

Chinese
landscapes
in banners.

Purely Chinese in conception and design are the landscapes which appear in the background of numerous scenes of our banners, and are among their artistically most pleasing features. The consummate skill with which the impressions of great distance, 'plein air', variety of mountain forms, and the like are conveyed within the very limited space, and the delicate and truthful presentation of colour effects due to atmospheric factors, betoken an art nurtured by great models and a long and still living tradition. To do due justice in this respect to the art merit of banners, such as Ch. lv. 0010-12, lxi. 002, reproductions on a larger scale would be needed than it has been possible to provide.³⁰

Diversity of
composition
and treat-
ment.

While the style in all the banners with scenes from Gautama Buddha's Life is frankly Chinese throughout, we also observe in them a striking diversity of composition and treatment. The idea naturally suggests itself that this diversity may have been caused, or at least facilitated, by that relative freedom from hieratic convention which the 'translation' of those legendary scenes into Chinese garb, whatever its origin, implied. To observe those variations is all the more easy for us because these banners range themselves on closer examination into a series of small groups exhibiting unmistakably common characteristics. This again is obviously connected with the fact that more than one banner was needed for a representation if it were only of the most popular or important scenes in Śākyamuni's secular life-story. Since only a small portion of this could possibly be illustrated in a single banner, the custom would necessarily arise of having these scenes painted in small groups or at least in pairs of banners.

Groups of
banners.

The largest of such groups to be found in our collection comprises the five banners Ch. 0039, 00471; xx. 008; xxii. 008, 0035. That they belong to one series is proved not merely by the general uniformity of style but by identity of size, details of arrangement, etc.³¹ As the reproductions of two among them show, their style is distinguished by a certain rude vigour of drawing which attains distinct charm in the rendering of animal figures.³² Their limited range and restraint of colouring is shared by another group comprising the three banners Ch. xxvi. a. 003, 004 (Plate LXXV); xxvii. 001 (Plate LXXVII), though here the drawing is not equally strong and true.³³ Another group of three banners, Ch. xxv. 001; lv. 0021, 0022, shows poor and perfunctory drawing, but presents the special interest of containing only scenes which so far have not been identified. The three paintings Ch. 00114; xlvi. 007; lxi. 002 have in common expressive if not always delicate drawing, besides harmony in rich colouring and truth in representing vivid movement.³⁴

Pairs of
banners.

Among pairs of banners that formed by Ch. lv. 009, 0010, both reproduced in colour, Plate LXXIV, is foremost in artistic merit and fortunately is also excellently preserved. The drawing is remarkable for its fine yet vigorous pen-strokes, the colours strong and clear. The landscapes of

above, p. 98 with specimens in Pl. III, IV; *Ancient Khotan*, i. pp. 207, 218 (Pl. XLIV, XLV). The reproduction of the door-handle in Pl. LXXV is too small to show any details of the ornament which is evidently meant to be of bronze or other metal. For an apparently similar grotesque head in a Turfān fresco, cf. Grünwedel, *Altbuddh. Kultstätten*, p. 310.

³⁰ See Pls. LXXV, LXXVI. Of the deftness of line and colour Ch. 0071 in Pl. XII of *Thousand Buddhas* will convey a better idea.

³¹ For a brief summary of these common characteristics, cf. Descriptive List, Ch. 0039.

³² See Ch. xxii. 008, Pl. LXXVI, and Ch. xx. 008, *Thousand B.*, Pl. XIII.

³³ The low undulating hill ranges which serve to divide scenes and the recurrence of identical sprays or flowers to fill

empty spaces are characteristic of this group.

I may note here in passing that the way in which banners belonging to particular groups have turned up from bundles bearing proximate numbers proves the utility of the care taken in preserving the original 'site-marks', given by me to the bundles successively brought to light. It also shows that the original contents of the bundles are not likely to have been mixed up altogether by Wang Tao-shih.

³⁴ See Ch. 00114, Pl. LXXIV, with its harmonious colours and clever presentation of clouds and Nāgas; xlvi. 007, Pl. LXXV; lxi. 002, Pl. LXXVI. Comparison of the last with the same scene of the mounted messengers searching for Prince Siddhārtha in Ch. 0071, *Thousand B.*, Pl. XII, clearly shows the use of a common model in composition. In all three an identical flower device is used to fill in empty spaces.