How comes it, then, that in portraying the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the saints and Lokapālas or Demon Kings, the Chinese painters follow so closely the Indian formula ? We may suppose that just as fifteenth-century painters in Italy and the Netherlands, in representing Gospel scenes, portrayed Christ and his disciples dressed in a conventional, supposedly Oriental garb, but painted secular persons and spectators in the costume of their own time and place, so it was with these Chinese artists. And perhaps this is sufficient explanation. Yet, when we remark what fidelity to Gandhāran models was observed, once the Chinese artists had come to know them ; when we remember that the Jātaka scenes were frequent subjects of the school of Gandhāra and were of course treated in the same style as the Bodhisattvas ; and when we consider that Buddha himself, in his youth, is portrayed in these banner paintings as a Chinese boy in Chinese dress, we may be tempted by another hypothesis. We may suppose that when the Buddha-legends were first illustrated by Chinese painters they were known by written and oral tradition only, and that the painters, having no models to fall back upon, painted the chosen scenes in their own way and according to their own lights ; and this style, this treatment, once fixed, remained. It might be that the tradition thus formed (which, be it noticed, is continued in Japanese art throughout) represents an earlier phase of Buddhism, when the Buddha-legend was more prominent in the mouths of missionaries than the worship of the Bodhisattvas. But all this is conjecture, and the simpler explanation may be the right one.

At any rate, what we have to note is the fact that Chinese painting had already developed a powerful genius of its own, and, however much it borrowed, was able to fuse its borrowings in its own style. But before dealing with this question of the fusion of Indian subject-matter in Chinese style, let us complete what there is to say about the purely Chinese features in the Tun-huang paintings.

Besides the illustrations of Jātaka-legends, there are at the foot of many of the pictures portraits of their donors. These are most valuable documents for the student of Chinese painting ; for they give us portraits of people actually living at a certain date, they show us what costume they wore—thereby often helping us to determine the approximate date of undated pictures—and they afford more than a hint of the prevalent style of drawing in secular art.

Every one who has studied the earlier art of China knows how difficult it is to find a really trustworthy starting-point for dating pictures and arriving at a sound conception of the style of a given period. We have usually only an ancient tradition, at the best, of date and authorship. But here we have dated work, from which we can start.

Among the paintings reproduced is one, ' Four Forms of Avalokiteśvara ' (Pl. XVI), which bears a date corresponding to the year A.D. 864. This is the earliest date found on any of the paintings. Others bear dates of the late ninth and early tenth centuries.

Comparing the picture reproduced on Plate XVI with other pictures which are not dated, we can have little hesitation in assigning the great majority of the paintings to the second half of the T'ang dynasty (seventh to tenth centuries) and towards its close, though it would be rash to attempt any minute determination of dates, for reasons already given.

We know nothing certain of Chinese painting before T'ang times, except the painting in the British Museum, ' Admonitions of the Instructress in the Palace ', and the ' Ló-shen Fu ' in the Freer Collection, both ascribed to Ku K'ai-chih. Whether either of these be allowed to be an original of the fourth century or not, there can be no doubt that they represent the style of that period in its main characteristics : they show a great mastery of expressive drawing of the human figure, an extraordinary command of finely modulated, sinuous line, a love of it both for its own sake and as expressive of movement, and a quite primitive and rudimentary treatment of landscape.

The paintings we are now considering afford no adequate material for comparison ; but one thing is at once noticeable, and that is the altered ideal of the human form ; in place of the tall, slender proportions of Ku K'ai-chih, T'ang art substitutes shorter and more massive proportions. An ideal of power has superseded an ideal of grace.

Hints of the treatment of landscape, primitive by comparison with the mature Sung art, but decidedly more advanced than Ku K'ai-chih's, are also of much interest.