

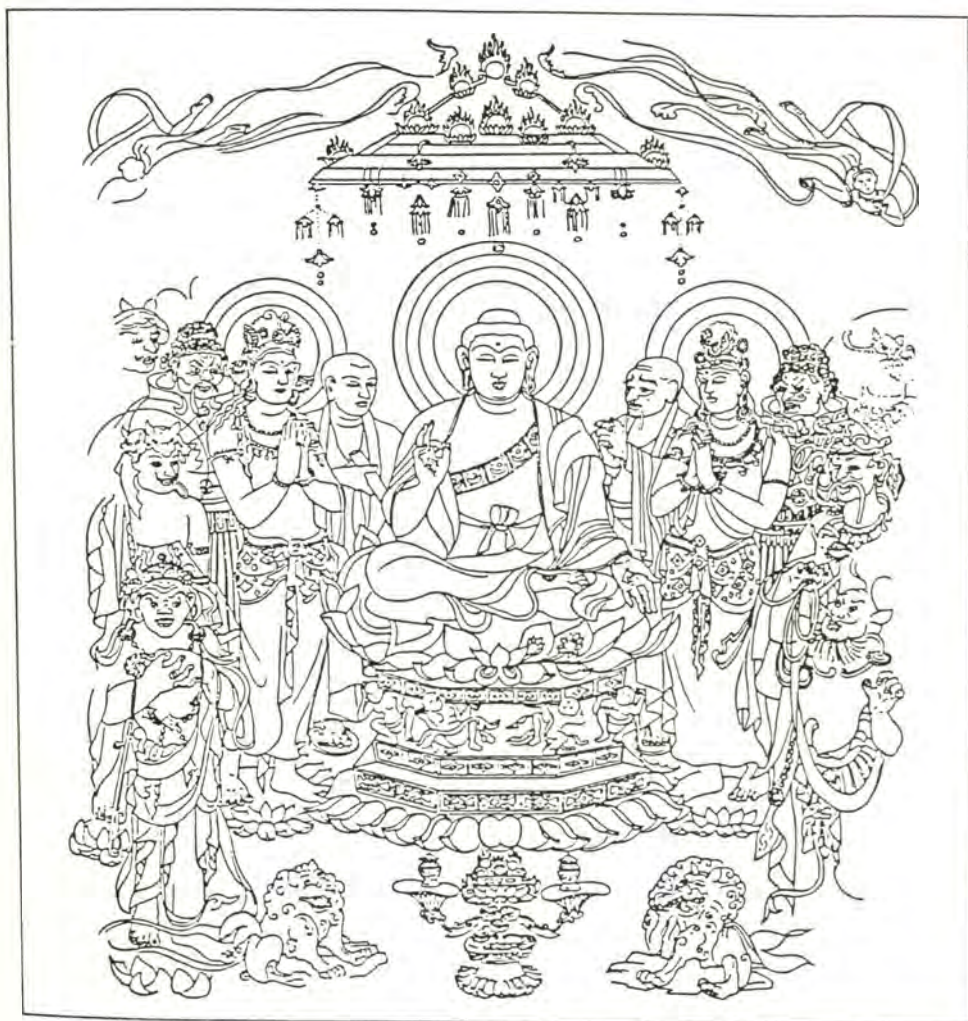
Painting

Buddhist sculpture and Buddhist painting are most intimately related. We may claim with some justification that paintings transpose three-dimensional figures onto a two-dimensional plane. This transposition was greatly facilitated by the fact that most sculptured works, as already mentioned earlier, are strongly tied to a two-dimensional plane. Principles of composition and other matters are similar and the aesthetic problem of the laws specific to each of these two fields of artistic endeavor has never been brought into sharp focus in East Asia to the degree this was done in Europe, if for no other reason than that the question of an "imitating" depiction of reality was not of crucial importance.

The distinction between the two is also less precise in another respect: cult figures or groups of figures such as free-standing sculptures in a temple room frequently emerge into their full three-dimensionality from a painted background and constitute therefore only one, albeit the most prominent, part of the entire iconographic "scene" which involves an intimate fusion with the other decorative elements and paintings of the interior of such temple halls (26). All elements act together as parts of an artistic continuum. In a religious sense it makes no difference whether a sacred figure is painted or sculpted. Much of what has been said in the previous chapter remains therefore valid here. For example, poses, movements, and expressions of individual figure types vary according to their level of existence, as does the treatment of bodies and garments and the relationship between them. The same holds true for the relationship of artistic forms and empirical reality in general. Once we have provided a survey of picture types, iconographical themes and technical procedures, we will, therefore, be free to turn our attention to the means of expression characteristic of painting: to the question of how painting, as a two-dimensional art, solves the problem of the third dimension, to the methods of composition, the treatment of lines and colors and the special contribution which painting has made to provide visual representations of the Buddhist world of ideas and images.⁷⁶

Picture Types and Themes

The most important Buddhist paintings in ancient times--now, unfortunately, for the most part destroyed or heavily damaged--are wall paintings found in temple halls, cave sanctuaries, or chapels of pagodas. Though East Asia never possessed the wealth of wall paintings found in the cave temples of Central Asia, pictures from places like Turfan or Tun-huang can contribute significantly to the iconographic, compositional and stylistic reconstruction of lost paintings. In particular, the "Thousand Buddha Grottoes" (Ch'ien-fo-tung) in Tun-huang, which was the westernmost outpost of Chinese art, still display today a representative sample of the kind of paintings (and, in part, also sculptures) used to furnish such sanctuaries. They come closest to giving us an impression of the original variety of paintings and the abundance of their forms and colors.



21* Diagram of a wall painting in the Golden Hall of the Hôryûji.

These paintings are mostly from the 5th to the 10th centuries, i.e., from the classic period of Buddhist art. Walls and ceilings are entirely covered with paintings, large hieratic compositions, narrow friezes, pictures of legendary figures and events, and a wealth of symbolic adornments. Nothing like this survives in China proper. In Japan a few more examples have been preserved from the classic period, but they, too, are scarce. Still, these remnants may serve, though not as substitutes, but at least as a basis for an imaginative reconstruction of lost continental models for which we have also extensive descriptions in literary sources, like the "Li-tai Ming-hua-chi" (Report of Famous Paintings in Historical Sequence) by Chang Yen-yüan (A.D. 847) who describes the wall paintings in the large temples of Ch'ang-an (modern Hsi-an), the splendid capital of the T'ang empire.

Several fragments of Chinese wall paintings, either from temples in China proper or from Central Asian sites, have found their way into Western collections. But many of these are either of provincial character or come from relatively late periods (i.e., after 1300). We lack, for instance, a sufficient number of original examples of the masterworks of the T'ang period. Only the best wall paintings in Tun-huang give us a true impression of the uniqueness and achievement of the art of classic Chinese wall paintings on the Asian continent.

It was Japan, however, which until recently provided the most important and oldest examples of a transplanted tradition of temple wall paintings in the famous works in the "Golden Hall" (Kondō) of the Hōryūji near Nara, which date from the end of the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century (98, 107; 21*). These works were most likely either done by Chinese or under Chinese direction and, no doubt, resemble their contemporary Chinese models very closely. It is, therefore, even more regrettable that they were destroyed or disfigured beyond recognition by water during a fire, caused by negligence, which broke out in January 1949 while facsimile copies were being made and restoration work on the building was going on.⁷⁷

The main function of wall paintings was, of course, to provide a cultic and edifying depiction of sacred truths and sacred images joined in a most intimate union of spirit and mood with the sculpted cult figures on the central Sumeru terrace. These paintings thus contributed to the original organization and decoration of the sanctuary, particularly since they were always integrated with painted decorations of an ornamental character covering the entire temple hall. The predominant themes for wall paintings and sculptures alike were sacred groups (21*) of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and such accompanying figures as Devas and Arhats. Such themes are found in the works in the Golden Hall of the Hōryūji which embody the highest levels of spiritual attainment ever depicted in wall paintings. The vital contribution of wall paintings to the consecration of sanctuaries is to turn them into a "Buddha Land," where the sacred figures convey their powerful presence within the visionary revelation of their "Pure Lands."

The large number of sculpted Buddha figurines already mentioned--the 1,000 or 3,000 Buddhas of the various cosmic chiliads--correspond to those painted on the walls or beams of temple halls; they also "illustrate" the Miracle of Śrāvastī, exhibiting the Buddha's mysterious power of multiplication. Most important are the mandala diagrams (7) which are usually located to the left and right of the cult image platform, and occasionally also on the back wall behind the platform. These represent the opposite pole to the almost amorphous massing of the small Buddha

figurines, i.e., they provide a most strictly geometric arrangement of a metaphysical-symbolic character. The central configurations follow a genuinely pictorial formative principle but one which by virtue of its strict regularity brings this form of composition close to that of the maṇḍalas.

The maṇḍalas were usually painted, just like ordinary wall paintings, in colors on a primed surface, and in the form of large scrolls (for example, 3 x 3.5 meters), and occasionally also as linear paintings done in gold on blue or purple silk. Generally speaking, all the paintings in a temple room, together with the cult figures, all furnishings, and even the painted walls and doors of the altar shrines, constitute a maṇḍala system whose figures or symbolic signs may even be distributed over other architectural elements, particularly the free-standing interior pillars.

Legendary or visionary "event pictures" or narrative sacred scenes may be considered as a second important group of themes. Among these we find, for example, the eight major events of Śākyamuni's earthly life, including the scene of his entry into nirvāṇa, which appears to have been a favorite theme of murals as well as kakemono or hanging scrolls (119). He is shown as a golden figure lying on his bed under flowering trees, surrounded by the mourning representatives of all levels of existence ranging from the Bodhisattvas to tiny beetles.

Visions of the Pure Land of Amitābha and its splendors (103) also belong to this group. Among these the scene showing Amitābha descending with a large entourage of Bodhisattvas to welcome a believer at the moment of his death and guide him to a blessed rebirth in the Pure Land (*J. Amida-raigō*; 106, 109) is particularly important. The Pure Land was not depicted in paintings alone; occasionally it is also represented by an entire sanctuary, its temple buildings, gardens and ponds, cult figures, and fittings (4). In an anticipatory vision, the pious individual is made to feel transported to the supra-mundane splendor of the Pure Land of the West as it appeared to religious imagination and was described in glowing colors by various texts. In this sense, such paintings or architectural structures are "illustrations" of Sūtras or representations of higher worlds.

At the other extreme are scenes of judgment passed on sinners and of their torture in purgatory which also frequently appear on temple walls; occasionally only the Ten Judges of Hell are depicted.

There is a remarkable scarcity of pictures from religious history of the sort known in Christian art, with its numerous wall paintings illustrating Old and New Testament stories or legends of the saints. This is because Mahāyāna art, like the doctrine itself, values "historical" events less highly than "spiritual" events. It therefore concentrates on the sacred figures as spiritualized representatives of the Absolute and on powerful demonstrations of certain basic teachings.

Among the surviving narrative pictures, the wall paintings of Tun-huang depicting Jātakas (legends from earlier existences of the Buddha and his good deeds) are the most common, and we may assume that many more such paintings existed during the flourishing period of Buddhist art. Inspired by such narrative pictures from Buddhist legend, many series of scenes from the lives of great personalities of East Asian Buddhism were painted, like those from the life of the Japanese Prince Shōtoku (574-622). Others depict the lives and works of men who embodied the ideals of a certain school in an exemplary manner. The individual events are often distributed along a single vertical picture plane where the sequence

of events is depicted as occurring along a garden path winding its way through a landscape, which usually provides the scenic background.

Thematically, those wall paintings showing portraits of popular priests and patriarchs are closely related to these biographical pictures. They usually occur in groups or rows of five, seven, eight, etc., but are not primarily dedicated to the memory of great individual personalities. Rather, they use these figures to represent the tradition of a certain doctrine or cult as it evolved from one age to another, from its Indian origins, or even its history throughout the entire Buddhist world. In the latter cases the movement from India, the land of origin, to Central Asia, China and to Japan could be shown. Just as in sculpture (see p. 86 ff.), portraits in painting essentially have a cultic function. The rows of patriarch portraits on the temple walls surrounding the central Buddha and Bodhisattva figures belong therefore to the "entourage" of the central figure or figures and, formally speaking, are part of the groups. Closely linked to such systematic arrangements of figures are the figures of donors which, though placed in inconspicuous places, are also included in that sacred sphere, the "Buddha Land" constituted by the sanctuary and, particularly, by the personal presence of the figures of sacred beings wherever they appear to the mind open to a visionary experience.

Second in importance are the kakemono, or hanging scrolls, which are usually mounted on brocade. Because most wall paintings were destroyed, hanging scrolls constitute the bulk of material surviving from early centuries and hold the highest religious and artistic rank among them. But such kakemono did not serve as permanent cult images in the temples or did so only in exceptional cases. This function was reserved for the sculpted images or the murals. Buddhist kakemono may perhaps be called portable substitutes for sculpted images because they were only removed from storage and displayed in the temple halls for special rites or for use outside of the temple where sculpted images were not available and where the presence of the numena they represented could create a temporary sanctuary, a sacred precinct, a Buddha Land.

Special rites might be held within the framework of the official cults in the temples and their side rooms, as, for example, certain ceremonies honoring individual sacred figures during which their image served as main cult image. They would also occur on memorial days for patriarchs and other important personalities of Buddhism, during religious ceremonies in commemoration of Śākyamuni's entrance into nirvāṇa and other key events and, finally, during such important ceremonies as the abhiṣeka ceremony (an initiation rite)⁷⁸ and during rituals of exorcism. The Vidyārājas, combating all evil and providing blessings, were usually at the center of exorcism rituals.

The other type of special rituals were held at the request of or for the benefit of individuals and groups in private residences and palaces, as, for example, on the occasion of entering the clergy, during supplication rituals for the recovery of sick persons, at death-beds and as "soul masses" for the departed, or during personal services in front of a sacred image in the private room of a priest. Paintings frequently served as part of daily private rites carried out on domestic altars or during travels, and played a role similar to that of miniature figurines. They were

occasionally also placed at the center of grand state ceremonies in the imperial palace. Such rituals were most likely inspired by Chinese models and were held rather frequently in Japan. On such occasions the wildly demonic Go-Dairiki-Bosatsu (the Five Bodhisattvas of Great Powers; 22*) were venerated in order to assure peace and blessings for the empire.

Kakemono were suspended on walls or free-standing frames. Small altar tables--frequently made of lacquerware and equipped with the usual cult implements (see p. 165 ff.)--together with a seat for the priest, were usually placed in front of these frames. Occasionally, when an entire group or row of sacred figures was being venerated, several pictures were hung side by side and each furnished with an altar of its own. All these pictures constituted an iconographic, cultic, and artistic whole, so that we are justified in calling them triptychs or picture cycles. In cases where the Five Hundred Arhats were depicted we may occasionally even encounter one hundred of such "portraits" (each containing five figures; 129).

This use of kakemono inside and outside of temples is depicted in clear detail in Japanese hand-scrolls (*emakimono*), which are an invaluable and inexhaustible historical source.⁷⁹ Japanese classical literature--particularly the novels and court diaries of the Fujiwara period--also provide numerous descriptions of these rites in lively detail. The *tokonoma* (the picture alcove of the Japanese house) evolved from the practice of displaying a Buddhist picture on the wall with the cult implements placed on an altar in front of it. The *ikebana* (the flower arrangement as a secularized flower offering) and the incense vessel are still placed in such niches in front of the kakemono; but other factors also contributed to its evolution (15).

The Amitābha faith gave rise to a custom which holds particular importance for art: a *raigō* picture (or screen), showing the Lord of the Pure Land of the West approaching with an entourage of his Bodhisattvas (106). This was placed near the death-bed of a believer, so that he could turn to it in faith during his last moments. Long threads were usually attached to the hands of the Buddha figure and were held by the dying individual. This put him in direct magical contact with the saving power of the Buddha. These threads were white, black, red, blue, and yellow--the five traditional Chinese symbolic colors--which in esoteric Buddhism signified the fivefold wisdom of the Enlightened One. Occasionally such graphic scenes, originally the product of religious imagination, were in turn transformed into ritual events when liturgical plays in the form of processions were performed in temple precincts. Masked priests and laymen (see p. 91) acted as Bodhisattvas, while Amitābha, who had entered *nirvāna*, was represented by a cult image carried in the procession. Such processions and plays are still performed in Japan.

Textile pictures form a special group of the kakemono type. These were rather common in earlier periods, but only a few examples have survived. The first type of them was done in embroidery (108), employing an extremely refined technique. Such textile kakemono constitute genuine "needle paintings" done entirely in a painterly manner. They were usually created as pious offerings by nuns and noble ladies and show individual figures or complex groups and display the highest standard of manual dexterity and aesthetic refinement. They served either as regular cult images, just like other kakemono, or as wall hangings in place of wall paintings.

Such paintings were also reproduced as tapestry. The extremely complicated, colorful compositions and minute patterns of such works are frequently of the highest technical perfection and achieve genuine pictorial effects. Unfortunately, only a few fragments of such works have survived. The best known of them is a silk tapestry, the so-called Taema Maṇḍala (copy: 103-105) in the Taema Temple near Nara, a depiction of the Pure Land of Amitābha, presumably dating from the eighth or ninth century. It is possibly even of Chinese origin or at least closely imitates excellent T'ang models.

Also related to the painted kakemono are majestic embroidered or painted banners which were hung from or between pillars during religious celebrations. They display single large figures but frequently also pictures of a narrative character arranged in rows from bottom to top. The best surviving examples are the pieces discovered in Tun-huang. Ordinary kakemono could also be used as banners if hung from vertically held poles. They were carried in this manner in processions by individual pilgrims or by mendicant monks.

Finally, mention should be made of folding screens (*J. byōbu*) bearing pictures of Buddhist figures which were also used during religious rituals. A favorite subject for such screens were the Twelve Devas (Deities of the Elements) who would be painted on a pair of screens with six panels each, surrounding the main cult image of the Buddha as a protective guard. The pictorial style of these screens not only shows no substantial difference from that of the kakemono but usually also resembles their format very closely. Buddhist as well as secular screens occasionally bear narrative pictures illustrating legends and events from religious life (temple festivals, etc.). These cover the entire screen surface with a coherent composition.

The topics dealt with in all these portable pictures used in rituals, whether kakemono, banners, screens, or embroideries, are in part identical with those of the wall paintings which they had to replace on particular occasions. But judging by the few surviving wall paintings, they evidently went beyond them. In particular, the proportion of narrative and scenic pictures appears to be larger.

Scenes from the Six or Ten Worlds, i.e., the ten spheres of existence of sentient beings ranging from purgatory (123) to the sphere of deities and, ultimately, to that of the Buddhas, as well as hell fire (124) and paradise scenes, for example, are occasionally depicted in greater detail, in regular picture sequences. The number of topics is also expanded by the inclusion of legendary stories from the history of particular schools or "sects" and their holy men. Pictures illustrating parables are also added as, for example, that of the Three Sages Tasting Vinegar, which shows Confucius, Lao-tzu, and the Buddha tasting vinegar from the same vessel. The same vinegar appears to taste differently to each of them. This is an allegory of the East Asian conviction of the ultimate identity of the three (and other) teachings.

Finally, the range of themes is also larger because the individual figures and groups of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Vidyārājas, Devas, etc., are depicted in more diverse iconographic variants (i.e., forms of incarnation or religious functions) which can, of course, not be described here. But all these additional themes do not change the fact that the portable pictures, too, are basically nothing but a kind of functional adaptation of wall pictures and in part also of sculptures for different purposes. Portraits (130 ff.) confirm this judgment. Even in their kakemono form, priest and

patriarch portraits--whether, as in the case of the former, showing more or less contemporary likenesses or, as in the case of the latter, idealizing portraits based on tradition and legend--serve as main cult images during memorial services or are displayed on temple walls whenever the presence of the depicted individual is required as part of a particular liturgical and iconographic program. In this way the sacred act is brought into a living relationship with its origins through the individuals venerated as the bearers of the doctrinal and ritual tradition of the particular school.

Only occasionally do portrait pictures emerge as intimate, truly individualized portraits. An example is that of the modest and pious, nature-loving Japanese priest Myō-e who is shown in the middle of a forest meditating in the branches of a tree (134). This picture is distinguished from those shown in the hieratic official cult portraits, which usually depict the holy men "in cathedra" and with the insignia of their rank, by its entirely unceremonious, yet still solemn and profound pose. Also unusual is the strong emphasis on nature, which usually plays a very insignificant role in classic Buddhist paintings and normally appears only where it is iconographically required; as, for example, in a certain version of Avalokiteśvara appearing in a rocky landscape by the seaside (112), or, very popular in Japan, in the theme of "Amitābha Coming Across the Mountains," in which the hilly landscape in the foreground becomes a symbol of the illusory "foreground" world of *samsāra* (105).

But landscapes came more and more to lose this subservient function and became both direct expressions of the religious experience of the world and symbols of its totality. This process began much earlier in East Asia than in Europe, both in absolute terms and in terms of a relative internal evolution. The secular art of landscape painting, which began to flourish from the middle of the first millennium, entered more and more into the Buddhist sphere until, finally, in the painting of Zen Buddhism, pictures of nature, as essential vehicles for religious meaning, became more important than the cult images.

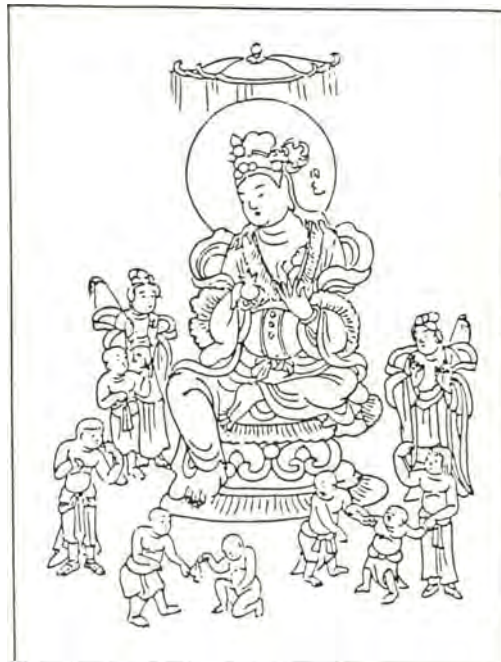
In the sphere of classic religious painting some of the more "worldly" narrative pictures, particularly illustrations of legends (119 ff.) and depictions of the different realms of existence, already offered numerous occasions for including landscape scenes. And in the narrative picture format par excellence--the *emakimono*--landscapes assumed a vitally important function not only with respect to topic and mood but also with respect to composition. Landscape, however, still only played a subordinate function and not yet an independent role as an essential, perhaps even the most essential, form for expressing the Buddhist world view.

In Japan, nature intruded even into the strictly cultic, symbolic world of the *maṇḍala*, namely in the *maṇḍalas* of medieval Buddhist-Shintō syncretism. These show a Shintō shrine in an idyllic landscape and above, suspended in the realm of the Absolute, the figures of the Buddhist sacred persons whose descended traces (*avatāras*) the Shintō numina (*kami*) were considered to be during this period. The emotion-filled, pious and lyrical, nativist sense of nature, so typical of the Japanese, has found attractive expression in these pictures. This sense of nature not only gave rise to a special type of architectural cult precincts, as mentioned above (see p. 50), but also produced Shintō images of the *Kami* in sculpture and painting under Buddhist influence. The latter still closely resembled native traditional types from the sphere of the imperial court with respect to pose, dress and ornament. This

parallels an earlier process in China where Buddhist cult images had a similar effect on the indigenous religious realm and where Taoist divine images, though not derived from Buddhist images, received some inspiration from them.



22* Kongō-ku. Scroll, ink on paper.



23* Hārītī. Ink on paper.

The other major type of the East Asian picture scroll, next to the kakemono, the emakimono (hand-scrolls unfolding horizontally), also found wide application in Buddhist painting in three forms: firstly, as illustrated or otherwise decorated book scrolls bearing sacred texts; secondly, as collections of iconographic model drawings; and thirdly, as narrative pictures. The first kind is dealt with in the next chapter, since it belongs to the field of calligraphy and book decoration. The other two will be discussed below.

The collections of iconographic model drawings (zuzō-shō), which have been preserved in large numbers in Japan, held extraordinary importance for their authors and users and still do for modern researchers. They are compendiums of every imaginable Buddhist figure type. These rather voluminous works of 10, 50, 100 and more long horizontal scrolls were prepared by priests of the esoteric schools and provided a stock of models for study as well as for the depiction of the complicated and strictly regulated figures of the Buddhist pantheon which would have hardly been possible without such "reference works." Such drawings also exist as single sheets, occasionally in large format (22*) and mounted as kakemono, but are normally found in emakimono, i.e., in the form of horizontal book scrolls. This, however, refers only to their external form. The internal form of such collections is

the album or catalogue, defined as a compilation of similar, but formally unconnected pictures, which may, however, also be found in independent versions.

Such collections of iconographic model drawings contain every available, dogmatically correct depiction of sacred figures ranging from the Buddhas on down to the lower categories of beings. They are executed mostly in skillful ink line drawings but occasionally are also given a light coloration (23*). Written explanations, particularly on the symbolically important colors, as well as directions for the proper liturgy are also added. The drawings could serve painters and sculptors as models for the depiction of particular figures which had to be correct in every detail because this alone assured their efficacy.

The drawings also enabled monks to study these sacred beings and immerse themselves in their significance, their miraculous saving powers and the Absolute manifested in them. In some instances, religiously and artistically talented priests succeeded in creating independent designs of their own, and thus managed to infuse new life into an iconographic tradition which was always in danger of succumbing to ossification. However, such instances always remained exceptions which were justified as being the result of special inspiration (137).

These pictures transmit both the archetypal patterns of the sacred figures and particular individual works of art, frequently those which priests or their predecessors had seen in China during their studies and whose saving powers they wanted to transmit to Japan by virtue of exactly fixed images so that they would also benefit Japan. The works reproduced in these sketches, some of which even reveal Indian and Central Asian elements, are by no means restricted to paintings or drawings but also include sculptures.

The originals of such archetypal pictures were done in different techniques, at different times, in different regions and perhaps were also based on different local monastic teachings and artistic traditions; furthermore, their reproductions or the models on which they were based came to enter such collections during different periods. These facts explain the noticeable stylistic differences even between drawings which appear side by side on one and the same scroll. The pictures thus projected onto one level and placed next to each other actually represent a richly graduated historical relief. This vast and highly interesting material, which must have had its counterpart in China, still awaits analysis by modern research. It is indispensable for any serious study of the history of religion and iconography. It also represents a beautiful and rich treasure of examples of the East Asian art of drawing.⁸⁰

The narrative *emakimono* are distinguished from all picture types mentioned up to now in two respects: First, in contrast to the wall paintings and movable pictures already introduced, *emakimono* are in no way linked to the sanctuaries or related to their architecture, to the cult figures they contain or the rituals performed in them as is the case to varying degrees with the former two types. Second, and also in contrast to most specimens of the other two categories, they are essentially narrative pictures. Because their scroll format is potentially unlimited in length and continues without interruptions, it creates a space-time continuum in which a narrative, historical, epic or dramatic story can unfold. This painting type has nowhere else been taken to its logical conclusions to the degree this was done in East Asia.

But this potential has not always been fully exploited. Sometimes individual pictures, such as long sequences of sacred figures and groups of self-contained scenes, merely follow each other and are at best only superficially held together by a common landscape background (122). Such isolated parts are frequently also separated by textual passages.

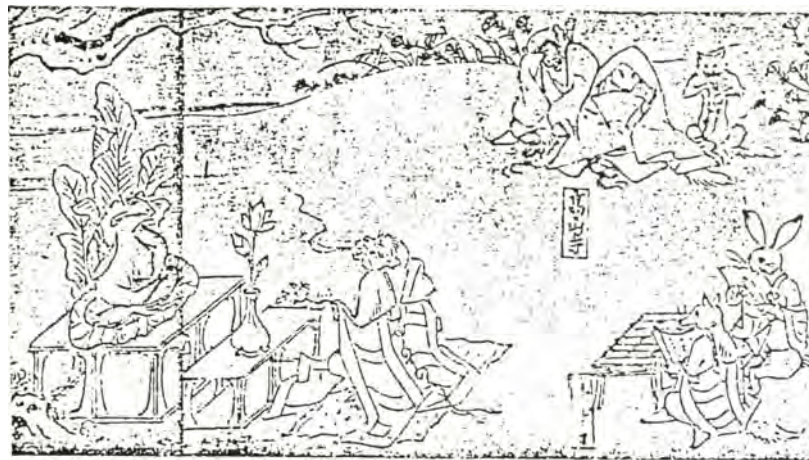
The true nature of the emakimono manifests itself only where related processes unfold before us in the sequence of their individual, continuously merging phases. Frequently such pictorial strips are several meters in length and tell genuine picture-stories. Depictions of the Buddha legend or from "church history" are rare. More frequent are illustrations of events from the history of individual sects. The majority are stories and legends concerning the founding of temples, miraculous events and mystical experiences, and, most commonly, the life stories of great priests. (Scrolls with secular themes, equally numerous, are left aside here.)

These pictorial narratives have dual origins. One may be seen in the frieze-like wall picture strips which in the cave temples of Tun-huang, for example, depict Jātaka stories. The other is found in the illustrated Sūtra scrolls. One such work, the "Kako-genzai-inga-kyō" (see p. 155), has been preserved in Japan but is purely Chinese in type. Aside from their religious content, the emakimono also convey a tangible impression of the cultural and, particularly, the cultural and devotional life of the medieval period. But this was hardly their original intent. Rather, these Buddhist pictorial chronicles and pictorial biographies were regarded as sacred documents, as reliable reports of high antiquity, of the particular saving and miraculous powers of a temple or of the exemplary lives and works of holy men, primarily those of the founders of Buddhist sects. They contain, of course, no historically objective presentation in the modern sense, but rather reports of such numinous events as the miraculous manifestation of the Buddha power in response to fervent pleas of the faithful (125). Their aim is to demonstrate the all-pervading absolute Law (dharma) in order to promote faith.

In Japan such pictorial narratives are often called *engi-emaki*. *Engi* is the term for a fundamental concept of Buddhist teaching, i.e., that of "arising from conditional causation" (*pratīya-samutpāda*), and the pictorial narratives are referred to by this term because they are intended to point out the innermost, true, indestructible and inescapable interdependence of all things and events. Such pictures were intended, first of all, to preach. Next to this, they may also have been used for personal instruction and edification as priests and monks slowly and solemnly unfolded them during quiet hours or in the presence of high ranking visitors, viewing them at a leisurely pace to allow these stories to make the reader share fully in the events they depict. The picture scrolls with scenes from purgatory (124) or the realm of the Hungry Ghosts (*preta*; 123) may have been powerful visual sermons illustrating the detailed descriptions of such realms in the edifying literature which they accompany. They even show us demonic-grotesque aspects of Buddhist painting and do so in a manner which, like their successors, the late 18th to 19th-century ghost pictures, is not without a certain element of humor amidst the gruesome ambience.

Emakimono may consist of single picture scrolls of constant height (between 20 and 40 centimeters) but varying lengths. The majority of them are series of scrolls, each at least four to five meters in length, whose number may go as high as

fifty in some special cases. This difficult picture format, whose individual passages are only gradually revealed as the scroll is unfolded from right to left, has been employed in a very skillful manner by East Asian painters not only to achieve a lively flow, frequently full of thrills and suspense, but also to show or suggest an almost incredibly wide pictorial space which seems to expand beyond the confines of the scroll itself. This effect is achieved on a small pictorial surface through forms of composition which defy the limitations of the picture surface and challenge the viewer's imagination by suggesting a vaster space beyond. Landscapes or buildings are useful vehicles for the creation of continuity of the pictorial space as medium for the progression of the events in time.



24* Satirical cartoon of a Buddhist ritual.

In early (pre-Sung) Chinese painting this picture type may have been more common than implied by the number of surviving examples. Most of such material, including its most important surviving examples, has been preserved in Japan, and this makes it appear that the Japanese were the first to have fully understood and applied the possibilities of this epic pictorial form. The emakimono has also found in both countries a number of highly important missions outside of the Buddhist sphere as secular narrative pictures reporting historical events or illustrating classical works of literature. The secular and the sacred frequently merged. Leaving aside the splendid pure landscape emakimono which play a leading role in Chinese and Japanese painting, this picture type may be seen as representing within the entire tradition of Asian painting the vitally significant border zone between the sacred and profane spheres (126).

Sacred themes occasionally reach into the profane world or profane themes enter the sacred world in one way or the other even within the Buddhist sphere. Such is the case with a Japanese pictorial scroll from the early 14th century which describes homosexuality in Buddhist monastic life. Homosexuality was widely spread in Japanese society and was not considered as offensive. The picture was created in

the very monastery where it is still kept today. Still another example is a famous series of pictures from the 12th century which are traditionally, but without clear evidence, ascribed to a high-ranking clergyman, Kakuyū (Toba Sōjō, d. 1140). These are a number of humorous and lively animal scenes rendered in witty monochrome ink line drawings. Some show monkeys, foxes, hares and frogs as Buddhist priests and believers. A drawing of a "mass," celebrated by a monkey in front of a frog representing the Buddha, was obviously intended to be a parody or caricature (24*). But since there is no doubt that these drawings originated within monastic circles, we are compelled to regard them as a form of self-criticism, adding a charming touch to Buddhist art, which generally tends to be more solemn and austere.

Examples of genuine travesty may, of course, also be found, but only in very late times. These, however, impart to the solemn or lofty substance of their subjects a profanely trivial form which does not suit it. Such is the case, for example, in Japanese woodcuts or paintings of the 17th and 18th centuries, where the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra appears as a city courtesan riding an elephant, or Kṣitigarbha is shown as a dancing and flute-playing boy wearing a giant lotus leaf as pilgrim hat. It is difficult to assume that such depictions were intended to ridicule the Buddhist religion and that they, therefore, aimed at effects akin to those found during the Reformation or Enlightenment in Europe. They are much too innocently playful for that. However, it is clear that the religious element is no longer being taken very seriously, and that we are dealing with a late phenomenon typical of a secularizing culture (cf. 35*).⁸¹

Techniques

Depending on the nature of the surface employed, Buddhist paintings may be divided into murals or wall paintings done on stucco or wood, and into movable pictures done on cloth (usually silk) or paper. In terms of material employed to paint the pictures, either ink drawing or ink painting or coloring is employed for both types of painting, while gold serves as an intensifying decorative element. Several other special techniques are also employed, but they all are only of marginal importance.

Since wall paintings (26, 98, 107) are found predominantly in wooden buildings where walls, if existent, are only partially made of masonry, the plaster covering the walls in such buildings has to serve as the base for such paintings. Wherever these walls are inserted between pillars, their surfaces of thin frame or lattice grids were covered with several layers of loam of increasingly finer texture towards the surface. This applies both to the nature and the treatment of the clay itself and to the texture of the substances mixed in with the clay for greater stability. The inner layers usually show admixtures of chopped straw while the outer layers have thin hemp fiber or animal hair mixed in with the loam. Oil and mainly glue made of seaweed were occasionally used as binders. The outermost layer, which provided the actual picture surface, consisted of finely textured white gypsum, fired shell chalk, smooth textured clay or similar materials.

The total thickness of such walls, based on the example of the Hōryūji, is only sixteen centimeters for wall surfaces 3.30 meters in height and either 2.60 or 1.5 meters in width. It is truly amazing that such walls have withstood the earthquakes

and the vicissitudes of the humid monsoon climate for over 1,200 years. Wooden walls, once their slits had been carefully pasted over, were given the same white surface coating which was also applied directly onto the natural, roughly hewn wall surfaces of Central Asian and West Chinese cave temples.

Paints were made of the customary mineral non-water soluble pigments like iron oxide, ocher, malachite, and cinnabar in pulverized form. The black substance for ink was derived from the soot of pine or oil while the white substance, used for surfacing the walls and also frequently mixed with other colors, was made of fired chalk powder from crushed mollusk shells. A few vegetable-based dyes were also used. All pigments were frequently mixed with white to make them more opaque. Thinned vegetable glue was used as binder and was mixed with the pigment powder by kneading it very carefully into the mass immediately before applying the paint.

Paint was applied on either moist or dried plaster. In neither case, however, is the result a genuine fresco as is often incorrectly said, because no chemical reaction took place between the picture surface and the pigments. Rather, this technique resembles more that of *tempera* and is therefore rather vulnerable. Such pictures are easily rubbed off or washed off. The pigment particles also tend to peel off the surface with the passage of time. This is one reason for the scarcity of old wall paintings in East Asia.⁸² The specific character of the coloration is the result of this technique and of the mineral, opaque character of most pigments. We always find colors covering circumscribed areas with flat, clear color hues. This hides the individual brush strokes, but produces an effect of great purity and radiance which sustains a warm harmony in spite of the wealth of colors employed. The same technique was applied to the coloring of movable pictures. In both picture types, gold plays an important role which we will discuss later. Beginning with the Sung period, gold was usually applied in wall paintings over slightly raised stucco lines, to represent, for example, pieces of jewelry, the seams of brocade garments and the like.

For wall paintings, the stages of the painting process may have been as follows: On the basis of iconographical model drawings (see p. 125) or other patterns, a kind of stencil was prepared in thin ink lines on sheets of paper. The outlines of the figures were transferred from it onto the wall by either of two techniques. The backside of the stencil was covered with charcoal dust and the lines traced with the application of light pressure onto the surface to be painted. Another technique consisted of producing dotted lines on the surfaces by puncturing the stencils with needles and applying charcoal dust through the holes. Such drawings with needle holes have actually been found in Tun-huang. The needle method could also be used to obtain several copies of a pattern simply by piling several sheets of paper on top of each other. For symmetrical Buddhist configurations half of the work of stencil-drawing could be saved by folding the sheet along its symmetric axis.

The use of such stencil-drawings would have made it possible for Chinese models to have been brought to Japan directly and exactly. It also became possible to apply the same drawing in several different places. For example, the measurements of the recently uncovered, rather dilapidated murals of Bodhisattvas in the Hôryûji pagoda were found to be almost exact duplicates of those in the Golden Hall, and must therefore have come from the same models. Once the

transfer process was completed, the light charcoal lines were reinforced with black or red ink and the proper colors applied. The outlines appear to have occasionally also been scratched into the surface.

Langdon Warner, in his *Buddhist Wall Paintings*, reports that at Tun-huang he has found in large complex wall paintings traces of the compass lines with which the halos had been outlined and of the vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines which were perhaps drawn with the help of strings and constituted a set of coordinates whose intersections marked essential points of the composition. In such instances, the use of stencil drawings--whose size set rather definite limits--could be dispensed with altogether or be restricted to particular details of the total composition. We should perhaps also assume that skilled draftsmen and important artists did not follow their models unthinkingly but produced independent designs, particularly since all forms had been so standardized. However, the degree of artistic freedom exercised by them should not be overestimated.

Painting on prepared wooden surfaces should also be considered in a technical sense as being part of wall painting. Such painting is found not only on walls, but also in figure shrines, on halos, canopies, and as decoration on architectural elements (20*). The application of colors to wooden, clay or lacquer figures is basically not different from their application to walls.

In Buddhist painting, and in East Asian painting in general, normally only aqueous binders were used. The most common among them was a glue made of seaweed or other organic substances. Binders containing fats were hardly ever used. But a kind of oil painting appears to have been in use during earlier times, i.e., during the Sui, T'ang, Asuka and Nara periods, respectively, for particular purposes. This was the so-called *mitsuda* or *mitsudasô* technique (Chin. *mi-t'o[-seng]*), which we encounter in the bowls and boxes found in the Shôsôin Treasure House in Nara (8th century) and in the paintings of figures and decorations on a tabernacle in the Hôryûji (Tamamushi shrine, ca. 600; 120 f.). The latter is most likely of continental origin, but it is still unclear whether the technique of mitsuda painting was employed in this particular instance or, as was by no means unusual, the painting was done with colored lacquer. Lacquer was an ancient Chinese medium which was also used for Buddhist implements. Mitsuda painting employs a mixture of light yellow or white lead oxide (as a drying agent) and vegetable oil. This mixture was given different colors through the addition of pigments, mainly red, yellow, and green. The use of oil as binder distinguishes this technique from that of lacquer painting, but the results of the application of the two techniques may often be mistaken for each other. The term *mi-t'o-seng* or *mitsudasô* is obviously a phonetic rendition of the Iranian word for lead oxide, *mirdâsang*. This mineral, along with many other products, was imported to China from Persia.⁸³ This is not surprising since Iranian influences on religion and art were not unusual given the kind of relations with the Iranian world prevailing during that time.

The techniques used for movable pictures (*kakemono*, *emakimono*, partitioning screens, banners, etc.) relied on the same ink and many of the same pigments used for immovable pictures. The transfer from stencils is also likely to have occurred rather frequently. But the surfaces on which pictures were placed differed. Silk was mainly used for *kakemono* and banners but paper was employed

132 BUDDHIST ART OF EAST ASIA

for emakimono, though there were exceptions in both categories. The silk surface was frequently given a dark tone in order to provide a quiet background for the brighter colors. It is unlikely that the brownish tone of the silk resulted solely from age and the fumes rising from candles and incense, and that the pictures were originally much brighter. Colors were used in the same manner as for wall paintings. Opaque application of almost jewel-like radiance was preferred.



25a* Samples of cut-gold decoration (kirikane) on Buddhist paintings.

This radiance was further increased by the rich application of gold. However, this was not in the form of gold in the background, but rather took the form of ornaments and jewelry lavished on the sacred figures. In general, the color of gold was held to be expressive of the body and essence of enlightened beings. There were two methods used simultaneously for its application: The first was painting with gold powder (99, 101, 110, 113 f., 135) mixed with glue and applied in more or less thick layers which made possible freely drawn lines and a smooth covering of surfaces. The other method served to complement and enhance this painted gold surfacing, which had a dull finish, by the attachment of bright ornaments cut out of gold sheets (*J. Kirikane*; 110 ff., 25*). Kirikane could also be applied directly onto a colored background (25*). This is an incredibly difficult technique, but is typical of East Asian--and apparently especially Buddhist--painting and sculpture. Extremely thin gold foil reinforced by a layer of silver, is cut into straight, extremely narrow, frequently almost stringlike strips, which are then glued onto the surface. The flexible strips make it possible to follow every curve. Star- or blossom-shaped ornamental motifs are put together from tiny, square, rhombic or triangular pieces which are cut from the longer gold strips during the gluing-on process itself, as it proved impossible to cut out curved lines or patterns in advance.

Unlike gold painting, the cut-gold technique was confined to purely linear patterns or to patterns consisting of combined dots, but this limitation was largely overcome by unusually imaginative invention of ever new patterns of the most complicated kind. All parts of a Buddhist painting which are intended to appear particularly bright or to shine with splendor are executed in, or at least enriched by, kirikane. This holds particularly true for the circular lines and rays of the halos, the ornaments of the garments or the minute veins on the flower petals of the lotus throne, each of which, as stated by the *Amitâyur-dhyâna-Sûtra*, sends off innumerable rays. Sculptures, too, frequently were given lavish kirikane ornamentation to enhance their surface coloring.

This procedure surely originated in China but, with the exception of Tun-huang, very few examples seem to have survived there. Remnants of kirikane ornamentation were recently found on the original colored surface painting of

wooden sculptures from the Sung period owned by museums in Amsterdam and Boston. In Japan, kirikane was used from the Asuka period to the end of the Kamakura period and even later, primarily by families of craftsmen specializing in this work, but reached its apex during the second half of the Fujiwara period.

Strangely enough, the gold background, so important in old European paintings and mosaics, plays no role at all in East Asian sacred paintings, but is important in secular paintings, particularly in such decorative genres as album leaves, painted fans, screens and sliding doors, and is found more frequently in Japan than in China.

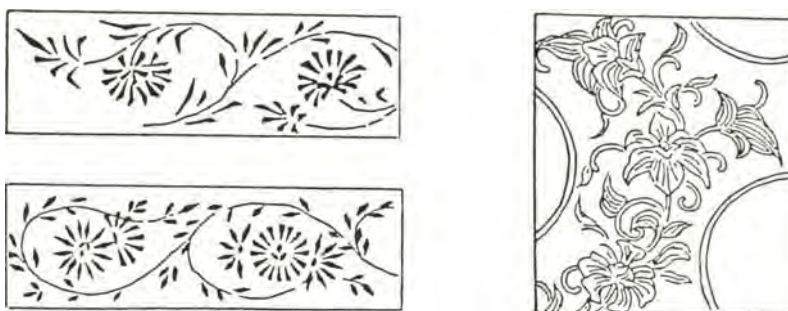


25b* Samples of cut-gold decoration (kirikane) on Buddhist paintings.

While speaking of the decorative effect of Buddhist pictures--leaving their meaning to be clarified later (p. 182 ff.)--and of their intricate interplay of colors and gold, we should not ignore the splendid silk brocades on which they are mounted and which add the final artistic touch to them. It is this total effect of the pictures--amounting to a veritable work of craftsmanship--which was integrated into the total ambience during ritual performances by merging it with the garments of the priests, the precious cult implements, the gold-decorated lacquer tables and chests, the warm-golden, incense-clouded light of the candles, and all the other elements forming part of such rituals to create an all-embracing mysteriously sacred atmosphere.

Just as gold decoration is treated in Buddhist paintings in the same predominantly linear and ornamental manner characteristic of this art in general, lines executed in black ink had to be pure, unmodulated (in East Asian terms "iron-wire") both for contour and interior lines (22*; 107, 110) in order to fit properly into the rigid structure of these pictures (excepting parts of lesser importance). Only in later times were these lines allowed to display moderate variations in thickness. Line drawing executed in black ink (or, occasionally, in color) lines provide rigid frames for the application of colors. These colors contribute so much to the total impression that black and white reproductions are never able to do justice to them.

While in cult pictures the ink lines are more or less limited to the function of defining the iconographic-symbolic line structure, full freedom was gained only later in the art of Zen Buddhism by exploiting the possibilities of calligraphic expression and painterly shadowing (139-146). To be sure, the play of ink lines was given freer reign in narrative pictures than in sacred images because the former employ a more painterly, looser technique frequently reminiscent of water-color painting (123, 124). But since the artistic characteristics of such narrative pictures essentially originated in the secular sphere, they do not present something unique to Buddhist painting. "Classic" cult paintings, however, truly have the character of line drawings while in ink painting, which began to be developed during this time, a distinction between their drawing and painting functions is hardly possible.



25c* Samples of cut-gold decoration (kirikane) on Buddhist paintings.

Purely linear drawings in black and white exist in large numbers, predominantly in the form of the iconographic model sketches already mentioned above (22*, 23*), and in part as votive drawings, frequently produced in numerous copies, as pious exercises and offerings. It was only a small step from such drawings to the kind of linear drawings which were reproduced in large numbers by way of woodblock printing (see p. 158).

Finally, another important field of drawing is the maṇḍala which was very often, but by no means exclusively, executed in detailed gold drawings on black, dark blue, or purple silk. We will add further remarks on a more specifically decorative kind of drawing executed in gold lines on a dark colored ground in connection with our comments on the art of the book (p. 154).

Elsewhere in Buddhist art, pure line drawings found a common and attractive use as engravings in stone or metal. Such engravings cannot be classified as relief art. They clearly belong within the art of drawing. The lyrical, musical beauty of Buddhist line drawings, their mature purity and coolness detached from all earthiness and phenomenal diversity, becomes evident in a very impressive manner in both figural and ornamental motifs (136). Such engravings can be found on the halos of stone or bronze figures but also on their pedestals--as, for example, on the petals of the lotus flower which forms the seat of the Great Buddha of Nara--

and on the votive steles which were very popular in China. In the latter case, such engraved line drawings are most likely found on the base, the back side and sometimes also the two narrow sides of the stele.

Famous paintings were also engraved on steles to preserve them for posterity. Long lost masterworks by outstanding painters of the Tang period such as Wu Tao-tse have been preserved in this manner, albeit in a shadowy and simplified form resulting from this technique, which reduces such pictures to purely linear and hence more or less simplified versions. Another purpose of such engravings was to allow these pictures to be copied at will by taking rubbings from them. Such copies could then be mounted as kakemonos, or pasted to walls and screens.

Pictorial Methods

The composition of Buddhist paintings is generally extremely simple, and only a few traditional types of composition exist. The basic composition consists of a seated or standing individual statue-like figure (97). Its poses, gestures and attributes, pedestal and halo follow the same principles governing sculpted images (compare 29 with 102). Just as in sculpture, groups of figures emerged quite early. The most elementary of such groupings consists of a central main figure with two accompanying figures symmetrically aligned at its sides. Usually these figures are a Buddha and two Bodhisattvas. But even where several such figures appear (21*), their number remains limited and their arrangement simple and easy to understand. In no case do we find such rich and artfully balanced compositional patterns as were frequent in Italian Renaissance painting.

A favorite arrangement for relatively complex groups shows the figures aligned around the central main figure in a circle open at the front. In such alignments, the more important secondary figures are prominently placed to the right and left of the central figure while the less important figures remain modestly in the background or occupy the marginal foreground positions. These groups always depict iconographically related figures whose relationships are subject to strict laws, so that the identification of a single figure frequently provides clues sufficient for identifying the entire group.

Large numbers of figures occur only in a very few picture types (103, 106, 119), but whenever they do occur they are always carefully arranged and, in spite of their large numbers, the figures remain very clearly ranked in accordance with their religious significance. Such pictures include depictions of the preaching Śākyamuni, Amitābha's paradise, or of Amitābha and his entourage coming from across the mountains and, finally, also certain "historical" scenes. The latter are relatively rare and, whenever they do occur, as in Śākyamuni on his deathbed entering into nirvāna (119), offer a quiet, eternalized picture of a particular sacred moment. They therefore resemble static circles of figures rather than narrative depictions of events. The latter were the exclusive preserve of the emakimono, except for legendary scenes depicted in single pictures or series of pictures.

The basic type of composition, whether of individual figures or groups, is thoroughly static in character and attempts only rarely and relatively late to dissolve the static arrangement into a dynamic event, creating between the individual figures not only a spiritual relationship but also one of action and movement. This is in full

accord with the meaning of this art which attempts to reveal the Absolute in its timeless validity. The spiritual relationship and higher unity of these figures is more clearly experienced in this quiet and seemingly unrelated juxtaposition. Such arrangements are frequently only one step removed from the two-dimensional schematic diagrams of the maṇḍalas. Their composition is, therefore, determined by the purely spiritual principle of symmetry.

Asymmetric compositions, which are often regarded as typical of East Asian art, evolved only relatively late. They had no role in the earlier phases and least of all in Buddhist art. The central axis was crucial both for temple precincts and groups of cult figures. It was understood as the world axis in architecture, sculpture, and painting alike. Every picture is powerfully dominated by it. All secondary figures are distributed in a regular fashion both around the main figure occupying the central axis and over the entire surface of the picture.

We may go even further. Not only the axis, but even the "absolute" center of the picture, i.e., the intersection of its vertical and horizontal axes, is frequently strongly emphasized, preferably being located in or near the heart or the body center of the main figure. The location of this point may vary from the chest to the lower part of the body. In the case of figures seated in the meditative pose, it is located at the point where the ankles of the crossed feet meet. It may also be found slightly below the navel in the vital center which is so important as the seat of spiritual powers, both for meditation and the arts of East Asians.^{71a,85} In some instances, this spot is marked by the central brooch of an ornamental belt. The center of the picture is also often located in the attribute held in front of the body, or in the hands forming a mudrā in front of the chest. This central point may occasionally not be found at the geometric center of the entire picture but only in the center of the main figure (including, however, its throne and canopy). In such cases, the location is determined rather precisely. This principle of intersecting axes has found its purest geometric form--related to the square or to the circle with eight radii--in the maṇḍala.

It is crucial for understanding the artistic aspects of such paintings to realize that the figure is never viewed in isolation but always in the most intimate relationship with its throne, its halo and its canopy. All these individual elements come alive only in this larger context, and all proportions and distances are calculated on the basis of the total design--just as sculpted cult figures, together with their pedestals, halos and canopies, are integrated into the space of the temple.

The preference for strict frontality is linked to these laws of composition. It is the rule which is applied at least to all central main figures. The frontal pose is the pose of quietude, majesty and sacredness. It is a pose which is self-contained and complete, immovable and unapproachable, beyond time and, because it is captured in two-dimensional form, also beyond space. A figure in such a pose is, in its innermost essence, full of activity and capable of radiating its infinite miraculous powers for the salvation of the world. Though quite common, turning movements of the body or even of the head alone, occur most often in secondary figures or in main figures only if they belong to a level below that of the Buddha.

Freer body postures and movements, resulting in participation in space and entry into the flow of time, which imply entry into saṃsāra, occur only at lower levels beginning with that of the Bodhisattva in whose compassionate deeds the

potential activity and emanation of the Buddha is actualized (98, 106, cf. 24). We frequently encounter a turning of the entire figure into a three-quarter profile to the right or the left. This, however, is not merely the result of the more "spatial" manifestation of these figures, but may also be explained purely by considerations of composition: A good many of the Bodhisattva figures have evolved as secondary and accompanying figures of central Buddha images. In their flanking positions they were turned towards the main image and thus contribute to the group's orientation towards the center (21*). This slightly turned pose was perhaps later applied to isolated images of Bodhisattvas, unless we are dealing with works which were originally side images of triads and have survived as isolated figures.

But there are also regulations in the iconographic handbooks according to which certain figures had to turn their heads to one of the cardinal points. In pictures, such movement could be shown as a turning to the left or right. The fact that Amitābha normally (but with some exceptions) appears in the *raigō* pictures approaching from the left is most likely also an indication of the Western direction ascribed to him because Buddhist images should normally be thought of as facing south.

Certain changes in the picture composition become noticeable as we descend on the scale of existence: The composition becomes less structured, the diagonal pose (which, for example, is almost always employed in painted portraits of priests) more pronounced, and the element of movement more dynamic. This process parallels that in sculptures. Yet the demonic figures displaying these features to the fullest are frequently more nearly frozen into rigid poses than truly moving in space and time. Even the higher-ranking Vidyārājas, though displaying the strongest inner tensions, do not assume highly active poses except during a relatively late phase of their development. Being is dominant over Becoming, the Eternal over the Transitory, or rather, the former includes the latter within itself. We might, therefore, perhaps better call it movement in rest or movement neutralized by immobility as we have already had occasion to do with respect to the temple precincts and religious sculptures.

Genuine movement in painting does not appear until the late medieval period, i.e., in China (as far as the evidence indicates) during the Sung period and in Japan (where this process can be traced very clearly) during the late Fujiwara and Kamakura periods. These were periods during which art tended to become generally more realistic and subjective. In the religious sphere this is revealed by a tendency toward a faithful surrender on the part of the believer to the Buddha and a compassionate descent on the part of the Transcendent. This two-directional flow replaced objective cult performances or meditative transformations as bridges across the distance between the faithful and the transcendent holy beings. There was a striving for union with the sacred powers which was sustained by subjective experiences of bliss and actions of fervent faith.

For this reason there appeared more active and less rigidly structured compositions reaching out more freely into space and time. The earliest of these were the Amida *raigō* pictures (106), where both the subject matter and the nature of Amitābha devotion required such compositions, and the heightening of movement during the evolution of this picture type can be traced step by step. Initially, the pose of Amitābha is still frontal and the Bodhisattvas, regularly

distributed throughout the picture, descend in an arrangement which is almost symmetric and only slightly off center. Later on, the composition becomes asymmetric and a diagonal movement from the high and the rear to the low and the front appears. The dynamic nature of their movements is gradually increased as the figures change from a slow and solemn to a rapid descent. An important artistic device was discovered to convey this movement: the clouds on which the sacred figures descend. They convey not only a sense of movement but at the same time enhance the dreamlike quality of the picture.

The quiet frontal appearance of the Amitābha triad survived, particularly in the solemn pictures of Amitābha Coming Across the Mountains (105), but diagonal movement also soon appeared in paintings showing solitary Amitābha figures. He is no longer shown in the statuelike frontal pose which was always maintained in Buddha pictures, but turned three-quarters to the front, depicting him approaching in compassion the faithful believer invoking his name. His feet rest on two lotus flowers: These flowers provide an additional way of symbolically showing his approach because, as tradition has it, a lotus flower would grow at every step taken by an Enlightened One.

Standing figures as such have a more active character than sitting ones, and it is revealing that standing figures occur predominantly among Bodhisattvas (and still more among Devas), but seldom among Buddhas. The opposite is true of seated figures with their timeless immovability. The Buddhas who appear standing are Śākyamuni, who is the earthly incarnation of the Absolute Buddha and therefore relatively more phenomenal and active, Bhaiṣajyaguru, who has a unique function as provider of special assistance in case of illness, and Amitābha, the active savior fulfilling his vow. But Vairocana, the Absolute Buddha in the most radical sense, as a matter of principle never appears in a standing pose.

The Bodhisattva figures intensified their movements as time went by and tended to approach the faithful with ever more active displays of their compassionate natures (114). Vidyārājas, too, shed their restraints so that, for example, Acala (Fudō) and his companions are depicted rushing along surrounded by a flaming cloud of fire. More complex groups of figures, like the older circular arrangements around the main figure, lose their rigidity and break up into asymmetrical groups moving diagonally across the picture plane. However, it is typical that the main figures always continue to be placed right on the central axis of the picture and that marginal figures are given symmetrical frontality so that the entire picture is still held in a two-dimensional and quietly balanced state. This principle asserts itself with great persistence even in cases where a general tendency towards dissolving quietude into movement dominates. The newer principles of composition therefore never come into general use, and throughout the following centuries the tradition of the older, strictly frontal figures or groups remained valid side by side with them.

The typical Buddhist composition usually unfolds in an entirely two-dimensional fashion. It is therefore not spatial. Insofar as being-in-space and acting-in-space mean an existence in the world of phenomenal reality, which to the Buddhists is the world of illusion and samsāra, such a composition is also not realistic. But in contrast to the creations of primitive art, these figures do not stand

"beyond" space in a world "as yet" two-dimensional. Rather they rise beyond the alternative of two- or three-dimensional space. They are neither in a state of two-dimensionality nor in one of three-dimensionality, but exist in a kind of spaceless state. This imparts to them also a timeless quality because they are removed from the flow of time into an "Eternal Now"⁸⁶ which includes all present, past and future, just as spacelessness includes all dimensions. They are, therefore, embedded in the infinite background of undefinable emptiness from which they radiate in spiritualized loftiness without, however, completely entering the present world.

Buddhist painting has, therefore, generally refrained from making use of the achievements in spatial representation made during the Han and T'ang periods, which are particularly evident in landscape painting. Almost without exception, Buddhist paintings employ a dark picture background and, wherever backgrounds with defined features appear, they tend to look like the paradisiac realms of the Pure Land (103), which display their palaces as backdrops for a firmly delineated pictorial space. Their "perspective" joins everything in a clearly and firmly circumscribed but imaginary space and brings together the more or less parallel depth lines of the right and left half of the picture in mirror-like fashion on the central axis. This effect only occurs in East Asian art and only in depictions of such imaginary space (except in cases where later European influences are felt). This strictly centralized and therefore "systematized space" is a truly "symbolic form" and is used to visualize an ideal as opposed to an empirical space. Unlike modern European art, it has no concern for a mathematically exact perspective which creates the illusion of being a "correct" depiction of the optical impression. It does not regard such a construction as a triumph of scientific empiricism irrespective of its "symbolic" character. On the contrary, space was to be characterized as the supra-empirical, visionary sphere of liberation, particularly through its strict regularity and self-contained integration, which differs notably from all other East Asian representations of space.

Space is here not depicted with respect to its compatibility with the optically perceived empirical space of nature in the conventional sense but, as in any art of the "medieval" type, in its compatibility with a vision rooted in its own laws inaccessible to any empirical perception and verification. The possibility that the "central perspective" in the pictures of the Pure Land may (though this is not yet proved) historically be traced to late Hellenistic-West Asian patterns transmitted through Central Asia would perhaps explain its origin but not its meaning nor the fact that it was only this particular picture type which adhered to a spatial scheme so fundamentally un-East Asian in character.

It was very characteristic of the use of an undefined empty picture ground in Buddhist painting that "Amitābha Coming Across the Mountains" (105) normally does not appear in front of or between the mountains, but behind them and set against the empty picture ground so as to symbolize his position beyond the Here and Now and behind the horizon of everything phenomenal. A shift from pure and spatially undefined frontality to a forward direction, into space and, accordingly, to a place in front of a concrete background usually occurs only with figures from lower levels beginning with Bodhisattvas, as in the case of Avalokiteśvara placed in a rocky landscape by the sea shore (112). But even then, the departure from pure frontality is never particularly emphasized. In any event, the figures in such

paintings never step out of our world and realm of existence in order to enter undefined or supra-sensual space nor do they "rise" into it. Motion is always in the opposite direction, involving a descent from the world beyond towards us and into the superficial world of phenomenal existence, but without the sacred figures ever divorcing themselves entirely from their infinite ground of being.

This treatment of space is of course found primarily in the most important picture type, the cult images proper. Picture types emphasizing narrative content (119, 122-125) or portraits (132) adhere to the rules customary for depicting empirical space in East Asia. They establish a stage of relatively shallow space in which the figures and objects are arranged without any, or at least without consistent, reduction in size. They are also not subjected to alignments for viewing them at particular levels or from fixed points, but manage to provide a clear overview of the situation or event. The preference for a high horizon, i.e., for a pronounced downward view from a high vantage point, favors such an arrangement and such overall views.

Under these circumstances space remains open to all directions. Its borders remain fluid because all optical centering, any isolation of fixed spatial cones or "optical pyramids" from the infinite space continuum, is avoided. East Asians view the procedure applied in Western perspective painting as artificial and arbitrary. They see it as an impermissible intrusion of the viewer into the picture, as a senseless and meaningless dissection of the totality of the world, and as an impermissible effort to force this space-time continuum into a rigid state as it flows incessantly before the background of Nothingness.

However, in spite of this avoidance of Western perspective, or perhaps because of it, the impression of three-dimensionality is always convincing even though two-dimensionality always asserts itself. But any sense of three-dimensionality tends to lose itself in the spacelessness of the empty picture ground. Yet within the "stage" established for the figures and objects of a particular picture, spatial relationships are clearly evident. Concrete objects such as implements, buildings or landscape elements, constitute firm reference points and delineate directions for the activities of the figures. Lines indicating depth normally run at oblique angles and are parallel to each other. As the result of an optical illusion, they appear to us to converge towards the foreground of the picture as if following a "reverse perspective." The parallel course of the lines, however, is not always quite consistent, i.e., lines do not display a uniform angle throughout the picture with respect to the picture frame.

This procedure for depicting the space of the empirical world, which we could only present here in its barest outline, is not specific to Buddhist painting which, on the contrary, is unique in that it does not employ this method for its most important picture types. Rather, it employs an entirely different system either of spacelessness or of imaginary, idealizing construction of space for representing all supra-empirical realms. The spirit of Buddhism does permeate, however, representations of empirical space in that they, as in all East Asian painting, do not confine objects in a space which merely serves as their "container," i.e., they are not rigidly fixed in space nor tied to a particular "position." Hence there is no perspective with fixed viewpoints and vanishing points and no opposition of subject and object. All objects and even space itself glide and float. Even time itself is part

of this process. Behind all depictions we always sense that groundless ground, that spaceless space and that timeless time of Emptiness from which everything emerges but for a fleeting moment and into which it ultimately will be reabsorbed. And even though in the cult pictures the numina manifest themselves in an illusory fashion, they do so in a manner which does not reveal their ephemeral character as viewed against the ground of being but rather in the form of their unchanging and indestructible essence which is part of this very ground itself.

The question concerning three-dimensionality in composition corresponds in the depiction of individual figures and objects to the question of their plastic modelling. As is well known, East Asian painting in general did not employ cast shadows and body shadowing prior to the 17th through 19th centuries when it came under European influence. It would be erroneous, however, to conclude that it was satisfied to treat bodies entirely in a two-dimensional manner. The problems of corporeal roundness, of light and dark shading, and even that of superimposing different layers and making the deeper parts visible as if seen through veils, were given their fair share of attention not only in ink paintings with their wealth of shadings and tones (140, 146), but also in the more linear figure and landscape paintings (97, 107-110, 116, 127).

All this is in accord with the comments made above on "two-dimensional" qualities, i.e., that this "two-dimensional" quality is not one that falls short of or below a command of three-dimensional space, but rather one that has gone beyond it. Modelling is, therefore, by no means timidly avoided or out of reach because of a lack of expertise. Rather, it is left unemphasized, so that objects almost seem to be without earthly gravity and to not have claimed any particular space. Spacelessness permeates all bodies and objects and renders them weightless, clear and transparent, and thus enables them to penetrate each other. Transparency and weightlessness are also characteristic features of East Asian landscape painting. These traits are quite compatible with that characteristic forcefulness of line-drawing and ink-values which allow the spiritual substance of landscapes to shine through so clearly.

Buddhist painting is also capable of bestowing roundness on its figures and of making visible the plastic quality of its body forms by means of gentle gradation of tones. But this modelling procedure is relatively rare and appears to have been mostly limited to the unclothed parts of the body (110). But even in these instances, it is always done so lightly that the full weight of their volume does not interfere with the impression of weightlessness. Rocks and similar features in cult paintings (127), and particularly figures and landscape elements in scenic pictures (122, 124, 135) are frequently given a loosely applied shadowing which only hints at an optical impression of reality without, however, competing with it. Yet such elements always manage to remain convincing because they do not fall short of or below the threshold of realistic depiction but rather go beyond it. The painting is free to either deny or confirm this impression of corporeality. It may do both simultaneously and thus present to us something which not only reminds us of reality but may even unlock its meaning for us while at the same time remaining remote from it and, in its innermost essence, having no share in it.

The presence of such paradoxes characterize this art as truly Buddhist. On the one hand, it achieves an appropriately modelled effect which allows the images

of the sacred figures to impress the eye; on the other hand, it manages to "decorporealize" these bodies and make them appear transparent and visionary.

Buddhist painting has developed a special method to achieve this result: the so-called reversed shading (*J. kaeriguma*) method. A three-dimensional body is darkened at its rounded parts, but lightened up towards its depressions or margins. This reverses the normal distribution of shadows and presents them in a manner contrary to the way they appear to our eyes (97, 113). This method was never consistently employed and was applied primarily to the bodies and still more frequently to the garments which, as a consequence, frequently look like veils.

An alternative method popular in older paintings which was applied to body forms and garment folds made each fold increasingly darker towards its crest and lighter at the lower levels where the folds emerge from the darker crests of the neighboring folds crossing them. In other words, parts which should appear darkest to the perceiving eye were made to appear lightest. The result is a stripe-like shading which emphasizes the abstractly musical interplay of lines and avoids any indication of heavy body-weight without, however, lapsing into two-dimensionality.

Shading is, therefore, not applied according to the actual distribution of light and darkness in the empirical-phenomenal world but in a non-realistic, schematic manner. This imparts to the total composition a strong artistic unity which is free from ties to empirical appearance and rests entirely within itself and the world of spiritual forms. It is characteristic of this painting that, generally speaking, it achieves an autonomy of artistic expression derived solely from the Buddhist artist's incredible freedom from the bonds of an object-laden empirical world. A Buddhist artist is free from the empirical world without, however, negating it altogether.

The same technique is employed by Buddhist painters in their treatment of the halos of sacred figures (108, 114, 127, 135) and the petals of the lotus flowers (113) forming a lotus throne; they are frequently lighter on their lower parts and darker towards their tips. Similar shadowing is also used for clouds carrying sacred figures (109).

With the help of such shadowing--the term modelling appears to be hardly appropriate--Buddhist painting not only manages to strip these figures of their realistic appearance and weight, it also imparts to them a marvellous softness and tenderness of form and color that makes them appear to be filled with an inner glow radiating mysteriously both from their physical bodies and their entire sphere. This is quite in line with the sacred texts which frequently speak about the radiance of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas emanating from all the pores of their bodies to illuminate all the worlds. It is this aura which contributes perhaps most prominently to the visionary character of the Buddhist figures, particularly those of the highest levels. The lower we descend the scale of existence, the more we encounter figures with a firmly modelled tangibility. This is frequently done by mere nuances, but these are sufficient to clearly distinguish the picture of a Deva or patriarch from that of a Buddha or Bodhisattva (compare 110, 117, 130 with 102, 112).

The shadowing, or better, the brightening mode employed in Buddhist painting --aiming at visionary and mystic transparency--is not only determined by artistic considerations and religious experiences and visions but also has a strict philosophical foundation which took shape under the particular influence of the Avatamsaka (Hua-yen, Kegon) school. Its central concept is that of the universal

mutual interpenetration of all phenomena and of the empirical with the absolute aspects of the world. These only appear to be distinguished from each other as long as our spiritual maturity has not yet reached the level of a Bodhisattva. This transcendence based on universal interpenetration is envisioned and poetically described as a "super-world" filled with the immeasurable splendor of light and jewels. It has to be a world of light because only rays of light can penetrate each other without displacing or overshadowing each other. In the absence of shadows, the separation into individual objects and alternative intellectual viewpoints is overcome and a general transparency and mutual penetration is achieved which also maintains individuality and order. Spatial perceptions are transcended because any empirical space depends for its comprehensibility on the separate existence of objects, which, in Kegon teaching is cancelled by their mutual interpenetration.⁸⁸ This shadowless shining world of the Dharma (dharma-dhātu) should not be understood as an abstraction or a symbol but as a concrete religious experience. It can hardly be better visualized in an artistic representation than in the way attempted by Buddhist painters. While remaining within the limits set by their technical possibilities they manage with the help of their *kaeriguma* procedure and of light and ray aureoles to dissolve all spatial objectivity, weight, and self-containment of objects and make them transparent without, however, having them dissolved into a complete fusion which would only lead to formlessness and absolute identity of everything with everything else, but not to an "interpenetration."⁸⁹

Whatever has been said in the preceding two sections dealing with position and modelling about the ways Buddhist painting solved fundamental problems confronting painting in general, i.e., that of the third dimension, confirms our earlier interpretation of architecture and sculpture. Though the interpretation of the latter two may have appeared in some instances to be rather arbitrary or at least unverifiable, painting offers us clear self-interpretations of how Buddhist art perceived body and space. This testimony is also of value for interpreting other fields of Buddhist art. This is made possible because the inner relationships and parallels between sculpture and painting in Buddhist art are so close and the number of laws peculiar to only one of these two fields so insignificant. Moreover, the conceptions of space in a given artistic tradition manifest themselves in similar fashion in painting, sculpture and architecture, and elucidate each other.

Even the line, in almost all East Asian art the basic structural element, keeps any Buddhist figure at a safe distance from our tangible and yet illusionary world where, to the ordinary eye, things crowd and overshadow each other. This is possible because the lines are generally very light and delicate and frequently appear to lack nearly all corporeality and substance. To be sure, the contours impart to the visible forms a certain corporeality and succeed in doing this with a remarkable degree of sensitivity (107, 110, 116 f.)—such as, for example, in instances where an arm may appear round and alive merely by virtue of its contours. But at the same time an effort is made to desensualize the lines so as to avoid using them merely as a means for capturing the objective substance in the service of realistic depiction. Their distinct artistic logic is maintained and made to help realize a spiritual vision in which the eternal is captured in pure form.

But this is a vision which is not hostile to phenomena. If it were, it would have to stay away from images altogether or to rely on abstract symbols. But this

vision both recognizes and uses visible forms--even if only in an extremely sublimated manner and without being ensnared by them. We encounter both marvels of pure and spiritual forms in the best Buddhist pictures and an art of the line of such tremendous sensitivity that it approaches a degree of exactness and perfection just short of the dissolution of forms and their transition into the formless absolute. It is, therefore, more than a merely conventional metaphor to refer to the melodic patterns of these lines. Like a melody, they, too, perform their task without any necessary relationship to some "content." They are formulated to reflect the content's objective substance but do so as beautiful and pure curves in the sphere of spiritual vision and supra-objective feeling. Yet they retain the full immediate force of the sensuous charm or, at least, ornamental magic, of both the forms and the fullness of life raised to a spiritualized level.

Buddhist paintings place a crucial emphasis on lines, even though these lines frequently appear to be quite weightless, unassuming and seemingly lacking in emphasis. They also possess that infinitely meaningful and silently eloquent "expressionlessness" which characterizes all representations of the highest levels of existence. The manner in which the curve of a garment or the contour of a shoulder, arm or hand flows--no matter how unselfconsciously this may happen--is filled with such profound meaning that an understanding of these paintings and sculptures depends largely on the correct perception of these lines. The objects will remain silent to a viewer who lacks sensitivity to the play of lines.

But lines are also the essential organizing element of the picture composition. The individual elements of compositions, just as those of groups of sculpted figures, are held together less by a common flow of movement or a tight formation of the group than by an extremely refined play of lines (21*, 109). These lines even bridge empty spaces. They move from figure to figure or from individual figures to their thrones (102) and make all figures part of a unity permeated by the flow of various dynamic forces. This web of lines extends through a two-dimensional plane, or at least within a shallow spatial zone parallel to the picture plane without, however, seizing depth or opening it. This makes possible the pronounced linearity of such pictures.

But even within individual figures--particularly in their garments--a complex interlocking of lines takes place. All lines either flow around a static center in quiet circular movements or in a steady rhythmic forward and backward flow (97, 135). Alternatively the lines reach out and surround the figures in long wavelike patterns (110, 114). The garments are not joined to the body by any objective relationship but rather through the flow and pattern of the lines. The contours of the halo and of the cup-shaped lotus flower holding the figures impart to them their ultimately defining shape while simultaneously allowing them to radiate their form into infinite and undefinable realms (113).

The most characteristic function of the line is to "call forth" the sacred figures from spheres beyond definition and to hold them in the magic circle of its form, and it accomplishes this task with determination, exactness and perfection. But it does not confine form tyrannically within a cage of lines and does not jealously set it apart either from other forms or from the "beyond form." The line always remains "open" and allows itself to be freely overflowed by that which goes beyond the line itself and all imposed limitations. It achieves the utmost in form but does so with

modesty while keeping the observer fully conscious of the temporary and insubstantial nature of even the most perfect form.

Once this characteristically paradoxical and metaphysical nature of the line in Buddhism has been understood, its "ornamental" character may be emphasized. The Buddhist line is far more than ornamental in the conventional sense. One of the secrets of East Asian, especially Buddhist art, is that it succeeded in making any form appear, along with its objective content and ideal meaning, as a purely decorative and yet nobly spiritualized ornament. Moreover, in addition to the qualities mentioned above, this decorative function of the line is attained or at least enhanced by a strong standardization. Fixed line motifs, formulated once and for all into what may also be called line symbols or formulas, are repeated over and over again and are only subject to certain variations. Standardized formulas have not only been evolved for hands, eyes, parts of garments, but certain types of lines have even been reserved for different categories of beings.

With only slight exaggeration one may even claim that it is frequently possible to determine the category of being to which a figure belongs solely from the character of the lines found in a particular segment of that figure. Buddhas would display very cool, utterly calm and dematerialized lines (102) while Bodhisattvas would have a livelier, more flexible and charmingly persuasive flow of lines (114). Vidyārâjas have either dynamically agitated or strict and sometimes even tense line forms (137) but Devas display more sensuous, fuller and luxurious webs of lines (117).

Yet all these lines, with few exceptions, belong basically to the type of line dominant in Buddhist art: the so-called iron-wire lines. These are smooth lines of different but always consistent and even thickness which are devoid of shading or expressive swelling. They form firm, long curves which clearly delineate the contours of any form. Their application conveys the impression that one is "cutting into metal." This line is "abstract" or "absolute" and both highly musical and decorative in its effect. The earlier the period, the stronger and more vigorous this line. Gradually it becomes livelier, finer, and more subtle, only to slowly give way during the late period of classic Buddhist painting (Sung and Kamakura) to a new type of line of irregular thickness. This new line is softer and yet more vigorously modulated. It is less abstract and ornamental and makes richer use of the possibilities offered by the flexible brush. It is only during this later time that the supposed eighteen types of lines⁹⁰ which were developed in China and then adopted in Japan became popular for the depiction of garments, particularly for figures at the lower levels of existence.

It would, however, be erroneous to view these two types of lines simply as belonging to two successive stages of development and to speak of wholesale replacement of a "linear" by a "painterly" style phase. Both continued to co-exist for a long time even though the strictly linear paintings go back to earlier periods.

The modulated ink line evolved in China in close relationship with calligraphy. The basic form of Chinese calligraphy was perfected during the Han and Chin periods, and its technique has subsequently been transferred to painting where it was vigorously promoted during the T'ang period. Wu Tao-tse is the man credited with this artistic surge which came to be so immensely important for all of East Asia. In his works (or works ascribed to him which can no longer be identified

with any degree of certainty; 97) the ink line can already be found applied to Buddhist paintings too, but this style does not appear to have been generally adopted. If it had been, the domination of the "iron line" could not have been as universal as it was at that time.

Both line types frequently occur in the same picture. In such cases, the strict wire lines are reserved for painting figures and the looser ink lines for natural shapes, like rocks or trees (112, 119, 122, 129). This practice produced an inner graduated scale of picture elements, a "relief" showing prominent major forms and accompanying marginal phenomena on the basis of a hierarchy of rank and essence, extending even to the details of line technique among the concrete objects of the world of *samsāra* and the hypostases of the sphere of *nirvāna*. This shows how wrong it would be to interpret such formal features simply as belonging to successive historical style phases when, in fact, they are merely features showing different levels of style.

Color performs two main functions in Buddhist art: One is objective and symbolic--ontological; the other psychological and aesthetic. Detailed treatment of the rather complex color symbolism is still impossible due to the lack of sufficient preliminary studies, but we should be aware that basically a particular color is present in a particular location first and foremost because it has a doctrinally determined and objectively fixed symbolic meaning. This meaning is described in the collections of iconographic rules and regulations and takes precedence over any aesthetic considerations.

Though the use of colors is rooted in a full-fledged metaphysic of color linked to Eastern cosmology, the peoples of East Asia, always very sensitive to colors, have never stripped them of their sensual magic for the sake of abstract formalized considerations. Colors are an important element of sacred beauty, first of all, simply as rich and joyous feasts for the eye, but also because they are intimately linked with transcendence and are therefore highly sublimated and spiritualized no matter how great their sensual appeal.

The "representational value" of colors, i.e., their participation in the more or less illusionist reproduction of real objects in colors characteristic for them (their actual colors or colors modified by gradations of light and shadow) is almost entirely negligible in Buddhist painting, except in cases where concrete objects of the earthly world are depicted in narrative pictures. The "intrinsic value" of colors dominates throughout, i.e., the specific character of each color as such has ornamental and aesthetic value, whose expression has a direct, intense psychological effect. It may assume an important role in the composition of a picture because its color components are selected entirely according to artistic criteria. All this may be completely independent of the "correct" coloration of the depicted objects.

The symbolic value of a color, i.e., the fixed religious, social, political or other meanings of a color, cannot be captured either as "representational" or "intrinsic" value because it is neither a natural quality of the particular objects depicted nor is it characteristic of the particular color as such. Rather, this symbolic meaning is attached to or bestowed on an object so as to enable it to make a statement about something that is not otherwise directly accessible to the senses. To understand the meaning of such a statement we cannot rely on our eyes alone but must add knowledge based on convention and tradition.⁹¹ In Buddhist art this

symbolic value is highly significant and is also most intimately tied to a color's intrinsic value for ornamental, expressive and compositional purposes. These color values express themselves with particular purity whenever the mode of painting--as is typical for Buddhist art--prefers to make use of more or less two-dimensional elements which are firmly defined in a linear fashion rather than to rely on devices which create spatial illusions or create impressions of solid objects through the play of light and shadow.

The role of colors in Buddhist painting is second only to that of line. The general impression colors convey is that of a deep, dark warmth combined with jewelled splendor and a richness of color tones. But these rich colors usually do not appear in large, clearly circumscribed areas, but rather are woven into highly complicated patterns which, in combination with the gold decorations, create the effect of a precious ancient brocade from which individual richly colored spots shine like scattered jewels.

This seemingly overly ornate and playfully aesthetic splendor of colors does succeed in creating an aura of mystical depth because in the best works the individual colors are applied in a manner that makes them yield a maximum of radiance or warmth but allows them also to preserve a state of muted harmony. The result is a web of colors which, in its unity of spiritual and sensual beauty, can only be compared to the musical sphere. Here every note expresses itself, but there are also accords and occasional dissonances; individual elements are not fused into an undifferentiated sound, yet submit as free and individual members to the order of the entire composition without competing among each other or vying for prominence. In this respect, colors are akin to the line which also modestly serves the purpose of expressing spiritual truths.

It is surprising how successfully different and "theoretically" dissonant colors are sometimes brought into harmony with each other and how--regardless of the density of the web of colors and wealth of hues--colors remain light and frequently even ethereal, an effect to which the "reversed shadowing technique" makes substantial contributions. The colors penetrate each other but do not get in each other's way. Each of them maintains its full individuality while constituting in their totality a well assembled order. And, given all the emphasis on the deliciousness and preciousness of the substance of colors, they are always made to appear as though immaterial. Its frequently bewitching sensual effects notwithstanding, the play of colors remains always remote from the phenomenal world.

Lines and colors are, therefore, clearly distinguished. Lines never submerge in a "painterly" surge of colors, but remain intimately linked to each other. The colors themselves are given a peculiarly linear structure by means of the so-called *ungen* method which has already been described in connection with the decorative elements in architecture (p. 62). The raigō triptych on Kōya-san⁹² offers a clear example for the use of this technique even though in this instance it is limited to the parts identical in color, i.e., particularly to the garments and to the clouds on which all figures are placed (109). This technique cooperates with the "reverse shading" to render the individual parts of the forms lighter towards their margins so that the impression of a three-dimensional rounding, seemingly illuminated from within, is achieved. Clouds also seem to move more intensively because of this device.

Ungen (cf. 20*) transforms uniform and smoothly colored surfaces into bunched stripes of varying tones. Its parallel strips of color reinforce the rhythm of the contours and make a significant contribution to the interweaving of the forms of the whole. In this manner the threat of fragmentation and unrest is avoided by having neighboring colors or color tones unified or at least systematically variegated and made to join in an overall harmony. The gradual transitions are an effective device for avoiding any harsh clashes and vigorous contrasts of strongly differing basic color tones while the striplike arrangement of the individual tones creates an orderly and clarifying gradation within this harmonious shifting play of lines, surfaces and colors. All this is animated by an artistic design whose peculiar features we have already observed on several occasions. It is free from any attempt to capture objects realistically or to create the illusion of imitating reality, but at the same time possesses a sensuous optical vision and a lively taste for decorative use of forms.

The nearly always dark picture ground is vital to the total effect of the colors. This dark ground is more than a mere symbol of "Emptiness" from which the sacred figures emanate. It also has the aesthetic function of helping the various colors to fully unfold their intrinsic values by contrasting them with each other. At the same time it joins them--as organ point and most profound "ground," so to speak--and leads them back to an ultimate unity, no longer clearly definable and beyond all colors, from which they all seem to emerge. According to the Buddhist principle of universal representation, all five basic colors (white, black, green/blue, yellow, and red) are contained in every single one of them. Yet, they are all also merely manifestations of a sole, primordial color which is beyond definition and which ultimately signifies the Absolute, the true nature of Dharma, and Emptiness which can and should be visualized in every existing phenomenon, no matter what its particular color or form.

Only if we are aware of this fundamental concept in Mahāyāna Buddhism will we correctly understand the variety of colors found in its pictures, both in their metaphysical transience and as mystic paradox. We will come to understand the importance of gold as "true color" (see p. 149 f.), of the blackness of ink as "containing all colors," and of the empty white ground in ink painting. In these three primordial colors the variety of colors we encounter in the phenomenal world has been reduced to an ultimate existential ground where they all have been transcended.

The individual spheres of existence are clearly distinguished by their coloration. The higher a sacred figure ranks, the simpler and more sweeping the coloration. Many of the Buddha images rely for their sublime effect on the contrast between this transcendent simplicity and the rich fullness and splendor of the Bodhisattvas. The latter, in turn, display the spiritualized wealth of Buddhist colors most impressively while the colorful ornaments of the Devas have occasionally something of a merely luxurious quality about them and are thus reminiscent of the world of *samsāra*. The Vidyārājas display the demonic aspect of colors with their dark, frightening glow which is occasionally punctuated by bursts of brighter colors. They are in sharp contrast to the profound calm of the other figures but also rise from the ground of that primordial color which potentially contains the entire spectrum within itself.

The figures of the human sphere, above all the Arhats and patriarchs, are usually given entirely different and "earthier" colors than the sacred figures. The transition from the world beyond into this world of colors becomes clearly evident upon inspection of a number of examples. Coloration is frequently the decisive element in symbolizing the innermost essence of the various figure-types. The doctrinal and emotional meaning of a Buddha, a Bodhisattva, a Vidyârāja can be gauged a priori from his colors not only because of their symbolic language but also because of their direct artistic impact.⁹³

In some large scenic pictures, colors have a pronounced effect on the character of the mood evoked by the spiritual substance of the depicted event. A picture showing "Śākyamuni's Resurrection from the Golden Coffin" is kept entirely in the minor color key of gold and brownish violet tones, while a raigō picture (106) expresses the hope for a redeeming rebirth into the radiant realm of Amitābha by a marvelous concert of happy, bright tones in which even gold achieves an entirely different expressive character.

This sacred world of color may be contrasted to that of profane paintings with their joyous but superficial, though more realistic display of colors. In narrative pictures, this profane realm frequently intrudes into the sacred sphere. It became more and more dominant after the decline of classic religious painting and after having already paralleled its development for a long time. The coloring in more recent painting is based in good measure on it. These two basic types of East Asian color design may be distinguished from a third type which was present in both religious and secular painting but was strongly promoted by Zen art. This was ink painting which, lacking a particular color of its own, but "containing all colors," ultimately joined the other two forms. East Asian art has therefore managed to combine within an impressive artistic range and spiritual polarity both a passionate love for colors and an almost equally strong love for black-and-white paintings, i.e., it has succeeded in combining an intensive love of life and of the world with a mystic-ascetic attitude which sees through this saṃsāra beauty and leaves it behind.

The gold of the Buddhist figures, both in sculpture and painting, constitutes in sensual-aesthetic and subjective-psychological terms a marvelously harmonious enhancement and crowning of the shining and mysterious interplay of colors. But its use is ontologically founded on the teachings about the Buddha-light which, in golden rays, emanates from every Buddha and not only floods all worlds with its splendor but makes it possible for them to shine forth at all and be constituted as manifestations of the "Buddha essence." The importance of the role of gold is, therefore, based on mystic-visionary experiences of light known to all mystics. It also rests on its profound symbolic meaning, and on the "abstracting" remoteness of the highest sacred beings representing the Absolute which is beyond the sphere of concrete reality and its fragmentation into multi-colored phenomena. At the same time, it possesses high decorative value as precious adornment.

As one of the avenues through which the Transcendent manifests itself, gold is properly the element indicative of the essence of the Buddhas, and in many instances also of the Bodhisattvas. But while it may appear as a "color" linked to their corporeal appearance, as "color beyond all colors" it represents the Absolute directly. The Sūtras frequently mention the pure, clear golden color of the body and

face of a Buddha. One of the 48 vows of Dharmākara-Bodhisattva, the later Amitābha-Buddha, proclaims to the beings to be reborn in his realm that they will all share in the same color--gold. Gold symbolizes the cancellation of all colors, and, according to Buddhist usage, also of all the qualities accessible to the senses. This one "transcendent color" is elevated into the mystery of the ultimate fullness of being.

Gold is also called a "natural" or "innate" color. This means that it is the genuine, appropriate, perfect, and unchangeable color in contradistinction to silver which, because it becomes discolored when exposed to air, is called the "clouded" or "discolored" metal. The two metals can, therefore, serve as symbols of nirvāna and samsāra respectively.⁹⁴ By having gold cover the entire body and frequently also his garment, the Buddha is elevated by virtue of this ultimate simplicity far above the multiple voices of the choir of the other colors into the realm of emptiness, which is filled with the unlimited potential of being and yet transcends it.

Only gold may be called the fully valid symbol of this emptiness, because its "colorlessness" or "supra-colorness" and ultimately valid unity embraces at the same time an infinite variety of colors and fullness of splendor. In its precious simplicity it has a mystic meaning. It emerges from the figure of the Buddha in his state of perfect quietude as the visible manifestation of his unlimited potential. Golden rays are an expression of his hidden saving powers. The other beings, particularly those at levels below that of the Bodhisattva, still remain more or less trapped in the superficially colorful and color-bound phenomenal world. These empirically realistic "samsāra colors" constitute the lowest stage of an ontologically determined order. Above it rises the elevated and sacredly transformed mystic world of colors in which supra-human and supra-mundane beings like Devas, Bodhisattvas, and Vidyārājas appear and where gold begins to play a part. The apex, and at the same time the "ground" of this hierarchy, is formed by the pure gold of the Buddha understood as manifestation of Absoluteness.

In addition to this ontological meaning, gold holds a secondary meaning, i.e., that of an element of the sacred splendor (shōgon) which plays an important role in all fields of Buddhist art, as we will explain in greater detail below (p. 183 ff.). In this function, its use is predominant among the Bodhisattvas and the divine figures below them, who are often lavishly endowed with golden jewelry. But this splendor never appears overdone because it represents a harmonious intensification of the splendid appearance of these figures and because it does not attempt to merely please the eye or stimulate the visionary imagination. Its numinous glorifying beauty possesses a profoundly metaphysical meaning and religious solemnity.

The Buddhist Painter

All these religious and artistically so important paintings were by no means, or only rarely, the creations of outstanding individual artists in the modern sense. Our comments on the Buddhist sculptors (see p. 113) apply in all basic points to the painters as well. Painting, however, generally holds in East Asia a higher place on the scale of the social rankings of the arts. It was considered a noble art; as such, educated men and aristocrats could embrace it as dilettantes, but bring to bear full technical and artistic expertise.

Even professional painters themselves frequently belonged to a higher social stratum than sculptors. It is possible to demonstrate that leading masters of Japanese cult painting were members of the court aristocracy just as were the many priests who played a crucial role in the creation of cult paintings by assuring their doctrinal-iconographic accuracy. In China, too, professional painters of high social rank were commissioned by the imperial court and leading temples. Only somewhat later do families and schools of artists of non-aristocratic origin appear. In Japan, where this phenomenon can be traced more accurately, this occurred toward the end of the twelfth century.

We should also not underestimate the contributions made by foreign painters. In China, these were mostly of Central Asian origin. The early painters who introduced the first iconographic and stylistic picture types were Central Asians who brought with them the forms established in India and transformed in Turkestan. Later, during the T'ang period, artists like Wei-ch'ih I-seng came from Khotan. His very peculiar style has only recently become a little better known to us. In Japan we find numerous Chinese and Korean architects, sculptors, artisans, and painters who transmitted to their eager Japanese students the large stock of picture types, techniques and stylistic forms which the continental art of the Six Dynasties and the T'ang period had produced. Below the leading, socially high-ranking personalities worked an army of artist-craftmen who may be assumed to have been allowed only a small degree of creative initiative. Individual priests are, therefore, often considered to have been the real originators of particular Buddhist pictures, but modern students still have a difficult time in determining their exact contributions. The Japanese imperial court and the large monasteries each had their own "Painting Office" (*edokoro*) in which large numbers of assistants and apprentices were employed under a strictly regulated division of labor based on common religious ties, traditions and ideals of craftsmanship. They worked under the direction of a few masters who may be considered to have been the real creators of the works of art. We know that such cooperatives, corresponding exactly to our medieval workshops, were hereditary in families of specialists in surface priming, draftsmanship, coloring, cut-gold work (*kirikane*), and mounting. But even the painters of noble descent who worked outside of these family-based cooperatives followed essentially the same artistic principles and techniques. All this led to the emergence of a circle of cult painters so narrowly prescribed and homogeneous that the division of labor did not prevent the evolution of a very uniform style. The individual artist generally remained, therefore, quite inconspicuous, even in cases where he was a person of remarkable talent and high prestige.

Workshop operations based on strict iconographic rules and stylistic traditions naturally gave rise to strongly standardized works and frequently put obstacles in the path of the work of freer and more imaginative artistic genius. But these constraints also saved Buddhist painting from undergoing individualistic fragmentation and arbitrary innovation and promoted an impressive inner unity and certainty. But disregarding those conditions which apply to any "medieval" artistic enterprise, the power of the individual personality was generally revealed in East Asia through the manner in which the impersonal or supra-personal aspects of this art were handled, the manner with which it represented the typical, and to what degree the creative artist, no matter how modestly he exercised his individual

preferences, was in touch with the essence of the matter at hand and with the metaphysical ground which "embraces him from behind" (Nishida).⁹⁵

Though "there exists no Ego" in art and craftsmanship, as an ancient Japanese text declares, it would be incorrect to assume a total uniformity of design and a stifling restraint on artistic imagination. Variations and new creations were given a certain leeway but were also kept within firm limits. Moreover, inspiration and vision occasionally resulted in certain innovations which, because they seemed to come from a transcendent source, were by virtue of this fact not only justified but even required. Still, such toleration was only granted to a few priests with appropriate spiritual authority. Only minor changes in detail and, above all, merely gradual changes in composition, line and color were left as possible individual contributions by artists in the employ of the court or the temples.

Such changes allow us to follow both the particular character of a painter--or at least of his school--and, more clearly, changes in style over the course of history. But it was just this power of type and tradition, as Binyon has commented, which confronted the artist with the lofty charge to do justice to his task and to match the level reached by his predecessors. This focused his energies by keeping him from engaging in a frantic search for individual and novel achievements no matter at what cost. Only in this manner could the depth of the given topics be probed and their meaning exhausted by seeing them embodied in ever new versions just as the vigor of an old tree is embodied in ever new blossoms.

The names of important Buddhist painters in China and in Japan have been handed down. In Japan we are even able to establish at least a tenuous link between a few of the surviving pictures and artists' names. But it remains extremely difficult to capture the personality of the painters and their works with any degree of clarity. We are, therefore, even more inclined to refrain from mentioning their names within the framework of this study since such an effort, even in the best of cases, would not yield much more beyond their names.

Moreover, traditional attributions are frequently highly questionable. For example, a large number of Buddhist paintings are traditionally ascribed to the great T'ang painter Wu Tao-tse (ca. 700-760 [97]), who was undoubtedly an outstanding pioneer and is venerated as the greatest figure of East Asian painting; but it is virtually impossible to form an adequate impression of his original works. We are not even in a position to vaguely estimate the degree to which the numerous later copies of his works--some reputedly done by him but known to us only through references in literary sources--depart from the originals.

Even in Japan, where a rich tradition has been preserved about such leading medieval families of cult painters as the Takuma family, serious doubts have been raised in academic studies about the authenticity of these family genealogies. Even the undoubtedly historical personalities of medieval Japanese cult painting remain very shadowy figures. All this changes with the rise of Zen painting, particularly since the Sung period in China and the Ashikaga period in Japan. From now on we encounter an art born out of a personal world view and original inspiration. We come to know a number of outstanding masters not only as real persons but also by impressive individual and authentic works.