

Iranian Studies in China

# 伊朗学在中国

## 论文集

叶奕良◎主编

Collection of Papers  
on Iranian Studies in China



北京大学出版社  
PEKING UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Edited by Ye Yiliang

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电子邮箱: [fd@pup.pku.edu.cn](mailto:fd@pup.pku.edu.cn)

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## Preface

One of the significant achievements of the CPAFFC in 2008 is, namely, the founding of the China-Iran Friendship Association. It is my honor to be chosen as its president, with Mr. Wang Meng as the honorary president. The aims of the China-Iran Friendship Association are to promote the exchange between the Chinese and Iranian peoples, and to push forward the political, economical and cultural co-operation between the two countries. As both China and Iran are countries boasting of their time-honored histories and ancient civilizations, the Sino-Iranian cultural exchange is a topic where China-Iran Friendship Association would exert great attention. Honorary President Wang Meng visited Iran in 2006, and then published his book *Impressions on Iran* discussing Iran's history and culture, and their inheritance in modern Iran. This work gives the expression of Chinese people's attention to Iranian culture. After my visit to Iran in Sept. 2007, I share the same impression with Pres. Wang Meng. The Iranian civilization is one of the most splendid civilizations worldwide. There used to be intimate contact between ancient Iran and Egypt, Babylon, India, Greece, Rome, and even China. Due to Iran's location at the center of Eurasian continent, the Iranians exerted significant influence on every ancient civilization. The exchange and co-operation among ancient civilizations left a labyrinth for later generations. In this labyrinth, every step forward would make a great discovery and brings lasting excitement to the whole world.

From Chinese and Iranian friends, I have learned that Chinese scholars have achieved significant progress in Iranian studies. Presided by professor Ye Yiliang, ex-director of the Center for Iranian Studies, Peking University, the Symposium "the Seminar on Iranian Studies in China" has so far been held four times successively from the 1990s. Every time after the symposium, a treatise of theses would be published, that reports the latest and best achievement made by Chinese scholars in Iranian studies. I am glad to learn about that, and I believe that the compilation and publication of these treatises has set good examples for Sino-Iranian cultural and scholastic co-operation. Now, the English edition of the *Collection of Papers on Iranian Studies in China* is to be published, still with Prof. Ye Yiliang as the chief editor. It consists of translations of 20 articles chosen from the three treatises already published. We are excited for hearing about

this, because the achievements made by Chinese scholars in Iranian studies would thus be more accessible to the whole world. On behalf of honorary president Wang Meng, and in the name of China-Iran Friendship Association, I hereby convey our warm congratulations to the publication of this treatise! The relationship between China and Iran is developing smoothly. Early this year, Iran celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, while various kinds of activities were carried out in commemoration of the 30th anniversary of the introduction of reform and opening policy in China, which took place almost simultaneously with the Iranian Revolution. We are convinced that both China and Iran would develop in leaps and bounds in the 21st century. The scholastic co-operation and exchange would strengthen the mutual understanding and trust between the two peoples, and in turn, enhance the overall co-operation between the two countries, and promote the time-honored Sino-Iran friendship. On behalf of the China-Iran Friendship Association, I hereby convey our sincere respect and congratulations to all the authors and translators of articles collected in the treatise, especially to the chief editor, Prof. Ye Yiliang, for all that you have done comply with the aims of China-Iran Friendship Association. Personally, I would express my gratitude to Mr. Lam Kin Chung, famous Hong Kong-based entrepreneur, and guest director of China-Iran Friendship Association, for the financial support he supplied for the publication of this treatise, which also contributed to the development of Sino-Iranian friendship. We sincerely hope that the publication of this book would lead to even greater achievement of Iranian studies in China!

陳昊蘇

Chen Haosu

President, CPAFFC

President, China-Iran Friendship Association

April 18, 2009



**The president of the China-Iran Friendship Association  
with the sponsor and the editors of this Collection**



**The Iranian ambassador in China with the editors and  
the sponsor of this Collection**



**The sponsor of this Collection with Ji Xianlin and Rao Zongyi,  
two distinguished Chinese scholars on oriental studies**



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# **The Manichaeian Paintings Buried in the Desert**

Chao Huashan 晁华山

Manichaeism was founded in Persia (now Iran) in the 3rd century, and spread to Xinjiang in the 7th century. It became popular in Xi Zhou (now Turfan) in the Tang Dynasty, and before long began to influence the inland of China. Around the 8th century, Manichaeism won its popularity in the Yellow-and-Yangtze-River Valleys. Also, it once extended to Mongolia. During the time of the Five Dynasties, Song Dynasty and Yuan Dynasty, Manichaeism began to decline in the Central Plains. However, it continued to spread in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and the Southeast coastland, until the Ming Dynasty when it finally died out. Altogether its popularity lasted for 800 years. Among other religions of foreign origins, Manichaeism was the most influential and widespread one, in China, only next to Buddhism.

## **The Foundation and Dissemination of Manichaeism**

The founder Mani was born in 216 A.D. Around the year 240 A.D., he founded Manichaeism. Due to the support from the King, Manichaeism became widely known within the boundary of Iran, but also had extended beyond the boundary before Mani died. It spread westward to Iraq, Arab, Syria, and Egypt and eastward to the middle Asia. Since then, the areas influenced by Manichaeism were enlarged. It had reached out to the vast area in south Europe and coastal area of Mediterranean Sea in North Africa before its fall in the 15th century. It spread eastward successively to Afghanistan and Xinjiang of China.

## **Literature and Doctrines**

The literature of Manichaeism consists of seven Great Scriptures and one Illustrated Scripture, all of which were written or illustrated by Mani himself, and then got translated into many vernacular languages. According to these Scriptures, we know that the Manichean doctrines are mainly about “the two Principles and three Stages.” “Two Principles” consists of one good principle and

one bad. The Good Principle dwells in the kingdom of light while the Bad Principle dwells in the kingdom of darkness. "Three Stages" refers to the Past, the Present, and the Future. In the Past, two kingdoms, namely light and darkness were separate. Then the darkness invaded the Light; therefore the Present chaotic world arose. In the Future, the kingdom of light will definitely defeat that of darkness, and so the two kingdoms will be divided again. Its disciples are categorized into two groups: one group stays at home and cultivates themselves, while the other renounces the family. The latter groups, who are usually divided into five degrees, live in temples and keep the elements of Light by means of reciting the Scriptures, worshipping, and confessing, in the hope of entering the kingdom of Light in the future. Those who stay at home are to financially support those who renounce family, hoping to enter the kingdom of Light in an indirect way.

### **A Brief History of Investigations in Modern Times**

The researches in modern times began in the 19th century. Due to the lack of Manichean literature and relics, the researches were basically and mainly on the Christian and Islamic literatures, which had condemned Manichaeism as a heresy. But things have greatly changed in the 20th century. From 1902 to 1904, a German expedition found in Turfan, China, two relics of fragmentary Manichean temples, in which they excavated thousands of pieces of incomplete scriptures of various sizes. In the 1930s, they found about two thousand pages of history and biography on Manichaeism and scriptures with parts missing. These two great discoveries together with other occasionally found relics prepared the ground for the research on Manichaeism and paved the way for a high tide of research. Thus, Manichaeism, which had remained bewildering for more than one thousand years, was finally brought to light.

After the German expedition went back to Germany, they published, in succession, many reports and pictures from 1905 to 1913. Except for the above fragmentary Manichean ground-level temples, they failed to distinguish the Manichean grottoes. In 1909, the Russian Academy also sent an expedition to Xinjiang for the purpose of investigating the Turfan grottoes. Then in 1914, the Russians published a brief report, announcing that they had identified a Manichean grotto in Bāzāklik, Turfan. In 1931, an archeologist from Académie Française came to Bāzāklik to investigate this grotto. Besides confirming its

reliability, he also believed that there was another grotto.<sup>①</sup>1988, a teacher from Osaka University of Japan came to the same place. With the local support and help, he published a monograph 1991, pointing out that there was another Manichean grotto with inscriptions in Uighur characters.<sup>②</sup>

## Distinguishing the Manichean Grottoes

In a valley in the branch range of the Tianshan Mountains of eastern Turfan, ancient people built three grottoes. From east to west, they are the Tuyok grotto complex, the Bāzāklīk grotto complex, and the Sangim grotto complex. Altogether the number of grottoes in the complexes amounts to 200. They are traditionally taken as the Buddhist grottoes, except for two or three of them. The author of this article has been investigating grottoes in Kucha area, Xinjiang since the end of the 70s. In 1987, the investigation was moved to Turfan. After close observation and rigorous analysis, the author managed to distinguish several Manichean grottoes from others. This article aims at introducing and discussing the subject matters of frescos in the grottoes.



Figure 1

Along the road from Turfan to Shanshan, there is a vast area of deserts. The Sangim Northern Temple (Figure 1) is about forty meters wide from left to right and up to twelve meters high. From the front of the temple to the highest point of the cavern, there are five platforms. The main platform is the third one, which has five grottoes excavated into its back wall. According to a Manichean

---

① The German expedition was led by A. Grünwedel and A. von Le Coq, and respectively these two identified the ruins of the two surface level Manichaeen temples as the K Ruin located within the city and the A Ruin to the Southwest. They also conserved the murals and unearthed some ancient Manichaeen manuscripts. The Russian expedition, led by C. Oldenburg, concluded that Bāzāklīk Number 27 Grotto (Grünwedel No. 25) was, in its second form, a Manichaeen grotto, and also published photographs of this grotto. J. Hacken of the Académie Française considered that Bāzāklīk Number 27 Grotto (Grünwedel No. 17) was, in its early form, possibly also a Manichaeen grotto. The views of these four scholars can be found in References (hereafter: Ref.) 5, 6, 7, 8, 12.

② The Manichaeen grotto referred to by Takao Moriyasu was Bāzāklīk Grotto Number 35 (Grünwedel No. 22). He also referred to the engraved Manichaeen inscriptions in Bāzāklīk Grotto Number 8 (Grünwedel No. 1 North Neighboring Grotto). See Ref. 13.



Figure 2

smaller (Figure 2). From the bottom to the top it has five regular platforms, with the grottoes built into the first and second platform. The layout of the monastery is akin to that of the cross-section picture of the Manichean temple in

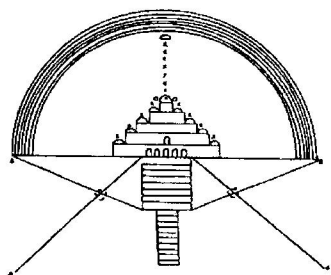


Figure 3

times or the geographic limitations.

The frescoes are mainly in the hall of prayer and penitence, the hall for preaching and the hall for instruction and abstinence: such an arrangement is based on the particular functions of the above three halls. Judging from the very name of the hall for prayer and penitence, we know that it is a place for worshipping the Damingzun 大明尊 (the Great Figure of Ming). Its structure is very similar to Buddhist grottoes, which indicates that the Sanxing Sanli 三行三

text found in Dunhuang, *the Compendium of the Teaching of Mani the Buddha of Light*, the halls of Manichean temples should be thus arranged: The temple must be arranged into five sections which consist of a lecture room, a hall for instruction and abstinence, a hall for prayer and penitence, a hall for preaching, and a monks' hospice. ①

The Southern Temple is somewhat smaller (Figure 2). From the bottom to the top it has five regular platforms, with the grottoes built into the first and second platform. The layout of the monastery is akin to that of the cross-section picture of the Manichean temple in the 38B Grotto of the Bāzāklīk Northern Grouping (Figure 3). The temple in the center is a building with five stages, on whose second floor there are five Manichean halls. It is divided into the firmament above and the earth below. The firmament has seven semicircles signifying the seven great scriptures of Manichaeism. The earth below can reach the vast earth through several steps. Other Manichean buildings in Turfan are less regular than this one, due to the differences of

① There are three kinds of Chinese manuscripts among those recovered from Dunhuang. Two kinds are Chinese translations of Central Asian texts, and another kind is the Chinese text *Compendium of the Teaching of Mani the Buddha of Light* (*Moni Guangfo Jiaofa Yilüe* 摩尼光佛教法仪略), that briefly introduces the religion's founder Mani, its scriptures, illustrated scriptures, religious hierarchy, temples, creeds and so on. *The Compendium of the Teaching of Mani the Buddha of Light* was written by a senior Manichaean priest in Chang'an to be presented to the Tang Emperor Xuanzong. These three kinds of Manichaean texts have been collected in Volume 54 of the *Taishōzō* (Tripitaka 大正藏). There is also a newly corrected version of these texts collected in Ref. 14, pp. 230–233.

礼 (the Three Etiquettes) resembles the Buddhist way of worshipping. As to the frescoes in it, we know very little of their subject matters, because most of the grottoes were reconstructed for other purposes. The hall for instruction and abstinence literally means a place for receiving instructions and practicing abstinence. The frescoes in it are mostly on the Manichean doctrines. For instance, the “Intertwining Trees of Life and Death,” which represents the Two Principles and Three Moments; the “Tree of Life,” which represents the Kingdom of Light; the “Seven-by-seven pictures of Treasure Trees and Envoys of Light,” which symbolizes the Seven Great Inscriptions, and so on. The hall for preaching is used for giving lectures and for preaching. Some of the surviving frescoes in it are about Manichaeian congregations, for instance “the grapevines,” “the Orchard of Treasure Trees,” and “the Manichean high priest”; some others are about the disciples, who practiced at home, for instance “the veneration of the Treasure Trees.”

### The Tree of Life and the Tree of Death Intertwined

The frescoes on the front wall of the main chamber of Grotto 4 in Sangim's 胜金 Northern Temple feature two intertwining trees (Figure 4). The front wall is the most important wall of the grotto, so that the frescoes on it carry the most important meanings.

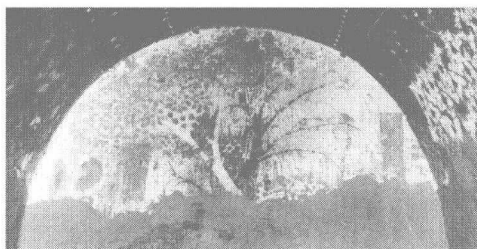


Figure 4

The lower section of the tree trunks has been damaged by the disintegration of the plaster layer on the wall. The foliage of the tree branching from left to right is lush and verdant, while that of the tree branching from right to left is withered and barren. We know from Manichean religious texts that at the core of the Manichean creed was a dualist doctrine, that is, a doctrine that postulated two kingdoms, the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness, or the Kingdom of the Spirit and the Kingdom of the Profane. These two kingdoms, one good and the other bad, were symbolized by these two trees, also often called the Tree of life and the Tree of Death, or the Tree of Good and the Tree of Evil. There is a

detailed explanation of the nature of these two trees in the *Juren Shu* (巨人书, *Book of Giants*), that states, "Virtue is expressed by 'Light' or by the 'Tree of Life' which occupies the East, the West and the North, while to the South there is the Tree of Death." An ancient Manichean manuscript written in Coptic that was discovered in Egypt during the 1930s, the *Kephalaia* (Essentials of the Faith), terms these two trees the Tree of Virtue and the Tree of Evil, and also quotes what are claimed to be Mani's own words: "The Tree of Evil is material substance." It represents Death and Darkness, and stands opposite to the Tree of Virtue and to Light. Death lies in Darkness and Life in Light, where they remain in perpetuity. The origin of Light is the Kingdom of Heaven, and the origin of Darkness is the Kingdom of Hell. Out of the root of Light grows the Tree of Life and out of the root of Darkness grows the Tree of Death. Regarding the significance of these two trees, the *Book of Giants* says that the Tree of Life is perpetually brimming with vitality and light, and always abundant with fine fruits. The Tree of Life symbolizes the Kingdom of Light and its inhabitants, its wealth and prosperity. Opposed to the Tree of life is the Tree of Death which, in essence, possesses no life and bears no fruit. It symbolizes the Kingdom of Darkness. The *Kephalaia* also declares that not only is the essential creed of Manichaeism expressed in these two trees, but also disciples of Manichaeism can connect all of its divinities and phenomena to these two trees.<sup>①</sup> The dualist doctrine of Manichaeism also provides a creed of cosmic transformation: "The Two Principles and Three Moments." According to the *Compendium of the Teaching of Mani the Buddha of Light*,

First are the Two Principles: the seeker of faith must know both the Principle of Light and the Principle of Darkness, for their nature and qualities are distinct. ... The Light has Three Moments: first, the Initial Moment; second, the Median Moment; and, third, the Ultimate Moment. The Initial Moment has neither Heaven nor Earth but possesses Light and Darkness. ... In the Median Moment, Darkness storms the Light, after which it wantonly pursues. Light then reenters the Darkness which it overwhelms and casts out ... In the Ultimate Moment, the teaching is spread and things are prepared, truth and depravity return to their roots. The Light returns into the Great Light, and Darkness returns into Darkness. The two Principles each turn back, and cross each other as they return.

It can be seen from the above quotation that the Three Moments refer to the

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① The *Book of Giants* is reprinted in Ref. 1. The *Kephalaia* is reprinted in Ref. 9. The quotes cited here come from pages 11 and 12 of the former, and page 22 and 32 of the latter.



past, present, and future. This is presented pictorially in the way the trunks of the two trees cross over twice. The parts of the trunks below the first crossing represent the Initial Moment, the parts between the two crossings represent the Median Moment, and the parts above the second crossing represent the Ultimate Moment. Of the present picture, only the upper portion of the two trees with the crossing of the trunks remains. Nevertheless, what remains visible indicates that it is indeed the Manichaean emblem of the Two Principles of Light and Darkness and the Three Moments.

### The Seven-by-Seven Images of the Treasure Trees and the Envoy of Light

In Grotto Number 2 in the southwest Area, Grotto Number 7 in the Middle Area, and Grotto Number 2 of the North Area of Tuyok, and Grotto Number 10 of Bāzāklik, the front frescoes are all the seven-by-seven image of the Treasure Trees and the Envoy of Light (Figure 5). These frescoes are large with the pictures arrayed in a seven-by-seven arrangement. In each picture there is a Treasure Tree. The image of the tree in the same grotto does not differ from picture to picture, and beneath each tree there are two or four lotus flowers or lotus pods. In Grotto Number 7 in Tuyok's central Area, there are white-clad divinities on the top of the Treasure Trees. In Grotto Number 2 in Tuyok's southwest area, there are seven precious stones of two kinds with gold inlaid in them (Figure 6). These stones are luminous with radiance. Amid the lotus flowers below the trees are white-clad divinities. In the margins between the pictures of the trees are pictures of ducks playing in the



Figure 5

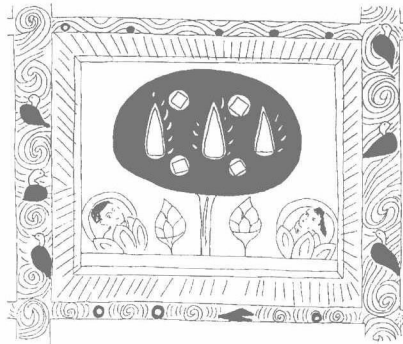


Figure 6