

Mahayana Buddhism while developing the worship of Bodhisattvas made them the spiritual sons of several Buddhas, and in due course assumed a separate Paradise for each of the latter. Avalokitesvara is thus the spiritual son of Amitabha Buddha, the 'Light Unlimited', who has created a Paradise in the West, and re-birth in this Paradise of Amitabha should be particularly singled out as the hope and ambition of the pious. Thus we find his Paradise represented more frequently than others among our large silk paintings.

From them I have selected the one shown in Fig. 106 as a first specimen, partly because its simple composition allows us clearly to distinguish certain essential features of such Paradise pictures, and partly because there is good reason to assign an early date to it. The painting, remarkable for its strong but harmoniously blended colours, shows in the centre Buddha Amitabha enthroned between the Bodhisattvas Avalokitesvara and Mahasthama. Below are seated two lesser Bodhisattvas. Behind the principal triad the six original disciples of the Buddha are ranged; their shaven heads mark them as monks. Above, on either side, a celestial maiden floats down scattering flowers. A very notable point of technique is the use of 'high lights' to bring out the modelling of the flesh. It is a method undoubtedly derived from Hellenistic art and found only in one other painting.

A very definite proof of early dating is supplied by the figure of the donatrix (Fig. 107) to be seen on the left of the panel below, which, though intended for a dedicatory inscription, was unfortunately never filled in. The figure of this lady kneeling on a mat is one of singular charm, and