

specimens of Buddhist religious painting as then prevailing in China were previously known. It is true that but few of our Tun-huang paintings can be attributed to the hands of great masters. Most of them are only pictures produced in provincial workshops, to meet the demands of local devotees for votive offerings.

But our paintings, just because they were produced on the extreme western border of China proper and on one of the great cross-roads of Asia, permit us to distinguish more clearly than might otherwise be possible between what the pictorial art of Mahayana Buddhism, first developed in the region of the Indian North-West Frontier and then carried with Buddhist doctrine through Eastern Iran and Central Asia, contributed to the artistic tradition of the Far East, and what was derived from purely native genius and style in earlier Chinese painting.

We can clearly distinguish these two essential elements in a beautifully executed series of silk banners (Figs. 93-96) which represent legends of Sakyamuni in his last life on earth, that is before he became the Buddha. These and all the other banners are executed on a very fine gauze-like silk and are almost transparent. They were meant to hang free, probably in the antechapel or passage leading into the temple cella, and to obstruct the light as little as possible. Being painted on both sides, they could be properly viewed by pious visitors to the shrines whichever way they were swung by the wind.

Curiously enough, where the legends of the Buddha are represented in several panels of the same banner, no strict chronological order is observed. In the top panel of the banner in Fig. 94 we see on the right the future Gautama