Paradise served to facilitate his own practice of visualizing the sacred realm of the Buddha.

Ding's *Supreme Bliss World* and the textile reproductions can be understood as part of Qianlong's larger project of transforming the imperial palaces into the sacred site of Western Paradise. Emperor Qianlong has been consistently engaging with Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise since the early phase of his reign. Physical sites for Western Paradise were constructed across the imperial space during Qianlong's reign and Qianlong himself visited these sites regularly to pray for his and his mother's longevity. Qing historians and art historians informed by "New Qing History" have greatly contributed to our understanding of Qianlong's engagement with Tibetan Buddhism from a politicized perspective. This part of my thesis meant to provide an alternative light onto the study of Qianlong's own Buddhist practices by addressing to his involvement with Pure Land Western Paradise. Praying for longevity, the boundary between Tibetan Buddhism and Chinese Buddhism was deemed as a less important issue.

### 3.1 Qianlong's Intention Behind the Commissions

Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World* (1759) is not the first copy of Guanxiu's prototype that Ding Guanpeng was ordered to make. A record in the tenth year of Qianlong's reign (1745) reads, "Ask Ding Guanpeng to model after the technique of the Buddhist painting *Jile tu* 極樂圖, make a draft in commensurable size and present it to Emperor Qianlong."<sup>56</sup>

Without attribution, the painting *Jile tu* that Ding Guanpeng was ordered to study and make a draft copy was very likely attributed to Guanxiu. In *Midian zhulin*, a colophon on a *kesi* copy of *Jile tu* drafted in the ninth year of Qianlong's reign was documented, in which Qianlong mentioned that he commanded his court artist to reproduce Guanxiu's *Jile tu* in reduced size. The colophon reads,

Painting of *Western Paradise of Supreme Bliss* (a scroll). This painting measures 1 *chi* 1 *fen* in length (about 34 cm), and 2 *zhang* 5 *chi* in width (about 833 cm). The *kesi* work with the subject of the Supreme Bliss World, on which was inscribed Qianlong's transcription of Su Shi's *Xifang jile shijie amituofo anyang daochang* 西方極樂世界阿彌陀佛安養道場 (Bodhimaṇḍas for Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise of Supreme Bliss, thereafter *Jile daochang*) and the emperor's inscription, which reads, (I) have copied Su Shi's fourteen characters several times, or just *jile daochang* (Bodhimaṇḍas of Supreme Bliss). Unfortunately, there was no pictorial illustration (of Western Paradise). (Therefore) I commissioned a court artist to make a copy of Guanxiu's painting of *Supreme Bliss World* in reduced size. With the illustration attached at the beginning of the text, (I can) comprehend the essence of the Buddhist doctrine once my eyes confront the text. (I am) already beside the gold lotus pond, appreciating the harmonious and

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<sup>56</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 13, 237. The record reads, "著丁觀鵬仿極樂圖佛像畫法，配合尺寸起稿呈覽。"

elegant music of the *kalavinka*. The fifteenth day of the first lunar month, the ninth year of Qianlong's reign.<sup>57</sup>

In this colophon, Emperor Qianlong elaborated upon his impetus behind commissioning the first copy of Guanxiu's *Jile tu*. Qianlong did not deem the modified replication of Guanxiu's painting a mere aestheticized pictorial representation. Instead, the inspired copy, adjusted in size, was intended as a pictorial illustration of Song dynasty poet and artist Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037–1101)'s calligraphy on the Bodhimaṇḍas for Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise, which Qianlong himself had copied multiple times for his personal belief.<sup>58</sup> Qianlong's two copies of Su Shi's *Jile daochang* was documented in *Midian zhulin*, one full copy with all fourteen characters *Xifang jile shijie amitufo anyang daochang* and one abridged copy of four characters *Jile daochang*.<sup>59</sup> Qianlong wrote a colophon for the full copy in the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in the ninth year of his reign (1744), which was also documented in *Midian zhulin*. The record reads,

Copy of the fourteen characters of Su Shi's *Jile Shijie* by the imperial hand (a scroll). Preserved in Qianqing Palace. Xuande version. The colophon in the great regular script reads, Song dynasty Su Shi was naturally endowed with surpassing longevity. In his later years, he was delighted in Chan Buddhism and meditation. He practiced this to the highest level, as shown in his calligraphy. People who obtain his authentic work in running and regular script can enter into the magnificent world as well. (I) greatly value

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<sup>57</sup> *Midian zhulin shiqu baoji xubian* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1971), vol. 8: 395. The original Chinese record reads, “西方極樂世界圖 (一卷). 本幅縱一尺一分。橫二丈五尺。縑絲極樂世界圖。前摹御臨蘇軾西方極樂世界阿彌陀佛安養道場御題行書。玉局十四字。臨仿數過。即是極樂道場。惜其未有圖繪。內府舊藏貫休極樂圖。命工縮本臨仿。弁諸卷端。目擊道存。已在金蓮池上。聽迦陵頻伽，出和雅音色也。乾隆歲在甲子上元日。御識。摹寶二。惟精惟一。乾隆宸翰。鑒藏寶璽 (全八璽) 幾暇鑒賞之寶。”

<sup>58</sup> About Su Shi's Buddhist conduct and his Pure Land Belief, see Ronald Egan's *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (1994) and Waifang Xu's "On the Pure Land Beliefs of Su Shi" (2002).

<sup>59</sup> *Qinding siku quanshu* 欽定四庫全書 [Imperially Ordered Complete Collection of Four Treasures], 1301–537.

this precious work. This great calligraphy is in particular a masterpiece. The fluidity and strength in Su's poem can be shown in his calligraphy itself. In my leisure time, I often enjoy appreciating it and won't let it to be stored. I also copy it myself and write a colophon at the end (of my copy). Shangyuan festival, Jiazi year of Qianlong. (It is attached with my calligraphy by merit. By the imperial hand of Emperor Qianlong. Two seals. Eight *cun* eight *fun* in height, and four *chi* and one *cun* in length.<sup>60</sup>

Qianlong's autobiographical account of visualizing himself in the realm of Buddha Amitābha illustrates the role of an image in summoning a Buddhist practitioner's visual intuition. Moreover, the visual imagination aroused by the image further allowed the emperor to evoke his auditory senses. With the painting in hand, the emperor recorded his hallucination of the music of the *kalaviṅka*, the immortal creature with a human head and bird torso who is alleged to have preached Buddha Amitābha's teachings with its fantastic tones.

In the colophon Qianlong wrote for Guanxiu's *Jile tu*, he again emphasized on the effective of the image in assisting one's visualization of the Western Paradise. The colophon reads,

Western Supreme Bliss Tuṣita, the crystal realm of Daoism and Buddhism, where there are seven kinds of jeweled trees and twelve kinds of animals. Each manifests solemnity and contains profound meaning, (leading to) perfect enlightenment. Bodhisattvas and sound-hear disciples all look at Buddha Amitābha flanked by Guanyin and Dashizhi in respect. Listening to the Buddhist law in the lotus pond, people regard the serenity as

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<sup>60</sup>*Midian zhulin, Shiqu baoji, xubian*, vol. 1, 135. “御臨蘇軾極樂道場十四字一卷。貯乾清宮。宣德牋本。大楷書。跋云宋蘇長公天姿高邁。晚年游心禪悅。臻無上乘。即翰墨所寄。並皆入妙世。人得其行楷真蹟。劇寶貴之。而此本擘窠大書。尤為傑作。蘇詩云端莊雜流麗剛健含婀娜誠自道也。余幾暇愛玩不置。濡筆重摹。因再誌數語於尾。乾隆甲子上元日。下有所寶惟賢。乾隆御筆。二璽。高八寸八分廣四尺一寸五分。”

peace and cultivation. With Guanxiu's pictorial illustration, what does it matter if those wishing for rebirth (in Buddha Amitābha's realm) don't move even one step? <sup>61</sup>

The copy of Guanxiu's painting, therefore, served as a shortcut to the Pure Land Western Paradise described in Su Shi's calligraphy and as a vehicle to the Buddhist truth in the emperor's own practice.

Qianlong's interest in commissioning Buddhist paintings began no later than the seventh year of his reign. His first Buddhist painting commission was a copy of Leng Mei's figure painting of a *luohan*.<sup>62</sup> In this commission, Qianlong asked his court artist Shen Yuan 沈源 to reproduce this draft and have Ding Guanpeng to make festival paintings based on other drafts of Leng Mei. Until this point, commissions received by Ding were still secular paintings, including several oil paintings and the festival paintings of *Taiping chunshi tu* 太平春市圖 [Peaceful Spring Market] and *Hangong cunxiao tu* [Spring Morning in the Han Palace].<sup>63</sup> Qianlong was initially uncertain of Ding Guanpeng's ability to model works after Buddhist paintings. In order to ensure that Ding was competent in Buddhist-themed painting, Ding was ordered, earlier in the tenth year of Qianlong's reign, to model a work after a Buddhist painting displayed in the Hall of Mental Cultivation in the emperor's presence.<sup>64</sup> Qianlong observed and was perhaps even involved in the artist's creative process. Soon after Qianlong confirmed Ding's talent in painting Buddhist subjects, Ding was commissioned to model a work after Guanxiu's painting.

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<sup>61</sup> *Midian zhulin*, vol.1, 135. 貫休極樂圖贊。西方極樂兜率天陀天琉璃界。道梵網層懸寶樹七種。禽十二。匪啻莊嚴。各具深意。圓覺倒退。菩薩聲聞無央數。眾瞻兩足尊。堂堂彌陀侍法王子左右以居觀音大勢（叶）池苗蓮花踞聽法。人以清淨緣為安養。因貫休作圖示。往生者一步不移又何謂也。

<sup>62</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 13, 237. The entry reads, “本月二十八日司庫白世秀將查得冷枚畫稿十七張手卷稿三張持進交太監高王呈覽，奉旨手卷稿內羅漢一張著沈源畫，悠風圖著冷枚徒弟姚文漢起稿，名園四序圖著造辦處收著，俟姚文漢起完稿時再呈覽，其餘畫稿十七張著丁觀鵬沈源畫節畫欽此。”

<sup>63</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 13, 237.

<sup>64</sup> *Zaobanchu*, vol. 13, 219. The record reads, “(乾隆十年二月九日) 養心殿現供佛像一軸，著丁觀鵬照佛像畫一軸，俟駕幸時在東暖閣畫欽此。”

In the colophon drafted by Qianlong in the forty-seventh year of his reign, Qianlong returned to his imaginary experience of the realm of the Western Paradise and described the Western Paradise he envisioned with compelling detail. In the form of a sutra, the inscription was written in the four official Qing languages, and was later attached to Ding's painting. The Chinese version of the inscription reads:

In Chinese sources, the world of ultimate bliss refers to the Buddhist heaven of Tuṣita, (which is like) a large round mirror without differentiating this realm from the other realm. (There are) numerous ways and jewel trees. They can be as large as Mount Meru or as minute as the hole of a pearl, and the sizes are beyond transitory phenomena. The Buddha's heart is like an ocean of great virtue, so the Buddha's white ūrṇā curl emits light between the eyebrows without finitude. In the middle appears Buddha Amitāyus, dignified in appearance, illuminating and enlightening all living creatures. Observing the Buddha sitting on the Lotus Pond with his palms joined, does that mean I have met with the Buddha? The excellent embroidery painting with intricately linked threads, bustling or peaceful, is epitomized by the Tripiṭaka. (This inscription was) drafted by the imperial hand in the second lunar month of the forty-seventh year of Qianlong's reign.<sup>65</sup>

Qianlong responded to the description of the Western Paradise in the *sutra*. The image of

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<sup>65</sup> Midian Zhulin, 361. The entry reads, "This painting is a Xuande annotated version, with a length of nine *chi* four *cun* and its width seven *cun* six *fen*. The polychromatic painting features the Buddha on a lotus throne, surrounded by ten disciples across the sky. It shows the heavenly maids scattering flowers, playing musical instruments, and clapping their hands with the sound echoing in the [surrounding] space. Solemn palatial architecture, a pond with the Eight Virtues, lotuses, trees, and various jewels were included." The seal reads: "February of the twenty fourth reign year of the Qianlong Emperor, respectfully painted by Courtier Ding Guanpeng." Another seal reads, "Respectfully painted by Courtier Ding Guanpeng." The calligraphy in four languages by the imperial hand, dated to Renxu year of Qianlong's reign, was inscribed on the work, reading, "华言极乐梵兜率陀, 一大圆镜, 非此他界。道重重, 宝树种种, 大则须弥, 小则铢孔, 而彼大小皆如来。心如是海会, 如是梵香白毫相光于佛顶, 放无央相, 间现佛无量, 相好堂堂, 慧日法雷, 海会众生。胥如其来池莲华中合掌而坐, 谓见佛乎? 优有者, 绣线为图, 缕缕丝丝, 是说是, 默三藏概之。壬寅仲春月中瀚御赞'。鉴藏宝玺, 八宝全: 五福五代堂古稀天子宝、八徵耄念之宝," 宝玺还有: 太上皇帝之宝、嘉庆御览之宝、宣统御览之宝、宣统鉴赏、无逸斋精鉴玺."

the mirror, the jewel trees, the Buddhas of the ten directions and the vision of the Buddha as the source of light rays, which were mentioned in the imperial inscription, envisioned the Western Paradise as that described in the Sutra. In a manner similar to Ding Guanpeng, who tailored the pictorial illustration of the Western Paradise in accordance with imperial interests, Qianlong also added his own particular understanding of the scene. While the image of the mirror, as in the sutra, refers to the association of clear vision with meditation, Emperor Qianlong uses the mirror as a metaphor to hint at the non-duality of the Western Paradise.

Qianlong's understanding of the role of images in assisting in the visualization of the Buddha resonates with the Pure Land Buddhist tradition in which imagination plays a central role in the path to Enlightenment. The textual description of the Sukhāvātī, or the Western Paradise, in the Pure Land sutra is itself an image of the Sukhāvātī, which attempts to evoke the enlightenment or awakening, or the essentially indescribable.<sup>66</sup> Central to the goal of achieving an awakened state of being is the ability to see one's surrounding as impermanent. Since things and people are relatively stable, one can only see through the illusion of this stability with the help of one's imagination.<sup>67</sup> The fundamental purpose of the pictorial representation of Buddha Amitāyus' Pure Land, therefore, is to assist the devotee's meditative cultivation and to serve as "votive offerings for the accumulation of merits for rebirth in the Pure Land."<sup>68</sup>

Emperor Qianlong's perception of images as a short cut for evoking Buddha Amitābha also aligns with the Esoteric tradition. There has been considerable dispute on how to characterize Esoteric Buddhism and whether it has been practiced in China as a distinct school,

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<sup>66</sup> Ratnaguna and Śraddhāpa, *Great faith, Great wisdom: Practice and Awakening in the Pure Land Sutras of Mahayana Buddhism* (Cambridge, MA: Windhorse Publications, 2016): 2.

<sup>67</sup> Ratnaguna and Śraddhāpa, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Puay-peng Ho, "Paradise on Earth: Architectural Depiction in Pure Land Illustration of High Tang Caves at Dunhuang" *Oriental Art* 41, no. 3 (Fall 1995), 22.

while most share the belief that the school is distinguished by the self-conscious emphasis on the incantation of Dhāraṇī, often assisted by images and icons in elaborately performed rituals to invoke Buddhist deities.<sup>69</sup> Visualization in esoteric practice, as recently proposed, should be understood in conjunction with the consecration of images and as an extension of liturgical performance.<sup>70</sup>

From the perspective of Emperor Qianlong, how would he understand Western Paradise in terms of the overall Buddhist cosmology? Many agree that the Buddhist art produced at the Qing court was trans-cultural, quoted from various cultural sources, and was closely related to Tibetan models.<sup>71</sup> However, the essence of Manchu rulers' Buddhist practices and their art commissions is difficult to characterize succinctly. The question has generally been posed in the historiography as: Did the Manchu rulers' engagement in Buddhism reveal sincere religious interest, or was it merely an instrumentalist way to rule the Mongols? It has been a thorny question in Qing studies since evidences in support of the seemingly opposing views are found. Scholars have gradually realized the religion-politics dichotomy presumed in such a historiography question and efforts have been made to reconcile the seemingly "contrasting" stands. Patricia Berger, in her *Empire of emptiness* (2003), attempted to reconcile the seeming paradox in Emperor Qianlong's Buddhist practice with the language of Buddhism itself. In a nutshell, this paradox can be summarized as follows: On the one hand, Emperor Qianlong was notoriously indulgent in the material world, and his fascination with sensual objects has long faced scholars. At the same time, as Berger has shown, Emperor Qianlong's intimate relationship

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<sup>69</sup> Robert Sharf, "On Esoteric Buddhism in China," in *Coming to terms with Chinese Buddhism: a Reading of the Treasure Store Treatise* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002): 263-278.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Orzech, "Tantric Subjects: Liturgy and Vision in Chinese Esoteric Ritual Manuals," *Chinese and Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism* (Boston: Brill, 2017): 18.

<sup>71</sup> Patricia Ann Berger, "Lineages of Form: Buddhist Portraiture in the Manchu Court," *The Tibet Journal* 28, no. 1/2 (April 2003): 109.

with the national preceptor Changkya Khutukhtu, his high attainment of the Tantric doctrine and Tibetan language, as well as the emperor's regular practices in the Buddhist complex constructed across the imperial space, which rigidly follow Tantric iconography, make it nearly impossible to deny Emperor Qianlong's sincere devotion to Buddhism.

The controversy in Emperor Qianlong's own Buddhist practices culminated in his notorious 1792 edict *Lama Shuo*, in which the emperor blandly proclaimed that "by patronizing the Yellow Church we maintain peace among the Mongols. This being an important task we cannot but protect this (religion). (In doing so) we do not show any bias, nor do we wish to adulate the Tibetan priests as (was done during the) Yuan dynasty."<sup>72</sup> Qianlong's late-in-life *Lama shuo* has been an influential text for interpreting Qing official attitudes toward Tibetan Buddhism, and has been frequently cited as evidence for the pure political motivation behind the Manchu patronage of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>73</sup> Elverskog noted that ever since the Emperor Qianlong's claim in *Lama Shuo*, the discourse on Qing patronage of Tibetan Buddhism has followed the same refrain, that Buddhism functioned merely as political tool to control the Mongols.<sup>74</sup> Such understanding commonly appeared in the Qing-period Mongolian histories, in writings of post-Qing Mongol nationalists and Marxists, Japanese imperialists, and contemporary Mongolists and Sinologists, the Oxford English Dictionary, or even Mongol Christians justifying their conversion.<sup>75</sup> The shared assumption is that the Manchu emperors attracted the Mongols with the appeal of the Dharma.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Berger's translation, *Empire of emptiness*, 35.

<sup>73</sup> See Illich's overview, "Illich provides an excellent, detailed overview of the history of academic interpretation of Qing patronage of Tibetan Buddhism, both strictly political and otherwise. Illich, "Selection," 160-66.

<sup>74</sup> Johan Elverskog's *Our Great Qing* (2006): 3.

<sup>75</sup> Elverskog, 3.

<sup>76</sup> Elverskog, 3. Worth noting is that such discourses are mostly undertaken for discursive ends. The community of Qing scholars, as mentioned above, has long come to realized that Emperor Qianlong was serious about his Buddhist

Written after the Gurkha invasion of Tibet, Emperor Qianlong was excoriating the corruption of Tibetan Buddhist hierarchs and claimed that the imperial patronage of Gelukpa existed merely for political expediency. Meanwhile, *Lama Shuo* articulates Emperor Qianlong's consciousness of the important role of his personal devotion to Tibetan Buddhism in the political employment of Tibetan Buddhism in unifying the Mongols, asserting that "It is only because of his familiarity with Tibetan Buddhism that he is uniquely equipped to reform its practices."<sup>77</sup> The notorious conflict between Emperor Qianlong's claim that the Qing patronage of Gelukpa was merely politically expedient and his own personal devotion to the religion, according to Berger, can be at least partly explained by the death of Rolpay Dorje in 1786.<sup>78</sup>

Wang cited Emperor Qianlong's almost self-contradictory claim inscribed on a shrine at Yongyou Si (Temple of Eternal Protection) in Jehol, which reads,

Although the way of Buddha is different from that of Confucius, their reasoning is the same... It is my intention that the coming generation see from this tablet that in honorable feats of war I have followed the example of my forefathers, and spread fear and veneration. If one carries out a constant propagation of the doctrines of Buddhism merely in order to attain an immediate benefit for governing, half of one's consideration is wrong.<sup>79</sup>

For Wenhua Luo, it is impossible to deny Emperor Qianlong's sincerity in his Buddhist practices. From the first year of Emperor Qianlong's reign, he gradually transformed the rear room of the Hall of Mental Cultivation (养心殿) to his own Buddhist chamber where the

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practices.

<sup>77</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 36, note 4.

<sup>78</sup> Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 9.

<sup>79</sup> Wang, "The inscription, dated 1754, is quoted in Yang Tianzai, *Bishu shanzhuang beiwen shiyi* (Annotation on the inscriptions at the Summer Palace)" 101–102.

Amitayus pagoda, the Five Tathagatas, the Father Tantra and Mother Tantra of the Highest Yoga Tantra in the esoteric tradition. While it seems to be useful to understand Emperor Qianlong's engagement with Buddhism by understanding the multiplicity of his roles, both as a politician and an ardent devotee, Luo also admits that from Emperor Qianlong's own perspective, it would be hard to draw a clear boundary between his political and religious need for Buddhism.

That his private Buddhist practice was hard to distinguish from his use of Buddhism as a political appeal to the Mongols reveals a more realistic state of the Manchu Emperor.<sup>80</sup> In this sense, the historiographical question of whether the imperial patronage of Tibetan Buddhism reveals the Manchu emperors' sincere belief in the religion or its mere political expediency is based on the assumption that the reality is one way or the other. Luo has cited a series of historical details to illustrate that the emperor's role exchange as a political leader and as a religious devotee was not always successful.<sup>81</sup>

Berger put forward several useful concepts which shed insightful light on Emperor Qianlong's engagement with Tibetan Buddhism regarding the familiar historiographical question. These concepts have similarly shaped my study on Emperor Qianlong's patronage of Ding Guanpeng's painting and the various reproductions in textile form that took Ding's painting as their source. In my discussions of these related works, as I will show in the following chapters, will come back to these concepts:

- That the emperor's engagement with Tibetan Buddhism can be understood in light of the multifaceted roles of the emperor both as a political leader and as a Buddhist devotee,

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<sup>80</sup> See Luo's *Longpao yu jiasha* (2005): 370.

<sup>81</sup> Luo, 370.

which are different yet closely associated.<sup>82</sup>

- That the emperor's Buddhist art commissions require political understanding.
- That the copies commissioned by the emperor reveal Emperor Qianlong's desire to correct and reproduce the past. The imperial patron's active engagement in the creative process, in providing "authoritative" advice and instructions, makes the emperor the Buddhist insider.

Moreover, Berger, in attempting to further explain and reconcile the conflict, has pointed out that the emperor's Buddhist practice in his private chamber cannot be separated from and was rather closely related to the political significance of the religion in unifying the Qing empire. She has reasoned that the influence of the Buddhist iconography in the Yuhua Pavilion, designed by the Rolpay Dorje for the purpose of the emperor's private practice, finally approached the larger Tibetan Buddhist community in Beijing. Berger further cited Luo Wenhua's observation that the Buddhist subject matter of thangkas in the Yuhua Pavilion, which were commissioned for the emperor's engagement of Buddhism, once assisted the creation of *All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas* between 1750 and 1756.<sup>83</sup> "A court document dated to 1756 supports the assumption and corroborates von S...thinking about the

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<sup>82</sup> In Rawski's accounts of the private rituals of the Manchu rulers, Crossley presented the larger picture in which a variety of ritual practices coexisted in the Qing court, including shamanism, Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Was there any priority among them? She consciously drew a distinction between the public patronage of the court and the personal practice of the imperial nobles, while she argued that the later was a fusion of various cultural influences. She concluded, in the example of Emperor Guangxu's New Year rituals, that "public rites did not necessarily take precedence over private ceremonies" on the assumption that the sequence of rites performed by the emperor signifies the priority. Rawski will need more evidence to testify her assumption. Considering the large number of royal families who were involved, temporal limits and the mass geographical expansion of the empire, the sequence of the rites, especially on the special occasion of the Chinese New Year, could be arranged simply for the sake of expediency to coordinate everyone's schedule and not necessarily reflect any priority of certain rites over the others.

<sup>83</sup> Berger (2003), 111.

use of the pantheon as a design model for *tsa tsa* model.”<sup>84</sup> Berger, with her interest in both visual culture and Buddhism, reconciled the conflicts by looking at how Emperor Qianlong himself once envisioned his Buddhist projects. The two distinct Buddhist roles Emperor Qianlong assumed were not in conflict, but were understood in light of the Double Truth in the Buddhist doctrine.<sup>85</sup>

Another important theme of Berger’s book is Emperor Qianlong’s reproduction and his fastidious attitude towards the correction of past Buddhist works. Berger has demonstrated that Emperor Qianlong, rather than merely envisioning his Buddhist art commissions as a political appeal to his Mongol subjects, showed great concern for the religious correctness of the visual translations. To resolve this paradox, Berger examined the emperor’s self-perception to understand Emperor Qianlong’s double Buddhist roles, both as an enlightened Chinese layman in the sensory world and as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.<sup>86</sup>

Berger recognized the contribution made by historians such as Mark Elliot, who have provided a readable account of the Manchu way from political, social, ethnic and legal perspectives, and Evelyn Rawski and Pamela Crossley, who shed light onto the Manchu construction of cultural identity and the multicultural perception of Qing rulership.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, Berger consciously aligned herself with David Farquhar and Samuel Grupper, regarding her study as a visual counterpart to the historians’ textual approach. While confirming Emperor Qianlong’s devotion to the Buddhist religion, Berger introduced Charles Orzech’s study of *the Humane King Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* and the imperial patronage of Vajrayana Buddhism in the Tang Dynasty, arguing that Emperor Qianlong’s distinct Buddhist roles “permitted, even

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<sup>84</sup> Berger, *Emptiness*, 112.

<sup>85</sup> Berger, *Emptiness*, 112.

<sup>86</sup> See Patricia Berger (2003), p4.

<sup>87</sup> See Patricia Berger (2003), “introduction”, note 14.

demanded, political interpretation.”<sup>88</sup> An important feature of Buddhist art in Emperor Qianlong’s court was its manipulation of messages, and even the “impenetrability and refusal to yield meaning,” as a result of the emperor’s active role as a message sender. <sup>89</sup> The Tibetan-inspired visual culture in Qianlong’s reign, for Berger, had “debts to 17th and 18th century Mongolian art.”<sup>90</sup> Emperor Qianlong’s Buddhist project, characterized by the pious copies, translation, and correction, as Berger analyzed, was a way to “construct and manipulate the past, the present and future” and to “make the past present again.”<sup>91</sup> Moreover, according to Berger, the emperor’s act of copying was meanwhile informed by the Chinese cultural tradition of attributing authenticity to the past, so that the action of copying itself was a “method of self-cultivation.”<sup>92</sup>

The emperor’s eclectic Buddhist outlook, claiming to unify the various schools as one, further complicated the iconographical and stylistic choices of the court representation of the Western Paradise. The emperor would hardly perceive the Western Paradise in Guanxiu’s and Ding Guanpeng’s paintings as from the distinct source of Pure Land Buddhism. The highly Tibetanized vision of the Western Paradise presented in the carved red sandalwood hanging screen with a Buddhist shrine and *tsha tsha* challenges against the absolute Pure Land source for the Western Paradise in Emperor Qianlong’s mind (fig.19). In Tibetan Buddhism, *tsha-tshas* are clay-molded miniature icons made to be carried on the pilgrimage by Buddhist practitioners or to fill the shrines of larger sculptures. The hanging screen accordingly surpassed a merely decorative function and served primarily as the Buddhist shrine of the Western Paradise. Interestingly, according to Luo Wenhua, the central deity was not Buddha Amitābha, but

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, introduction, note 11.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p10.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p13.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

Emperor Qianlong himself.<sup>93</sup> The proportionally significant portrait sculpture of the emperor is seated on a Tibetan-style cushioned throne. The inscription on the throne manifests the imperial identity.

Mañjuśrī (Smooth Lord), sharp-witted sovereign of men. Playful, unexcelled, great Dharma King, On the diamond seat, feet firm. May your wishes spontaneously meet good fortune!<sup>94</sup>

'Jam dpal rnon po mi'i rje bor rol pa'i bdag chen chos kyi rgyal rdo tje khri la zhabs brtan cing bzed don lun grub skal pa bzang.<sup>95</sup>

Moreover, the ritual aspect of the hanging screen echoes with the emperor's understanding of Guanxiu's painting as an aid to the imperial Buddhist practitioner's imagining of Buddha Amitābha's Western Paradise. The overall composition of the hanging screen conforms to Ding's painting of the Western Paradise, with the central deity sitting against palatial architecture contemplating the Lotus Pond on which souls are being reborn. Qianlong, in the guise of a Tibetan Buddhist monk, is physically positioned in his imagination of the Western Paradise he once described.<sup>96</sup> Originally displayed in *Cuishang Lou* 萃賞樓 (Pavilion of Enjoying Lush Scenery) in the Qianlong Garden, which was intended as his retirement complex, the hanging screen with the Emperor Buddha enshrined in the Western Paradise reveals the crystallization of the emperor's belief in the Western Paradise.

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<sup>93</sup> Wenhua Luo, "Qianlong de Jile Shijie," *China Collections* (2013): 94-5.

<sup>94</sup> English translation taken from Patricia Ann Berger, *Empire of emptiness*, 61.

<sup>95</sup> Wenhua Luo, "Qianlong de Jile Shijie," 94. The Chinese text reads, "睿智文殊人之主，游戏圣主法之王，金刚座上安奉足，意愿天成善福缘。"

<sup>96</sup> See note 22.

### 3.2 Qianlong's Sites for Western Paradise

Emperor Qianlong's obsession with the Western Paradise has much to do with the emperor's love and devotion to his biological mother, Empress Xiaoshengren (1693 -1777), who was of Mongolian descent and a devoted Buddhist herself. Both the Chanfu Temple and the Little Paradise were built for Empress Xiaoshengren's birthday. As Berger observed, Amitābha was the favorite theme of gift giving on his mother birthdays, and the number of gifts were always calculated in terms of nine.<sup>97</sup> The emperor's mother had received nine, and then ninety, nine hundred, and even nine thousand icons of Buddha Amitābha from Emperor Qianlong as birthday gifts.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, *Cining Gong* 慈寧宮 (Palace of Compassion and Tranquility), Empress Xiaoshenxian's residence, was a regular site of the daily chanting of *the Amitayus Sutra*.<sup>99</sup>

The pictorial space of the Western Paradise in Ding's painting and the later textile reproductions can be understood in light of Emperor Qianlong's larger project of incorporating the theme of the Western Paradise into the imperial space. The scale of this project is revealed in the large quantities of statues of Buddha Amitābha and the Buddhist offerings dedicated to him recorded in the official archive of Palace Workshop.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the cult of the Western Paradise has been normalized through the imperial rituals dedicated to Buddha Amitābha on a regular basis.

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<sup>97</sup> Berger, *Emptiness*, chapter 2, note 40.

<sup>98</sup> Berger, *Emptiness*, 80.

<sup>99</sup> The chanting of *the Amitayus Sutra* was conducted daily and biweekly across the Forbidden City. See Berger, *Emptiness*, chapter 2, note 26.

<sup>100</sup> Records in the Zaobanchu Archives, quoted in Wang, Zilin. "Yuhua Ge: A discussion of this Buddhist centre in the Qianlong imperial palaces." *Palace Museum Journal* [The Palace Museum], no. 4 (2005).

I meant to provide a more comprehensive list of Emperor Qianlong's *Jile shijie daochang* (Bodhimaṇḍas of the Supreme Bliss World) in the imperial palace for future research.<sup>101</sup> Wang Zilin's article, "Xifang Jile Shijie Daochang" (2008) is important to this chapter as a foundational work; it included the Chinese official archive *Jile shijie dang* (The Archive of the Western Paradise), which confirmed the regular rituals dedicated to Buddha Amitābha's Pure Land in the imperial palace. Based on the records, Emperor Qianlong frequently went to the sites for the Western Paradise in person or assigned imperial family members and lamas as substitutes to pray for his mother's and his own longevity. Until the fifty-ninth year of his reign, at the age of 83, the emperor continued to attend the ritual in person.<sup>102</sup> The frequency of his attendance in *Jile shijie* reveals the religious significance of the sites and Emperor Qianlong's personal devotion to the Western Paradise.

Moreover, Wang provided a list of *Jile shijie* in the Forbidden City and defined *Jile shijie* in the Qing palaces based on three criteria.<sup>103</sup> For Wang, these Buddhist sites for Western Paradise were those where a plaque inscribed with Emperor Qianlong's own calligraphy, *Jile shijie anyang daochang* 極樂世界安養道場 (Bodhimaṇḍas for the Supreme Bliss World of Serene Cultivation), was displayed; where a miniature heavenly space, models of hills and valleys emulating the Western Paradise, would be enshrined; and in such sites, paintings with

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<sup>101</sup> See Lopez, Donald S. *Buddhism in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 276. Daochang originally referred to the "site where the Buddha attained enlightenment," and it also refers to the site where the Buddha or enlightenment is invoked and sought through rituals. Daochang can therefore denote an altar, chapel, or any place of Buddhist practices. The regular rituals of Pure Land worship generally begins with an incense offering and the chanting of the congregation. Worshippers then progress to the mental recollection of the specific forms, physically and spiritually, of Amitābha Buddha and the two accompanying bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta, and finally to the practitioners themselves in the Pure Land themselves facing the Buddha and repenting their sins. Seeking rebirth in Buddha Amitābha's Pure Land Sukhavati, the worshippers were pledging themselves to a purified environment without obstacles to their salvation, which was in alignment with the universal Mahayana goal of enlightenment.

<sup>102</sup> See the appendix in Zilin Wang, "Xifang Jile Shijie Daochang." *Fayuan* (Zhongguo Foxueyuan) 26 (2008): 305–323.

<sup>103</sup> Zilin Wang, 91.

the subject of Western Paradise or statues of the related Buddhist deities would be displayed. Wang's definition centered on Emperor Qianlong's own conscious effort to distinguish the Bodhimaṇḍas for the Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss from other Buddhist sites in the imperial space with his calligraphy. Meanwhile, Wang's list precluded those sites in which Buddhist Amitābha was enshrined, but not as the primary deity.

Based on this definition, Wang listed five Bodhimaṇḍas for the Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss which were once located in, firstly, the front hall on the first floor of *Yuhua Ge* (Pavilion of Raining Flowers), built in the fourteenth year of Qianlong's reign; secondly, the Palace of Double Glory (*chonghuagong*), whose original display no longer exists; thirdly, the eastern room of the Retreat for Cultivating Harmony in the Qianlong Garden, built in the thirty-seventh year of Qianlong's reign; fourthly, *Yizhai*, at Southeastern corner of the Qianlong Garden's front yard, constructed in the same year; and finally, *Xiangyun Ting* (Pavilion of Fragrant Clouds), where a *thangka* of Buddha Amitābha was displayed. The scale of Qianlong's sites for Western Paradise in the imperial space is larger than Wang had expected. Based on Wang's definition, I am already able to supplement the list of *Jile shijie* he had proposed by adding one more Buddhist sites for the Western Paradise in the Qing imperial place, which is the *Jile shijie* in Chanfu Si 闡福寺 (Temple of Demonstrating Blessings).

To the west of Chanfu Temple was an independent architecture dedicated to *Jile shijie* (hereafter *Jile shijie*). Together with Wanfo Lou 萬佛樓 (Ten Thousand Buddhas Hall), which was unfortunately destroyed in 1916, *Jile shijie* 極樂世界 was often referred to as *Xiao xitian* 小西天 [Little Western Heaven].<sup>104</sup> The construction of *Jile shijie* started from the thirty-third year

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<sup>104</sup> See note 61. Susan Naquin, *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000): 41.

of Qianlong's reign and finished two years later.<sup>105</sup> It was commissioned by Emperor Qianlong to celebrate the eightieth birthday of Empress Xiaoshengren. *Jile shijie* very likely served as the ritual site that Qianlong had frequently attended in person, as recorded in *Jile shijie dang*.<sup>106</sup>

In 1922, Bredon gave a detailed description of the inner settings of *Jile shijie*, which reads:

the Hsiao His Tien or 'Little Western Heaven,' with its broken images, amidst model hills and valleys representing the Paradise of the gentle Buddha Amitābha where those who have deserved happy immortality revel in perpetual youth..... all these old buildings and monuments appear as hated precincts asleep like the enchanted palaces of some fairy-tale, silent and deserted since those who built and enjoyed them ceased to be.<sup>107</sup>

Bredon's description discloses an earlier state of the Little Western Heaven which should be truer to its original state than we can see today. The description points to the serenity of the space and its isolation from other imperial palaces. In *Jile shijie*, a plaque with Emperor Qianlong's own inscription of four Chinese characters, *Jile shijie*, was hung in the main hall over the models of mountains and plants emulating the Western Paradise (fig.20). On the top of the mountain models sits the gold statue of Buddha Amitābha, who is distinguished from other Buddhist deities and *luohans* both in material and size (fig.21). The central Buddha of the Western Paradise is seated under a pavilion-like building that functions as a canopy. The color scheme

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Susan Naquin cited another two references, *Qinding Rixia Jiuwen Kao* and Chen Zongfan's *Yandu Congkao*, for Emperor Qianlong's miniature heavens, she would have confused the Small Western Paradise (*xiao xitian*) and the Large Western Paradise (*da xitian*), also called the Buddhist Realm of the Western Paradise (*xitian fanjing*). The Large Western Paradise was originally a Ming lama temple and was ordered by Emperor Qianlong to be renovated and extended to the west in 1759. The main architecture of the Large Western Paradise is the Palace for the Four Heavenly Kings (*tianwang dian*), rather than the Bodhimaṇḍa for the Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss.

<sup>105</sup> Erxun Zhao, *Qingshigao* (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1977), vol. 118: 3437.

<sup>106</sup> See note 47.

<sup>107</sup> Juliet Bredon, *Peking: a Historical and Intimate Description of its Chief Places of Interest* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1922): 97.

and the dragon patterns of the canopy coordinates with the style of the larger architectural elements. The scenery of the Western Paradise was not limited to the area within the architectural itself. Without constructing any models of the pond in which souls were supposed to get reborn, the designer of the square pavilion made use of its location in the imperial garden where water abounded. An aquatic channel was made around the square pavilion and the scenery of the Western Paradise to therefore extend it to the outside.

Another potential site for the Western Paradise in the imperial palace was in the *Yuanmingyuan* 圓明園 (The Garden of Perfect Brightness). Located in the west of the Fairy's Islet, the World of Supreme Bliss (*Jile shijie*) served as the site for Buddhist and Daoist rituals.<sup>108</sup> Located at the center of the Sea of Blessing Laje (*fuhai*), the Fairy's Islet was one of the Forty Views designed in *the Yuanmingyuan*, and Qianlong referred to the place as the *pengdao yaotai* 蓬萊仙島 (Immortal Abode on the Fairy Terrace).<sup>109</sup> Qianlong would have frequently visited the place and launched the dragon boat race there to celebrate the Mid-May Festival.<sup>110</sup> Regarding the original intention of the Mid-May Festival to mourn the death of the patriotic poet Qu Yuan, it is intriguing to associate Qianlong's choice of location for the dragon boat race with the World of Supreme Bliss in the Fairy Islet. Similar to the *Jile shijie* in the Small Western Heaven in terms of its architectural plan, the *Jile shijie* was also surrounded by natural water, which could have been incorporated as part of the Western Paradise.

The Bodhimaṇḍa for the Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss in the Qing palaces served as important sites for the emperor's personal practice. Qianlong's practice was not interrupted even during his southern inspection tours. Qianlong visited Yunqi Monastery, one of the most

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<sup>108</sup> Young-tsu Wong, *A Paradise Lost : the Imperial Garden Yuanming Yuan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001): 44.

<sup>109</sup> Wong, Young-tsu, 44.

<sup>110</sup> Zhao Lian, *Xiaoting Zalu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980).

influential Pure Land monasteries in Hangzhou, on each of his six southern tours.<sup>111</sup> On the eleventh day of the third lunar month in the twenty-seventh year of his reign, Qianlong revisited Yunqi Monastery and offered incense in the main hall. According to the abbot, Emperor Qianlong, after the Buddhist rituals, meditated in the depth of the bamboo grove. The emperor then drafted *Xifang jile shijie anyang daochang* (The Bodhimaṇḍa for the Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss), which was later inscribed on a plaque.<sup>112</sup>

For Emperor Qianlong, the sites for the Western Paradise in the imperial Buddhist temple were also significant as prayers for longevity. The Retreat for Cultivating Harmony (Yanghejing She) is located in the Palace of Tranquil Longevity, which is also referred to as the Qianlong Garden, intended to become the retirement complex of Emperor Qianlong. The overall design of the entire retirement complex reveals the emperor's nostalgic concerns. Many have argued that the Qianlong Garden is a miniature Forbidden City, combining copies of other places which once played a significant role in Qianlong's life as an emperor.<sup>113</sup> A couplet written by Emperor Qianlong in the forty-first year of his reign, "bring tranquility to the world and its people, and longevity will be the first of the five happinesses," points to the wish for longevity carried in the name of palace.<sup>114</sup>

Considering the limited space of the Qianlong Garden as compared to other Palaces in the Forbidden City, the importance of the site for the Western Paradise in praying for the emperor's longevity is clear. Also worth noticing is that the completion of the reconstruction of the Palace of Tranquil Longevity coincided with the expected submission date of Emperor Qianlong's order of two brocade works of Ding Guanpeng's painting of the *Supreme Bliss World* in the fortieth year

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<sup>111</sup> Xiaojun Yan, "Dong Qichang yu Hangzhou Zhu Wenti Kao II," in *Rongbaozhai* 06 (2009): 276.

<sup>112</sup> Anonymous, *Yunqi Jishi*, (Qing Guangxu Qiantang Dingshi), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 9-2.

<sup>113</sup> Kristina Kleutghen, *Imperial Illusions: Crossing Pictorial Boundaries in the Qing Palaces* (Washington : The University of Washington Press, 2015): 113.

<sup>114</sup> Kleutghen, 113.

of his reign. The brocade version of Ding's painting might not have been commissioned to be displayed in the Retreat for Cultivating Harmony, yet such a reading sheds light onto what might have occupied the emperor's mind when he commissioned the brocade version of the Western Paradise.

## Conclusion

This paper investigates the transformation of the Qing imperial palace into the sacred realm of Buddha Amitābha and the crystallization of the Emperor Qianlong's belief in Western Paradise. The first part studies Ding's painting of the *Supreme Bliss World* on its own terms. While Ding Guanpeng's painting of the Supreme Bliss World conforms to the pictorial tradition of portrayals of the Western Paradise, the subjects included and the stylistic preference, which are intimately associated with Manchu court practices, reveal that Ding's painting is steeped in particular imperial interests.

The second part of this study has disclosed the series of records in official archives that provide useful information on the bilateral interaction between the imperial patron and the local artisans. Emperor Qianlong was actively involved in the reproduction of textile copies of Ding's painting by setting prerequisites and evaluating the final products, yet the effectiveness of the emperor was in turn influenced by the craftsmanship. The process of making these artifacts involved negotiations between the imperial patron and the craftsmen who produced them. The absolute effectiveness of the imperial authority is complicated by the complex technical processes involved in making textile duplications. From the initial copy of Guanxiu's painting to the forty-seventh year of Qianlong's reign, the theme of the Western Paradise was a recurrent theme in the emperor's life through this series of imperial commissions.

The last section of this study explores the sites dedicated to the Western Paradise across the imperial space. The modified vision of the Western Paradise, in the eye of the emperor, served as a conduit to the visualization of Buddha Amitābha's realm. Such contextualization brings us a more nuanced understanding of the impetus behind this series of commissions. The objects examined in this paper transcend the category of art and religion, serving as they did the greater imperial authority.

The Bodhimaṇḍas for the Western Paradise of Ultimate Bliss were of religious significance for the Manchu ruler. The incorporation of the Pure Land Western Paradise into the imperial space illustrates the emperor's unified vision of Buddhist cosmology. In these pictorial translations—from Guanxiu's late Tang painting to Ding's painting during Emperor Qianlong's reign, from Ding's painting on *xuan* paper to the various textile surfaces, and from the imaginary space of private devotion to the physical spaces created for religious rituals—the cult of the Western Paradise was normalized as an integral part of Emperor's path to enlightenment.

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# Images



Fig. 1. Ding Guanpeng, *Supreme Bliss World* (1758). Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper. 295.8 x 148.8 cm. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei. *Guhua* 003705.



Fig. 2. Anonymous, *Kesi Copy of Ding Guanpeng's Supreme Bliss World*. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.

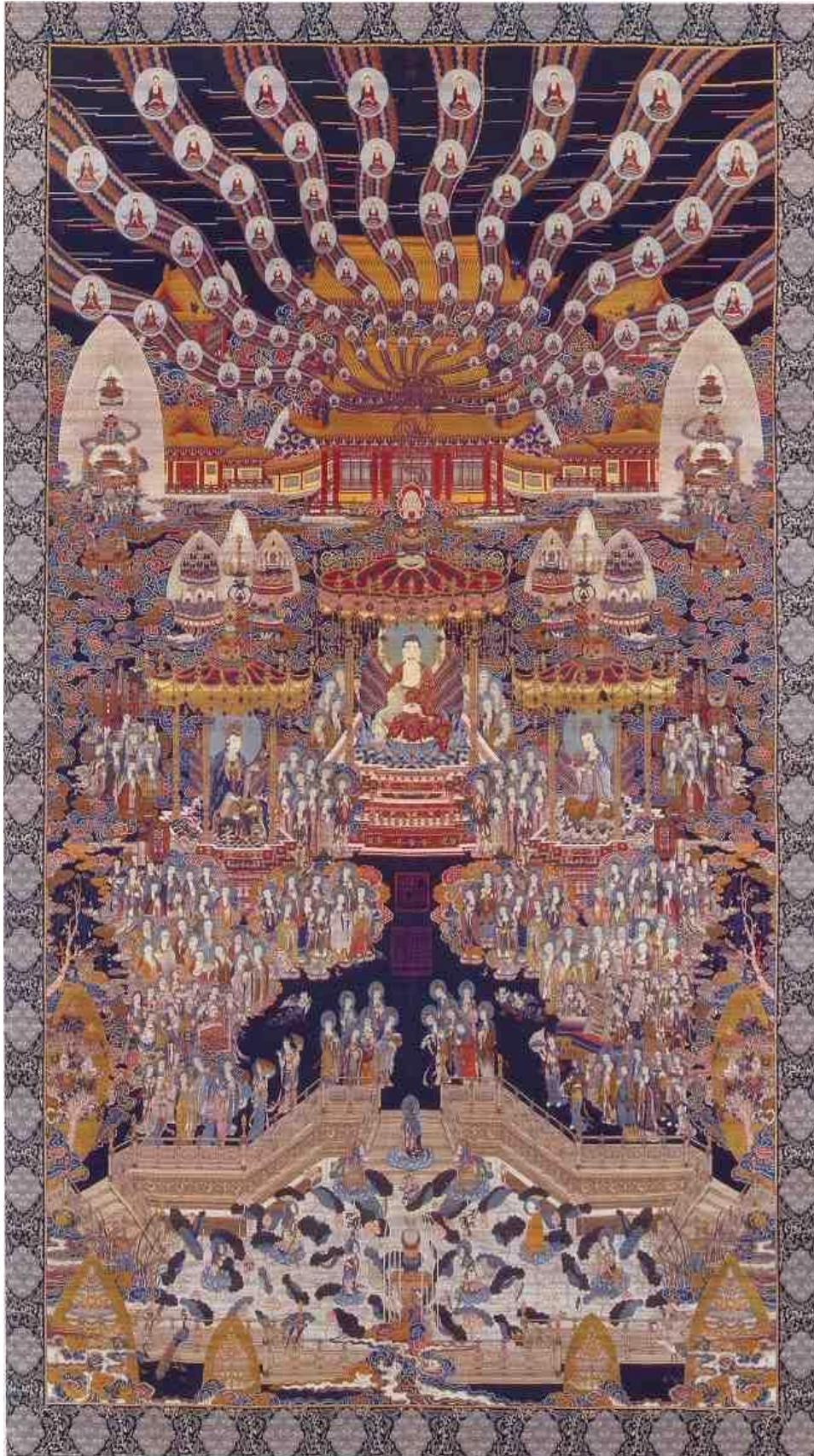


Fig. 3. Anonymous, *Weaving a Brocade Scroll of the Supreme Bliss World on an Azurite-colored Ground* (*Shiqing di jile shijie zhichengjin tuzhou* 石青地极乐世界织成锦圖軸). Song brocade tapestry. 448 x 196 cm. In the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing.



Fig. 4. Ding Guanpeng, *The Sixteen Lohans: Abhedha* (number 16). Hanging scroll, ink and colors on paper. 127.5 x 57.5 cm. In the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 5-1. Anonymous, *Marvellous Scene of Western Paradise* (*Xifang shengjing* 西方盛景). Mural painting. 7.13 m x 4.36 m. In the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing.



Fig. 5-2. Anonymous, *Marvellous Scene of Western Paradise* (*Xifang shengjing* 西方盛景). Mural painting. Dated to Ming dynasty. Mural painting. 7.13 m x 4.36 m. In Moni Dian, Longxing Temple, Zhengding, Heibei.

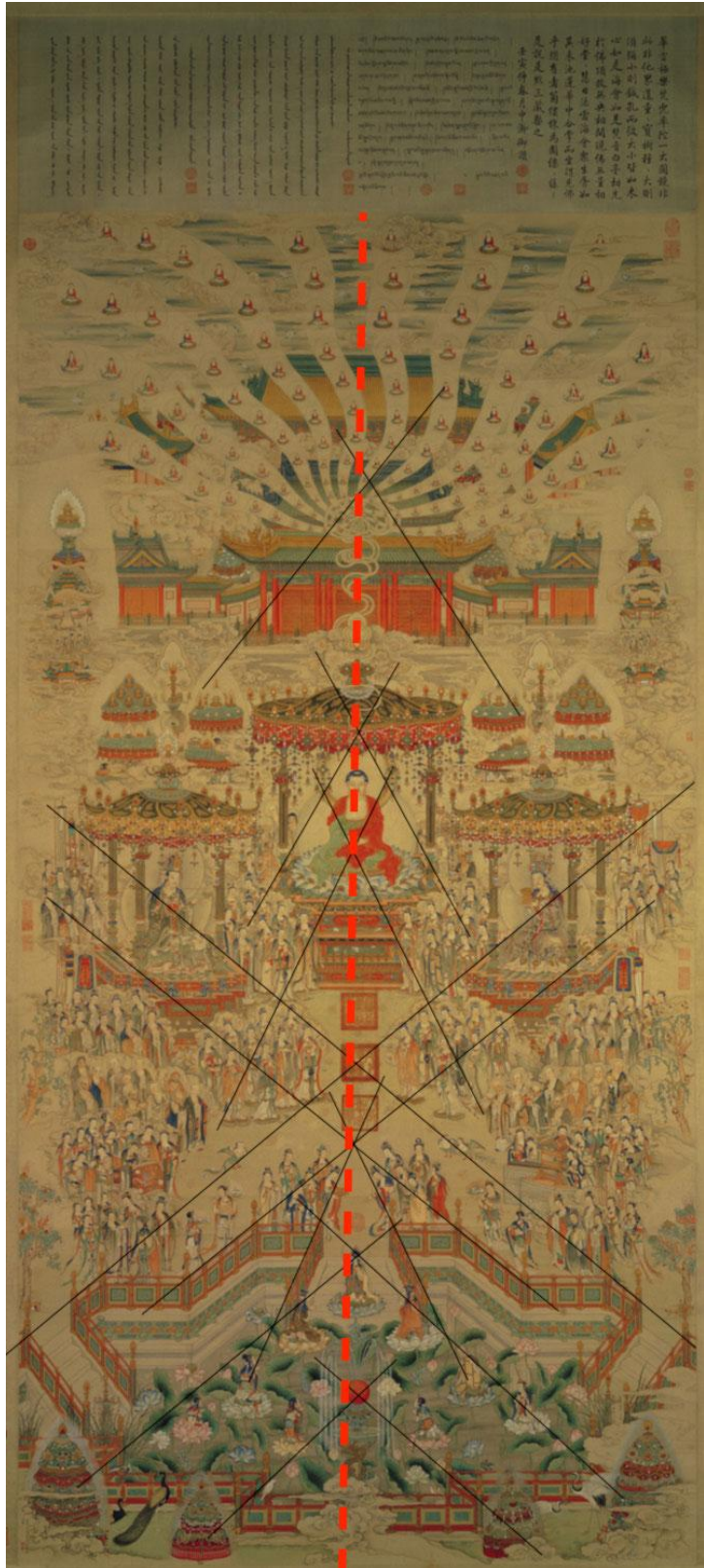


Fig.6. Compositional analysis of Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World* (1758).



Fig.7. Compositional analysis of *Xifang shengjing*.

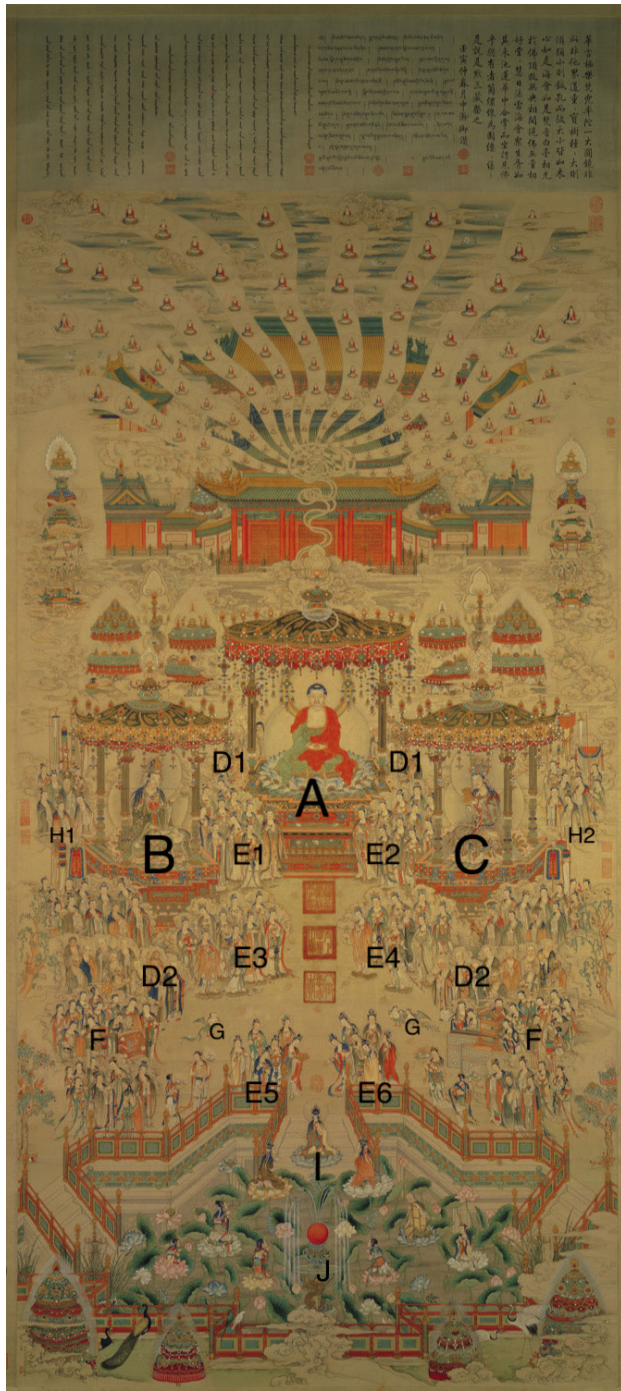


Fig. 8 Iconographical analysis of Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*

A	Buddha Amitābha	F	Musicians
B	Avalokiteśvara ( <i>Guanyin</i> 觀音)	G	<i>jivanjiva</i> and <i>kalavinka</i>
C	Mahāsthāmaprāpta ( <i>Dashizhi</i> 大勢至)	H	Chinese officials/patrons
D	Arhats ( <i>Luohan</i> 羅漢).	I	Lotus pond with reborn souls
E	Bodhisattvas	J	Fountain



Fig. 9. Partial scene of *Supreme Bliss Word* with Buddha Amitābha in the center.



Fig. 10A. Buddha Amitābha and two attendant bodhisattvas besides his throne in Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*



Fig. 10B. Buddha Amitābha and two attendant bodhisattvas besides his throne in *Xifang shengjing*.



Fig. 11A. Avalokiteśvara in Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*



Fig. 11B. Avalokiteśvara in *Xifang shengjing*.



Fig. 12A. Mahāsthāmaprāpta in Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*



Fig. 12B. Mahāsthāmaprāpta in *Xifang shengjing*.



Fig. 13A. A group of bodhisattvas in Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*



Fig. 13B. A group of bodhisattvas in *Xifang shengjing*



Fig. 14A. Musicians in Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*

Fig. 14B. Musicians in *Xifang shengjing*.



Fig. 15A. *Jivanjiva* and *kalaviṅka* in Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme Bliss World*.



Fig. 15B. *Jivanjiva* and *kalaviṅka* in *Xifang shengjing*.



Fig. 16A. Kneeling devotee in  
Ding Guanpeng's *Supreme  
Bliss World*.



Fig. 16B. Kneeling devotee in  
*Xifang shengjing*.



Fig. 17. Giuseppe Castiglione, *Peacock Spreading Its Tail Feathers* (1758), Hanging scroll, ink and color on paper. H:328cm, W: 282cm. In the collection of National Palace Museum, Taipei.



Fig. 18 *Paradise Scene*, Kesi Tapestry. 290 cm x 148 cm. In the collection of Palace Museum, Beijing.



Fig. 19 Carved red sandalwood hanging screen with Buddhist shrine and *tsha-tsha*. 166cm x 93 cm x 7.2 cm. In the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing.



Fig. 20 Photography of *Jile shijie*, taken in March 2018.



Fig. 21 Photography of *Jile shijie*, taken in March 2018.