

Flowers Bloom and Fall:
Representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* In Traditional Chinese Painting

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ABSTRACT

The Vimalakirti Sutra is one of the classics of early Indian Mahayana Buddhism. The sutra narrates that Vimalakirti, an enlightened layman, once made it appear as if he were sick so that he could demonstrate the Law of Mahayana Buddhism to various figures coming to inquire about his illness. This dissertation studies representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in Chinese painting from the fourth to the nineteenth centuries to explore how visualizations of the same text could vary in different periods of time in light of specific artistic, social and religious contexts.

In this project, about forty artists who have been recorded representing the sutra in traditional Chinese art criticism and catalogues are identified and discussed in a single study for the first time. A parallel study of recorded paintings and some extant ones of the same period includes six aspects: text content represented, mode of representation, iconography, geographical location, format, and identity of the painter.

This systematic examination reveals that two main representational modes have formed in the Six Dynasties period (220-589): depictions of the Great Layman as a single image created by Gu Kaizhi, and narrative illustrations of the sutra initiated by Yuan Qian and his teacher Lu Tanwei. The latter mode, which became more popular than the former in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), experienced adaptation from handscroll to panoramic mural. It is also during this period that a minor scenario, the Heavenly

Maiden Scattering Flowers, became a necessary vignette for representation of the sutra.

Since the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers gradually became an independent theme. This author investigates the thematic shift caused by various factors. These include the transformation of later Chinese narrative painting and the prevalence of *shinu hua* 仕女畫, painting of beauties, in later Chinese painting. There is also a change in the role of the Heavenly Maiden from one of many maidens to the only and necessary partner of Vimalakirti. Ultimately, the image of the Heavenly Maiden evolves from a Buddhist heavenly being to a Daoist fairy and later to a symbol representing auspicious meanings.

To my husband, He Ning and our lovely son, He Yixing

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Vimalakirti Sutra or *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經, whose full name is *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra* or *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經, is one of the classics of Mahayana Buddhism originated in India around 100 A.D.¹ Among all the Buddhist classics, it is unusual because its protagonist is not the Buddha himself but a layman named Vimalakirti and yet it is still called a sutra.²

1. The Content of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*

There are fourteen chapters in *The Vimalakirti Sutra*.³ The book starts with “ru shi wo wen (如是我聞, thus have I heard),” as all the other

¹ For the origin of the sutra, see Sun Changwu, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*. (Tianjin: Tianjin jiao yu chu ban she, 2005), 30. For a detailed discussion on Mahayana Buddhism, see Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. London: Routledge, 2009. For further study of the history of Buddhism, see Noble Ross Reat, *Buddhism: A History* (California: Asian Humanities Press, 1994).

² The *Vimalakirti Sutra* and *The Srimala Devi Sutra* 聖鬘經 are the only two of the kind. The protagonist of the latter is Queen Srimala, who converted to Buddhism and preached the law of the Buddha in the sutra. For an English translation, see Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, trans., *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala: A Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

³ All the Chinese translations of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* can be seen in Da zang jing kan xing hui, *Da Zang Jing* (Taipei: Xin wen feng chu ban gong si, 1983).

Buddhist classics do.⁴ Chapter One displays a scene in which the Buddha gives his lectures to all kinds of Buddhist figures in the Amra Gardens in the city of Vaishali.⁵ The Buddha's teaching sets the keynote of Mahayana Buddhism for the sutra. From the second to the twelfth chapter, it is through Vimalakirti's conversations, discussions and demonstrations that the text's ideas on Mahayana Buddhism are gradually revealed.

Vimalakirti, as described in Chapter Two of the sutra, is a wealthy layman who has achieved enlightenment and can claim nirvana and his Buddhahood but insists instead to reside in Vaishali in order to save people.⁶ In the description, he lives like a normal person. He has a family and does everything common people might do such as earning money, going to brothels and gambling. But the text keeps pointing out that all these deeds are to educate people and to teach them Buddhist discipline.

⁴ "Thus have I heard" suggests that all the sutras are recited by Ananda, one of the Buddha's disciples, from what he heard from the Buddha.

⁵ Vaisali, or Vaishali or Vesali, was the capital of the Licchavi Republic, which was a democratic kingdom established in the region of the modern day Bihar State of India (northeastern of India) in the sixth century B.C. and later moved to Nepal, existing there from 400 A.D. to 750 A.D.

⁶ In this sense, Vimalakirti could be regarded as a Bodhisattva. In fact, he is even regarded by some scholars as playing the role of the Buddha in the sutra. See Sun, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*, 39.

Then, there was a time when Vimalakirti made it appear as if he were sick so that he could demonstrate the Law of Mahayana Buddhism to various figures coming to inquire about his illness.

The Buddha, who was aware of his intention, asked ten of his disciples and four bodhisattvas to go to see him, but all refused because of Vimalakirti's renowned eloquence. In Chapter Three, the Buddha asks ten of his disciples in succession to inquire after Vimalakirti's illness. However, all of these ten figures, including Shariputra, Mahamaudgalyayana, Mahakasyapa, Subhuti, Purnamaitrayaniputra, Mahakatrayana, Aniruddha, Upali, Rahula and Ananda, would not go. They all replied that they had had the experience of failure in debating Buddhist doctrines with Vimalakirti before. For example, there was a time when Ananda wanted to go to someone's house and ask for a bowl of milk for the Buddha when he was sick. Vimalakirti, upon seeing this, stopped him and said that the Buddha cannot be sick since he had achieved Buddhahood. He insists that saying Buddha is sick indicates he cannot cure sick people if he cannot cure his own illness. This vignette will be referred to as Ananda Asking for Milk or *Anan qiru* 阿難乞乳 in later discussions by this author.

Thereupon, in Chapter Four, the Buddha turns to ask four bodhisattvas one after another to visit Vimalakirti. Again, these four, Maitreya, Licchavi Prabhavyuha, Jagatimdhara, Sudatta, also express their reluctance to go because of their previous conversations with Vimalakirti. Finally, Bodhisattva Manjusri (Ch.: *Wushu pusa* 文殊菩薩) agreed to go and thousands of figures followed him to witness the brilliant debate about to begin in Chapter Five. Some essential concepts of Mahayana Buddhism such as emptiness (Ch.: *kong* 空) and non-duality (Ch.: *bu'er* 不二, literally, “no-two”) were explained by the Great Layman. *Kong* suggests “the false or illusory nature of all existence” and refers to “the doctrine that all phenomena and the ego have no reality, but are composed of a certain number of skandhas or elements, which disintegrate.”⁷ *Bu'er* refers to “the unity of all beings, the one reality, the universal Buddha-nature.”⁸

Among these arguments, Vimalakirti also employed his supernatural power to overawe the assembly. In Chapter Six, after

⁷ William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous comp., *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms: With Sanskrit and English Equivalents and A Sanskrit-Pali Index* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co., ltd., 1937), 276.

⁸ *Ibid*, 103.

reading Shariputra's thoughts on sitting, Vimalakirti has the Sumeru Lamp King moved thirty-two thousand lion seats into his room. Magically, these seats accommodated to his room for the crowd to sit on. Vimalakirti then explains to Shariputra that this is brought about by the emancipation Beyond Comprehension possessed by bodhisattvas. In other words, the bodhisattvas have the ability of moving the whole world. In later chapters, this vignette will be referred to as Thirty-Two Thousand Lion Seats.

In Chapter Seven, Vimalakirti expounds to Manjusri about the attitude and behavior bodhisattvas should have toward living beings. In general, he insists that the secular issues are all empty and illusory and therefore bodhisattvas should treat them with a mind with no distinctions. Then a heavenly maiden from Vimalakirti's household assisted his demonstration by scattering flowers, which symbolize the secular world, over his audience. The flowers fell to the ground when touching the bodhisattvas but stuck to the disciples. All the disciples tried to get rid of the flowers but failed. Then the Heavenly Maiden explains that distinctions only exist in people's minds. In the mind of the enlightened figures, everything is regarded as the same without difference, or in other

words *bu'er* or “not two.” Since the bodhisattvas’ minds are pure and have no distinctions, the flowers to them are no longer what are not in accordance with the Law. In comparison, those who had not truly understood the Law such as the disciples regarded flowers as representing the secular world and this label obstructs their entering into the pure land. This vignette will be referred to as the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers in later discussion.

When Shariputra is surprised by her insight and wisdom, the Heavenly Maiden gives credit to the eight phenomena in Vimalakirti’s room. She illuminates that everyone would have been enlightened after seeing these phenomena. Thus, Shariputra wonders why she is still in a female body since in Buddhist tradition only male bodies could be enlightened. At this moment, the Heavenly Maiden switches her body with that of Shariputra’s. By this exchange, the Heavenly Maiden accentuates that things do not have fixed forms.

In Chapter Eight, the Great Layman explains the path bodhisattvas should follow to master the Buddha way. He recites a long Buddhist verse (Ch.: *ji* 偈) to make it clear. In comparison, in the ninth chapter, he asks bodhisattvas present to explain their own understandings of the

way to enter the gate of nondualism (Ch.: *bu'er famen* 不二法門). Thirty two bodhisattvas including Manjusri express their ideas one after another. Finally, when being asked by Manjusri about his own ideas on this issue, Vimalakirti keeps silence instead. In this way, Manjusri understands that “not a word, not a syllable – this truly is to enter the gate of nondualism.”⁹

Next in Chapter Ten, Vimalakirti is able to read Shariputra’s thought again. But this time, it is about food. By his miraculous power, Vimalakirti displays in front of everyone’s eyes a far country named Many Fragrances where everything is extremely fragrant. When no one would dare to go to this country for food, the Great Layman created a phantom bodhisattva in front of the assembly. This phantom bodhisattva then, under Vimalakirti’s order, ascends to Many Fragrances and gets a bowl of fragrant rice from the Buddha there who is called Fragrance Accumulated. Coming back along with this bodhisattva were nine million bodhisattvas from Many Fragrances who were very curious about Shakyamuni Buddha and Vimalakirti in this world. Again, they were all seated in lion seats in Vimalakirti’s room by his amazing power.

⁹ Burton Watson trans., *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 111.

Attracted by the unbelievable fragrance, eighty-four thousand persons led by the elder, Moon Canopy, from the city of Vaishali join the assembly. This is the moment when the largest number of people was in Vimalakirti's room. Miraculously, the fragrant rice in the bowl is more than enough for all the figures present to eat. When everyone is full, Vimalakirti explains the ways in which Shakyamuni enlightens people in this world to the bodhisattvas from Many Fragrances. This vignette will be referred to as Phantom Bodhisattva Bringing Back Fragrant Rice.

In the following chapter, the Great Layman not only invites but is able to bring everyone in the gathering sitting in their lion seats in his right hand to see the Buddha in the Amra Gardens. After everyone is seated, in the same manner as Vimalakirti's speeches, Shakyamuni Buddha explains in person about the Dharma to the assembly, especially the bodhisattvas from Many Fragrances.

In the previous eleven chapters, either Shakyamuni Buddha or Vimalakirti preaches to the other people. It is not until Chapter Twelve that these two important figures have a conversation. This chapter starts with the Buddha's question to Vimalakirti about his view of the Thus

Come One (Tathagata, Ch.: *rulai* 如来). The latter's answer reveals that in his eyes, as all the other things, the Thus Come One is void, too.

Hearing this speech, Shariputra, who was astonished by the Great Layman's superior insight, asks about Vimalakirti's previous life. This time it is Shakyamuni who answers the question. He explains that Vimalakirti comes from a pure country named Wonderful Joy (Ch.: *miaoxi* 妙喜) whose Buddha named Immovable (Ch.: *wudong* 無動). Since everyone present is eager to see this different land, Vimalakirti was able to lift the Wonderful Joy World and showed it in his right hand to the assembly. This is the last demonstration Vimalakirti presents in the classic, which will be referred to as Lifting the Wonderful Joy World in the following chapters.

Throughout the whole text, it has been stated repeatedly that hundreds of thousands of Heavenly sons got the essentials of the Buddhist teaching each time after Vimalakirti gives a lecture or manifestation. Finally, Chapter Twelve ends with Shariputra's appreciation and prayer of the law. Vimalakirti does not preach or

expound any more in the following two chapters and it is safe to say that the main text of the classic ends here at Chapter Twelve.¹⁰

In the thirteenth chapter, Shakyamuni Buddha states to Shakya Devanam (Indra, Ch.: Dishitian 帝釋天) the benefits people may attain by reading and offering this sutra. Using the example of his own previous life, Shakyamuni clarifies that the offering of the Law, which means studying the sutras the Buddha preaches, is the best offering. In the last chapter, the Buddha entrusts the sutra to Maitreya. In the end, upon Ananda's quest, the Buddha named the sutra *The Vimalakirti Sutra* after which all the assembly joyfully accepted the Law.

2. Chinese Translations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*

At present, although some quotations from *The Vimalakirti Sutra* can still be seen in books by ancient Indian Buddhist scholars such as Candrakirti (Ch.: Yuecheng 月稱, 600-ca. 650) and Shantideva (Ch.: Jitian 寂天, 8th century), the original Sanskrit copy of this sutra has long been lost.¹¹ Besides incomplete Sogdian and Tocharian translations, the

¹⁰ In fact, the Tibetan edition of the sutra and thus Thurman's English translation according to that edition, only have the first twelve chapters. See Robert Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakirti: A Mahayana Scripture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976).

¹¹ All the discussions on the Sanskrit origin and translations of the

only complete translations directly from the lost Sanskrit original that exist today are Chinese and Tibetan.¹²

In comparison to its lack of importance in India, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* has been one of the most popular Buddhist classics in China since its introduction around 188 A.D. From the second to the seventh century, there were at least seven Chinese translations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, three of which survive today.¹³

As early as the fifth year of the Zhongping 中平 era of Emperor Lingdi 靈帝 (reign 168-189 A.D.) in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 A.D.), equivalent to 188 A.D., *The Vimalakirti Sutra* has been introduced into China by the early Chinese Buddhist monk Yan Fodiao 嚴佛調 (or Yan Fudiao 嚴浮調 or Yan Diao 嚴調, c.a. 117 A.D.-197 A.D).¹⁴ It is a two-

Vimalakirti Sutra in this dissertation follow Sun, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*, 30-35, and Wang Xinhui, *Weimojie jing sixiang yanjiu* (PhD diss., Fudan University, 2006), 1-6.

¹² The Tibetan translation is by Chos Nid Tshul Khrims in the ninth century.

¹³ Besides these seven translations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, there are also selected and combined translations such as *Shan Weimojie Jing* 刪維摩詰經 (Selected Vimalakirti Sutra) by Zhufahu 竺法護 and *He Weimojie Jing* 合維摩詰經 (Combined Vimalakirti Sutra) by Zhimindu 支敏度.

¹⁴ For more information on the Buddhist figures mentioned in this dissertation, see Ren Daobin ed., *Fojiao wenhua cidian* (Hangzhou:

volume edition named *Gu Weimojie jing* 古維摩經. However, Yan's translation does not survive.

The earliest extant Chinese edition is by Zhiqian 支謙 (c.a. 3rd century) in Jianye 建業 (today's Nanjing 南京) during the Huangwu 黃武 era (222-229 A.D.) of the Wu Kingdom (222-280). This edition has three volumes titled *Foshuo weimojie jing* 佛說維摩詰經. It is said that this copy has some errors though it provides a good foundation for later translators.¹⁵

The succeeding two centuries witnessed three other translations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. In 291, Zhushulan 竺叔蘭, an Indian who was born and lived in China, completed the third translation. It is called *Yipi moluojie jing* 異毗摩羅詰經 and has three volumes. Twelve years later, the famous translator of Buddhist classics, Zhufahu 竺法護 (Dharmarakṣa, ca. 231-308), a Central Asian who lived in western China, translated the fourth edition. It only has one volume and the title is *Weimojie jing* 維摩詰經. According to the record by his disciple Nie Daozhen 聶道真 (ca. 270-340), Zhufahu's translation is similar to Yan's

Zhejiang gu ji chu ban she, 1991).

¹⁵ Sun, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*, 31.

and Zhiqian's editions.¹⁶ Then in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), Zhiduomi 祇多蜜 completed the fifth Chinese translation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, which has four volumes and is also titled *Weimojie jing*. Unfortunately, all of these three have been lost.

However, two later important translations by Kumarajiva (Ch.: Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什, ca. 334-413) and Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664), respectively, survive today. In 406, eight hundred Buddhist monks supervised by Kumarajiva completed the sixth translation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in Chinese history in Chang'an 長安 (today's Xi'an). Kumarajiva's edition has three volumes and its title is *Weimojie suoshuo jing* 維摩詰所說經. Since they used a more comprehensive Sanskrit copy, the Chinese translation is said to be better than Zhiqian's edition.¹⁷ Later in 650, Xuanzang finished the seventh Chinese translation of this sutra. This edition's title is *Shuo wugoucheng jing* 說無垢稱經. It is said that although it is even more comprehensive, this copy is too rigid and thus harder for common believers to understand compared to Kumarajiva's edition.¹⁸ In general, seven translations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in less

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 32.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 32-33.

than five hundred years from the end of the second century to the end of the seventh century indicate its wide popularity in early traditional Chinese society. Among them, Kumarajiva's edition became most popular because it is comprehensive in content and mellifluous in language.

3. Previous Scholarship and This Dissertation's Contribution

Visual representations of the classic have never been found in India or Central Asia, whereas the sutra was often illustrated in China.¹⁹ In fact, this author has identified nearly forty Chinese painters from the fourth century to the nineteenth century who have visualized the sutra. It is undoubtedly one of the oldest and most long-lasting painting subjects in Chinese art history.

Such a theme that has persisted throughout Chinese painting history provides an excellent example to study the relation of painting to its social background in classical China. This dissertation studies the evolution of representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in Chinese painting

¹⁹ For the absence of representations of the sutra in India and Central Asia, see Emma Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakirti," *Artibus Asiae* 30, no. 1 (1968): 28, and Laura Gardner Heyrman, "The meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri: Chinese Innovation in Buddhist Iconography" (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1994), 4.

over about 1,500 years to explore how visualizations of the same text could vary in different periods of time in light of specific artistic, social and religious contexts.

Visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* came to the attention of historians of Chinese art as early as the 1930s. In his study of Dunhuang murals, Matsumoto Eiichi 松本榮一 introduced some chapters of the sutra and listed some representative illustrations in Dunhuang.²⁰ In the 1940s, sporadic discussions on representations of the sutra have appeared in some scholars' studies.²¹ The relation between visualizations of the *Lotus Sutra* and the *Vimalakirti Sutra* has been noted.²² But because of the dearth of the visual resources from China at that time, they have not been studied specifically in detail.

A relatively comprehensive examination of the theme did not appear until the Chinese scholar Jin Weinuo 金維諾 published two

²⁰ Matsumoto Eiichi, *Tonkoga no kenkyu* (Tokyo: Hatsubaijo Bunkyo Shoten, 1937), Vol. 1, 143-164; Vol. 2, 46-54.

²¹ See, for example, J. Leroy Davidson. "The Origin and Early Use of the Ju-I," *Artibus Asiae* 13, no. 4, (1950), 239-249.

²² See, for example, J. Leroy Davidson. "Traces of Buddhist Evangelism in Early Chinese Art," *Artibus Asiae* 11 no. 4, (1948), 251-265.

articles in 1959.²³ In the first article, Jin refers to the *Lidai minghua ji* 歷代名畫記 (Famous Paintings of Successive Dynasties) and points out that an image of Vimalakirti painted in the year 364 by Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 344-405), the great fourth century virtuoso artist, might be the first visualization of the sutra. He reviews some other traditional Chinese records and lists other Six Dynasties (220-589) artists that painted the theme. His main focus, however, is on murals in Dunhuang 敦煌, Yungang 雲崗, Longmen 龍門, and some steles from the Sui (581-618) and the Tang (618-907) Dynasties.

In his second article, Jin investigates murals visualizing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* at Dunhuang from the late Tang to the Song Dynasty (960-1276). He briefly explored how the paintings illustrate the texts. Representations of the first twelve chapters of the sutra have been discovered in his discussions. He also inventoried sixty-three murals of *Weimobian* 維摩變 (Visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*) at Dunhuang

²³ Jin Weinuo, "Dunhuang bihua weimobian de fazhan," *Wen Wu*, no. 2, (1959): 3-9 and "Dunhuang wanqi de weimobian," *Wen Wu*, no. 4, (1959): 54-60. For some early studies, see Helen Fernald, "An Early Chinese Sculptured Stela of 575 A.D.," *Eastern Art* 3, (1931): 73-111 and J. Leroy Davidson, "Traces of Buddhist Evangelism in Early Chinese Art," *Artibus Asiae* 11, no. 4, (1948): 251-265.

and appended this list to the two articles.²⁴ In general, although they are not long, Jin's studies provide a basic developmental clue for the visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* from the fourth century to the thirteenth century.

While Jin's studies are mainly on murals, Emma Bunker's investigations of the topic focus on early Vimalakirti sculptures and stone engravings in her article published in 1968.²⁵ More than seventy examples are briefly studied and her interest is to track the iconographical development of the theme in stone from its innovation in the fourth century to the sixth century. Her conclusion is that the mode created by Gu Kaizhi was a basic formula for later visualizations of the sutra in stone.

Both Jin's and Bunker's studies introduced above are general ones on representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. The first study of the subject in detail is Judy Ho's Ph.D. dissertation completed in 1985.²⁶ Ho

²⁴ At present, sixty-eight murals have been identified as representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in Dunhuang. These will be further addressed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

²⁵ Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakirti," 28-52.

²⁶ Judy Chungwa Ho, *Tunhuang Cave 249: A Representation of the Vimalakirtinirdesa* (PhD diss., Yale University, 1985).

examines Dunhuang Cave 249, which is a coherent representation of one sutra, the *Vimalakirti-nirdesa Sutra*. She reconstructs the scattered representations and sculptures in the cave according to the events taking place in the text. Her conclusion is that sinicization is the main rationale for the arrangement of the visualizations of the sutra in the cave.

In comparison to Ho's work, which is a case study, Laura Heyrman's Ph.D. dissertation completed in 1994 is a comprehensive study of the Vimalakirti theme from the fifth to the twelfth centuries.²⁷ According to her research, all of the representations of the sutra during this period of time take Vimalakirti as the protagonist or one of the two protagonists. In fact, previous scholarship has revealed that representation of Chapter Five in the classic, Manjusri inquiring after Vimalakirti's illness (Ch.: 文殊問疾), has usually been painted as the main composition. Heyrman even defines her topic, the Vimalakirti theme, as "a representation of two figures placed opposite one another, one a bodhisattva, the other a layman, which may be limited to these two

²⁷ See Note 19.

figures or may be elaborated by the addition of narrative elements, setting, additional figures or other elements.”²⁸

Heyrman reviews the popularization of the sutra and its visualizations in China. She accentuates that the analogy between Vimalakirti and the Chinese ideal person, *junzi* 君子, is the key reason for the prevalence of the sutra. In her study, 162 representations of the debate between Vimalakirti and Manjusri are identified. By iconographical studies, she argues that early Vimalakirti images indicate their creators’ struggle to visualize the text and accentuate the importance of the Great Layman. She further argues that a final mode of the Vimalakirti theme borrowed elements from images of the *Zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢 (the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove) and representations of Bodhisattva figures developed in the middle of the Tang Dynasty.²⁹ In general, previous studies on visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* have stressed the Vimalakirti theme as defined by

²⁸ Heyrman, *The Meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri: Chinese Innovation in Buddhist Iconography*, 4.

²⁹ *Zhulin qixian* or the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, refers to Ji Kang (or Xi Kang), Ruan Ji, Shan Tao, Xiang Xiu, Liu Ling, Wang Rong and Ruan Xian. During the Zhengshi era (240-249) of the Wei, they always gathered in a bamboo grove in the Shanyang County to drink, play music instruments, compose poems and engage in qingtian or pure conversation. They advocated Daoism and a bohemian life style although their individual political views were different.

Heyrman, especially murals before the thirteenth century, when the sutra and its representations were most popular.

4. Object and Methodology of This Research

This dissertation, for the first time, will take all representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* into consideration. Since Vimalakirti did not appear in any other Buddhist sutras, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* is the only literary basis for any related paintings. In other words, all the related depictions can be regarded as representations of the sutra. Because of this, not only the Vimalakirti theme, but depictions of the Great Layman as a single image and illustrations of anecdotes from the sutra as an independent painting will be studied here.

In the meanwhile, not only those before the thirteenth century are studied but paintings based on the sutra created in and after the Song Dynasty will be examined systematically for the first time. At the same time, not only the extant but the lost paintings recorded in documents from the fourth century to the nineteenth century will be analyzed. The goal of enlarging the perspective is to rebuild the evolution of representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* as accurately as possible.

As for the methodology, on the one hand, this author has investigated traditional Chinese art criticism, catalogues and related documents to search for visualizations of the sutra in records throughout history. About forty identified artists who have been recorded representing the sutra from the fourth century to the seventeenth century are included in one study for the first time. On the other hand, by iconographic analysis, extant paintings of this subject matter from the fifth to the nineteenth centuries will be examined.

In addition to the earliest extant one created in 420 in the Binglingsi 炳靈寺 Temple in Gansu 甘肅 province, eight representative wall paintings at Dunhuang visualizing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* dated from the sixth to the thirteenth centuries will be investigated.³⁰ It is not until the Song Dynasty that we see Vimalakirti representations surviving in scroll format. This author has identified more than ten scrolls illustrating the sutra dated from the tenth to the nineteenth centuries.³¹ They will be investigated together here for the first time.

³⁰ He, Shizhe, "Dunhuang mogaoku bihua zhong de weimojie jingbian," *Dunhuang yanjiu*, Vol. 2 (1982).

³¹ One painting attributed to Liu Songnian, which will be studied in Chapter Four, is now mounted as an album leaf but used to be a handscroll.

This author will compare extant paintings to recorded ones of the same period. Six aspects will constitute the discussion: text content represented; mode of representation; iconography; geographical location; format; and identity of the painter. One important factor to be analyzed is which part of the text is visualized in a specific painting. Chapter Five of the classic text has long been painted as the main composition for paintings relating to *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. This author will explore whether any other excerpts were the basis for independent paintings. In other words, is there any other subject representing the sutra than the Vimalakirti theme defined by Heyrman.³²

In addition, both the representational and the iconographical modes will be investigated. On the one hand, this study will consider whether a painting is a narrative or non-narrative representation and does it employ a single-scene or multiple-scene mode. To be further discussed is the question of what larger art trends such choices are related to. On the other hand, the features of the depictions of the main characters will be analyzed to see the transformation of their identity in different periods.

³² See page 18 of this dissertation for the definition.

Moreover, the geographical location of a painting or the site of its creation will be taken into consideration to see how different areas in China may have had their local fashions. Also how did these local styles interact with each other? In addition, the format and identity of the painter or patron and collector where applicable will be explored. This study will examine whether a painting was created as a mural in a Buddhist temple or a scroll owned by a Buddhist or secular collector. The variation of its function will thus be further elaborated.

5. Prospectus

In Chapter Two, representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* from the Six Dynasties (220-589) period will be explored. Records on what may be the first representation of the sutra created by Gu Kaizhi in 364, which has long been lost, will be examined to see how the image was disseminated from a mural in the Waguansi 瓦棺寺 Temple in Nanjing 南京 to influence a lot of later painters. Its representational as well as iconographical mode will be reconstructed according to records by people who viewed the wall painting in person.

Also in Chapter Two, the earliest extant representation of the sutra, a mural in the Binglingsi Temple in Gansu province, dated to 420, will be

investigated. It is a narrative depiction of the meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri with the Buddha presiding. Some unique iconographical features of this mural which are not seen in later Vimalakirti Sutra representations will be identified and examined. The possible existence of another tradition for visualizing the sutra, developed in India or Central Asia, will be considered alongside the analysis of the tradition developing in central China.

Gu's painting in the Jiangnan 江南 area, the lower Yangzi River Delta area, will then be compared to the Binglingsi mural in the Western border area. The author will differentiate two manners of visualizing the sutra which exist from the very beginning: one a single image and the other a narrative. Studies on recorded paintings of the sutra by six other artists of the period further reveal the style and iconography in central China during this period of time.

From the Sui (581-618) to the Five Dynasties (907-960), it seems that the only extant paintings visualizing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* appear to be the murals at Dunhuang. Although more than a dozen artists have been recorded representing the sutra, their artworks, usually murals in Buddhist temples, have long been lost to history. Chapter Three will thus

explore these lost Vimalakirti Sutra Visualizations by examining extant paintings attributed to these artists and eight contemporaneous representative murals of the classic at Dunhuang. Apparently this is the period when visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* reached a peak in popularity. The author will discuss the prevalence of the narrative mode, with a settled main composition of the Great Layman and Manjusri facing each other, ringed by many vignettes of scenarios from the sutra.

Three other issues concerning Vimalakirti Sutra representations during this period will be explored. The first is the landscape elements that appeared in Vimalakirti Sutra representations at Dunhuang as early as the Sui Dynasty. Second, an alternative iconographical mode of representing the Great Layman as a healthy man appeared in the early part of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Third, the close relationship between representations of the sutra in Central China and those created at Dunhuang will be examined.

Chapter Four discusses representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in the Song Dynasty (960-1279) and the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Visualizations of the sutra by eleven recorded artists will be compared to the six extant scrolls from this period of time. Especially, the possible

copying relationship between a painting attributed to Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1101) and two extant handscrolls, one attributed to Ma Yunqing 馬雲卿 (active ca. 1230) and the other, by Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬 (active ca. 1281-1329), will be illuminated.

Four other extant paintings representing the sutra, including one attributed to Liu Songnian 劉松年 (ca. 1155-1218) and three anonymous hanging scrolls, will be explored. Some poems by contemporary literati will be analyzed. During this period of time, it seems the main format in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* shifted to scrolls. This change seems to be a reflection of the larger art trend of a relative reduction in mural painting along with the widespread use of silk and paper. It is also during this period that the function of Vimalakirti Sutra representations experienced a fundamental shift, which will be investigated.

The narrative mode with its basic composition established in the previous period was inherited by artists of these two dynasties. However, because of the space limit of a scroll, many vignettes seen in the panoramic representations of the sutra in the Tang Dynasty murals were omitted. However, this author will discuss how the Heavenly Maiden

Scattering Flowers became the only scenario that could be depicted to accompany the main composition.

In Chapter Five, visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties will be investigated. Three recorded ones by Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1523), Qiu Ying 仇英 (ca.1509-1551) and Ding Guanpeng 丁觀鵬 (18th century), respectively, which seem to be the three extant scrolls attributed to them, will be studied. A fashion in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in a full depiction of a landscape setting, appeared in the Ming Dynasty, will be discussed in relation to the prevalence of landscape painting during this period.

Most importantly, depictions of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers, which had become the only one scenario painted in the established composition of the Vimalakirti theme, may have gained its independence as early as the Song Dynasty and it became popular in the end of the eighteenth century. Three hanging scrolls of the Heavenly Maiden theme, in which a young beautiful lady is depicted scattering flowers, will be examined. The history of the term, *Tiannu sanhua* 天女散花 (Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers) will be studied, as well. This

author will explore four factors likely to be responsible for such a shift of theme.

CHAPTER TWO

VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA REPRESENTATION IN THE SIX DYNASTIES

PERIOD

As stated in the introduction, Chinese visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* have never been studied systematically although several of them individually have been topics of scholarly studies. Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five of this dissertation will aim to make up this deficiency and investigate the Chinese lineage of representations of this sutra. Paintings representing this important Buddhist classic including murals and scrolls, lost and extant, will be sorted and examined in chronological order. The goal is to restore a clear and comprehensive genealogy of the iconography and successive visualizations of this original Indian Buddhist story.

1. The Vimalakirti Sutra Representation by Gu Kaizhi

According to *Lidai minghua ji* by Zhang Yanyuan 張彥遠 (812-877), Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (ca. 344-405) created the first Vimalakirti image. Zhang said, “Mr. Gu is the first person who created the image of Vimalakirti.”³³ A

³³ Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this dissertation are this author's. Meng Zhaochen, ed. *Hua pin* (Haerbin: Beifang wenyi chubanshe, 2000), 90. Waguansi Temple was first built in 364. Its name *waguan*, is written as 瓦官 or 瓦棺. The former, which literally means

review of Chinese documents suggests that Gu Kaizhi may be the earliest recorded person visualizing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in Chinese records. The painting was a mural in Waguansi 瓦棺寺 Temple in Nanjing painted around 364 A.D, which has long been lost (Waguansi representation hereafter).

It is said that Gu agreeably promised a million *qian* 錢 to the Waguansi Temple as his donation.³⁴ People were astonished since Gu was not rich. Then Gu started to paint an image of Vimalakirti on a wall prepared in the temple. After one month when the figure was completed except the eyes, Gu told monks of the temple to ask for people's donations in order to see the fresco. Gu asked for a hundred thousand *qian* for the first day, fifty thousand *qian* for the second and whatever

official tile, was said to have been given after its foundation, an official ceramic workshop. The latter literally means tile coffin. It is said that there was a monk in the Jin Dynasty who always recited the *Lotus Sutra*. He was buried in a tile coffin after his death. Miraculously, two lotus flowers grew out of the grave, with their root in the body's tongue. So the temple built here is named after this magic tile coffin. This is recorded in a note to a poem by Du Fu. See Du Fu, *Ji Qianjiazhu Du Gongbu shiji* (SKQS), *juan* 4, 13.

³⁴ *Qian* refers to *Wuzhu qian* 五銖錢, a type of currency used from the Han Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty.

people like to donate on the third day.³⁵ As expected, more than a million *qian* was collected after three days because Gu's painting was so brilliant.

Gu's creation was said to be so wonderful that it was copied by artists such as Lu Tanwei 陸探微 (ca. 424-471) and Zhang Sengyou 張僧繇 (active 502-519); these are generally regarded as lesser works compared to Gu's original.³⁶ Lu and Zhang were both famous painters in their own ways. Thus, it can be seen how influential Gu's creation was, and it is safe to assume that many more copies must have been made by various artists in later dynasties. This point will be addressed later in this chapter. In fact, this seminal image of Vimalakirti created by Gu is actually believed by later people to have been not only excellent but also supernatural. For example, in *Pianzhi* 駢誌, the author Chen Yumo 陳禹謨 (active ca. 1596) quoted *Jinling liuchaoji* 金陵六朝記 by Yuchi Wo 尉遲偓 (active ca. 936) reporting that the Vimalakirti painted by Gu Kaizhi in

³⁵ The notes given under the title of a poem by Du Fu tell the story fully. See Du, *Ji Qianjiazhu Du Gongbu shiji*, 13.

³⁶ Meng, *Hua pin*, 90.

the Waguansi Temple brought holy light to the whole hall, lasting several days before disappearing.³⁷

Because of the mural's fame, a stele was made to commemorate it more than three hundred years later in the Tang Dynasty. This stele has also been lost and is only known to us because the prose composed for it has been passed down to the present. The text is by a little known person named Yuan Huangzhi 元黃之 (active 662-716), and the title is *Runzhou Jiangning xian Waguan si Weimojie huaxiang bei* 潤州江寧縣瓦棺寺維摩詰畫像碑 (Stele of Vimalakirti's Image in Waguansi Temple at Jiangning County in Runzhou). From this prose full of rhetorical and flowery words, it cannot be determined if the stele is just a memorial one with text or if the mural was also engraved on it.

Although its style might have been reflected in later renditions as will be analyzed later, this first image of Vimalakirti, like many other early Chinese Buddhist murals, suffered in the late Tang Dynasty. To avoid its being destroyed in the Huichang 會昌 Persecution of Buddhism under Emperor Wuzong of the Tang Dynasty 唐武宗 (814-846, r. 840-846) in 845, Gu's original was moved to Ganlusi 甘露寺 Temple in Zhenjiang. This must have been conducted secretly by some Buddhists. It is

³⁷ Chen Yumo, *Pianzhi* (SKQS), *juan* 10, 53.

uncertain if the stele made in the end of the seventh century or the early eighth century mentioned above was brought to Ganlusi Temple with the mural at the same time or not. There have been no known records about the stele ever since.

The wall painting by Gu was safely stored in Ganlusi Temple for several years. Ironically, it was sent to the Tang palace nine years after the Huichang Persecution when Emperor Wuzong died and his uncle Emperor Xuanzong 宣宗 (810-859) ascended the throne. Although it was not destroyed in the Huichang Persecution, it seems that this marvelous wall painting did not survive the troubled times at the end of the Tang. In fact, no one after the Tang Dynasty mentions seeing the original mural by Gu in person. The author of the *Lidai minghua ji*, Zhang Yanyuan who was active in the ninth century, was thus among the last few people who had the opportunity to see the authentic mural by Gu Kaizhi.

However, fortunately, before it was transported to Ganlusi Temple, the famous poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852) was said to have made ten copies of the original wall painting.³⁸ It is uncertain whether these copies are rubbings after the stele mentioned above, if there has been the mural engraved on it, or painted on paper or silk by brush. Also unknown is the

³⁸ Bunker, "Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakirti," 29.

size of these copies. This copying event is detailed in an inscription by a Song scholar Su Song 蘇頌 (1020-1101) probably after seeing one of these copies.³⁹ According to Su, instead of being copies by Du himself, these copies were made by artisans hired by Du. At the same time, these more than ten copies were made for those enthusiastic admirers of Gu's original, one of whom was the *taishou* 太守 of Ruyin 汝陰 (today's Fuyang 阜陽 of Anhui Province).⁴⁰ The one Su viewed was passed down by this *taishou* in the government office although Su mentioned that it might also be a copy of Du's copy. No matter if it was a first-hand copy or a second-hand one, their original model was Gu's masterpiece. Su Song's inscription is actually on this second or third copy. In fact, Su regarded it such a unique and fabulous artwork that he ordered artisans to make yet another copy for his own collection.

Du Mu's copying of the mural was valuable and influential. *Huashi* 畫史 by Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107) also records this Vimalakirti painting copied by Du Mu after Gu Kaizhi in the Government Storehouse of

³⁹ Su Song, *Su Weigong wenji* (SKQS), *juan* 72, 10.

⁴⁰ *Taishou* 太守 is an official title, which equals to a mayor in most of the Chinese dynasties.

Yingzhou 潁州 (today's Fuyang, Anhui Province).⁴¹ In Mi's description, the one by Du, which was kept in the storehouse's shrine, was marvelous and those in the literati officials' homes, which must have been copies after Du's copy, were quite unlike the original. Mi then tried to find renowned artisans to make new copies but was not satisfied by any of these efforts. In the end, Mi proposed to ask the palace masters to make a copy and distribute it to common people for wider distribution.

It is unknown if Mi Fu's proposal was adopted but it seems that many Song Dynasty officials may have heard about this mural. The Song literati official Ge Lifang 葛立方 (active ca. 1138) reported that the first question asked by the new governor of Nanjing to monks in Jietansi 戒壇寺 Temple, which was built upon the remains of Waguansi Temple, was why this Vimalakirti mural does not exist. Since the monks had no idea, Ge said,

When I was the governor of Nanxiong 南雄 [in today's Guangdong Province], there was a person who showed me a stone stele. He said that in the Huichang era of the Tang Dynasty, Du Mu once stored the copy of the Vimalakirti fresco from Waguansi Temple in Chenying 陳穎. Zhang Yanyuan had it engraved in the governor's house. I thus asked for the copy in Chenying and had it engraved in Nanxiong. Now I still have the ink sketch in my bamboo suitcase. I'll give it to you so that you can have it engraved in Temple Jietan. It is like returning an old treasure and every viewer

⁴¹ Mi Fu, *Huashi* (SKQS), 44.

can now get the chance to see the brilliance of Gu's brushes. It is really a marvelous thing for Jietansi Temple. Then the monks had it engraved.⁴²

In other words, from Ge's records, we know that Waguansi Temple was rebuilt in the Song Dynasty and was renamed Jietansi Temple. At the same time, Gu's Vimalakirti mural in the temple, which was probably lost at the end of the Tang Dynasty, was restored according to a later copy of Du Mu's copy of Gu's original work.

The three records discussed above are about Du Mu's copies of Gu's original in Anhui and Guangdong Province. These records indicate the wide spread of this first image of Vimalakirti created in Jiangsu Province through Du's copying event. At the same time, this was probably the reason that the iconography created by Gu Kaizhi was inherited in later depictions of the Great Layman, as will be discussed in the following chapters. It seems that this marvelous wall painting by Gu was indeed re-painted in the newly renovated Waguansi Temple, which was renamed Jietansi Temple. It would be highly possible that it was painted after Ge Lifang's draft copy.

More on the re-painting can be learned from the Song scholar Mi Fu's text. Mi said a scholar official in Suzhou who was enthusiastic in

⁴² Ge Lifang, *Yunyu yangqiu* (SKQS), *juan* 14, 8-9.

collecting artworks, always attributed paintings to ancient masters. After seeing the Vimalakirti painting by Gu in Mi's collection, this scholar official asked an art dealer Hu Changmai 胡常賣 to get two Vimalakirti paintings for him. The scholar then signed the names of Gu Kaizhi and Lu Tanwei on them, respectively. Mi said that the one signed with Gu's name was just an image of Vimalakirti since the scholar saw the image by Gu in the Waguansi Temple. The one signed in Lu's name has Manjusri with his lion because the scholar once saw a lion painted in the Ganlusi Temple by Lu.⁴³ From this account, it can be seen that Gu's Vimalakirti Sutra representation has been well-known and its copies were in high demand by the eleventh century. On the other hand, as early as the eleventh century, there have been fake Vimalakirti Sutra representations attributed to Gu.

2. The Iconography of the Waguansi Representation

Since neither Gu's original mural nor the copies made after it are extant today, its iconography can only be surmised by investigating ancient records. On the one hand, in early viewers' descriptions, this first representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* created by Master Gu is said to only have a single image of the Great Layman. For example, in the

⁴³ Mi, *Huashi*, 38-39.

earliest record of this mural, the text by Yuan Huangzhi mentioned above, it is suggested that there was only Vimalakirti's image on the painting. Actually in this long essay, there are only a few phrases describing the iconography. These read,

目若將視; (Vimalakirti's) eyes look like he is about to stare
(at you);
眉如忽嘖; (Vimalakirti's) brows look like he frowns frequently;
口無言而似言; (Vimalakirti's) mouth looks like he is talking
although he is not;
鬢不動而疑動。(Vimalakirti's) hair on his temples looks like it is
moving although it is not.⁴⁴

These descriptions all make reference to the image of the Great Layman, which suggests that Gu only painted the image of Vimalakirti without any other representations of the sutra.

The great Tang poet Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770) had the chance to see a Vimalakirti image from Waguansi Temple. He wrote a poem recording the experience.⁴⁵ It is a poem composed in Chang'an 長安 (today's Xi'an) titled *Song Xu Ba shiyi gui Jiangning jinxing* 送許八拾遺歸江寧覲省 (Farewell Shiyi Xu Ba Returning to Jiangning to Visit his Family).⁴⁶ Jiangning is today's Nanjing, so it reminded Du of his previous visit to

⁴⁴ Li Fang, *Wenyuan yinghua* (SKQS), *juan* 857, 6.

⁴⁵ Du Fu, *Ji Qianjiashi Du Gongbu shiji* (SKQS), *juan* 4, 13-14.

⁴⁶ *Shiyi* is an official title initially set in 685.

this county. The preface reads, “I have visited this county [Nanjing] before and asked for the Vimalakirti picture of Waguansi Temple at Mr. Xu’s. I will review it at the end of this poem.” Here Du used the word *tuyang* 圖樣 (literally, picture draft) to refer to the image he saw. At the same time, since this viewing event seems to have occurred in Mr. Xu’s house, what Du Fu saw was probably actually a painting draft or a copy of the mural in scroll format. The last two sentences of the poem mention the painting, which read, “I was so eager to see the painting; I was so regretful to think that (Master Gu) has been deceased long before. Master Gu’s image of Vimalakirti is so marvelous that (I) can never forget.”⁴⁷ From this last sentence, we know that the painting was probably an image of Vimalakirti without other figures represented.

In addition, Zhang Yanyuan, who lived in the ninth century and was mentioned above as one of the last generation who saw the mural in person, also refers to this mural by Gu as *Weimo xiang* 維摩像 (Image of Vimalakirti). Zhang described it as “having the look of a weak person’s showing illness and a status of meditating while leaning on a *ji* table (有

⁴⁷ *Hutou* is Gu Kaizhi’s alias name. *Jinsu* or sometimes *Jinsu rulai* (Tathagata Jinsu) refers to Vimalakirti.

清羸示病之容，隱几忘言之狀)。”⁴⁸ In fact, “status of meditating” in Zhang’s words, *wangyan* 忘言, literally means forgetting (his) words. In other words, Vimalakirti was not depicted in the act of discussing anything as seen in most later Vimalakirti Sutra representations. This appearance seems to be very close to a Vimalakirti image attributed to an anonymous Song Dynasty artist now in the collection of the Tofukuji Temple (Ch.: Dongfusi 東福寺) in Kyoto, Japan.⁴⁹

Although absence of discourse cannot be seen in most later Vimalakirti images, the look of “showing illness” has been inherited in later artists’ Vimalakirti images, which will be further addressed in the following three chapters. In fact, the depiction of the scholar Fusheng 伏生 attributed to the Tang Dynasty artist Wang Wei 王維 (ca. 701-761) might have inherited some features of Gu Kaizhi’s Vimalakirti image.⁵⁰ Fusheng was a profound scholar who, at his ninetieth year, recited the *Shangshu* 尚書 or Book of Documents after Emperor Qinshihuang’s

⁴⁸ Meng, *Hua pin*, 90. *Ji* is a kind of small table or armrest for people to lean on when sitting.

⁴⁹ For the image, see Liu Hua and Jin Tao ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang* (Beijing: Jinghua chubanshe, 2001), 129.

⁵⁰ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 45. The painting is in the collection of Municipal Museum of Fine Art, Osaka, Japan.

Fenshu kengru 焚書坑儒 (Burning of Books and Burying of Confucian Scholars) in 213 B.C. and 212 B.C. He is usually depicted as an emaciated old man. At the same time, given the fact that Wang did paint the Vimalakirti theme, which will be discussed in Chapter Three, it is highly possible that Wang's image of Fusheng had something to do with that of Vimalakirti.

In Mi Fu's story about a Suzhou scholar who commissioned two fake paintings discussed above, the painting attributed to Gu was just an image of Vimalakirti because the scholar claimed that he saw the original one in the Waguansi Temple. This also suggests that Gu's Vimalakirti painting in Waguansi Temple is a single image.

Furthermore, in a poem titled *Song xiezhao Chen Zhongfu huan siming* 送寫照陳中復還四明 (Saying Farewell to my Portraitist Chen Zhongfu Returning to Siming) by a Buddhist monk Shi Dagui 釋大圭 (ca. 1304-1362), there are two sentences, which read, "I have had illness for so long that I jeer myself as Vimalakirti. It has to be Gu Kaizhi who can make a portrait."⁵¹ Chen Zhongfu (active 1370) was a very famous portraitist who had even painted a portrait for Emperor Taizu (1328-1398) of the Ming Dynasty. Here the poet associated himself with the Great

⁵¹ Cao Xuequan, *Shicang lidai shixuan* (SKQS), *juan* 366, 21.

Layman and his portraitist Chen with the virtuoso painter Master Gu. The subtext is that Shi Dagui obviously believed that Gu Kaizhi created a portrait of Vimalakirti. In other words, although it is uncertain if Shi Dagui had seen any of the reliable copies of Gu's original, by his time the mural created by Gu in Waguansi was widely regarded as a single image or simple portrait of the Great Layman.

However, some later records indicate that there have been other images in the painting created by Gu. Some indicate that the Heavenly Maiden is in the painting. For example, in *Shuofu* 說郛 compiled by Tao Zongyi 陶宗儀 (ca. 1329-1410), it is said that there were three treasures in Waguansi Temple, one of which was a *Weimojie tiannu* 維摩詰天女 (Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden) by Gu.⁵²

In addition, in *Baojinzhai Tie* 寶晉齋帖, Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526-1590) explained that Mi Fu's studio Baojin zhai (Studio of Preserving Jin Dynasty Treasures) was named after two treasures from Eastern Jin Dynasty masters. These two are Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (303-361)'s *Poqiang Tie* 破羌帖 and Gu Kaizhi's *Weimo Tiannu* 維摩天女

⁵² Tao Zongyi, *Shuofu* (SKQS), *juan* 114, 62.

(Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden).⁵³ Thus, Wang recorded Gu's painting as one of the three treasures of Waguansi Temple also as a *Weimojie tiannu* when composing the *Chongjian Waguansi Zhuli Shengshou ji* 重建瓦棺寺祝厘聖壽記 (To Commemorate the Rebuilding of Waguansi Temple).⁵⁴ Because of this interpretation, the repainted Vimalakirti representation in the rebuilt Waguansi Temple in the Ming and the Qing Dynasties might be Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden.

In fact, Mi Fu's studio is widely known as being named when he got three calligraphic works by Wang Xizhi, Xie An 謝安 (320-385) and Wang Xianzhi 王獻之 (344-386), all of whom are Jin Dynasty masters. In other words, the painting titled *Weimo tiannu* has nothing to do with the name of Mi Fu's studio. But it can be seen that by Wang Shizhen's time, namely the sixteenth century, a painting depicting both the Great Layman and the Heavenly Maiden attributed to Gu was regarded as an authentic and important work, comparable to other masterpieces from the Jin Dynasty.

In *Yuzhitang tanhui* 玉芝堂談彙 written by Xu Yingqiu 徐應秋 (*jinshi* in 1616), a *Weimo tiannu feixian xiang* 維摩天女飛仙像 (Vimalakirti, the

⁵³ Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibugao* (SKQS), *juan* 167, 21.

⁵⁴ Wang Shizhen, *Yanzhou sibugao* (SKQS), *Xugao*, *juan* 62, 11-14.

Heavenly Maiden and Flying Immortals) is listed under Gu Kaizhi's name.⁵⁵ It is said this was the *Weimo tiannu* (Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden) recorded in Mi Fu's *Huashi*. In the meanwhile, in the *Shigutang shuhua huikao* 式古堂書畫會考 by Bian Yongyu 卞永譽 (1645-1712), it is recorded that Mi Fu said in his *Huashi* that he had a *Jingming tiannu* 淨名天女 (Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden) by Gu Kaizhi. It measures 2.5 *chi* and is believed to be the *xiaoshen Weimo* 小身維摩 (small sized Vimalakirti) recorded in the *Lidai Minghua ji*. Bian said that according to Mi, Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106) loved it so much that he personally incised a white jade tag and engraved four characters *Hutou jinsu* 虎頭金粟 (Vimalakirti by Gu Kaizhi) in the *zhuan* 篆 style (seal font) on the tag for the painting.⁵⁶ Since Li was so attracted by Gu's painting as described by Mi, it is safe to say that Li Gonglin's Vimalakirti image must have inherited some features from what was created by Gu Kaizhi, which will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In Mi Fu's *Huashi*, a painting titled *Weimo tiannu feixian* was said to be in his home with no other descriptions or comments.⁵⁷ In other

⁵⁵ Xu Yingqiu, *Yuzhitang tanhui* (SKQS), *juan* 30, 31.

⁵⁶ Bian Yongyu, *Shigutang shuhua huikao* (SKQS), *juan* 38, 7.

⁵⁷ Mi, *Huashi*, 10.

words, accounts on a painting with both Vimalakirti and other figures attributed to Gu began to appear from Mi's time, about seven hundred years after Gu's death. This fact highly challenges the authenticity of the painting.

The previously mentioned Song Dynasty scholar Su Song, who had seen a first-hand or second-hand copy of Gu's original, said that the clothes and utensils in the painting were all those of Gu's time. In other words, the first image of the Great Layman was that of a Six Dynasties' person. In fact, it is highly possible to be that of a Six Dynasties' gentry class scholar-enthusiast of *qingtan* 清談 or pure conversation, which will be further address in the next section.

In general, from all the records this author found in numerous documents, Gu Kaizhi created an early and influential Vimalakirti Sutra representation in the Waguansi Temple as a mural in the fourth century. It was lost around the tenth century probably with the destruction of the Waguansi Temple. But thanks to Du Mu's copies of this original painting in the ninth century, Gu's creation was widely known and was restored in a rebuilt Waguansi Temple, which was renamed the Jietansi Temple in the twelfth century.

As for the iconography, this wall painting should be a single image of the Great Layman, which may look like a Six Dynasties' gentry class scholar who is good at pure conversation. However, in Song and post-Song records, the Heavenly Maiden and possibly some other figures were regarded as being in a Vimalakirti painting by Gu. It is possible that Gu created another painting with both Vimalakirti and other figures, in addition to a single image of the Great Layman painted in the mural at Waguansi. However, since such a painting seems to suddenly appear in the eleventh century, this author believes that more likely it is a work by a later artist attributed to Gu.

3. The Originality of the Waguansi Representation

As quoted in the first section, Zhang Yanyuan said that Gu Kaizhi "is the first person who created the image of Vimalakirti."⁵⁸ This poses a question on the originality of the Waguansi representation. Did Gu create it or copy after another source? To examine this problem, a review of the period before Gu Kaizhi's lifetime is needed.

Buddhism is usually regarded to have been introduced into China in 2 B.C., the first year of the Yuanshou 元壽 era of the Aidi 哀帝 Emperor (25 B.C.-1 B.C.) in the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-8

⁵⁸ Meng, *Hua pin*, 90.

A.D.).⁵⁹ It was when Yicun 伊存, the representative of the King of the Yuezhi 月氏 Kingdom, recited the *Futu jing* 浮屠經 or *Futu Sutra* and taught it to the Chinese *boshi-dizi* 博士弟子, Jinglu 景盧.⁶⁰ Although there are other theories on the date of the introduction of Buddhism into China, it was not until the end of the second century that this foreign religion started to become popular in China.⁶¹

Just in the time that Buddhism was becoming accepted by Chinese, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* was introduced into China. It was probably introduced in 188 by the early Chinese Buddhist monk Yan Fodiao 嚴佛調, several decades after it originated in India around 100

⁵⁹ For the history of Chinese Buddhism, see E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist conquest of China: the Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*. Third edition with a foreword by Stephen F. Teiser (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei liang Jin Nan Bei chao fo jiao shi* (Beijing: Kunlun chu ban she, 2006); Tang Yongtong, *Sui Tang fo jiao shi gao* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1982); Ren Jiyu ed., *Zhongguo fo jiao shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she, 1981). For a comprehensive study of Buddhism and its distribution to the East Asian countries and the western world, see Ren, Jiyu ed., *Fojiao shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo she hui ke xue chu ban she, 1991).

⁶⁰ There has not been found a Buddhist classic titled *Futu Sutra*. Thus, it must have been a collection of *jataka* stories and Buddhist doctrines. *Boshi-dizi* refers to the students in the *taixue* 太學, the highest education academy established by the Wudi Emperor of the Western Han Dynasty.

⁶¹ Other theories on the date of the introduction of Buddhism into China include periods of the reigns of the Mingdi Emperor (28-75) of the Eastern Han Dynasty and the Wudi Emperor (156 B.C.-87 B.C.) of the Western Han Dynasty.

A.D.⁶² Yan Fodiao is said to be the first Chinese Buddhist monk. Although this first Chinese translation by Yan has long been lost, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* is one of the earliest Buddhist classics translated into Chinese.

Born in Xiapi 下邳 (today's Xuzhou 徐州 in Anhui Province), Yan Fodiao lived in Luoyang 洛陽, the capital of the Eastern Han Dynasty. It can be assumed that at this early stage, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* along with other Buddhist classics and teachings were mainly available around the area of modern day Shanxi 陝西 Province. Then in the third century during the Huangwu 黃武 era (222-229 A.D.) of the Wu Kingdom, Zhiqian 支謙 (ca. 3rd century) translated the second edition in Jianye 建業 (today's Nanjing), the capital of the Wu Kingdom. Zhiqian's edition must have encouraged the popularity of this classic in the Jiangnan area.

Looking at the history of painting in China, Cao Buxing 曹不興 of the Wu Kingdom (222-280) of the Three Kingdoms period is said to be the first historic painter recorded in Chinese documents. Cao was also widely regarded as the first Chinese to paint Buddhist themes. It is said

⁶² Sun, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*, 30. Na Yi, "Fojiao meishu zhong de weimojie tcai shidu," *Palace Museum Journal*, No. 4 (2004): 96-109. For more information on the Buddhist figures mentioned in this dissertation, see Daobin Ren ed., *Fojiao wenhua cidian* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang gu ji chu ban she, 1991).

that when the famous Buddhist monk Kangseng Hui 康僧會 from the Kangju 康居 Kingdom (today's northern Xinjiang and Central Asia) came to Jianye in 247, he brought some Buddhist paintings with him.⁶³ It is said that from these paintings, Cao first copied and then learned to paint Buddhist images.⁶⁴ His Buddhist figures were very popular in the Jiangnan area and it is said that he worked on both scrolls and murals in Buddhist temples.

As mentioned above, Zhiqian introduced *The Vimalakirti Sutra* into the Jiangnan area in the Huangwu era (222-229). In other words, by the time that he started to paint Buddhist themes in 247, Cao Buxing had had the opportunity to learn about *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. However, from the present records on Cao Buxing, it seems that he did not illustrate *The Vimalakirti Sutra*.

In the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316), there were two other translations. In 291, Zhushulan 竺叔蘭 (ca. 3rd century) completed the third translation. Shortly after this, in 303 the famous translator of Buddhist classics Zhufahu 竺法護 (ca. 3rd-4th centuries) translated the

⁶³ Kangseng Hui literally means “Hui, the monk from the Kangju Kingdom.”

⁶⁴ Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwen zhi* (SKQS), *juan* 1, 13.

fourth edition. However, there were apparently no Vimalakirti Sutra representations during this period. Even Cao Buxing's famous pupil Wei Xie 衛協, who was active in the Western Jin Dynasty and was famous for his Buddhist paintings, is not recorded to have represented the classic.

That neither Cao Buxing nor Wei Xie illustrated *The Vimalakirti Sutra* reveals at least two things. On the one hand, *The Vimalakirti Sutra* and Buddhism itself were still waiting for their golden time to come. On the other hand, this author believes that during the introduction of the classic itself, there may have been no foreign Vimalakirti Sutra representations brought into China that these early Chinese Buddhist artists could easily copy.

In the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), Zhiduomi 祇多蜜 completed the fifth Chinese translation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. In the meanwhile, eight hundred Buddhist monks supervised by Kumarajiva or Jiumoluoshi 鳩摩羅什 (344-413) completed the sixth translation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in Chinese history in Chang'an in 406. So many translations available by the Eastern Jin Dynasty reflect the importance of the text and must have boosted the popularity of this classic during this period of time.

Thus, it is not difficult to understand that the first Chinese Vimalakirti Sutra representation was imminent at this point. In fact, it should be noticed that by the time Gu Kaizhi created his image of Vimalakirti in 364, there had been five Chinese translations of the sutra. In other words, the first Chinese Vimalakirti Sutra representation somehow lagged behind the popularity of the sutra. It should be one of the reasons that Gu Kaizhi's mural was so welcomed when it was completed in the Waguansi Temple. Of course, Gu's brilliant skill must have played the major role.

In general, by examining the early situation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* and its representations in China before Gu Kaizhi's life time, it can be seen that the first Chinese Vimalakirti Sutra representation appeared relatively late after the classic was introduced into and repeatedly translated in China. Such a lag suggests that along with the introduction of the classic itself, there should have been no ready foreign Vimalakirti Sutra representation distributed into China that early Chinese Buddhist artists such as Cao Buxing and Wei Xie could easily copy. In fact, as stated in the introduction, a Sanskrit original of the sutra has long been lost and no Vimalakirti Sutra representations have been found in India or

central Asia. It seems that the sutra and its visualization were not popular in India. In other words, the originality of the Waguansi representation by Gu seems convincing.

4. Six Other Six Dynasties Artists

Other artists of the Six Dynasties Period recorded to have visualized *The Vimalakirti Sutra* include Zhang Mo 張墨 (early 4th century), Lu Tanwei, Yuan Qian 袁倩 (mid-5th century), Zhang Sengyou, Sun Shangzi 孫尚子 (active 581) and Dong Boren 董伯仁 (active 581). Zhang Mo is a mysterious artist whose life dates are quite uncertain. Many documents take him as a Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) artist while some others put him into the Eastern Jin Dynasty (316-420) category. Since it is widely accepted that he was the pupil of the famous Western Jin Dynasty painter Wei Xie, his lifetime probably lasted from end of the Western Jin to beginning of the Eastern Jin. In other words, Zhang Mo should be at least forty years older than Gu Kaizhi. However, Zhang's Vimalakirti Sutra representation does not seem to be painted before Gu's. In fact, Zhang Mo's work was recorded by Zhang Yanyuan, who nonetheless regarded Gu's as the first Vimalakirti Sutra

representation.⁶⁵ Without any descriptions, Zhang Yanyuan perhaps only intended to clarify that the Vimalakirti painted by Zhang Mo did not measure up to the one created by Gu Kaizhi.

It seems that, since they are compared without extra explanations, Zhang Mo's painting was a single depiction of the Great Layman as was the Waguansi representation. During the Ming dynasty, collector Zhu Mouyin 朱謀璣 (active 1631) composed *Huashi huiyao* 畫史會要 (Summarized Essentials of Painting History), in which a *Weimo xiang* 維摩像 (image of Vimalakirti) by Zhang Mo is recorded.⁶⁶ Since Zhu did not provide any other information about the painting, the only thing we know is that this is probably a depiction of the Great Layman as a single figure. It is possible that this one in Zhu's collection is the one seen by Zhang Yanyuan.

Under the name of Lu Tanwei, a court painter for Emperor Mingdi 明帝 of the Liu Song Dynasty (420-479), a Vimalakirti painting is recorded under the title *Anan Weimo tu* 阿難維摩圖 (Ananda and Vimalakirti).⁶⁷ It is first recorded in Zhang Yanyuan's *Lidai minghua ji*.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Meng, *Hua pin*, 90.

⁶⁶ Zhu Mouyin, *Huashi huiyao* (SKQS), *juan* 1, 12.

⁶⁷ Another painting titled *Jinsu rulai xiang juan* 金粟如來像卷 (Vimalakirti

Ananda was one of Buddha's ten disciples and the narrator of many Buddhist classics including *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. The vignette of Anan qiru 阿難乞乳 or Ananda Asking for Milk is narrated in Chapter Three of the sutra and has been introduced in Chapter One of this dissertation. This *Anan Weimo tu* by Lu probably depicted this scenario of the classic, which has been visualized to some extent in *Vimalakirti Sutra* representations at Dunhuang.⁶⁹

Lu's *Anan Weimo tu* is just one narrative representation of the sutra. In comparison, a handscroll by a contemporary artist named Yuan Qian is probably the most comprehensive representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. According to *Zhenguan gongsi huashi* 貞觀公私畫史 (Official and Private Collections of Paintings in the Zhenguan Era) by Pei Xiaoyuan 裴孝源 (7th century), there was a scroll titled *Weimojie*

Image Scroll) attributed to Lu Tanwei and copied by the Yuan painter Qian Xuan 錢選 (or Qian Shunju 錢舜舉, 1239-1301) is recorded in *Qinghe shuhua fang* 清河書畫舫. See Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua fang* (SKQS), *juan 6 xia*, 26. According to Zhang, it was a scroll in color on paper. The image is described to be very vivid and precisely after Lu's original.

⁶⁸ Meng, *Hua pin*, 176. Zhang Yanyuan, *Lidai minghua ji* (SKQS), *Juan 6*, 2.

⁶⁹ Two examples can be seen in Cave 159 and Cave 9 of Mogao Grottoes. For the images, see Dunhuang yanjiuyuan ed. *Dunhuang shiku quanji*, Vol. 7 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1999), 231 and 236.

bianxiang tu 維摩詰變相圖 (Representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*) under Yuan Qian's name.⁷⁰ Pei said that it was “from the official collection of the Liang 梁 Kingdom and has been inscribed at the time of the Taiqing 太清 era.” Taiqing is the seventh title of Emperor Liang Wudi 梁武帝's reign (547 - 549). Thus, probably Yuan Qian painted the scroll for the Song official collection and then they were inherited successively by the Qi (478-502) and Liang (502-557). Since Emperor Wudi of the Liang Kingdom was enthusiastic for Buddhism, he might have been interested in inscribing or have someone else inscribe the scroll of the *Vimalakirti Sutra* by Yuan.

Zhang Yanyuan listed a scroll titled *Weimojie bian* 維摩詰變 (Representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*) under Yuan Qian's name. His comments on this scroll read:

百有餘事；運思高妙；六法備呈；置位無差。若神靈感會，精光指顧。得瞻仰威容，前使顧陸知慙，後得張閻駭歎。

There are more than a hundred events illustrated [in this scroll]; [Yuan's] design is brilliant; all the six principles of painting are managed very well; the composition is perfect. It is as if supernatural and is as excellent as Master Gu Kaizhi's creation. If [these people] have [the chance to] look at this outstanding scroll, previous Masters Gu and Lu would be ashamed and later Masters Zhang Sengyou and Yan Liben would be astonished.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Pei Xiaoyuan, *Zhenguan gongsu huashi* (SKQS), 6.

⁷¹ Meng, *Hua pin*, 182.

This scroll has been recorded in some other sources such as *Yuzhitang tanhui* 玉芝堂談彙 by Xu Yingqiu 許應秋 (*jinshi* in 1616).⁷² But as usual, none of these records provides further information about the iconography of the scroll(s). Considering the fashion at that time, it can be assumed that it might look like *Goddess of the Luo River* attributed to Gu Kaizhi, in which events are represented from right to left in the order that they happen in the text.⁷³

Since it was said that Yuan's handscroll(s) illustrate "more than a hundred events (百有餘事, *bai you yu shi*)," it means that for the fourteen chapters of the sutra, each chapter on average would have more than seven scenes or events to be visualized.⁷⁴ In other words, Yuan must have depicted the classic in a very detailed way.⁷⁵ Thus, both the painter

⁷² Xu Yingqiu, *Yuzhitang tanhui* (SKQS), *juan* 30, 26.

⁷³ There are at least five copies of Gu Kaizhi's original painting extant today. For the image of the copy in the Palace Museum, Beijing, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 18-19. For a detailed discussion of the paintings, see Chen Pao-Chen, *The Goddess of the Lo River: A Study of Early Chinese Narrative Handscrolls* (PhD Diss., Princeton: Princeton University, 1987).

⁷⁴ Although sometimes "a hundred" is used as a way of saying many, in this case, when Zhang said, "more than a hundred," it seems the number is not a rough description.

⁷⁵ It would be interesting to reconstruct the more than a hundred scenes that could be illustrated from *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, which will be this

and the intended viewers must have read the sutra very carefully. In fact, this author would assert that it might have been used as a visual guide for religious activity such as reciting the sutra. Perhaps it could be seen as an aid to prayer, which would be perfect for illiterate people, perhaps women. Since it was in the imperial collection, it might even have been such a guide for the empresses and princesses. On the other hand, such detailed representation could have functioned as a draft or model for later wall paintings and scrolls.

Although the specific dates of their lives are unknown, Yuan Qian is said to have learned from Lu Tanwei and Lu to have learned from Gu Kaizhi. In fact, since Ananda Asking for Milk is such a minor scenario from the sutra, it is hard to believe that Lu Tanwei painted only this narrative illustration without visualizing other scenarios of the classic. This author believes that it is highly possible that Yuan's full narrative representation of the sutra is based on a model by Lu.

On the other hand, Gu was probably older than Lu and Yuan in Chinese convention. Thus, a development in early representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* can be drawn. In general, a single figure of Vimalakirti has been painted by Gu Kaizhi and Zhang Mo. By Lu Tanwei

author's next project.

and Yuan Qian's lifetime, a narrative representation of the sutra appeared.

After Yuan Qian, three other Six Dynasties artists, Zhang Sengyou, Sun Shangzi and Dong Boren, have been recorded representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. Zhang Yanyuan recorded that he once saw a Vimalakirti painting by Zhang Sengyou in the middle of the Yuanhe 元和 era (806-820).⁷⁶ Since no further information was provided, the iconography of this painting is unknown. In comparison, another Vimalakirti painting by Zhang is known to have been a depiction of the Great Layman as a single figure. It is known to us because of a later copy in a Song Dynasty record. A single figure of Vimalakirti by an otherwise unknown artist Hong Kai 洪鑑 in a temple in Mount Lu is said to be after Zhang Sengyou's original.⁷⁷ In addition, a Vimalakirti wall painting by Sun Shangzi is recorded by Zhang Yanyuan.⁷⁸ It is on the east wall of the hall in the Dingshui Temple in Shangdu. In *Yuzhitang*

⁷⁶ Zhang, *Lidai minghua ji* (SKQS), *juan* 7, 8. Yuanhe is a reign title of Emperor Gaozong (628-683) of Tang.

⁷⁷ Chen Shunyu, *Lushan ji* (SKQS), *juan* 2, 14.

⁷⁸ Zhang, *Lidai minghua ji* (SKQS), *juan* 3, 17.

tanhui, a painting called *Weimojie xiang* is listed under the name of Dong Boren.⁷⁹

In general, from the fourth to the sixth centuries, it seems that after Gu created a single figure of Vimalakirti, a narrative pattern representing the sutra was coming into being. However, depicting the Great Layman himself remained the fashion, especially in murals of Buddhist temples, where they were painted for veneration purposes.

5. The Earliest Extant Vimalakirti Sutra Representation

The earliest known extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations are in Cave 169 of the Binglingsi Temple in the Yongjing 永靖 County, Gansu Province.⁸⁰ Because of the dated inscription, the paintings in this cave can be dated to the first year of the Jianhong 建弘 era (420-428) in the Western Qin or Xiqin 西秦 Kingdom (385-400, 409-431), equivalent to 420 A.D.⁸¹ There are three Vimalakirti Sutra representations in sub-caves

⁷⁹ Xu Yingqiu, *Yuzhitang tanhui* (SKQS), *juan* 30, 28.

⁸⁰ Yongjing County is about 45 miles southwest of Lanzhou and 700 miles southeast of Dunhuang.

⁸¹ Western Qin or Xiqin was one of the sixteen kingdoms established by northern minorities in North China paralleling the Eastern Jin Dynasty (316-420), which was ruled by the Han people in the Jiangnan area. In 400, Xiqin was conquered by Houqin, another one of the sixteen kingdoms, and was not rebuilt until 409.

10, 11 and 24, respectively. This study will examine the one in sub-cave 11 (Binglingsi representation, hereafter).⁸²

In the wall painting, which is partly damaged, two images, each with an inscription beside, *weimojie zhi xiang* 維摩詰之像 (image of Vimalakirti) and *shizhe zhi xiang* 侍者之像 (image of the attendant) can still be recognized. Under a canopy, Vimalakirti is depicted facing to the left of the painting and reclining on something toward the right. Apparently this pose is to indicate his “showing illness”. His left arm is probably resting on a *ji* table, which cannot be recognized on the partly damaged wall painting now. His left forearm is raised and the left hand can be clearly seen in front of his chest. The thumb is turned outward while the other four fingers are held together stretching forward. Although it is hard to tell if the right arm is in front of his chest or stretching toward the attendant, the left hand gesture does not seem to be a kind of *mudra*. In fact, it is more likely that Vimalakirti has been represented holding something, probably something with a handle. It could be a fan or a fly whisk or a *ruyi* 如意 as can be seen in later Vimalakirti representations, which will be further discussed later.

⁸² For the image, see Jin Weinuo and Shiping Luo, *Zhongguo zongjiao meishu shi* (Nanchang: Jiangxi meishu chubanshe, 1995), 21.

His facial features and four limbs have been damaged. But it can be seen that both Vimalakirti and the attendant are depicted wearing *jiasha* 袈裟 (Sanskrit: *kashaya*), a cassock of Indian origin for monks, with their right shoulders uncovered.⁸³ This is one of the two most popular types of *jiasha*, which is believed to have been worn by the historic Buddha. Of course, the clothing is to show their Buddhist identity. Furthermore, haloes can be seen on both figures' heads, which is to suggest their status as deities.

Probably because of the restriction of a big horizontal rectangular frame outside the two figures, which is a bed and will be discussed in the next section, and the inscriptions that accentuate the two figures as images or *xiang* 像, some scholars have regarded these two figures as composing an independent painting.⁸⁴ In fact, they are just a part of a bigger painting, which is a narrative representation of the meeting between Vimalakirti and Manjusri Bodhisattva. Images of Vimalakirti and

⁸³ Usually there are two types of *jiasha*. The one with the right shoulder uncovered is called *tanyou jiasha* 袒右袈裟. The other common type of *jiasha* is to be worn on both shoulders, which is called *tongjian jiasha* 通肩袈裟.

⁸⁴ For example, see Dong Yuxiang, "Binglingsi shiku di 169 ku neirong zonglu," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 2 (1986): 148-159.

his attendant are on the right of the painting while Manjusri and two attendants are on the left.

Manjusri is sitting on a platform in the cross-legged position. His head and face slightly turn to the right side towards the Great Layman. His arms and hands are too obscure to tell if he has been represented in some kind of *mudra* or holding something. Two attendants are standing on his left and right side, respectively. As the two figures in the right group, those of the left group are all depicted wearing *jiasha* and emanating haloes. There are small vertical rectangles next to each of the images but it seems that the inscriptions for these cartouches were never written in, as can be seen in many Dunhuang murals.

In the middle of the two groups, a Buddha is depicted sitting in the cross-legged position under a canopy bigger than that of Vimalakirti's. Besides this Buddha, there is a small vertical rectangle in which the inscription "Wuliangshou fo 無量壽佛 (Amitabha Buddha)" is written. The Buddha's right hand displays the gesture of *abhaya mudra* or the Gesture of Fearlessness.⁸⁵ His left hand is depicted holding a sash which encircles his neck and wrist. Again, like the other figures in the painting,

⁸⁵ In the hand gesture of *abhaya mudra*, which is also called the Gesture of Fearlessness, the right hand is slightly elevated to the chest-shoulder level and the palm is turned outwards with the fingers extended.

the Buddha wears the *jiasha* and has a halo. He directly faces the viewers and is on the middle axis of the two groups. In other words, the painting is compositionally symmetrical.

The depiction of the Amitabha Buddha in this mural is interesting because this Buddha actually never appeared in the sutra. It is the Shakyamuni Buddha who appeared in the beginning and the end of the classic as the ultimate supporter of Vimalakirti. Thus, the presence of the Amitabha Buddha, described in many Mahayana Buddhist scriptures as the principal Buddha residing in the western paradise, is not a representation of the text but a reinforcement of the Mahayana Buddhism advocated in *The Vimalakirti Sutra*.

6. Some Chinese Features in the Binglingsi Representation

In the Binglingsi representation, some Chinese features can be noticed. In other words, the Binglingsi representation has some characteristics that are related to central China. First of all, the big horizontal rectangle that defines the space of Vimalakirti and his attendant like a frame is in fact the depiction of a Chinese bed. As mentioned above, the rectangle has been identified as a painting frame by some scholars. However, the valances on the above, which gracefully

drape down to the two figures' heads, suggest that this simple depiction is that of a bed. A similar bed can be seen from paintings of the same period. For example, on the fifth section of the *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies* attributed to Gu Kaizhi, a husband and a wife are represented sitting and leaning respectively on a similar bed.⁸⁶ Although this painting is now widely accepted to be a later copy, it should have kept the original look. Thus, it can be imagined that the bed would look like the one in the Binglingsi representation if painted from the strict frontal view.

The original sentence in Chapter Five of the sutra when the debate between the Great Layman and Manjusri Bodhisattva is about to begin reads, "At once he employed his supernatural powers to empty the room, clearing it of all its contents and his attendants, leaving only a single bed on which he lay in sickness."⁸⁷ In other words, depicting Vimalakirti on a bed instead of any other furniture such as a *ta* platform or a *ji* table, as

⁸⁶ For the image of the copy in the British Museum, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 16-17. For further discussions of the painting, see Shane McCausland, *First Masterpiece of Chinese Painting: the Admonitions Scroll* (London: British Museum Press; New York: G. Braziller, 2003) and Shane McCausland ed., *Gu Kaizhi and the Admonitions Scroll* (London: British Museum Press, 2003).

⁸⁷ Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, 64-65.

can be seen in some of later Vimalakirti Sutra representations, is very faithful to the description in the sutra.

It may have been noticed that the original literary source suggests no attendants around Vimalakirti. However, in the Binglingsi representation, an attending figure is depicted standing beside the Great Layman with an inscription indicating his identity. In fact, this is a common depiction of the gentry class of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. For example, in the *Life of the Tomb Owner* excavated from an Eastern Jin Dynasty tomb, the tomb owner, apparently an upper class man, is depicted sitting under a canopy with an attendant girl standing beside.⁸⁸ This tradition can still be seen in later paintings when depicting the gentry class of the Eastern Jin Dynasty. For example, in the *Gaoyi tu* 高逸圖 by Sun Wei 孫位 (active 862-888), an incomplete painting depicting the renowned *Zhulin qixian* 竹林七賢 or the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, each one of the four sages of the Eastern Jin Dynasty is depicted sitting with an attendant boy standing or kneeling beside.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 15. The painting is in the collection of Museum of Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region.

⁸⁹ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 64. The painting is in the collection of Shanghai Museum, Shanghai,

Besides the depictions of the bed and the attendant, there are some typical Chinese art traditions that can be seen in the Binglingsi representation. First of all, the composition, as discussed above, is axially symmetrical. The Amitayus Buddha is represented in the middle while two groups of figures, the Vimalakirti group and the Manjusri group, are placed on either side of him. The axial symmetric composition had long been adopted into Chinese art. For example, in the T-shape silk painting excavated from the Mawangdui 馬王堆 Tomb No. 1 of the Western Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-9 A.D.), symmetric depictions can be seen in the upper part.⁹⁰ In this part visualizing the scene of the heavens, two human figures and two dragons are depicted symmetrically on either side among many other decorations. In the upper most part of the painting, a sun in which there is a crow on the right is balanced with a moon on top of which there is a toad and rabbit on the left.

Secondly, the Chinese tradition of hierarchical scale, which is to depict important people bigger than less important ones, can be seen in the Binglingsi representation. Here the Amitayus Buddha is represented as the biggest image in the scene and Vimalakirti and Manjusri are a little

China.

⁹⁰ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 5.

smaller but bigger than their attendants. This convention can be seen in early Chinese paintings. For example, in the *Lidai diwang tu* 歷代帝王圖 (The Thirteen Emperors) attributed to Yan Liben 閻立本 (ca. 600-673), all the attendants are depicted much smaller than the emperors.⁹¹

Third, the use of inscriptions next to each figure is typical of Chinese taste. In fact, in traditional China, characters are regarded as having the same origination as paintings. Thus, it is not uncommon that there are characters or sentences written in paintings. For example, in the *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies*, each illustration is accompanied by corresponding texts from the original book. This tradition was further strengthened in later periods when calligraphy was used in harmony with painting and poetry.

7. Some Unique Features in the Binglingsi Representation

It is interesting to compare this earliest extant Vimalakirti representation to the later Vimalakirti Sutra representations. Many differences can be noticed when comparing the iconographies of the Binglingsi representation and most of the other extant Vimalakirti Sutra

⁹¹ The painting is now in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 37.

representations. These differences may suggest a possible Central Asian or Indian prototype for the former.

First of all, Vimalakirti in the Binglingsi representation has a typical Buddhist figure hair style which probably originated in India or Central Asia. There is a high bun on the top of his head while the other hair is scattered on his shoulders. In comparison, in most other extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations, Vimalakirti is shown wearing a Chinese kerchief or hat, which suggests his identity as a Chinese literati official or member of the educated gentry class.

Secondly, in the Binglingsi representation, both Vimalakirti and the attendant are depicted wearing *jiasha* with their right shoulders uncovered. In later Chinese Vimalakirti Sutra representations, the Great Layman is always depicted wearing layers of robes typically worn by Chinese scholars, especially a kind of *hechangqiu* 鶴氅裘 favored by the Six Dynasty scholars who are good at and fond of *qingtan* 清談 or pure conversation.⁹²

⁹² Pure conversation is a kind of Daoist debate which prevailed during the Six Dynasties Period. The *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Change), *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* are the main texts for discussion. The representative figures for such activity are the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. For further discussion on the pure conversation, see He Changqun, *Wei Jin qing tan si xiang chu lun* (Taipei: Wen li chu ban she, 1977).

In fact, scholars have pointed out that the popularization of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in China is closely related to the social trend of pure conversation starting from the middle of the third century.⁹³ In other words, Vimalakirti's discussing the law of Buddha with many Buddhist figures and demonstrating it to the many audiences in the sutra is similar to the pure conversation that prevailed in the Six Dynasties although the content of the latter is Daoist. To some extent, Chinese scholars of the period who advocated pure conversation would see themselves in the image of Vimalakirti. In the meanwhile, Vimalakirti's image and identity as a profound scholar-expert in pure conversation was thus widely accepted and became popular in later times. Thus, the Binglingsi representation in which Vimalakirti wears a special hair style and a *jiasha* was probably influenced by a Central Asian or Indian prototype.

Third, the facial features are different. Probably because the pure conversation is about Daoist subjects, Vimalakirti depicted as a pure conversationalist seems to have added more Daoist features. For example, in most later representations, Vimalakirti wears a long white beard and has the look of an old man. In fact, when comparing the later Vimalakirti images to those of the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove, it

⁹³ Sun, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*, 81-113.

seems that they were intended to be painted as the same group of people.

At the same time, in most later Vimalakirti Sutra representations, the Great Layman is depicted as having an appearance of illness as in Gu Kaizhi's Vimalakirti image. On the contrary, Vimalakirti in the Binglingsi representation does not have any beard and looks much younger. Furthermore, although he is depicted reclining in a bed, his facial features do not indicate any sickness.

Fourth, besides the costumes, Vimalakirti in the Binglingsi representation wears a halo which indicates his status as a deity. This author believes that this suggests a Central Asian or Indian tradition of representing Vimalakirti as a Buddhist figure equal to Bodhisattvas. Furthermore, even Vimalakirti's attendant wears a halo in the Binglingsi representation. In comparison, in many later Vimalakirti Sutra representations, the Great Layman does not have a halo while his opponent Manjusri Bodhisattva usually does. Moreover, even in those later representations in which Vimalakirti was painted with a halo, his attendants do not have one.⁹⁴ This author argues that Vimalakirti and his

⁹⁴ In some later Vimalakirti Sutra Illustrations, even Manjusri Bodhisattva and his attendants do not emanate a halo. This will be further discussed

attendants without a halo accentuates his identity as a *jushi* or lay Buddhist.

In fact, Vimalakirti's identity as a layman is another important reason that *The Vimalakirti Sutra* became so popular in China. Scholars have pointed out that leaving home to become a monk or *chujia* 出家 is basically a conflict with one of the essential teachings of Confucianism, filial piety. Buddhism teaches people to leave the secular life to pursue nirvana, a state of mind that is free from obsessions and fixations. Following this teaching, people would leave their families including their elders unattended. At the same time, Buddhist monks and nuns were prohibited to have spouses and of course no offspring, as well. Yet having no descendants is regarded as most unfilial. Such conflicts have discouraged the growth of Buddhism in China at various times.

However, the Great Layman described in *The Vimalakirti Sutra* established a model of staying in the secular world while pursuing Buddhist law. Instead of leaving home, Vimalakirti stays at home and does everything common people do including making money, having a wife and even gambling and going to brothels. At the same time, the Great Layman perceives the law of Buddha and demonstrates it to the

in the next chapter.

common people. Such a model solves the conflict between pursuing Buddhist law and completing Confucian responsibilities.⁹⁵ Thus, the word *jushi* or layman regains its new definition from Vimalakirti.⁹⁶ In fact, *jushi* became a respectable identity and many Chinese scholars claimed themselves to be *jushi*.

As pointed out above, Vimalakirti without a halo in most later Chinese Vimalakirti Sutra representations weakens his Buddhist identity while it accentuates his *jushi* identity. This author believes that this adjustment is to cater to Chinese scholars' self-identity. In other words, Vimalakirti without a halo represents the Chinese pattern of visualizing the Great Layman. Conversely, Vimalakirti with a halo suggests a non-Chinese origin.

In fact, this poses a common question in discussing Chinese Buddhist art, two possibilities in the distribution sequence. Particularly for the Vimalakirti theme, on the one hand, it is possible that Gu Kaizhi in the Jiangnan area created the first image of Vimalakirti around 364 A.D.

⁹⁵ Related discussion can be seen in Sun, *Zhongguo wen xue zhong de Weimo yu Guanyin*, 42.

⁹⁶ The Chinese word *jushi* first appeared in the Yuzao Chapter in *Liji*, which is a collection of articles by Confucian scholars of the Warring States period (475 B.C.-221 B.C.) and the Qin (221 B.C.-207 B.C.) and Han Dynasties (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) interpreting *Yili*. The word originally refers to the hermits who have special arts, talents or spiritual pursuits.

Then such representations became widespread and were popular in northwestern China and even in the western area. Examples include the Binglingsi representation painted in 420 A.D. and those in the Dunhuang caves completed since the 6th century. On the other hand, it is also possible that some artists in northwestern China created, or introduced from the western area, Vimalakirti representations which dated before 364 and are now lost. Then other Chinese painters such as Gu Kaizhi and the artists of the Binglingsi representation started to paint this theme.

Some Chinese scholars such as Jin Weinuo insist on the first possibility as they believe that central Chinese civilization is the origin of “minor” cultures in the border areas. As stated in the Introduction, illustrations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* have not been found in India or Central Asia. In comparison, as *The Vimalakirti Sutra* was introduced into China in the second century and was accepted and became widespread in China in the following two hundred years, its representations start to prevail along with the popularization of the classic in China.⁹⁷ In other words, unlike many other aspects of Buddhist art, visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* do seem to be Chinese artists’ creations.

⁹⁷ Bunker, “Early Chinese Representations of Vimalakirti,” 28.

On the other hand, it is really hard to imagine that there were no Vimalakirti Sutra representations created in India or Central Asia in the first two or three centuries following the sutra's appearance around 100 A.D. From the discussions in the second and the third sections of this chapter, it can be seen that the representation Gu Kaizhi created in the Waguansi Temple must have been an image of the Great Layman as a single figure. Afterwards, artists such as Zhang Mo painted Vimalakirti as a single figure as well. In comparison, the Binglingsi representation is a narrative representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, which visualizes the meeting of Manjusri Bodhisattva and the Great Layman.

As mentioned above, the Binglingsi representation was painted in 420, which is earlier than the lifetimes of Lu Tanwei and his pupil Yuan Qian. In other words, the narrative representations of the sutra painted by Lu Tanwei and Yuan Qian should have been painted after the Binglingsi representation. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that there was a narrative pattern representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* created in northwestern China or introduced from the western region.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Indian art is widely regarded as having influenced Chinese art. For example, Victor Mair has discussed Indian influence for Chinese paintings for recitation. See Victor Mair, *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and Its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988).

In fact, there might have been two lineages of Vimalakirti Sutra representation independently created by central Chinese and Central Asians or the Indians, respectively. Of course, if this is true, the one created in Central Asia or India may not have been very popular since the sutra itself was not as popular there as in China. Vimalakirti Sutra representations made in these areas thus disappeared in history as did its original Sanskrit text.

In general, this author proposes that Gu Kaizhi created an image of Vimalakirti in 364 before which there was no evidence of Vimalakirti Sutra representations in the Jiangnan area. This fashion prevailed in the area until the early part of the fifth century when the other fashion, the narrative pattern, probably created in Western China or the Central Asia was introduced. Afterwards, both patterns were applied by major artists.

CHAPTER THREE

VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA REPRESENTATION FROM SUI TO FIVE DYNASTIES

In this Chapter, this author will discuss Vimalakirti Sutra representations painted from the Sui Dynasty (581-618) to the Five Dynasties (907-979). As in the previous chapter, recorded paintings and painters will be discussed together with the extant ones of the same period of time. Generally speaking, Vimalakirti Sutra representations were very popular in the Sui and the Tang (618-907) Dynasties. However, starting from the Five Dynasties, their popularity decreases.

From the Sui Dynasty to the Five Dynasties, most extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations are seen in the Buddhist caves at Dunhuang in the format of murals. According to Jin Weinuo, there are sixty three wall paintings illustrating *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in sixty Mogao caves 莫高窟.⁹⁹ At present, it is believed that there are at least sixty-eight Vimalakirti Sutra representations in Dunhuang.¹⁰⁰ Most of these murals

⁹⁹ See the appended lists in Jin Weinuo, “Bihua weimobian de fazhan,” 384-388 and “Dunhuang wanqi de weimobian,” 389-394.

¹⁰⁰ He, Shizhe, “Dunhuang mogaoku bihua zhong de weimojie jingbian,” *Dunhuang yanjiu* 2 (1982): 62-87. Most of them are Sui to Five Dynasties

are narrative illustrations with a basic composition representing Vimalakirti being visited by Manjusri. Their similarities in composition and iconography suggest that they have used similar *fenben* 粉本 or sketches. The handscroll representing the sutra in detail by Yuan Qian discussed in the previous chapter and its copies might have served as such a model. Surviving examples may include sketches done in ink and color on silk or paper discovered in the Library Cave at Dunhuang, now in the collection of the British Museum.¹⁰¹ In this chapter, this author will choose examples from each period to compare to recorded Vimalakirti Sutra representations.

1. The Sui Dynasty

According to available historical sources, at least two Sui Dynasty artists are recorded to have painted Vimalakirti Sutra representations, including Yang Qidan 楊契丹 (active late 6th-early 7th century) and Zhan Ziqian 展子虔 (ca. 550-600). *Yuding pianzi leibian* 御定駢字類編 reports that the *Minghua ji* 名畫記 recorded that Yang Qidan painted a Vimalakirti

in date with less than ten from the Song Dynasty.

¹⁰¹ For the image, see Eiichi Matsumoto, *Tonkoga no kenkyu* (Tokyo: Hatubaijo Bunkyo Shoten, 1937), Vol. 2, 53.

Sutra representation.¹⁰² However, this work cannot be found in the famous Tang work *Lidai minghua ji*. It is said to be a mural in the Baochasi 寶剎寺 Temple in Chang'an. Although apparently none of Yang's artworks has survived to today, he was famous for his Buddhist figures and was recorded to have painted many murals in Buddhist temples. So it is not surprising to find that he painted a Vimalakirti Sutra representation. It is further recorded that this painting was paired with Yang's famous *Niepan bian* 涅槃變 (Nirvana representation) in the Baochasi Temple. They could have been paintings on the two walls of a gate or a statue. *Niepan bian* usually depicts the Buddha's achieving ultimate peace of mind while his followers mourn for his death. Thus, as the other one of the pair, Yang's Vimalakirti Sutra representation probably depicted at least the Great Layman and some of his audience in a narrative mode.

Another Sui Dynasty artist, Zhan Ziqian, is recorded to have painted a Vimalakirti image (Weimo xiang 維摩像) in several catalogues including *Xuanhe huapu*.¹⁰³ As most painters of that time, Zhan was

¹⁰² Wu Shiyu and Shen Zongjing ed., *Yuding pianzi leibian* (SKQS), *juan* 76, 18.

¹⁰³ *Xuanhe huapu* (SKQS), *juan* 1, 7.

proficient in representing Buddhist themes. However, Zhan was also famous for his architectural and landscape paintings. In fact, one of a few extant paintings of the Sui Dynasty is a landscape painting titled *Youchun tu* 遊春圖 attributed to Zhan in the Palace Museum, Beijing.¹⁰⁴ Because of this, it is possible that Zhan added some landscape elements in the setting of his Vimalakirti painting although it is described as an image of the Great Layman.

Interestingly, some landscape representations can be seen in the Vimalakirti Sutra representation in Cave 420 at Dunhuang, which is a good example representing the Sui Dynasty.¹⁰⁵ In the foreground of the painting, a pond is depicted inside which ducks, lotus leaves and other plants can be seen. In addition, tall plants like palm trees are painted in the background. A similar setting can also be seen in the Vimalakirti Sutra representation in Cave 314 at Dunhuang.¹⁰⁶ It seems that landscape settings probably appeared during the same period of time in

¹⁰⁴ Some scholars believe this to be a later copy.

¹⁰⁵ For the images, see Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui. *Zhongguo Mei Shu Quan Ji, Huihuabian 14: Dunhuang Bi Hua* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), 12.

¹⁰⁶ For the image, see Wu Zhefu and Su Yinghui, ed., *Zhonghua wuqiannian wenwu jikan. Dunhuang pian*, Vol. 4. Taipei: Zhonghua wuqian nian wenwu jikan bianji weiyuanhui, 1986, 62-63.

Vimalakirti Sutra representations both at Dunhuang and in central China such as the one by Zhan Ziqian. This coincidence might suggest that as early as the Sui Dynasty, Vimalakirti Sutra representations painted in these two areas may already have some kind of interrelation, which can be seen more obviously in later periods.

Compared to the Binglingsi representation discussed in the previous chapter and Vimalakirti Sutra representations of later dynasties that will be discussed, those created in the Sui Dynasty look more orderly. For example, in Cave 420, on the north and south sides of the west wall shrine, Vimalakirti and Manjusri are depicted sitting in two temple-like buildings, which are painted in ruled lines like those seen in *jiehua* 界畫 paintings such as *Xueye fangpu tu* 雪夜訪普圖 (The First Song Emperor Visiting *Zhao Pu* 趙普 in A Snowy Night) by Liu Jun 劉俊 (active 1450-1500).¹⁰⁷ Although the latter is much later, it can be seen that the buildings in both paintings are completed with the aid of a straightedge.

In the Vimalakirti Sutra representation in Cave 420 at Dunhuang, the Great Layman and Bodhisattva Manjusri are facing each other with some disciples and followers kneeling around them. No other narrative

¹⁰⁷ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, xia*, 16. The painting is in the collection of Palace Museum, Beijing.

scenarios are represented. The size of the two buildings and the number of the followers for each protagonist is about the same. In general, the painting is designed to be well-balanced in a strict axial symmetrical composition. A similar situation can be seen in the illustrations in Cave 314 and Cave 380 of the Sui Dynasty.¹⁰⁸

In the meanwhile, both Vimalakirti and Manjusri in the Binglingsi representation wear haloes. Actually, even their attendants wear haloes, as well. In comparison, it can be noticed that starting from the Sui Dynasty, Vimalakirti images in the murals at Dunhuang did not have a halo although Manjusri did. This author believes that this indicates that as early as the Sui Dynasty, Vimalakirti's identity has been shifted from a spiritual being to a layman. As for the facial features and dress of the figures, it can be seen from the illustrations in these three caves that Vimalakirti is depicted more and more like a Chinese instead of an Indian or Central Asian. This can be seen more obviously in Vimalakirti Sutra representations of the Tang Dynasty, which will be discussed below.

¹⁰⁸ For the image in Cave 380, see Wu, et al. ed. *Zhonghua wuqiannian wenwu jikan. Dunhuang pian*, Vol.4, 113-114.

2. Early Tang: Yan Liben and Wu Daozi

The famous early Tang artist Yan Liben 閻立本 (ca. 600-673) is recorded to have two Vimalakirti Sutra representations. A painting titled *Wenshu yi weimo wenji tu* 文殊詣維摩問疾圖 (Manjusri Calling on Vimalakirti to Inquire after His Illness) by Yan is recorded in *Shuhua fang* 書畫舫 or *Qinghe shuhua fang* 清河書畫舫 written by Zhang Chou 張醜 (1577-1643) and is cited in *Shigutang shuhua huikao* 式古堂書畫彙考.¹⁰⁹ Another painting, *Weimo wenshu* 維摩文殊 (Vimalakirti and Manjusri), signed by Yan Liben was said to be in the collection of Shao Bi 紹必 (*jinsi* in 1038).¹¹⁰ There is no proof to show whether these two could be the same painting. From the titles, it can be assumed that one or both paintings attributed to Yan illustrate the scenario of Manjusri's visiting Vimalakirti.

The painting attributed to Yan recorded by Zhang Chou is described as color on silk with antique trees and rocks and vivid figures. In other words, if this is an authentic painting, Yan painted a landscape

¹⁰⁹ Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua fang* (SKQS), *juan 3 shang*, 42. Bian Yongyu, *Shigutang shuhua huikao* (SKQS), *juan 38*, 30. Zhang said a Mr. Shi from Jinchang 金閭 (now a district in Suzhou 蘇州) showed him this painting.

¹¹⁰ Tao Zongyi, *Shuofu* (SKQS), *juan 92 shang*, 45.

setting for the meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri. However, Yan was not a painter known to be skilled at landscapes. Most of the extant paintings that are widely accepted as Yan's works such as *Bunian tu* 步輦圖 (Emperor Tang Taizong Meeting Tibetan Emissaries) and *Lidai diwang tu* do not have landscape elements.¹¹¹ In fact, the figures are all painted against a blank background. Thus, a reasonable explanation for Yan to paint a landscape setting for his Vimalakirti Sutra representation is that he inherited that tradition from previous paintings, which could have been the one painted by Zhan Ziqian or another that served as the model for the illustrations in Cave 420 and Cave 314 dated to the Sui Dynasty discussed above.

It seems that Yan's paintings do have some relation with Vimalakirti Sutra representations in the Dunhuang caves. Actually, scholars have noticed that the image of Emperor Wu of the Jin 晉武帝 in the *Lidai diwang tu* by Yan looks very close to the depiction of an emperor in the Vimalakirti Sutra representation in Cave 220 in Dunhuang.¹¹² In both paintings, the emperor faces the right and looks

¹¹¹ *Bunian tu* is in the collection of Palace Museum, Beijing. For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 38.

¹¹² For the image, see *Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui*.

like he is walking toward the right with arms outspread. The facial features are similar with beard and mustache. At the same time, both figures wear a crown known as a *mian* 冕, which is composed of a board with *liu* 旒 or tassels draping in both the front and back; a circled ribbon hangs on the top of the board and drapes down to the lower body. Both figures wear a robe called the *xuanyi xunshang* 玄衣纁裳 (black top, dark red bottom) with a black top and dark red bottom.

Cave 220 was built in the sixteenth year of the Zhenguan 貞觀 era, equivalent to 642. Yan's birth date is uncertain but it is known that he died in 673 A.D. In other words, the artisans who painted the murals in Cave 220 lived in the same period as Yan. So it is highly possible that there is a direct relationship between the illustration in Cave 220 and Yan's work(s).

On the other hand, this author notices some differences between the two paintings. It is known that *mian* has six levels of design, that is, a board with twelve, nine, seven, five, four and three tassels, respectively. Interestingly, the emperor's *mian* has twelve tassels in Yan's painting but only six tassels in the mural in Cave 220. In other words, the latter is not

*Zhongguo Mei Shu Quan Ji, Huihuabian*15: *Dunhuang Bi Hua xia* (Shanghai: Shanghai ren min mei shu chu ban she, 1985), Figures 20 and 21.

only much lesser than the former, it also does not fall into any standard level of design of *mian*. Thus, it can be assumed that the painter of the latter did not know about the regulation of *mian* and just copied absentmindedly from a model.

Furthermore, in Yan's painting, the emperor stretches out his arms because two attendants are supporting him on either side, respectively. His hands are hidden in his inner sleeves while the wide outer sleeves are draping down almost to his feet. In the mural in Cave 220, the emperor's arms are also stretching out but both the inner and the outer sleeves are draping down. No one seems to support him so the stretching out arms seems to be meaningless except as part of a pose. This difference, again, suggests that the artist of the mural in Cave 220 copied Yan's work or a similar model but did not pay much attention to certain details.

In general, both the similarities and differences of the two figures reveal that the mural in Cave 220 copied Yan's image of an emperor. However, *Lidai diwang tu* may have been created for the emperor's own appreciation or as documentation. It may not have been viewed or studied by artisans of the same period. Thus, this author proposes that

the image of the emperor in the mural at Cave 220 might have been copied from a Vimalakirti Sutra representation by Yan, in which he painted an image of Vimalakirti in a pose and costume similar to the emperor in *Lidai diwang tu*. What is more, it is even possible that the whole Vimalakirti Sutra representation in Cave 220 might have been based on an original by Yan, which could be one of the two recorded representations discussed above.

In any case, this mural in Cave 220 can be regarded as a good example of Vimalakirti Sutra representations in the early part of the Tang Dynasty. It is painted on the north and south sides of the east wall. The basic composition of the painting is the same as those of the Sui Dynasty. Vimalakirti and Manjusri are sitting on either side facing each other and some followers and disciples are painted around them. But unlike Sui images, the shrine-like buildings are now removed and the whole composition does not look rigid any longer.

On the left or north side, Manjusri is depicted sitting on a platform under a canopy. On the right or the south side, Vimalakirti is depicted sitting in a bed with draperies hanging from above. Compared to those painted in the Sui Dynasty, his pose is now more relaxed. Instead of

sitting formally with straight back, Vimalakirti is leaning on his right side with bare feet seen from under his robe. He is now wearing a *hechangqiu* 鶴擎裘, a cloak originally made with crane feathers, which is a costume typically worn by aristocratic scholars of the Six Dynasties. At the same time, he is holding a *zhuwei* 麈尾, a fly-whisk originally made with deer's tail, which was used as a *tanbing* 談柄 (conversation baton), also from the Six Dynasties. In other words, now the image of Vimalakirti is totally that of a practitioner of the pure conversation of the Six Dynasties period. In addition, as in the representations painted in the Sui Dynasty, Vimalakirti does not wear a halo while Manjusri does. In other words, as pointed out in the previous section, his identity as a human being is accentuated. At the same time, his facial features are those of a Chinese with beard and mustache.

In general, with this costume and facial features, and with no halo, the image of Vimalakirti in Cave 220 at Dunhuang is basically that of a Six Dynasties scholar who is good at and fond of *qingtan* 清談 or pure conversation. In fact, this image of the Great Layman looks very close to that of Ruan Ji 阮籍 in the *Gaoyi tu* by Sun Wei 孫位 (9th century), which

represents the seven famous conversationalists of the Six Dynasties, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove.

Clustering around the two protagonists are different groups of people, disciples, a Chinese emperor and his officials, foreign princes and other followers. In addition, several minor scenarios from the sutra such as Displaying the Universe in a Hand (*shoujie daqian* 手接大千) and Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers (*tiannu sanhua* 天女散花) have been visualized around the main representation. This is one of the earliest representations of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers in the Dunhuang caves. Although the mural has been partly damaged, it still can be seen that the Heavenly Maiden is standing next to Vimalakirti facing the left with a fan in one hand. Shariputra, on the other side, is standing beside Manjusri and some flowers are sticking on his *jjasha*.

The term “Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers” appears in descriptions of a Vimalakirti Sutra representation by the famous early Tang artist, Wu Daozi 吳道子 (680-759). It is in the Longxingsi 龍興寺 Temple at Ruzhou 汝州 (in today’s He’nan 河南 Province). Thanks to a prose text by Su Zhe 蘇轍, in his *Luanchengji* 樂城集, we know that this is a mural depicting Vimalakirti and Manjusri on the east wall of the

Huayan Hall 華嚴殿 in the Longxingsi Temple.¹¹³ The text was created to commemorate the restoration of the murals under Su Zhe's financial support in the first year of Shaosheng 紹聖 era (1094). Su Shi 蘇軾 also composed a poem to record this event.¹¹⁴ In his *Yunyu yangqiu* 韻語陽秋, the Song Dynasty poetry critic, Ge Lifang, recorded this mural by Wu, which was reconstructed under Su Zhe's funds.¹¹⁵

In all these records, the wall painting is referred to as *Weimo shiji wenshu laiwen tiannu sanhua* 維摩示疾文殊來問天女散花 (Vimalakirti Showing Illness, Manjusri Coming to Visit and the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers). Thus it seems that the painting at least depicted two events: Vimalakirti's being visited by Manjusri and the Heavenly Maiden scattering flowers to demonstrate the law. The latter could be a secondary scenario with the former being the main composition as can be seen in many later Vimalakirti Sutra representations. Nonetheless, this painting attributed to Wu is the earliest recorded representation of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers (Heavenly Maiden representation hereafter).

¹¹³ Su Zhe, *Luanchengji* (SKQS), *houji*, *juan* 21, 1-2.

¹¹⁴ Su Shi, *Dongposhi jizhu* (SKQS), *juan* 27, 44.

¹¹⁵ Ge Lifang, *Yunyu yangqiu* (SKQS), *juan* 14, 14.

It is also during this period of time that the Heavenly Maiden scenario routinely appears in Vimalakirti Sutra representations in Dunhuang such as the one in Cave 220 discussed above. Another example is the one in Cave 203.¹¹⁶ In this Vimalakirti Sutra representation, on the left side the Great Layman is also depicted sitting in a bed wearing *hechangqiu* and holding *zhuwei*. In front of him, a figure with a halo is squatting and pouring rice on the ground from a bowl. This is probably a depiction of the *hua pusa* 化菩薩 or phantom bodhisattva created by Vimalakirti to get fragrant rice from the Fragrance Accumulated Buddha, which is narrated in Chapter Ten of the sutra. On the other side, Manjusri is kneeling on a platform with three bodhisattvas standing behind him. Between the two figures, the Heavenly Maiden scenario is depicted. On the left side next to Vimalakirti, the Heavenly Maiden is standing gracefully holding a fan with long handle in her hands. On the right side Shariputra is standing with his arms stretching out as if he is at a loss. Some flowers can be seen on his *jjasha*.

Generally speaking, depictions of minor scenarios have been added to the main representation of the meeting of the Great Layman

¹¹⁶ For the image, see Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui. *Zhongguo Mei Shu Quan Ji, Huihuabian15: Dunhuang Bi Hua xia*, Figures 2 and 3.

and Manjusri in Vimalakirti Sutra representations from the Tang Dynasty. Among those minor scenarios, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers is one of the earliest and the most primary one to be visualized.

Although all the Vimalakirti Sutra representations at Dunhuang including those of the Tang Dynasty are narrative representations of the meeting of the two, representations of the sutra seem to have other modes in the Tang Dynasty. For example, Wu Daozi, who appears to be the earliest artist recorded to add a Heavenly Maiden scenario into a narrative representation of the sutra, has also been recorded to have other kinds of visualizations of the classic. In *Pengcheng ji* 彭城集 by Liu Ban 劉頌 (1023-1089), a *Weimo jushi* 維摩居士 (the Layman Vimalakirti) by Wu is said to be in an old temple hall, and so is likely a mural painting.¹¹⁷ Judged from the title, this is probably an isolated image of the Great Layman. Another Vimalakirti painting by Wu Daozi was recorded on the *Daxiangguosi bei* 大相國寺碑 (Stele of Temple Da Xiangguo). It is said to be one of the ten wonders of the Daxiangguosi Temple titled *Wenshu weimo xiang* 文殊維摩像 (Manjusri and Vimalakirti).¹¹⁸ The title indicates that there are at least these two figures in the painting.

¹¹⁷ Liu Ban, *Pengcheng ji* (SKQS), *juan* 13, 12.

¹¹⁸ Guo Ruoxu, *Tuhua jianwenzhi* (SKQS), *juan* 5, 7-8.

During the Tang Dynasty, Vimalakirti is sometimes represented as a plump layman. Cave 220 in Dunhuang is a good example in which Vimalakirti is depicted as a person with a round face. Most importantly, his lips are painted by fresh red with a little black mustache, which indicate that he is a healthy middle-aged man.

Thus it seems in visualizing Vimalakirti there are two fashions by the Tang Dynasty. In the first one, which was created by Gu Kaizhi, Vimalakirti is depicted as being thin and has an appearance to show illness. In the other one, Vimalakirti is depicted as a normal Buddhist layman with a fleshy body. In extant Tang Dynasty Dunhuang murals, it is hard to see a typical appearance of illness. But some Tang artists probably represented the Great Layman in this fashion. For example, in his poem entitled *Weimoxiang Tang Yang Huizhi su zai Tianzhusi* 維摩像唐楊惠之塑在天柱寺 (On the Vimalakirti Statue by the Tang Dynasty sculptor Yang Huizhi in the Tianzhu Temple), the famous Song literatus Su Shi (1037-1101) described the appearance of this Vimalakirti statue.¹¹⁹ The first half reads,

昔者子輿病且死，In olden days, Ziyu fell ill and was about to die.
其友子祀往問之。His friend Zisi went to inquire for him.
跼蹐鑿井自歎息，(Ziyu) straggled along to see himself reflected

¹¹⁹ Su Shi, *Dongpo quanji* (SKQS), *juan* 1, 16.

in the well and sighed,
造物將安以我為? “How will the creator arrange my destiny?”
今觀古塑維摩像, Today I watch this Vimalakirti statue sculpted
long ago.
病骨磊嵬如枯龜。 He shows illness and the skeleton piles up like
tortoise bones.

...

This poem is not about a painting but a statue in the Tianzhusi Temple, which is in Fengxiang 鳳翔 County (today's Baoji 寶鷄 City in Shaanxi Province). However, it can be seen that at the lifetime of the sculptor Yang Huizhi (active 713-756), the “showing illness” feature created by Gu Kaizhi is still accentuated in representing Vimalakirti's image.

In fact, Su Shi's younger brother Su Zhe (1039-1112) has a response verse to Su Shi's poem on Yang Huizhi's sculptures in the Tianzhusi Temple.¹²⁰ The first two sentences in Su Zhe's poem read, “Jinsu Rulai (Tathagata Jinsu) is so thin that (his body is) like preserved ham. (In comparison), seated Manjusri is so (plump that his face is) round like the Mid-Autumn moon 金粟如来瘦如腊, 坐上文殊秋月圓.” Jinsu Rulai is another name that refers to Vimalakirti. Thus, both Su Shi and Su Zhe's poems accentuated the thin and “showing illness” look of Vimalakirti's image, which indicates the continued popularity of this kind of representation.

¹²⁰ Zha Shenxing, *Sushi buzhu* (SKQS), *juan* 4, 20.

From the discussions on Yan Liben and Wu Daozi above, a close relationship between Vimalakirti Sutra representations created by central Chinese painters and Dunhuang mural artists in the early Tang can be seen. Also during this period of time, Vimalakirti Sutra representations in Dunhuang experienced the transformation from a relatively simple depiction of the meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri to a whole panoramic depiction of many demonstrations. The former is usually painted on the two sides of a gate while the latter is typically painted on one wall. By the eighth century, a mature Vimalakirti Sutra representation has come into being. A good example is the mural in Cave 335.¹²¹

In general, early Tang is an important period in the development of Vimalakirti Sutra representations in China. In representing Vimalakirti, besides an appearance of having illness, Tang artists also employed the characteristic of a contrasting healthy plump look, which caters more to the Tang aesthetic taste. On the other hand, although the depiction of the Great Layman as a single figure was still in fashion, the narrative mode seems to be extremely popular. By this time, minor scenarios have been routinely added to the main composition of the meeting of the Great

¹²¹ For the image, see *Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui. Zhongguo Mei Shu Quan Ji, Huihuabian15: Dunhuang Bi Hua*, Figure 40.

Layman and Manjusri Bodhisattva and a panoramic depiction of the meeting in Vashali gradually came into being.

Such compositional adjustment seems to be an adaptation to the format of mural from detailed representations in handscrolls such as the one by Yuan Qian discussed in the previous chapter. In other words, more than a hundred scenes presumably were depicted equally in a sequence in Yuan's handscroll. But when they are transferred to a wall painting, apparently they cannot be represented all at once in a limited space. So the meeting of the two protagonists, which first happens in Chapter Five and lasts till the eleventh chapter of the sutra, has been selected as the main composition. Depictions of some other scenarios, then, are selected by the artists or the patrons according to their own preference to be added as vignettes.

3. High Tang to Late Tang

Besides Yan Liben and Wu Daozi, the Vimalakirti theme has been painted by other important Tang Dynasty artists such as Wang Wei 王維 (ca. 694-761). In fact, the style name of Wang Wei is Mojie 摩詰. Literally, the combination of his given name Wei and style name Mojie is the same as Vimalakirti's Chinese translation Weimojie 維摩詰. It seems that he

was definitely expected by his parents to grow up to become a great Buddhist layman.¹²² He is said to have painted a work entitled *Weimo Wenshu bu'er tu* 維摩文殊不二圖 (Vimalakirti, Manjusri and the Single Doctrine). It is known to us because of a poem by the Song scholar Li Mixun 李彌遜 (1082-1153) who once viewed it in the collection of Su Cuizhi 蘇粹之 (12th century).¹²³ Li's colophon on that scroll is recorded in his *Junxiji* 筠谿集 and also cited in the appendix of *Wang youcheng ji jianzhu* 王右丞集箋注 edited by Zhao Diancheng 趙殿成 (ca.1683-1743).¹²⁴ It reads:

王輞川以凝碧詩見知當世。餘事丹青，亦造神品。晚年長齋，刻意空門。學室中唯繩床經案。退朝之後，焚香獨坐，大有所契，證三復斯畫，知其不苟。毗耶一會，儼然目中觀者。要當於默然處驚海潮春雷之作，始不負渠。

Wang Wangchuan 王輞川 [Wang Wei] is famous for his landscape poems in the contemporary world. At leisure, he paints and [his paintings] are really wonderful. In the later years of his life, he lived as a vegetarian for Buddhist reasons. In his studio, there was only a *shengchuang* 繩床 [resting chair usually for Buddhists] and a *jing'an* 經案 [small and low table for sutras]. After having a

¹²² Wang Wei's mother is recorded to have been a Buddhist believer. His father was highly possibly a Buddhist layman, as well. See, Wang, Huibin. "Wang Wei chongfo yuanyin zonglun," *Xin Zhou shifan xueyuan xuebao* 23, no. 6 (Dec. 2007), 43-47.

¹²³ Li Mixun, *Junxiji* (SKQS), *juan* 21, 20.

¹²⁴ Zhao Diancheng ed., *Wang youcheng ji jianzhu* (SKQS), *fulu*, 19. *Wang youcheng ji jianzhu*, published in 1737, is regarded as the best annotation to Wang Wei's *Wang youcheng ji*. *Youcheng* is Wang Wei's official title.

routine audience with the emperor [in the palace each day], he would [go home and] burn incense and sit by himself. He would meditate for a while and then start to paint. Thus you know how serious and earnest he is. It is as if he witnessed the meeting [of Vimalakirti and Manjusri] in the Vaishali city. The viewers [of this painting] should be able to comprehend this marvelous masterwork in the silence. Then it could be counted as not letting Wang down.¹²⁵

From this colophon, we know that this painting may have been a depiction of the whole gathering in Vaishali city and its purpose was to represent the main Buddhist teaching at the meeting, the Single Doctrine. The passage also suggests that Wang Wei lived as a Buddhist layman at least in his later life. What is more, his painting of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* was something like a Buddhist ritual performed in his own studio.

In fact, this description of Wang's painting process reveals a change in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. All the *Vimalakirti Sutra* representations painted before Wang's lifetime were by professional artists and most of them were painted for the public to learn Buddhist law and worship the Buddha. However, Wang's painting of *Weimo Wenshu bu'er tu* seems to be for self-recreation "at leisure", and it may not have been intended to be viewed by other people. In other words, as Wang is

¹²⁵ Li Mixun, *Junxiji* (SKQS), *juan* 21, 21. Wang Wei lived in a villa named Wangchuan. So he is sometimes called Wang Wangchuan. A painting titled *Wangchuan tu* (Depiction of the Wangchuan Villa) now in the Shofuku-ji 聖福寺 in Japan has been believed to be painted by Wang in his later life.

regarded as the first literati painter in China, the Vimalakirti Sutra representation painted by him started to have a function other than a purely religious one.

Based on such a different purpose, the painting must be different from those painted at Dunhuang in the same period, which are panoramic murals with depictions of many minor scenarios. Wang's work is more likely to have been a simple representation of the meeting of the two protagonists. His depiction of the Great Layman was possibly to be like the image of Fusheng 伏生 attributed to him and discussed in Chapter Two with Gu Kaizhi's Vimalakirti image. In fact, this thin and weak old man sitting beside a low table with a scroll in hand is just like Wang's own portrait as described in Li's colophon.

Wang Wei also painted an image of the Great Layman as a single figure. In *Zhiyatang zachao* 志雅堂雜抄, Zhou Mi 周密 (1232-1298) recorded seeing a *Weimo xiang* (Vimalakirti image) by Wang with Xianyu Shu 鮮于樞 (1246-1302) at the home of Yunpan Qiao Zhongshan 雲盤喬仲山 in the year of *yichou* 乙丑, equivalent to 1265.¹²⁶ Zhou said it was vivid. In both *Zhiyatang zachao* and *Yunyan guoyanlu* 雲煙過眼錄, Zhou called this painting *Weimo xiang*. In the meantime, *Kunxuezhai zalu* 困學

¹²⁶ Yunpan is an official title.

齋雜錄 by Xianyu Shu records a painting by Wang Wei in Qiao's collection as a *Weimo shiji tu* 維摩示疾圖 (Vimalakirti Showing Illness). It seems that this is a depiction of Vimalakirti as a single figure. Even up to the Qing Dynasty, two of Wang's *Weimojie tu* 維摩詰圖 (Vimalakirti paintings) were said to be kept in the palace collection among the other 124 paintings attributed to Wang.¹²⁷ In general, Wang Wei, like Wu Daozi, has painted both isolated images of Vimalakirti and the Great Layman's being visited by Manjusri.

Besides the two popular modes discussed above, there were special representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. For example, Zuo Quan 左全 (active ca. 825), a court painter, is said to have painted a *Weimo jushi shizi guowang bianxiang* 維摩居士獅子國王變相 (Representation of The Layman Vimalakirti and King of the Lion Kingdom) in the Middle Hall of the Dashengcisi 大聖慈寺 Temple at Chengdu. The title is unique and it is hard to tell what the painting would have looked like. This is recorded by Fan Chengda 範成大 (1126-1193), who was the governor of Chengdu for two years, in his *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* 成都古寺名筆記 (Record of

¹²⁷ Zhao Diancheng ed., *Wang youcheng ji jianzhu* (SKQS), *fulu*, 15.

Ancient Temples and Famous Paintings in Chengdu).¹²⁸ That Dashengcisi Temple survived the Huichang Persecution and thus Fan got the chance to see the wall painting is perhaps because the temple had a board signed and bestowed by Emperor Suzong 肅宗 (reigned 756-762) of the Tang Dynasty. The mural even existed in the Ming Dynasty since it is also recorded in *Shuzhong guangji* 蜀中廣記 (Miscellaneous Records on Sichuan) by the Ming scholar Cao Xuequan 曹學佺 (1574-1646).¹²⁹ This time, it was recorded by a much more common title, *Weimojie bianxiang* 維摩詰變相 (Representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*).

Cao also records that he personally saw another *Weimojie bianxiang* in the Main Hall of the Shengshousi 聖壽寺 Temple in Chengdu painted in the early part of the Dazhong 大中 era (847-860) by Zuo Quan.¹³⁰ In Cao's description, Zuo's depictions of the buildings and pavilions, trees and stones, flowers and birds, figures and their costumes, no matter whether Han or other nationalities, were all wonderful (樓閣樹

¹²⁸ Fan's article can be seen in Zhou Fujun, *Quanshu yiwenzhi* (SKQS), *juan* 42, 2.

¹²⁹ Cao Xuequan, *Shuzhong guangji* (SKQS), *juan* 105, 28.

¹³⁰ Cao Xuequan, *Shuzhong guangji* (SKQS), *juan* 105, 29.

石花雀人物冠冕蕃漢異服皆得其妙今見存). In other words, Zuo Quan's two visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* discussed above are not single depictions of the Great Layman but narrative representations of at least some of the scenarios.

After the An Shi zhi luan 安史之亂 (755-763), or the Rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming, the cultural and art center of the Tang Empire gradually shifted to Sichuan Province. The two Vimalakirti murals by Zuo Quan discussed above are both in Chengdu, Sichuan. Another court painter Zhao Gongyou 趙公祐 (active ca. 827) also painted a Vimalakirti Sutra representation mural in the Yaoshiyuan 藥師院 (Monastery of the Medicine Buddha) in Chengdu. It is first recorded in Fan Chengda's *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* and later in Cao Xuequan's *Shuzhong guangji*.¹³¹ Neither of the records describes the wall painting in detail.

However, from the extant Dunhuang murals, we can infer something about these murals painted in Sichuan. The Vimalakirti Sutra representation in Cave 12 at Dunhuang is a good example from this period.¹³² Generally speaking, it inherits the panoramic visualization of

¹³¹ Zhou Fujun, *Quanshu yiwenzhi* (SKQS), *juan* 42, 4. Cao Xuequan, *Shuzhong guangji* (SKQS), *juan* 105, 30.

¹³² For the image, see Liang Weiyong, ed. *Mogaoku dijiuku, diyierku, wan Tang* (Nanjing: Jiangsu mei shu chu ban she, 1994), 178.

the sutra formed in the early Tang and is only different in some details. In fact, in the Tang Dynasty, wall paintings of the Vimalakirti theme were very popular in both the capitals and other cities. *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎 written by Duan Chengshi 段成式 (ca. 803-863) records such murals in the Xuanfasi 玄法寺 Temple in Anyifang 安邑坊 and the Putisi 菩提寺 Temple in Ping'anfang 平安坊 at Chang'an (today's Xi'an).¹³³ The text calls both of them *Weimo bian* 維摩變 (Representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*), which likely refers to a panoramic visualization of the sutra.

Besides the famous Tang painters discussed above, there are several anonymous Tang artists who have painted Vimalakirti Sutra representation. An unknown Jing *shushi* 荆術士 (Magician Jing) mythically created a Vimalakirti Sutra representation. It is a story recorded in *Youyang zazu* and collected in *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記 edited by such Song scholars as Li Fang 李昉 (925-996).¹³⁴ It is said that in the Dali 大曆 era (766-779) of the Tang Dynasty, there was a magician in Jingzhou 荊州 (Hubei Province) who came to the Zhipisi 陟圮寺 Temple from the south. This person liked to drink wine. One time when

¹³³ Duan Chengshi, *Youyang zazu* (SKQS), *xuji juan* 5, 11, 12.

¹³⁴ Li Fang, *Taiping guangji* (SKQS), *juan* 285, 9-10.

he was sober and the Temple was having a gathering, Jing said he could perform something to entertain people. He then mixed colors into a container and sucked water into his mouth after praying. After that he spat the water on the wall and immediately a colorful *Weimo wenji bianxiang* 維摩問疾變相 (Representation of Vimalakirti Being Asked after His Health) appeared.

Since the text does not describe the process in detail, it is unclear how Magician Jing made the colors in the container appear on the wall with the water. The picture was said to be fresh as if newly painted. After half the day, the colors faded and disappeared until dusk. It was said that only the fiber headband on Vimalakirti's head and one flower on Shariputra's clothes could still be seen at night. With this description, it can be assumed that the scenario of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers must be in the painting. This record of a painting performance as if by magic indicates the popularity of the Vimalakirti Sutra representation during the Tang Dynasty.

A Vimalakirti Sutra representation attributed to an anonymous Tang painter is known to us through a poem composed by the Song scholar Lu Benzong 呂本中 (1084-1145) on viewing this painting. The title of the

poem is *Guan Ning Ziyi suoxu Weimo hanshan shide Tanghua ge* 觀寧子儀所蓄維摩寒山拾得唐畫歌 (On Viewing the Tang Painting(s) *Vimalakirti and Monks Hanshan and Shide* collected by Ning Ziyi).¹³⁵ The first half of the poem reads,

君不見、寒山子， Can't you see Master Hanshan,
蓬頭垢面何所似？ Unkempt like nobody?
戲拈拄杖喚拾公， Holding a crutch sportively calling for
Master Shide,
似是同遊國清寺； It is as if they are playing together in the
Guoqingsi Temple.
君不見、維摩老， Can't you see Senior Weimo,
結習已空無可道； The gatherings are dismissed and [he has]
nothing to preach;
牀頭誰是散花人， Who is the one scattering flowers beside
his bed,
墜地紛紛不須掃； It is unnecessary to sweep [the floor as the
flowers] fell on the ground.

...

From these comments, we can assume the content of the painting, which is the disheveled Masters Hanshan and Shide interacting and a silent *Vimalakirti* with probably the Heavenly Maiden scattering flowers beside him. In fact, from both the title and the content of this poem, it is hard to tell if these two unrelated themes are represented in the same composition or in two paintings hung side by side. It is even possible that the three main figures are depicted in three paintings with the Great Layman flanked by Hanshan and Shide.

¹³⁵ Lu Benzong, *Donglai shiji* (SKQS), *juan* 3, 11.

In addition, a *Weimo bu'er tu* 維摩不二圖 (Vimalakirti and the Single Doctrine) by Han Huang 韓洸 (723-787) and two Vimalakirti paintings attributed to anonymous Tang artists are recorded in some Qing Dynasty catalogues.¹³⁶ But since they are not seen in any earlier records, their authenticity is doubtful.

Paintings including murals and scrolls by artists from the Tang Dynasty have been examined above with their contemporary works at Dunhuang. Generally speaking, Vimalakirti Sutra representations were very popular in the Tang Dynasty both in central China and in other areas such as Dunhuang and Chengdu. As for the representation, both the narrative manner and the portrait manner prevail in parallel during this period of time. Sometimes there are special representations with unique titles. As for the facial features, Vimalakirti is customarily depicted as a Chinese scholar. The thin look and the healthy look of the Great Layman are preferred by different artists. As for the function, Wang Wei of high Tang started to paint the Vimalakirti Sutra representation for personal reflection instead of for public religious worship.

¹³⁶ See Wang Shizhen, *Juyilu* (SKQS), *juan* 31, 24; Li Guangying, *Jinshiwen kaolue* (SKQS), *juan* 3, 33; Zhang Zhao et al., ed., *Midian zhulin* (SKQS), *juan* 11, 4.

4. Three Artists of the Five Dynasties Period

Among central Chinese painters, Zhou Wenju 周文矩 (ca. 907-975), Qiu Wenbo 邱文播 (active 934-965) and Shi Ke 石恪 (active ca. 965-975) of the Five Dynasties Period (907-979) are recorded as representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra. A Weimo jiangjiao* 維摩講教 (Vimalakirti Preaching the Law) by Zhou Wenju is recorded in several different documents such as *Nansong guange lu xulu* 南宋館閣錄續錄.¹³⁷ But again, none of the records has further comments on its iconography or physical status. In addition, two Vimalakirti paintings, *Weimo huashen tu* 維摩化身圖 (Embodiment of Vimalakirti) and *Weimo shiji tu* 維摩示疾圖 (Vimalakirti Showing Illness) are briefly recorded under the Five Dynasties artist Qiu Wenbo's name.¹³⁸

In contrast to the simple records of Zhou Wenju and Qiu Wenbo's Vimalakirti Sutra representations, Shi Ke's Vimalakirti representation attracted the famous Song literati Su Shi to write a long poem for it. Its title is *Shi Ke hua Weimo song* 石恪畫維摩頌 (Eulogizing the Vimalakirti Painting by Shi Ke):

...

¹³⁷ See, *Nansong guangelu xulu* (SKQS), *juan* 3, 10.

¹³⁸ *Xuanhe huapu* (SKQS), *juan* 6, 8.

我觀三十二菩薩， I saw the thirty-two Bodhisattvas,
 各以意談不二門。 All present their own understandings of the
 Non-duality.
 而維摩詰默無語， But only Vimalakirti keeps his silence,
 三十二義一時墮。 And the thirty-two understandings are
 immediately meaningless.
 我觀此義亦不墮， I do not regard the understandings
 meaningless,
 維摩初不離是說。 Vimalakirti does not say anything in the
 beginning.
 譬如油蠟作燈燭， It is like a lamp using oil and candle,
 不以火點終不明。 It cannot be lighted without fire.
 忽見默然無語處， Suddenly in the silence,
 三十二說皆光焰。 [I] saw the thirty-two presentations are all
 shining.
 佛子若讀維摩經， If you Buddhist believers read *The Vimalakirti
 Sutra*,
 當作是念為正念。 [You] should take this as the correct idea.
 我觀維摩方丈室 I saw Vimalakirti's small room
 能受九百萬菩薩。 Can hold nine million Bodhisattvas.
 三萬三千師子坐 Thirty-two thousand Lion Chairs
 皆悉容受不迫迮。 Are all contained freely.
 又能分佈一鉢飯， [He] can even distribute a bowl of rice,
 饜飽十方無量眾。 To make countless people from ten directions
 full.
 斷取妙喜佛世界， [He then] takes the Wonderful Joy World [to
 this world],
 如持針鋒一棗葉。 Like a date leaf on top of a needle head.
 雲是菩薩不思議， [People] say that it is Bodhisattva's
 unbelievable capability,
 住大解脫神通力。 And supernatural power.
 我觀石子一處士， I saw Mr. Shi was just an independent scholar,
 麻鞋破帽露兩肘。 Wearing linen shoes and a broken hat with his
 ribs uncovered.
 能使筆端出維摩， [But he] can depict Vimalakirti using his
 brushes,
 神力又過維摩詰。 [This kind of] power even surpasses
 Vimalakirti's.
 若雲此畫無實相， If [someone should] say that this painting does

not represent real scenes,
毗耶城中亦非實。 [Then things that happened in] the city of
Vaishali are not true, either.
佛子若作維摩像, If any Buddhist believers want to paint a
Vimalakirti image
應作此觀為正觀。 [He] should take this as a model.¹³⁹

From this poem, it seems that Shi's painting might have depicted the gathering in Vaishali with many minor scenarios such as Borrowing Lion Chairs from Chapter Six of the sutra, Getting Fragrant Rice from Chapter Ten and Bringing the Wonderful Joy World from Chapter Twelve. But it seems that the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers was not visualized.

In the Five Dynasties Period, Vimalakirti Sutra representations in Dunhuang still preserve the settled panoramic mode from the previous dynasties. The one in Cave 98 created in the early part of the Five Dynasties is a good example.¹⁴⁰ However, from the tenth century, representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* decline and gradually disappear at Dunhuang.

In general, from the sixth to the tenth centuries, Vimalakirti Sutra representations first flourished and then gradually declined. The Tang Dynasty is undoubtedly the era of greatest popularity for representing the

¹³⁹ Su Shi, *Dongpo quanji* (SKQS), *juan* 98, 6-7.

¹⁴⁰ For the image, see Zhongguo meishu quanji bianji weiyuanhui. *Zhongguo Mei Shu Quan Ji, Huihuabian15: Dunhuang Bi Hua*, Figures 160 and 161.

sutra, in both the capitals and the frontier such as Dunhuang and Sichuan. At the same time, representations painted in these different areas seem to have influenced each other significantly. Some even suggest the relationship of direct copying.

During these four hundred years, Vimalakirti's identity as a human being instead of a Buddhist deity is accentuated; in fact, he appears to be a Chinese scholar especially a Six Dynasties' scholar good at pure conversation instead of an Indian person. He is sometimes depicted as having an appearance of illness, which was an approach inherited from Gu Kaizhi. Other times, he is represented as a healthy middle-aged man who is actively involved in preaching the Buddhist law.

In the format of the mural, depictions of minor scenarios have been routinely added to the main representation of the meeting in the Vaishali City. Among those minor scenarios, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers is one of the earliest and the primary one to be visualized. A panoramic depiction usually painted on one big wall gradually came into being. But the depiction of a single image of the Great Layman was still in fashion, especially in the scroll format. Most Vimalakirti Sutra representations of these centuries were painted by

professional artists for religious purposes, usually in a Buddhist temple or cave. However, literati artists such as Wang Wei also chose to represent the theme for self-cultivation, which becomes mainstream in the following dynasties.

CHAPTER FOUR

VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA REPRESENTATION IN THE SONG AND YUAN DYNASTIES

In the Song (960-1279) and the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), while inheriting the already established tradition, some new features came into being in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. This period of time can be considered as a link and turning point in the evolution of the theme. In this chapter, the author will examine six extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations, all in the format of scrolls, attributed to the Song and Yuan Dynasties and compare them to the recorded lost ones.

First, three paintings related to Li Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1101), two extant works attributed to Ma Yunqing 馬云卿 (active ca. 1230) and Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬 (active ca. 1281-1329), respectively, and one recorded work, will be examined in detail for their possible relationships. Then, the author will examine one painting by Liu Songnian 劉松年 (ca. 1155-1218) and three anonymous hanging scrolls and analyze some poems recording Vimalakirti Sutra representations. The popularity of Vimalakirti Sutra representations in both Buddhist temples and secular

collections and the various modes in representing the sutra in the Song and Yuan will be discussed.

1. Two Extant Vimalakirti Sutra Representations Related to Li Gonglin

Li Gonglin is probably the most famous and most important figure painters of the Song Dynasty, and he had a close relationship with Buddhism.¹⁴¹ He has been recorded representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in many documents since the twelfth century. At present, there are two extant handscrolls of the theme, attributed to Ma Yunqing and Wang Zhenpeng respectively, believed to be either created by Li's own hand or copied after Li's original work. In this section this author will examine these two paintings and discuss the possible relationship between these two and another recorded scroll.

A *Weimo yanjiao tu* 維摩演教圖 (Vimalakirti Demonstrating the Law, *Yanjiao tu* hereafter) attributed to Li Gonglin is recorded in *Jiangcun xiaoxia lu* 江村消夏錄 and *Shigutang shuhua huikao* 式古堂書畫彙考.¹⁴²

The scroll is said to be on paper and to measure 1.5 x 6.1 *chi* 尺. The

¹⁴¹ For a recent study on Li Gonglin and Buddhism, see An-yi Pan, *Painting Faith: Li Gonglin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007).

¹⁴² Gao Shiqi, *Jiangcun xiaoxia lu* (SKQS), *juan* 3, 20; Bian Yongyu, *Shigutang shuhua huikao* (SKQS), *juan* 42, 96.

famous scholar Shen Du 沈度 (1357–1434) was asked to write the *Heart Sutra* or *Xinjing* 心經 attached to the painting. Besides Shen Du's calligraphy, there are two colophons by Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636) and Wang Xideng 王穉登 (1535-1612), respectively. In his colophon, Wang Xideng said that during his time there were a lot of fake paintings attributed to Li Gonglin and this Vimalakirti painting is one of the seven authentic ones seen by him. Wang described the images of Vimalakirti and Manjusri in the painting as having a heavenly, supernatural appearance. He said that the monks listening to Vimalakirti's preaching all put their hands together with a devout expression like bowed rocks.¹⁴³

Because of this description and the colophons, it can be determined that this painting is the one of the same title now in the Palace Museum, Beijing.¹⁴⁴ This *Yanjiao tu* is an ink on paper handscroll painted by the *baimiao* 白描 technique. On the right side of the painting, Vimalakirti is sitting in the center of a *ta* 榻 bed facing the left. His shoes can be seen on the long stool in front of the *ta* bed. He is wearing robes

¹⁴³ Bian Yongyu, *Shigutang shuhua huikao* (SKQS), *juan* 42, 98.

¹⁴⁴ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji*, *shang*, 191.

and a headband like a Chinese scholar. His bare chest is partly hidden by his long beard. His facial features are those of a grandfatherly Chinese. His left hand holds a fan against his left shoulder while his right hand stretches in front of his chest with the index and middle fingers held up together. Apparently he is represented as preaching the *bu'er famen* 不二法門 (the law of non-duality).

On the right and back side along the *ta* bed, first two and then four figures are depicted kneeling on the ground behind Vimalakirti facing the left, respectively. These *lohans* and monks all put their hands together in front of their chests with a devout expression as described in Wang Xideng's colophon. Between the two groups, a maiden holding a bowl of rice is depicted standing facing the left, as well. She is apparently the phantom Bodhisattva that Vimalakirti created to get the fragrant rice from the *xiangjifo* 香積佛 (Fragrance Accumulated Buddha) narrated in Chapter Ten of the sutra. Behind her, a strong supernatural warrior, who is bigger than the other figures, is standing frontally.

On the left side of the painting, Manjusri is depicted sitting on a *xumizuo* 須彌座 (decorated pedestal) facing the right. He is wearing a typical Bodhisattva costume and his bare feet rest on two lotuses. His

usual riding animal, a blue-green lion or *qingshi* 青獅, is depicted lying on his left. On the other side of the lion stands a boy with his hands held together. Around the front and left side of the *xumizuo*, five heavenly figures are kneeling on the ground facing the right. Three of them put their hands together in front of their chests and the other two hold a small incense burner and a *ruyi* 如意 in hand, respectively. Behind them, an older scholarly looking man and a *lohan* are kneeling on the ground, again, with their hands held together in front of their chests. On the far left, a heavenly guardian is standing facing to the right with knitted eyebrows as if he is thinking of something complicated. It can be noticed that the painter paid attention to the balance of the painting by depicting the same number of figures behind each of the two protagonists.

At the same time, in the middle of the two main figures in the center of the painting, the Heavenly Maiden and Shariputra are represented symmetrically. On the right side is the Heavenly Maiden, who is standing beside Vimalakirti. Her left hand lifts a flower basket up to the level of her head while her right hand holds out a flower as if she is about to throw it. On the left side, Shariputra is depicted standing beside Manjusri. Both of his arms are acting like he is trying to get rid of the

flowers, some of which still stick to his *jiasha*. Right in the middle of these two secondary figures, an incense burner can be seen in the foreground. Smoke can be seen coiling up from a lion decoration on the top of the burner. In general, the whole handscroll is designed in an axially symmetrical composition.

As introduced above, three colophons follow this painting. The first colophon is by Shen Du. It reads:

In the *bingxu* 丙戌 year of the Yongle Reign, I stayed in the Zhenrusi 真如寺 Temple in the Yantai 燕臺 area. The senior monk Yuanjue 元覺 showed me the painting *Demonstrating the Law*, an authentic work by Li Longmian 李龍眠. Then he asked me to write the *Heart Sutra* to be attached to the painting. ...¹⁴⁵

This *Yanjiao tu* was regarded as by Li's own hand ever since.

However, the attribution has been challenged since scholars have come to notice an ink on silk handscroll very close to the *Yanjiao tu* now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is by the Yuan painter Wang Zhenpeng 王振鵬, titled *Lin Jin Ma Yunqing Weimo bu'er tu* 臨金馬雲卿維摩不二圖 (Vimalakirti and the Single Doctrine after Ma Yunqing's of the Jin Dynasty, *Bu'er tu* hereafter).¹⁴⁶ Because the title indicates that this *Bu'er tu* is after

¹⁴⁵ Longmian is Li Gonglin's style name.

¹⁴⁶ For a high quality image, see the webpage of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, http://www.metmuseum.org/works_of_art/collection_database/asian_art/vimalakirti_and_the_doctrine_of_nonduality_wang_zhenpeng/objectview.

one by Ma Yunqing, the *Yanjiao tu* in the Palace Museum at Beijing, which is so close to the former, is now widely regarded as the one by Ma Yunqing.

However, some scholars such as Xu Zhongling 许忠陵 have disagreed with that conclusion noticing the many differences between the two.¹⁴⁷ First of all, the two edges of the *ta* bed in the *Yanjiao tu* are painted diagonally like a forward slash (/). In comparison, those in Wang's painting are like a back slash (\). Secondly, in the *Yanjiao tu*, Vimalakirti is placed in the center of the *ta* bed and two *lohan*s are kneeling on the right side of the *ta* bed. However, in Wang's painting, Vimalakirti sits slightly in the left of the *ta* bed. Then it seems that to balance with Vimalakirti, one *lohan* is placed on the right of the front side of the *ta* bed. Third, Manjusri and the five heavenly figures behind him in Wang's painting all have mustaches above their mouths, which cannot be seen in the *Yanjiao tu*. Besides these three, the figures' clothes and some decorative details are different in the two paintings.

aspx?page=1&sort=6&sortdir=asc&keyword=Vimalakirti&fp=1&dd1=6&d2=0&vw=0&collID=6&OID=60007750&vT=1&hi=0&ov=0 (accessed Oct. 1, 2011).

¹⁴⁷ Xu, Zhongling. "Weimo yanjiao tu jiqi xiangguan wenti taolun," *Palace Museum Journal*, No. 4, (2004): 120-129.

As Xu pointed out, although differences are common in copying paintings, this degree of variance would have been unacceptable as the *Bu'er tu* was ordered by Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (1285-1320) of the Yuan Dynasty, who was a prince at that time. This is recorded in the inscription at the far left of the painting written by Wang Zhenpeng himself. It reads,

On the first day of the second month of the first year of the Zhida 至大 era (1308-1311), I respectfully visited and stayed with the *Qiexue* 怯薛. On the next day, in the west Heyetian 荷葉殿 Hall located on the hill in the garden of the Longfugong 隆福宮 Palace, this was copied by (me,) the official Wang Zhenpeng ordered by Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (1285-1320), who was the crown prince at that time, after the *Weimo bu'er tu* by Ma Yunqing of the Jin Dynasty (chen wang zhenpeng tefeng renzong huangdi qiandi shengzhi lin jin ma yunqing hua weimo bu'er tu caoben 臣王振鵬特奉仁宗皇帝潛抵聖旨臨金馬云卿畫維摩不二圖草本).

Since the copying was completed upon a crown prince's request, it is hard to believe that the *Bu'er tu* was based on the *Yanjiao tu*, because of the many obvious differences.

In addition, important information indicated in the other colophon by Wang, which has previously received a little attention, further reveals that *Yanjiao tu* is unlikely to be the model for the *Bu'er tu*. This second colophon is on another piece of paper following the painting, which narrates the copying process in detail. It reads,

In the second month of the *xushen* 戊申 year of the Zhida era [1308], Emperor Renzong, then in his crown prince's palace, showed me the *Weimo bu'er tu* on paper by Ma Yunqing of the

past Jin Dynasty dedicated by the *Pingzhang* 平章 Zhang Ziyou. [I], the humble official Zhenpeng copied [*lin* 臨] it on a piece of *dongjuan* 東絹 silk and talked about the cause of the discussion on nonduality... Zhenpeng copied [*linmo* 臨摹] upon request at that time and furthermore embellished and touched it up. When the copy was completed, [I] also narrated the general process before dedicating it. Thereupon [I] received the draft [*moben* 摹本] to be treasured and unrolled at my leisure for my own enjoyment. Wang Zhenpeng from Dongjia 東嘉 respectfully wrote [this].

In the colophon, Wang's different words for copying indicate the process. Wang used the word *linmo* to refer to the copying mission assigned by the crown prince. It means the copying process involved both *lin* and *mo*. *Mo* is to place a very thin piece of paper or silk, sometimes waxed to make it more transparent, on top of the original work. Thus the copier would hold both of them against the light so that he or she can see through and outline precisely on the top, usually by light ink.¹⁴⁸ Then he can color the copy accordingly. This, of course, can make the most accurate copy of the model, which is called *moben* and has been widely used to preserve and study old paintings in ancient China. For example, the *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Court Ladies* attributed to Gu Kaizhi in the British Museum is now regarded by many scholars as a Tang Dynasty *moben*. In comparison, *lin* is to copy

¹⁴⁸ See Xu Bangda, "Wutan gushuhua jianbie: dui zuowei de fangshi, fangfa de jianding," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 2 (1981), 56-68; Yu Hui, "Lin mo fang ta juyao ji qita," *Shoucangjia* 3 (1995), 54-57.

freehand on another piece of paper or silk placed beside the original work. Thus the *linben* can show more traits of the copyist.

This colophon thus suggests that Wang applied both the *mo* and the *lin* methods in copying Ma Yunqing's work. The former could quite possibly be a preparation for the latter. The *linben*, which was painted on a piece of the precious *dongjuan* silk, is the one dedicated to the crown prince while the *moben*, as a draft, was kept by Wang himself. In other words, the *Bu'er tu* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art should be the *moben*. In fact, the last word of the first colophon written on the painting and quoted above, *caoben* 草本, actually means that this is a draft for the *lin* process.

In general, this author argues that the *Bu'er tu* is a *moben* by Wang Zhenpeng in copying an original work attributed to Ma Yunqing. It is more appropriate to be called *Lin Jin Ma Yunqing Weimo bu'er tu caoben* (臨金馬雲卿維摩不二圖草本 Draft in Copying *Vimalakirti and the Doctrine of Nonduality* by Ma Yunqing of the Jin Dynasty). This might also explain why no seals were applied to the painting by Yuan court patrons such as Princess Senge Ragi 祥哥剌吉 (ca. 1283-1331), the elder sister of Emperor Renzong.

Returning to the question about the relationship between the *Yanjiao tu* in Beijing and the *Bu'er tu* in New York, it can be seen that with so many obvious differences between the two, the former is almost impossible to be the model for the latter. One reason is that since the copy was commissioned by the crown prince, it should be completed seriously and should strictly follow the original work. Secondly, this author argues that the *Bu'er tu* is a *moben*, which should be the most precise copy of the model almost with no detectable difference. Thus, this author also believes that *Bu'er tu* is not copied from the *Yanjiao tu*, which thus should not be attributed to Ma Yunqing.

2. A Possible Model for the *Bu'er tu*

Little is known about the painter Ma Yunqing. However, his name appeared in the record of another Vimalakirti Sutra representation attributed to Li Gonglin. The painting is recorded in *Midian zhulin* 密殿珠林 and is also titled *Weimo bu'er tu* 維摩不二圖 (*Midian scroll*, hereafter).¹⁴⁹ It is said to be ink on silk and in Li's famous *baimiao* 白描 technique. Six colophons by Chuxuan 樗軒 (or Wanyan Shu 完顏樞, 1172-1232), Shang Ting 商挺 (1209-1288), Liu Geng 劉賡 (1248–1328),

¹⁴⁹ Zhang Zhao et al. ed., *Midian zhulin* (SKQS), *juan* 9, 11-13.

the Yuan poet Teng Bin 滕賓, the Yuan literatus Yu Ji 虞集 (1272~1348) and an unknown layman Liu Bingfu 劉秉鈇, respectively, are listed.

Although this painting may not be extant, from the title it can be assumed that the painting mainly represented Vimalakirti's preaching the single doctrine probably in front of people led by Manjusri. At the same time, Liu Geng's colophon mentions the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers scenario, which thus may also have been visualized in the painting. In other words, this *Midian scroll* might look like the *Yanjiao tu* and the *Bu'er tu*. Although there are no further detailed descriptions of the iconography, these recorded colophons show the provenance of the painting, which indicate a possible relation between this *Midian scroll* and the *Bu'er tu*.

The second colophon by Shang Ting reads,

In the Zhengda 正大 era (1224-1231), I viewed this painting in the home of Fang Zishang 方子上 in the west of the Xuanpingfang 宣平坊 District in Bianliang 汴梁. It was said that this painting was collected by the layman Ma Yunqing 馬雲卿 and his son. At that time, there was the *Heart Sutra* (Xinjing 心經) written in the cursive style by Shangu 山谷 (Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅) in the beginning and the poem by Chuxuan 樗軒 was not inscribed yet. Yunqing's elder brother Yunzhang 雲章 got his *jinshi* degree in the Confucian Classics Argumentation category in the second year of the Chongqing 崇慶 era (1212-1213), together with my father. Zishang was a good friend of mine so he borrowed the painting (from the Ma's) for me to view; this was already fifty-six years ago. I did not know if (the Ma's) still owned it or not after the battles.

The other day the secretary Qiao Zhongshan 喬仲山 brought it by and said it belonged to the minister Zhang Ziyou 張子有. At this time I saw Chuxuan's poem but Shangu's *Heart Sutra* was gone...¹⁵⁰

According to Shang, it was known that a *Heart Sutra* by Huang Tingjian (1045 – 1105) was once the only colophon for the painting. Given the fact that Huang was a good friend of Li Gonglin, the *Midian scroll* should be an authentic painting by Li. The calligraphic work was either requested by Li to be written for the completed painting or the two works were meant to be created as a pair. In fact, Huang Tingjian wrote a poem titled *Weimojie huazan* 維摩詰畫贊 (Eulogizing the Vimalakirti Painting), which might have been composed for this painting.¹⁵¹

Shang Ting's colophon is dated the *yiyou* 乙酉 year of the Zhiyuan 至元 era (1264-1294), equivalent to 1285. Since he said it had been fifty-six years before he saw the painting for the second time and wrote the colophon, it should be in 1229 when he saw the painting for the first time. That is to say, in 1229, this painting was in Ma Yunqing's collection in Bianliang, which was under the Jin government's control at that time.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Shang Ting's father, Shang Heng 商衡, whose style name is Pingshu 平叔, got his *jinshi* degree in the same year, 1213, in the *cifu* 詞賦 (poetries and songs) category at the age of twenty-five.

¹⁵¹ Huang Tingjian, *Shanguji* (SKQS), *bieji juan* 2, 8.

¹⁵² Bianliang was occupied by the Jin government from 1127 to 1233.

As pointed out in the above, a little is known about Ma Yunqing's life. He and his brother Ma Yunzhang were said to be good at painting. But since Yunzhang got a *jinshi* degree in the Confucian Classics Argumentation category, it is hard to assume that they were professional artists or court artists as some scholars regard. On the contrary, they might be officials good at and interested in painting.

Chuxuan's colophon has no date but since he died in 1232, his colophon must have been done between 1229 and 1232. Chuxuan or Wanyan Shu is one of the grandsons of Emperor Shizong 世宗 (1123-1189) of the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234). In other words, Chuxuan, as a royal family member of the Jin court, saw and inscribed the painting which might have been either in the Ma's family collection or in his own.

In 1285 when Shang Ting saw it for the second time and wrote the colophon, the painting was in the collection of Zhang Ziyou 張子有 (1242-1302). Zhang Ziyou is Zhang Jiushi 張九思, who was made minister or *Shangshu* 尚書 in 1279 by Kublai Khan, Emperor Shizu 世祖 (reigned 1271-1294) of the Yuan Dynasty. During the period from 1229 to 1285 when the painting was in the collection of either Ma Yunqing or Chuxuan or Zhang Jiushi, the *Heart Sutra* by Huang Tingjian was detached. The

calligraphic work might have been trimmed to become an independent artwork.

The following two inscribers Liu Geng and Teng Bin did not indicate the years they wrote the colophons. Then in Yu Ji's colophon, the last sentence reads, "On a lucky day in the fourth month of the fifth year of the *yanyou* 延祐 era (1314-1320), the Pingzhang Dacidu 平章大慈都 asked me to write something." In other words, in 1318 the painting got into the collection of Dacidu, who was a high official for Emperor Renzong 仁宗 (reigned 1311-1320) of the Yuan Dynasty.¹⁵³ In the last colophon by an unknown layman Liu Bingfu, it is indicated that the painting was then in the hand of a Buddhist patron, Wu Zhonghuang 吳仲黃. In summary, the *Midian scroll*, which should be an authentic painting by Li, was collected by the Jin official Ma Yunqing and then belonged to several Yuan high ranking officials.

With the same title, the *Midian scroll's* collecting process indicates a possible relation with the *Bu'er tu*. First of all, the former was in Ma Yunqing's collection around 1229 while the latter was copied after a painting attributed to Ma in 1308. Thus, it seems reasonable to think that

¹⁵³ Pingzhang is an official title which originated in the Tang Dynasty. In the Yuan Dynasty, it was usually the governor of a province. Dacidu is Dachengdu 大乘都's son. They were Uighurs who served the Yuan rulers.

the model for the *Bu'er tu* is the *Midian scroll*, which might have been regarded as painted by Ma although he just owned it for a period of time. However, a detail refutes this assumption. In Wang Zhenpeng's second colophon, the work attributed to Ma as the model for his painting is said to be on *jianzhi* 繭紙 paper whereas the *Midian scroll* is recorded as on silk. Although the direct model for the *Bu'er tu* may not be the *Midian scroll*, it is possible that Wang Zhenpeng copied after a copy by Ma of the latter, given the fact that Ma was skilled at painting.

Another person involved in both paintings is Zhang Ziyou or Zhang Jiushi, who was a high official of the Yuan Dynasty. Zhang held the rank of the Pingzhang zhengshi 平章政事 in 1265 and was not promoted to be the minister or *Shangshu* until 1279. According to Wang Zhenpeng's colophon, the model for the *Bu'er tu* was presented to the emperor by Zhang when he was a *Pingzhang*. In other words, Zhang should have presented the painting attributed to Ma between 1265 and 1279 when Emperor Shizu was on the throne. Since Wang's copying happened in 1308, the model presented by Zhang must have been a gift presented to and kept in the royal family collection.

Interestingly, according to Shang Ting's colophon for the *Midian scroll*, he saw the painting for the second time in 1285, when it was in Zhang's collection. This, again, suggests that the original work by Li Gonglin or the *Midian scroll* is not the one presented to the emperor by Zhang. In other words, the *Midian scroll* is not the direct model for the *Bu'er tu*. However, as pointed out in the above, it is possible that Ma Yunqing copied the *Midian scroll* when he owned it around 1229 and both went to Zhang Ziyou's collection later. Zhang then dedicated Ma's copy to the royal collection between 1265 and 1279 and still kept the *Midian scroll*. Thus, in 1285 Shang Ting still had the opportunity to view the *Midian scroll* in Zhang's collection whereas in 1308 Wang Zhenpeng completed the *Bu'er tu* from Ma's copy.

In addition, one more person might have been involved with both paintings, the official Pingzhang Dacidu. It has been mentioned above that when he wrote his colophon in 1318 on the *Midian scroll*, Yu Ji indicated that the painting was in Dacidu's collection. In the meanwhile, in Wang Zhenpeng's first colophon in the *Bu'er tu* quoted above, he said he "respectfully visited and stayed with the Qiexue" on the day before he was commissioned the *Bu'er tu*. The word Qiexue refers to Zhisuwei 直

宿卫, who were royal warriors who living within the palace and acting as bodyguards for the royal family. One thing worth noting here is that Dacidu was made a *Zhisuwei* in the early years of the Zhongtong 中統 era (1260-1263) and was not promoted to be a *Pingzhang* until early in the Huangqing 皇慶 era (1312-1314) by Emperor Renzong.¹⁵⁴ In other words, in 1308 Dacidu was really a *Qiexue* warrior.

Since it is not reasonable for Wang Zhenpeng, as a court artist, to visit the whole *Qiexue* army and stay with them, Wang must have visited only one *Qiexue* warrior, who might have been Dacidu. If so, it means Dacidu might also have viewed the painting by Ma Yunqing and Wang's copies in 1308 when he was a *Qiexue* warrior or *Zhisuwei*. Such an experience might have encouraged him to collect the *Midian scroll* after 1312 when he was promoted to be an important official *Pingzhang*. In fact, Zhang Ziyou died in 1302 and his collection of paintings might have been sold by his family afterwards.

In general, at least two figures, Ma Yunqing and Zhang Ziyou, have been involved in both the *Midian scroll* and the *Bu'er tu*, which indicates a possible relationship between the two paintings. Because the

¹⁵⁴ See Ke Shaomin ed., *Xin Yuanshi*. Vol. 192, Chapter 89. Taipei: Yi wen yin shu guan, 1955.

medium does not match, the latter is not directly copied from the former. On the contrary, this author believes that Ma Yunqing copied the *Midian scroll* when it was in his own collection. Then Ma's copy was dedicated by Zhang to the royal collection from which the *Bu'er tu* was copied while the *Midian scroll* was passed down from Zhang Ziyou to Dacidu and then to an unknown Buddhist patron.

3. Buddhist Patrons and Collections

Besides the three paintings discussed above, there is another painting attributed to Li Gonglin. It is titled *Weimojie suoshuojing xiang* 維摩詰所說經相 (Representation of *The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra*) or *Weimojing xiang* 維摩經相 (Representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*) recorded in Zhang Chou's *Qinghe shuhua fang*.¹⁵⁵ According to Zhang's record, Xiang Dexin 項德新 (style name Youxin 又新, ca. 1561-1623), the third son of the famous Ming collector Xiang Yuanbian 項元汴 (1524-1590), once showed him this scroll. Zhang said it was definitely Li's authentic work by his unique *tiexian miao* 鐵綫描 (iron-wire brush). Seals by such famous collectors as the monk Yingtianmin 應天民 and colophons by nine Yuan monks and Dong Qichang are said to be authentic, as well. Zhang pointed out, however, that Li's signature and

¹⁵⁵ Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua fang* (SKQS), *juan 8 xia*, 35-36.

seal were fake ones.¹⁵⁶ The nine monks who wrote colophons are Xingkui 行魁, Shanqing 善慶, Keliao 可了, Ruozhou 若舟, Yuze 餘澤, Benfu 本復, Qingchu 清澗, Xintai 心泰 and Puqia 溥洽.

Although it is called *Weimojie suoshuojing xiang* or *Weimojing xiang* in the first text, in the second it is also referred to as *Pixie wenji tu* 毗邪問疾圖 (Inquiring after Vimalakirti's Illness in the Vaishali City) or *Weimo shuo bu'erfa tu* 維摩說不二法圖 (Vimalakirti Preaching the Law of Non-duality) in the colophons.¹⁵⁷ Nine out of the ten colophons are recorded with only the sixth colophon by Benfu somehow omitted.

Four of the colophons are dated. The first one by Xingkui was written in the second year of the Zhida 至大 era (1308-1311), equivalent to 1309. The fourth one by Ruozhou was inscribed in the *renshen* 壬申 year of the Zhishun 至順 era (1330-1333), equivalent to 1332. The seventh colophon by Qingchu was dated to the twelfth year of the Hongwu 洪武 era (1368-1398), which is 1379 in the Ming Dynasty. Then the ninth colophon by Puqia was written in the *jjazi* 甲子 year of the Hongwu era, or the year 1384.

¹⁵⁶ Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua fang* (SKQS), *juan* 8 shang, 34.

¹⁵⁷ Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua fang* (SKQS), *juan* 8 xia, 34.

The first colophon was composed more than two hundred years after Li Gonglin was deceased. Thus, it can be assumed that this painting had long been preserved privately if it is authentic. At the same time, in less than eighty years, the nine viewers who inscribed it were all monks. Thus, it should be safe to say that this painting was long kept in a Buddhist's hand, highly possibly in a Buddhist temple. In fact, Zhang Chou also mentioned that the painting was held by the monk Yingtianmin before it got into the Xiang family collection. In other words, from the end of the eleventh century or the beginning of the twelfth century when the painting was created until the end of the sixteenth century, this painting might have always been kept in a monk's private collection.

The popularization of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* representation among monks is suggested by a poem titled *Zeng Yufeng Fang huashi* 贈玉峯方畫士 (For the Painter Fang Yufeng). It reads,

妙畫今無顧虎頭， [We] do not have Master Gu Kaizhi's fabulous
paintings today,
休論韓馬戴松牛。 Do not even talk about Han Gan's horses or Dai
Song's bulls.
玉峯住近山中寺， Now Yufeng lives close to a temple in the
mountain,
好畫維摩施比丘。 [It is] good [for him] to paint Vimalakirti for the
monks.¹⁵⁸

Han Gan (ca. 706-783) and Dai Song (active in the 8th century) were

¹⁵⁸ He Menggui, *Qianzhai ji* (SKQS), *juan* 3, 12.

famous painters who specialized in painting horses and bulls, respectively. The poet He Menggui 何夢桂(1229-1303) mentioned these two ancient masters to praise Painter Fang's superb skills. The last sentence of the poem listed paintings of Vimalakirti as an example of artworks such a good artist can paint for the monks as gifts. It indicates that Buddhist monks of He Menggui's lifetime, namely the thirteenth century, prized representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*.

Furthermore, monks as painters of the Vimalakirti theme appeared in the Song Dynasty. One is Xingshangzuo 行上座 who painted a *Weimo wenji tu* 維摩問疾圖 (Vimalakirti Being Asked About His Illness). It is known to us because of a poem upon viewing this painting by the famous Buddhist patriarch Zhu'an Shigui 竹庵士珪 (1083-1146).¹⁵⁹ The poem is also recorded in another book, in which the title was precisely given as *Shigui zhu Wenzhou Longxiangsi guan Xingshangzuo suozuo Weimo wenjitu* 士珪住温州龍翔寺觀行上座所作維摩問疾圖 (When he stayed in the Longxiangsi Temple in Wenzhou, Shigui viewed the *Vimalakirti Being Asked About His Illness* by Xingshangzuo).¹⁶⁰ In other

¹⁵⁹ See Sun Shaoyuan, *Shenghua ji* (SKQS), *juan* 2, 6.

¹⁶⁰ Li E, *Songshi jishi* (SKQS), *juan* 92, 21-22.

words, this *Weimo wenji tu* by the monk Xingshangzuo was in a Buddhist temple named Longxiangsi Temple.

Another Song Dynasty monk who painted a Vimalakirti painting is Duzhao zhanglao 獨照長老 (Master Duzhao). A poetic colophon by the Yuan minister Xu Youren 許有壬 (1287-1364) on his painting *Wenshu wen weimo bing tu* 文殊問維摩病圖 (Manjusri Inquiring After Vimalakirti's Illness) is recorded in Xu's *Zhizheng ji* 至正集.¹⁶¹ Thus it seems that in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the Vimalakirti Sutra representations were still popular in Buddhist temples and collections. Furthermore, some Buddhist monks have joined secular painters in visualizing the sutra.

4. The Secularization of Vimalakirti Sutra Representation

Although they were still painted in temples and collected by Buddhists, it seems that Vimalakirti Sutra representations were getting less attention for religious purposes. For example, the famous Song poet Lu You 陸遊 (1125-1210) wrote a poem on a Vimalakirti representation.¹⁶² It reads:

回龍寺壁看維摩，Viewing the Vimalakirti on the wall of the
Huilongsi Temple,
最得曹吳筆意多。[I think it] has Cao and Wu's styles.

¹⁶¹ Xu Youren, *Zhizhengji* (SKQS), *juan* 9, 6.

¹⁶² Lu You, *Jiannan shigao* (SKQS), *juan* 34, 8.

風雨塵埃昏欲盡, [It] is fading in time of winds and rains,
何人更著手摩挲? Who would gently touch and appreciate it?

Here Cao and Wu should refer to masters Cao Buxing 曹不興 (active 222-277) and Wu Daozi 吳道子 (ca. 680-795), respectively. Since this mural “is fading in time,” we can assume that it was painted at least decades before Lu’s time. That means the Vimalakirti mural was not cared for or appreciated very well over the years. In other words, from the early part of the twelfth century, due to the social and political unrest to a great extent, Vimalakirti murals were getting less attention as religious icons.

A similar situation can be seen in the Song literati Su Shi’s poem titled *Weimoxiang Tang Yang Huizhi su zai Tianzhusi* 維摩像唐楊惠之塑在天柱寺 (On the Vimalakirti Statue by the Tang Dynasty sculptor Yang Huizhi in the Tianzhu Temple). The last part reads,

...
至今遺像兀不語, Till today the statue of the deceased keeps
silent.
與昔未死無增虧。 Just the same as when he was alive.
田翁裡婦那肯顧, Local countrymen and countrywomen would
not come to worship (him).
時有野鼠銜其髭。 Sometimes wild rats hold his moustache in their
mouths.
見之使人每自失, Seeing this makes one feel lost.
誰能與結無言師? Who can comprehend this wordless master?

In other words, the statue of Vimalakirti, which was created as a

Buddhist icon to be worshipped in the Tang Dynasty, had lost its original purpose in the Song.

By contrast, it seems that the Vimalakirti theme was more and more favored by the literati class, sometimes as gifts between scholars. For example, there is a poem titled *He Zhizhong ji xie Jianfa* 和執中及謝檢法 (Thanks to the Jianfa in the Rhyme of Zhizhong's Poem) in *Poyang ji* 鄱陽集 by Hong Hao (洪皓, 1088-1155).¹⁶³ Zhizhong should refer to He Zhizhong (何執中, 1043-1116) and the official title Jianfa might refer to Li Gonglin who was appointed as *Yushi jianfa* 御史檢法.¹⁶⁴ If so, this poem must have been composed by Hong after receiving Li Gonglin's Vimalakirti Sutra representation as a gift.

Another example is the famous Song calligrapher Huang Tingjian who once got a Vimalakirti Sutra representation, perhaps a copy from Gu Kaizhi's original. It was a gift from Hu Cangzhi 胡藏之 (11th c.-12th c.), son of Huang's peer Hu Yanming 胡彥明 (*jinshi* 1067). The present was very special as it was painted by a brush made of the tail of an animal

¹⁶³ Hong Hao, *Poyang ji* (SKQS), *juan* 11, 17.

¹⁶⁴ *Jianfa* is a Song Dynasty official title for an official in charge of law enforcement.

called a *lishu* 栗鼠 and Huang composed two poems for it.¹⁶⁵ The first two sentences of the first poem read, “The *lishu* tail is a very precious material in making brushes. Hutou’s use of ink is as brilliant as it is magical (Diaowei zhencai kebi, Hutou momiao ningshen. 貂尾珍材可筆, 虎頭墨妙凝神).”¹⁶⁶ Hutou is Gu Kaizhi’s alternate name. Thus, the painting received by Huang is possibly a copy of Gu’s original creation.

Similarly, the official scholar Zhao Bian 趙抃 (1008-1084) once wrote a poem on receiving a Vimalakirti Sutra representation as a present from Zeng Lugong 曾魯公 (or Zeng Gong 曾鞏, 1019-1083).¹⁶⁷ The last sentence of the poem reads, “[I will] hang it on the wall as my role model (Guaxiang bijian kan banyang 掛向壁間看榜樣).” This indicates the change of the function of the Vimalakirti painting in the Song Dynasty. In other words, it was no longer a religious icon that people should venerate. In contrast, Vimalakirti became a role model like any other Confucian sage for scholars.

¹⁶⁵ The title of the two poems is *Xie Hu Cangzhi song lishu wei hua Weimo ershou* 謝胡藏之送栗鼠尾畫維摩二首 (Two thank you poems on a Vimalakirti painting done by a brush made of *lishu* tails sent by Hu Cangzhi). *Lishu* 栗鼠 refers to a kind of animal similar to a chipmunk or marten.

¹⁶⁶ Huang Tingjian, *Shanggu ji* (SKQS), *juan* 12, 8.

¹⁶⁷ Zhao Bian, *Qingxian ji* (SKQS), *juan* 1, 14.

5. The Vimalakirti Sutra Representation Attributed to Liu Songnian

In the Palace Museum, Taipei, there is a painting attributed to Liu Songnian titled *Tiannu xianhua* 天女獻花 (Heavenly Maiden Presenting Flowers) instead of the more common name, *Tiannu sanhua* 天女散花 (Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers). It used to be a handscroll and is now mounted as an album leaf. On the right side of the painting, Manjusri is depicted sitting on a small raised platform, which is more like a decorated bench. He wears the *yingluo* 纓絡 necklace as bodhisattvas usually do. His left hand is placed freely upon his left leg while his right hand is reaching out in front of his chest. His green lion is lying underneath and three Buddhist monks are standing nearby. In the middle of the painting stands Shariputra, who is turning his head to the left where the Heavenly Maiden is. The young maiden is holding a flower basket with her left hand in front of her chest. Her right hand, picking up one flower, is raised up to the level of her head as if she is going to throw it.

Judging from the composition of the painting, there must have been a group of people in the leftmost to balance the Manjusri group. At the same time, since Manjusri is depicted bigger than the other figures, a

similar bigger image must have been painted in the center of the left group. In other words, the other protagonist of the story, Vimalakirti and some of his followers, must have been represented in the left of the painting. The fact the painting was a handscroll and is now mounted as an album leaf also suggests there should have been more representations. Since the depiction of the Great Layman was cut off, the current painting does look like the Heavenly Maiden is presenting flowers to Manjusri since Shariputra's identity is not that obvious. This author believes that is how the current title came about.

Although this painting is not about the theme of presenting flowers, it seems that there might have been such depictions in the Vimalakirti Sutra representations in the Song Dynasty. In the poem titled *He Zhizhong ji xie Jianfa* mentioned in the previous section, the Heavenly Maiden is said to present flowers. The first two sentences read, "The Heavenly Maiden rushes to present flowers. How (can one) eulogize the splendor and brilliance. (天女匆忙來獻花，莊嚴淨妙一何嘉)"¹⁶⁸

The famous Song literati and official Wang Anshi (王安石, 1021-1086) also wrote a poem on presenting flowers to Vimalakirti. It is entitled *Weimo xiangzan* (維摩像贊, Eulogizing the Vimalakirti Image),

¹⁶⁸ Hong Hao, *Poyang ji* (SKQS), *juan* 11, 17.

which reads,

是身是像無有二相， This body and this image have no other
appearances,
三世諸佛亦如是像。 The Buddhas of the Past, Present and Future
are all like this image.
若取真實還成虛妄， If [one] takes it as real, it is still a fantasy,
應持香花如是供養。 [So one] should hold fragrant flowers and
make offering like this [to it].¹⁶⁹

Although the appearance of this painting is unknown, it seems that at least from Wang's time on such thoughts on presenting or offering flowers to Vimalakirti started to prevail.

6. Various Modes in Representing the Sutra

In the Song and Yuan Dynasties, there are still single depictions of Vimalakirti. For example, a Song court painter Gu Shiyan 顧師顏 (active 1260-1264) is recorded to paint a *Weimo xiang* 維摩像 (Image of Vimalakirti).¹⁷⁰ Gu is a *Daizhao* 待詔 in the Jingding era (景定, 1260-1264). He is said to be from Hangzhou and to have learned from Li Song (李嵩, 1166-1243), who was also from Hangzhou. It is said that Gu specialized in Buddhist and Daoist themes. Thus, it is not surprising to see that he painted this topic, probably as a mural in a Buddhist temple.

¹⁶⁹ Wang Anshi, *Linchuan wenji* (SKQS), *juan* 38, 11.

¹⁷⁰ Li E, *Nansong yuanhua lu* (SKQS), *juan* 8, 22.

Another example is a *Weimo chanding tu* 維摩禪定圖 (Vimalakirti in Meditation), by an otherwise unknown Song artist Sun Yonghe 孫用和 (11th c.).¹⁷¹ Although the iconography is uncertain, it seems likely to be a single depiction of the Great Layman while meditating. In addition, the Yuan Dynasty artist Qian Xuan 錢選 is also recorded to have painted a Vimalakirti image (*Weimo xiang* 維摩像).¹⁷² All these paintings have long been lost but their iconographies can be assumed based on an extant portrait of Vimalakirti in the Tofukuji Temple mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation.

The Tofuku-ji portrait is painted in ink on silk, and is mounted as a hanging scroll. It is attributed to Song but seems to have a more ancient flavor. In the painting, the Great Layman is depicted leaning on a *ji* table on top of a decorated platform with his legs crossed freely. He lowers his head facing the ground toward the left as if he is thinking or meditating. His sunken cheeks and frowning eyebrows indicate his unhealthy status, which seems to follow the tradition created by Gu Kaizhi discussed in Chapter Two. He wears a typical Chinese scholar's robe with his chest and feet bare, which suggest his affinity with the unconventional and

¹⁷¹ Wang Yuxian, *Huishi beikao* (SKQS), *juan* 6, 51.

¹⁷² Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua biao* 清河書畫表 (SKQS), 6.

uninhibited scholars of the Six Dynasties Period fond of pure conversation. In addition, he holds a fly whisk or *fuchen* 拂塵 in his right hand, which is a variation of the *zhuwei* 麈尾 or *tanbing* 談柄 in previous Vimalakirti Sutra representations as examined in Chapters Two and Three. In general, this portrait seems to transmit an ancient tradition established in the Six Dynasties.

There are another two extant images of Vimalakirti attributed to the Song Dynasty. One is in the Kyoto National Museum in Japan, which is also a hanging scroll in ink on silk.¹⁷³ In the painting, on top of a decorated platform, Vimalakirti is leaning on a *ji* table toward the right. His face is plump and he is not “showing illness” at all. His expression is calm and he even looks like he is smiling. His eyes are focusing on something to the right. Although the outfit is similar to what is in the painting discussed above, his image seems to be more orthodox with only a small part of chest seen and his feet covered under the robe.

Behind him on the left stands the Heavenly Maiden. She wears a beautiful dress with very wide sleeves, long sashes and many pieces of jewelry. She stands elegantly amidst plenty of incense smoke as if she

¹⁷³ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 128.

just makes herself appear from nowhere. Her left hand holds a flower basket while her right hand picks up one flower facing the right. That both Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden stare to the right suggest that there might have been more representations to the right. If so, it should be Manjusri and Shariputra facing to the left.

The other image of Vimalakirti attributed to the Song is a hanging scroll in ink and color on silk in the Palace Museum, Taipei.¹⁷⁴ In this painting, Vimalakirti is sitting on a *ta* bed with small railings on three sides. He wears a similar outfit and holds a fly whisk as seen in the hanging scroll in the Kyoto National Museum. Here again, the Great Layman looks calm and kind and does not seem to be ill.

Slightly to his right side behind the *ta* bed stands the Heavenly Maiden. Her image is a little different than those in the other Vimalakirti Sutra representations. She stands silently with her head slightly lower down as if she were an attendant girl to the Great Layman. Her outfit and hair are finely decorated but not complicated. Her appearance is soft and gentle while she just picks up one flower by her right hand from a basket held by her left hand.

¹⁷⁴ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 130.

As in the hanging scroll in the Kyoto National Museum in Japan, there might have been more representations to the right. Since this painting has been in the royal collection of the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Qianlong noticed this possibility. He composed a poem upon viewing this painting and inscribed it on the upper right part of the scroll. The poem is titled *Songren weimo shoujing tu zan* (宋人維摩授經圖贊, Eulogizing a Painting *Vimalakirti Imparting the Classic* by a Song Dynasty Artist).¹⁷⁵ The last two sentences read, “The painting is not intact but ends at Manjusri. And there is only the Heavenly Maiden scattering flowers.” (全圖不存師利奚止, 天女散花聊復爾爾). It seems that at Emperor Qianlong’s time, representation of Manjusri can still be seen. If so, he must have been painted on the right side, which would mean Qianlong wrote his inscription in the mid-upper part of the painting. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that the current hanging scroll is part of a bigger painting with probably more narrative representations based on the sutra.

In fact, it seems narrative representations of the sutra were really popular during the Song and Yuan Dynasties. For example, a *Wenbing weimo tu* 問病維摩圖 (Inquiring after Vimalakirti’s Illness) by Hou Yi 侯翌 (active, end of the 10th c.) is recorded in the Qing collector Zhang Chou’s

¹⁷⁵ Emperor Qianlong, *Yuzhi wenji* (SKQS), *chujī juan* 30, 17.

Qinghe shuhua fang.¹⁷⁶ Although the record does not provide more information on the iconography, it can be detected from the title that this painting probably depicted the Great Layman's being visited by Manjusri and other people. Another example is a *Weimo fa tu* 維摩法圖 (Vimalakirti and the Law) attributed to a Song painter recorded in *Midian zhulin*.¹⁷⁷ Although the iconography is not described, from the title it seems there are narrative illustrations representing Vimalakirti's demonstrating the law.

In addition, in the poem titled *Weimojie huazan* by Huang Tingjian mentioned above, it is indicated that not only Vimalakirti and Manjusri but Shariputra and the Heavenly Maiden are in the painting.¹⁷⁸ It reads,

維摩無病自灼灸， Vimalakirti has no illnesses but worries for his
own concerns.
不二門開休闖首。 Do not rush into the Gate of Non-duality when it
is open.
文殊贊歎辜負人， [Since] Manjusri's comments disappointed
people,
不如趙州放筓箒。 It would be better for Monk Zhaozhou to put
aside the whisk broom.
不二法門無別路， There is no other way to get to Non-duality,
諸方臨水不敢渡。 [But] everyone is afraid of reaching it.
鷺子怕霑天女花， Shariputra is scared to be touched by the
Heavenly Maiden's flowers,

¹⁷⁶ Zhang Chou, *Qinghe shuhua fang* (SKQS), *juan 5 shang*, 40.

¹⁷⁷ Zhang Zhao et al. ed., *Midian zhulin* (SKQS), *juan 13*, 5.

¹⁷⁸ Huang Tingjian, *Shangu ji* (SKQS), *bieji juan 2*, 8.

花前竹外是誰家。Whose home is it in front of flowers and beside
bamboo groves?

It seems that this painting probably had the popular mode of the
Vimalakirti theme in the Song Dynasty. That is, Vimalakirti and Manjusri
facing each other with the Heavenly Maiden scattering flowers on
Shariputra.

In Zhu'an Shigui's poem upon viewing a Vimalakirti Sutra
representation by Xingshangzuo mentioned above, four sentences
indicate the iconography. They read,

我觀此畫真其尤。In my eyes, this painting is really outstanding.
病維摩詰小有瘳，Vimalakirti seems to recover from an illness,
文殊大士從之游。Following him traveling is Bodhisattva Manjusri.
彼上人者難對酬。(But) it is really hard to discuss face to face with
such a master (like Vimalakirti).¹⁷⁹

It can be assumed that the basic composition of the painting is
Vimalakirti and Manjusri facing each other.

Also, in the colophon poem by Xu Youren 許有壬 (1287-1364) on
Master Duzhao's *Wenshu wen weimo bing tu* mentioned above, there
are four sentences which read,

娟娟其妹來散花，Elegantly the (Heavenly Maiden) comes to
scatter flowers.
逢場豈亦資諧謔。How can one mock in such a circumstance?
可憐弟子神氣微，Pitifully the disciple [Shariputra] gets
discouraged.
盡力去華華不落。The flowers do not drop [although he] tried

¹⁷⁹ Sun Shaoyuan, *Shenghua ji* (SKQS), *juan* 2, 6.

hard to get rid of them.

From such description, we can tell that in this painting, the Heavenly Maiden and Shariputra are probably both depicted.

Furthermore, in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, the narrative representation of the sutra seems to have some new variations. For example, there is a specially titled painting by a son of Su Jianzhuo 蘇堅卓 (active 1195-1200), *Wenshu Weimo si yinyuan tu* 文殊維摩四因緣圖 (Four Karma Stories between Manjusri and Vimalakirti).¹⁸⁰ This son of Su Jianzhuo was a *Daizhao* in the Qingyuan 慶元 era (1195-1200). Although we do not know what the painting looked like, from the title it seems four stories between the two Buddhist figures are represented.

Another example is a painting titled *Weimo jushi Pang jushi tu* 維摩居士龐居士圖 (Layman Vimalakirti and Layman Pang) listed under the entry Song Dynasty without mentioning the painter.¹⁸¹ *Pang jushi* or Layman Pang refers to Pang Yun 龐蘊 (9th c.), who was a famous layman of the Tang Dynasty. He was born to a rich family and was said to have been kind and benevolent. He had been interested in Buddhism at

¹⁸⁰ Wang Yuxian, *Huishi beikao* (SKQS), *juan* 6, 42.

¹⁸¹ It is first listed in Shanhu wang (SKQS), *juan* 47, 47 and then recorded in Wang Yuanqi et al. ed., *Yuding peiwenzhai shuhua pu* (SKQS), *juan* 98, 31.

his youth and studied Zen Buddhism from famous masters such as Mazu daoyi 馬祖道一 (709-788). It was said that he once poured all of his fortunes and belongs into the Xiangjiang 湘江 River before he retreated to live in seclusion beside the Lumenshan Mountain 鹿門山 with his wife, son and daughter.¹⁸²

Because of their similar family background and their pursuit of Buddhism, Layman Pang is sometimes called the Chinese Vimalakirti. Thus, it is reasonable to paint these two figures together. This title also recalls a painting attributed to the Tang Dynasty discussed in the previous chapter in which Masters Hanshan and Shide are painted with the Great Layman. In general, in the Song and Yuan Dynasties, there are still single depictions of Vimalakirti, apparently a tradition inherited from Gu Kaizhi in the Six Dynasties. On the other hand, narrative representations of the Sutra are very popular with more variations in iconography.

Moreover, although it cannot be seen in the six extant paintings attributed to the Song and Yuan Dynasties, it seems landscape backgrounds were introduced into Vimalakirti Sutra representations in the format of the handscroll. There is a poem on viewing a *Weimo*

¹⁸² Lumenshan Mountain is in today's Xiangyang City, Hubei Province.

huaxiang tu 維摩畫像圖 (Portrait of Vimalakirti) by Li Gonglin as an inscription by the Song literatus and official Lu Benzong 呂本中 (1084-1145).¹⁸³ The first half reads,

老松攬天四無壁， Old pine trees reaching the sky, nothing but
four walls,
小菴不勞容一室， A small temple has only one room.
野竹入戶芭蕉肥， Wild bamboos grow beside the building
and banana trees flourish,
下有無言病摩詰。 Underneath is a silent Vimalakirti in sickness.
文殊妙對亦未真， Even Manjusri's brilliant answers are not the
truth,
身如浮雲那得親。 [because] human bodies are like floating
clouds, which cannot be the essential.
驚倒同行問話人： (This) astonished the curious people along
with (Manjusri),
彼上人者何所云？ What are you masters talking about?

From this poem, we can see that although Lu called it a Portrait of Vimalakirti, it is probably a depiction of the meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri with other Buddhist figures. Interestingly, this scene seems to be arranged in a landscape setting with pine trees, bamboo and banana trees. In other words, this Vimalakirti painting might have created the trend of setting the Vaishali gathering in a landscape background in scrolls. This practice became popular in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, and will be further examined in the next chapter.

¹⁸³ Lu Benzong, *Donglai shiji* (SKQS), *juan* 4, 1-2.

CHAPTER FIVE

VIMALAKIRTI SUTRA REPRESENTATION IN THE MING AND QING DYNASTIES

The Ming (1368-1644) and the Qing Dynasties (1644-1911) witnessed a thematic change in popular representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* although some precedents can be seen as early as the Song Dynasty. In this chapter, four extant paintings attributed to Tang Yin 唐寅 (1470-1523), Qiu Ying 仇英 (ca. 1509-1551), Li Lin 李麟 (1558-1636) and Ding Guanpeng 丁觀鵬 (18th century), respectively, will be studied. These paintings represent the last period of the traditional mode in representing the sutra.

From the end of the eighteenth century, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers became popular as an independent painting theme. It replaced the mode that had been adopted for many centuries and came to be the prevalent representation of the sutra. Some extant examples of independent depiction of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers will be examined and the art historical, social and religious factors that may have been responsible for the change of the motif will be analyzed.

1. Vimalakirti Sutra Representation Attributed to Tang Yin and Qiu Ying

In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, visualizations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* developed new variations. From extant sutra representations, it can be seen that artists of this period made an effort to find new ways to represent the classic. A good example is a hanging scroll titled *Weimo shuofa tu* 維摩說法圖 attributed to Tang Yin in the Palace Museum, Taipei.¹⁸⁴

In the center of the painting, Vimalakirti is depicted sitting cross-legged on top of a huge rock with a big patterned cloth draping down and functioning as a mat. His feet are all covered under his clothes but a pair of shoes can be seen in front of the rock. He holds a *ruyi* 如意 in his right hand leaning on an armrest at his right side as can be seen in many previous Vimalakirti Sutra representations. His left hand is raised in front of his chest with his upper body slightly moving forward as if he is preaching the law of Buddha.

He wears the kind of clothing typically worn by scholars from the Eastern Jin Dynasty onwards with a black sash tied in front. A big dark-

¹⁸⁴ The painting can be seen at the website of the Palace Museum, Taipei, http://painting.npm.gov.tw/npm_public/System/View.jsp?type=1&ObjectID=10605 (accessed Oct. 1, 2011).

colored headscarf covers his hair bun on top of his head and drapes down all the way to his back. He wears a mustache and a beard and looks thin. In general, his image is very close to that of the famous Jin Dynasty hermit, Tao Yuanming 陶淵明. For example, the image of Tao also by a Ming Dynasty artist Zhang Peng 張鵬 (late of the 16th c.-early of the 17th c.) now in the Guangdong Provincial Museum is very close to the image of Vimalakirti by Tang Yin.¹⁸⁵ In general, the latter is that of a scholar of the Six Dynasties period.

Two attendants standing next to his right side reinforce his image as that of an official scholar. One is holding a scroll and the other is raising a jar. On the left of the Great Layman stand two old Buddhist monks or *lohans* one of which wears a *jiasha* robe. Behind the Great Layman are two middle-aged men. One is holding in front of his chest a vase from which several big and long stems of flowers or *lingzhi* 靈芝 mushroom can be seen. The other man, wearing a patterned outer robe and a hat, holds his two hands together and shows a little smile as if he understands what Vimalakirti is preaching. These six figures standing

¹⁸⁵ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 72. It is in the collection of Guangdong Museum, Guangzhou, China.

around the Great Layman's sides and back function like a screen to the protagonist.

In the foreground, more than twenty figures can be seen gathered in three groups listening to the preaching. It is obvious that the painter Tang Yin intended to represent the diversity of the audience. Men, women and a child; wealthy people and commoners; scholars, farmers and a musician; even a handicapped person can be seen. In the background, part of a mountain beside a river is represented. Pine trees and bushes are depicted surrounding the gathering.

There are two especially important aspects of this painting. First, in composition, it does not follow the model established as early as the Sui Dynasty in which Vimalakirti and Manjusri are facing each other as two protagonists. At the same time, none of the vignettes often illustrated in previous Vimalakirti Sutra representations, such as the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers and the Phantom Bodhisattva Bringing Back Fragrant Rice, is represented. In comparison, this painting creates a new mode in visualizing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in which there is only one protagonist, the Great Layman, yet it is not a portrait but a narrative representation. Furthermore, this image of Vimalakirti is not showing any illness.

It seems the painter did not aim to depict the main plot of the classic, *Vimalakirti Demonstrating the Law*, in which the figure of Vimalakirti is shown meeting people led by Manjusri and inquiring about his health. In contrast, it visualizes a common preaching by the Great Layman in daily life as described in the second chapter of the sutra,

If he was among rich men, they honored him as foremost among them because he preached the superior Law for them. If he was among lay believers, they honored him as foremost because he freed them from greed and attachment. Among Kshatriyas he was most highly honored because he taught them forbearance. Among Brahmins he was most highly honored because he rid them of their self-conceit. The great ministers honored him as foremost because he taught the correct Law. The princes honored him as foremost because he showed them how to be loyal and filial. Within the women's quarters he was most honored because he converted and brought refinement to the women of the harem. The common people honored him as first among them because he helped them to gain wealth and power. The Brahma deities honored him as first among them because he revealed the superiority of wisdom. The Indras honored him as first among them because he demonstrated the truth of impermanence. The Four Heavenly Kings, guardians of the world, honored him as foremost because he guarded all living beings.¹⁸⁶

The other thing that makes this painting unusual is that the gathering is arranged in a landscape setting. As discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation, landscape elements such as trees and lotus flowers, can be seen in *Vimalakirti Sutra* representations in Dunhuang caves as early as the Sui Dynasty. In the format of scrolls, a

¹⁸⁶ Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, 33-34.

representation attributed to Li Gonglin was recorded to have a landscape setting, which has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, Tang Yin's painting seems to be the earliest extant one that has a full depiction of the landscape setting with a mountain, river, trees, bushes and rocks. In fact, the landscape elements are so prominent that they occupy at least half of the composition.

Landscape painting became an independent painting category in the Sui and Tang Dynasties. It became extremely popular and developed as the primary category of Chinese painting in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. It is during this period of time that narrative representations are usually arranged in a huge landscape background such as *Lin Dai Jin Xie An Dongshangtu* 臨戴進謝安東山圖 by Shen Zhou 沈周 (1427-1509). This Vimalakirti Sutra representation attributed to Tang Yin thus followed the Ming trend of arranging a narrative representation in a big landscape setting.

This painting seems to be well known as the catalogue *Chengshi moyuan* 程氏墨苑, which was edited and published in 1610, used it as one of the models for making inks.¹⁸⁷ It has been influential ever since.

¹⁸⁷ For the image, see Cheng Dayue ed. *Chengshi moyuan* (Hefei: Huangshan shushe, 2009), Vol. 3, 1077.

Like Li Gonglin's Vimalakirti Sutra representations, it was copied by later painters. For example, there is a copy by the Qing Dynasty artist Shen Zongqian 沈宗騫 now in a private collection in Japan.¹⁸⁸ In addition, a scroll with the same title attributed to an anonymous Ming artist is recorded in *Midian zhulin* 密殿珠林, and it might look like this work.¹⁸⁹

Another Ming Dynasty artist who is famous for his figure paintings, Qiu Ying, is recorded to have painted a Vimalakirti Sutra representation. It was described as a *Weimo jiangfa tu* 維摩講法圖 (Vimalakirti Preaching the Law) by Qiu Ying, and it was presented to Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (1654-1722) for his sixtieth birthday by several ministers.¹⁹⁰ Like many other Vimalakirti paintings on record, there is apparently no further information about this painting.

However, it seems this scroll may be the one titled *Weimo shuofa tu* 維摩說法圖 attributed to Qiu Ying now in the Idemitsu Museum of Arts

¹⁸⁸ For the image, see Toda Teisuke and Ogawa Hiromitsu eds., *Chugoku kaiga sogo zuroku: zokuhen* (Comprehensive Illustrated Catalogue of Chinese Paintings: Second Series). Vol. 3 (Tokyo: University of Tokyo, 1998), 50-51.

¹⁸⁹ Zhang Zhao and Liang Shizheng et. ed., *Midian zhulin* (SKQS), *juan* 11, 14. It is said to be on *sujian* 素箋 paper with the *baimiao* technique.

¹⁹⁰ Wang Yuanqi et al. ed., *Wanshou shengdian chuji* (SKQS), *juan* 58, 4.

in Tokyo, Japan.¹⁹¹ It is a long handscroll in color on silk which opens with an expanse of water. In fact, the first one third is filled by water representing a river or sea. Some rocks are exposed here and there. In the middle of the scroll, huge rocks or hills, one of which is represented as an arch or gate, are depicted with trees and bushes. In the left one third of the scroll, the meeting of Vimalakirti and Manjusri is depicted. The two are facing each other in the middle with an audience standing nearby.

Numerous pine trees are painted in the background. The hills depicted in the middle of the scroll show a little in the foreground and extend to the left for most of the painting. They function as a defense in the shape of a screen for the gathering. In general, Qiu Ying's Vimalakirti Sutra representation follows the Ming fashion of representing the story in a full landscape setting.

2. Li Lin's Vimalakirti Sutra Representation

Li Lin was a student of the Ming master of figure painting, Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬. He was good at Buddhist themes especially in the

¹⁹¹ For the image, see Toda et al. ed., *Chugoku kaiga sogo zuroku: zokuhen*, Vol. 3, 51, JM18-036.

baimiao technique. This is suggested by the name he chose for himself:

Longmian houshen 龍眠後身 or reincarnation of Li Gonglin.¹⁹²

In 1635, Li painted a Vimalakirti Sutra representation now in the Palace Museum, Beijing.¹⁹³ In this hanging scroll, only three figures, Vimalakirti, Manjusri and the Heavenly Maiden, are represented. In the left middle of the painting, the Great Layman is depicted sitting on a *ta* bed, partially seen amidst cloud and smoke. He has an obvious foreign look and a long full beard hides his chest from view. He wears a Buddhist hat and a long robe draping onto his belly covering all his body and four limbs.

Parallel to the layman's right is the Bodhisattva Manjusri. He wears ornate clothing and jewels with very long hair hung down all the way to the bottom. His right hand is resting on his lap while his left hand holds a long *ruyi* stretching to the level of his head. He sits on a lotus pedestal carried by his typical mount, a blue-green lion or *qingshi*, which is depicted crouching on the ground.

¹⁹² Longmian is Li Gonglin's alternate name.

¹⁹³ For the image, see Zhongguo gudai shuhua jiangdingzu ed., *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, Vol. 21 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1997), 314.

In the upper left corner of the painting, the Heavenly Maiden is represented. Her hair style and costume are typical ones worn by young maidens in the Ming Dynasty. Her left hand holds a tray full of flowers above her head; her right hand is picking up a blossom. Although her lower body is hidden amidst cloud and smoke, several flowers can be seen falling from the upper left corner to the middle of the painting.

The tradition of a symmetrical composition of Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden versus Manjusri and Shariputra is superseded in this hanging scroll. In other words, Shariputra is omitted with the other three figures forming a triangular composition. Importantly, the Heavenly Maiden is now depicted in the clouds above the other two figures. This elevated position and heavenly depiction obviously strengthened the special status of the image of the Heavenly Maiden.

3. Ding Guanpeng's *Bu'er tu*

The Qing court painter Ding Guanpeng created a Vimalakirti Sutra representation titled *Bu'er tu* 不二圖.¹⁹⁴ Emperor Qianlong's inscription in

¹⁹⁴ Besides this *Bu'er tu*, Ding also painted another Vimalakirti Sutra representation in his long Buddhist scroll *Fajie yuanliu tu* 法界源流圖. *Fajie yuanliu tu* is a copy of the *Daliguo fanxiang juan* 大理國梵像卷 by Zhang Shengwen 張勝溫 completed in 1180. This author would take on the analysis of these two scrolls in a later study. For a discussion of the *Daliguo fanxiang juan*, see Lu Weimin, "Fajie yuanliu tu zhi yuanliu,"

the painting reads,

維摩默然處，When Vimalakirti keeps his silence,
文殊曰善哉。Manjusri said, "Good."
是真入不二，Those who really entered non-duality,
不語義已該。Make themselves very clear with no words.
擬向默然會，[I] wanted to participate in this silent meeting,
捉影徒成乖。But it is futile.
云何儼作圖，[If one would] ask why [I] commissioned this
painting,
聲聞笑哈哈。[I] would laugh loudly on hearing this question.¹⁹⁵

In this painting now in the Palace Museum, Beijing, Ding applied the most popular mode in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, which is to place the two protagonists facing each other while the other figures gather around.¹⁹⁶ In the lower left, Manjusri Bodhisattva is sitting on a platform most of which is covered by nearby figures. His hands are held together in front of his chest in the *Atmanjali Mudra* or the *Prayer Mudra*. His feet are placed on a lotus flower pedestal while his mount, the blue-green lion, is crouching on the ground to his left.

A cute little boy stands on the other side of the lion also with his hands held together in a Prayer Mudra. To the right and back of Manjusri

Shanghai wenbo luncong 4 (2007), 42-45.

¹⁹⁵ This poem is also collected in Emperor Qianlong, *Yuzhi shiji* (SKQS), *erji juan* 43, 22.

¹⁹⁶ For the image, see Patricia Berger, *Empire of Emptiness: Buddhist Art and Political Authority in Qing China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), Plate 1. See also Berger's discussion of this and other non-duality pictures.

kneel five heavenly figures and a heavenly guard stands in the back. Shariputra is depicted standing behind the Bodhisattva. He bends his body to the right and his arms twist in the air with wide sleeves as if he is trying to wipe the flowers off his *jiasha*.

In the lower right of the painting parallel to the Manjusri group is the Vimalakirti group. The Great Layman is depicted sitting on a *ta* bed slightly leaning back on a *quanyi* 圈椅 or circled chair. He holds a fan in his left hand while his right hand is raised in front of his chest with two fingers stretching up indicating *bu'er famen* 不二法門 or non-duality.

Five *lohans* are kneeling on both sides of the *ta* bed around Vimalakirti. On the right of the group and behind the Great Layman stands a beautiful lady holding a bowl in her hands representing the Phantom Bodhisattva. Behind the Great Layman stands the Heavenly Maiden. She wears ornate clothing and elegant hair buns. Her left hand holds a basket of flowers raised up to the level of her head while her right hand is picking up one by stretching to the left. An incense burner is depicted in the middle of the two groups making the composition symmetrical. But two followers kneeling in the foreground facing the right enliven the composition.

Although no inscriptions in the painting mention the source, the gathering in Ding's painting apparently looks similar to those in the *Yanjiao tu* attributed to Ma Yunqing and the *Bu'er tu* by Wang Zhenpeng. For example, in her analysis, Patricia Berger regards Ding's painting as a rendition of the former. "As was often the case in his practice, the painter creatively interprets a work already in the emperor's collection, a handscroll that may have been done by the Jin-Dynasty painter Ma Yunqing (who was himself inspired by the Northern Song painter Li Gonglin)."¹⁹⁷

However, after careful study, it can be found that Ding's hanging scroll is more like Wang's painting. In fact, in all the three major features which distinguish the *Yanjiao tu* and *Bu'er tu*, which have been discussed in the previous chapter, Ding's work follows the latter. First, the two edges of the *ta* bed are painted like a back slash (\). Secondly, Vimalakirti sits slightly in the left of the *ta* bed on the right of the front side of which one *lohan* is placed to balance with it. Thirdly, Manjusri and one of the heavenly figures around him have mustaches.

However, there is no evidence showing that Wang's *Bu'er tu* was in Emperor Qianlong's collection. In fact, except the artist's own two

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

inscriptions indicating that this draft was kept in his own collection, *Bu'er tu* only has two other colophons by scholar officials of the Qing Dynasty. But as argued in the previous chapter, this *Bu'er tu* is a *moben* of an original, which this author believes to be Ma's copy of the *Midian* scroll presented to the royal collection by Zhang Ziyou. There should have been a *linben* by Wang that was presented to the prince who became Emperor Renzong of the Yuan Dynasty. In other words, both Ma's copy and Wang's *linben* were in the royal collection of the Yuan, and might have been inherited by the Ming and the Qing rulers.¹⁹⁸ Either one could have been in Emperor Qianlong's collection and served as Ding's reference.

Ding's painting refers to Wang's handscroll but he also made some revisions. For the left group, the two figures, a *lohan* and a scholarly person kneeling between the heavenly figures and the heavenly guard in Wang's painting are now placed kneeling in the foreground. For the right group, the four *lohans* kneeling a little far to the right of the Great Layman in Wang's painting are now represented close to the Vimalakirti,

¹⁹⁸ It was common for the royal collection of each dynasty to be inherited by the succeeding one. For example, the director of the Palace Museum in Beijing mentions that one of the sources for the Qing court collection is those of the previous dynasties. See Zheng Xinmiao, "Gugong wenwu de jiadi," *Zhongguo wenhua yichan* 5 (2010): 61-67.

two on each side. At the same time, the Phantom Bodhisattva, which is painted on the right side of the *ta* bed in Wang's painting, is placed just a little behind Vimalakirti. Shariputra and the Heavenly Maiden are painted standing beside instead of in front of each of the two protagonists. These revisions seem to be an adjustment for the format of the painting, a hanging scroll instead of a hand scroll.

The other heavenly guard represented at the far right in Wang's painting cannot be seen here in Ding's painting. However, since the *ta* bed is not represented completely in the painting, which would seem incomplete, it is possible that there was originally a full depiction of the bed and a guard on the right, which have been trimmed.

One special thing about Ding's Vimalakirti Sutra representation is that Vimalakirti's facial features are not like those in any of the previous paintings. In fact, it is the face of the emperor himself, which can be seen by viewing any one of his many portraits.¹⁹⁹ In other words, Emperor Qianlong had himself painted as the Great Layman in this hanging scroll. That is why the two figures kneeling between the heavenly figures and the heavenly guard in Wang's painting are now placed kneeling in the

¹⁹⁹ For the images of some examples, see Nie Chongzheng, "Qianlong huangdi xiaoxiang mianmianguan," *Shoucangjia* 2 (1994): 38-40.

foreground facing Vimalakirti. This change makes them as followers not of the bodhisattva but of the great emperor who is depicted as the Great Layman here.

In fact, the whole left group including the Bodhisattva himself is depicted as Vimalakirti's followers instead of equal partners in the discussion. Even the heavenly guard looks not as severe as in Wang's painting. In comparison, he shows an expression of listening reverently. In the meanwhile, the right group is painted a little higher than the left one. The image of Vimalakirti is a little bigger than that of the Bodhisattva. All these efforts are to enhance the status of the Great Layman or actually, the emperor himself.

Emperor Qianlong has had himself painted as other important figures in paintings. For example, he is painted as Manjusri Bodhisattva in the *Hongli xixiang tu* 弘曆洗像圖 also by Ding Guanpeng.²⁰⁰ It is interesting to think that Emperor Qianlong has had himself painted as Manjusri, in which he is depicted as the powerful and supernatural

²⁰⁰ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji*, xia, 130. The painting is in the collection of Palace Museum, Beijing. For further discussions, see Nayi, "Saolang tu yu xixiang tu manshuo," *Zijin Cheng* 4, (1995): 29-31.

bodhisattva. But here in the *Bu'er tu*, when he is painted as Vimalakirti, the bodhisattva is represented as part of his audience.

According to the emperor's inscription in the upper left corner of the hanging scroll, the painting was commissioned in mid-autumn of the *kuiyou* 葵酉 year, which was September 11th, 1753, when the emperor was forty-three years old. Actually he was in Chengde 承德 for the Mulan *qiu xian* 木蘭秋獵 or Mulan Autumn Hunting at this time. In his inscription, the emperor said he was in the *shanzhuang* 山莊 or the Villa, which refers to the *Bishu shanzhuang* 避暑山莊 or the Imperial Summer Villa in Chengde.

It is unusual for the emperor to commission such a painting on such a special day in Chengde. No wonder in the inscription Qianlong suspected that someone would ask why he ordered this painting. But his answer is just like that of the Great Layman's for the question about non-duality, which is, no words. He said, "[I] would laugh loudly by hearing this question." It seems the emperor did understand the meaning of emptiness of Mahayana Buddhism demonstrated in *The Vimalakirti Sutra*.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ In this sense, a hanging scroll titled *Shiyi shier tu* 是一是二圖 (One or Two?) or *Jiangutu* 鑒古圖 (Appreciating Antiques) might have something

4. The Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers

The end of the eighteenth century witnessed a new fashion in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, which is an independent depiction of the scenario of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers. In fact, the painting theme of representing the sutra by painting the gathering of the Great Layman and Manjusri Bodhisattva can rarely be seen after the seventeenth century.²⁰² In contrast, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers became a popular motif in Chinese figure painting since the end of the eighteenth century.²⁰³

to do with this *Bu'er tu*. In the painting, Emperor Qianlong is depicted sitting on a *ta* bed with his own portrait hanging beside. For further discussions, see Angela Zito, "Silk and Skin: Significant Boundaries," in Angela Zito and Tani E. Barlow, ed., *Body, Subject and Power in China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Charles Lachman, "Blindness and Oversight: Some Comments on a Double Portrait of Qianlong and the New Sinology," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 1996): 736-744.

²⁰² There is a Vimalakirti Sutra representation depicting the gathering by a Buddhist monk Dashan 大汕 in 1680 now in the Lingyanshansi 靈岩山寺 Temple in Suzhou. It has never been published except for a small black and white picture in the *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*. For the image, see Zhongguo gudai shuhua jiatingzu ed., *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu*, Vol. 6, Su 2 - 26. Qing representations of the theme after this date have yet to be discovered.

²⁰³ The independence of the Heavenly Maiden theme has been briefly discussed in a previously published article by the author. See Chen Liu, "From Narrative to Transformed Narrative: Visualizations of the Heavenly Maiden and the Maiden Magu," in Claudia Brown ed., *Myriad Points of*

As early as the Tang Dynasty, the famous poet Li Bai (李白, 701-762) had composed a poem titled *Deng jincheng sanhualou* (登錦城散花樓, Climbing up the Scattering Flowers Mansion in Chengdu). In the poem, Li only appreciated the beautiful scenery upstairs in this mansion and did not indicate relation between the name of the mansion and the Heavenly Maiden. However, according to *Yudi jisheng* 輿地紀勝 by Wang Xiangzhi 王象之 (*jinshi* 1196), the Scattering Flowers Mansion was built in the Kaihuang era (開皇, 581-600) of the Sui Dynasty (581-618) and was believed to be the place where the Heavenly Maiden scattered flowers.

As discussed in the third chapter of this dissertation, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers was represented in Vimalakirti Sutra representations as a secondary scenario as early as the Tang Dynasty. For example, a fresco titled *Weimo shiji wenshulai tiannu sanhua* by Wu Daozi was painted in Longxingsi Temple in Ruzhou 汝州 (in today's He'nan province). Other examples can be seen in Vimalakirti Sutra representations in Dunhuang.

Paintings with titles that only mention the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers cannot be seen until the Song Dynasty. In his *Chengdu gusi mingbi ji* (Record of Ancient Temples and Famous Paintings in Chengdu), Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193) mentions a *Sanhua tiannu* 散花天女 (Scattering-Flowers Heavenly Maiden) fresco outside the gate of Jileyuan 極樂院 Temple in Chengdu. It is by an artist named Fan Qiong 范瓊 (active 827-840), whom we only know a little about.²⁰⁴ Afterwards, a *Nanji chengxiang tiannu sanhua tu* 南極呈祥天女散花圖 (God of Longevity Presenting Prosperity and the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers) painted by Fang Chunnian 方椿年 (active 1228-1232) is recorded as a gift for Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662-1722) presented by his sixteenth son on the emperor's sixtieth birthday.²⁰⁵ Since no further descriptions were provided, it is hard to know the iconography of both paintings.

In addition, two other Southern Song artists, Wang Hui 王輝 (ca. 1225-1274) and Hu Yanlong 胡彥龍 (active 1228-1232), have been recorded to paint two works, *Sanhua tu* 散花圖 (Scattering Flowers) and *Sanhua shennu xiang* 散花神女像 (Scattering-Flowers Goddess),

²⁰⁴ Yang Shen ed., *Quanshu yiwenzhi* (SKQS), *juan* 42, 4.

²⁰⁵ Wang Yuanqi, *Wanshou shengdian chuji* (SKQS), *juan* 54, 58.

respectively.²⁰⁶ The Ming painter Qiu Ying is said to have painted a *Tiannu sanhua tu* 天女散花圖 (Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers).²⁰⁷ The iconographies of these five paintings are uncertain, as well. However, that of a *Sanhua tu* 散花圖 (Scattering Flowers) by Ding Yunpeng (1547 - 1628) is recorded in the second edition of *Midian zhulin*.²⁰⁸ It is said that in the scroll, Vimalakirti ringed by a gathering is depicted sitting on a *ta* bed preaching while the Heavenly Maiden is scattering flowers in front. In other words, although the title only mentioned the action of the Heavenly Maiden, the painting represents the Great Layman, as well.

In the *Linhuitang quanji* 林蕙堂全集 compiled by Wu Qi 吳綺 (1619-1694), there is a poem titled *Mao Shike tiannu sanhua tu zan* 茅士可天女散花圖贊 (Eulogizing a Painting Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers by Mao Shike).²⁰⁹ This author found no further information about the artist Mao Shike. However, since Wu Qi is the county seat of Huzhou 湖州 in Zhejiang Province, Mao is probably a local artist of the Jiangnan

²⁰⁶ Bian, *Shigutang shuhua huikao* (SKQS), *juan* 32, 180, 182.

²⁰⁷ Wang Keyu, *Shanhuwang* (SKQS), *juan* 47, 45.

²⁰⁸ Guoli gugong bowuyuan ed. *Midian zhulin Shiqu baoji xubian* (Taipei: Guoli gugong bowuyuan, 1971), Vol. 8, 160.

²⁰⁹ Wu Qi, *Linhuitang Quanji* (SKQS), *juan* 11, 34.

region. The beginning and ending sentences of the poem read,

彼何人斯? Who is the person over there?

維摩居士 It is the Great Layman Vimalakirti.

...

是花非花 The flower here is not really a flower.

花落何際 Where is it falling?

From such questions and answers, it seems that Vimalakirti was also depicted in the painting although the title does not mention him.

In general, paintings with titles that only refer to the Heavenly Maiden or her scattering flowers appeared as early as the Song Dynasty. They may have been some earliest recorded instances of paintings with the Heavenly Maiden as an isolated theme. But it seems that many of these paintings also represent the Great Layman. Or we can say that as early as the Song Dynasty, the Heavenly Maiden can be regarded as the protagonist even when being represented with Vimalakirti.

In extant paintings, an example of independent depiction of the Heavenly Maiden is a hanging scroll by Yu Ji 余集 (1738-1823) titled *Sanhua tiannu* 散花天女 or Scattering-Flowers Heavenly Maiden in the Palace Museum, Beijing.²¹⁰ It depicts the Heavenly Maiden floating in the air with her long sleeves waving above her head with all kinds of flowers

²¹⁰ For the image, see Zhongguo gudai shuhua jiangdingzu ed. *Zhongguo gudai shuhua tumu* Vol. 17, *chuan* 2-122.

falling from her. Her elegant dancing pose, her fluttering sleeves and ribbons and the flowers around her create a fairy-like atmosphere.

The inscription written on the upper right corner of the painting reads, “I, Qiushi 秋室 painted this in the Daliang Guanshe 大梁館舍.” Qiushi is the alternate name of Yu Ji and he had been the director of the Daliang Academy or Daliang shuyuan 大梁書院 in Kaifeng around 1808 for eight years. In other words, this hanging scroll is painted by Yu Ji in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Qing figure painter Gai Qi 改琦 (1774-1829) has also painted a Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers in his album titled *Lienu tu* 烈女圖 or *Outstanding Ladies* in 1799.²¹¹ Although it is hard to tell the theme just from this image, from the poem corresponding to the painting we know it is the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers 天女散花. She is also depicted as flying in the air with sashes floating as can be seen in Yu Ji’s painting. Another example is a hanging scroll by Ren Xun 任薰 (1835-1893) with a very similar rendition.²¹²

²¹¹ For the image, see Chou Ju-hsi, *Journeys on Paper and Silk: The Roy and Marilyn Papp Collection of Chinese Paintings* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Art Museum, 1998), No. 44, Leaf M.

²¹² For the image, see Zhao Guide and Wu Shouming ed., *Haishang siren jingpin: Gugong bowuyuan cang Ren Xiong, Ren Xun, Ren Yi, Ren*

In general, although the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers has been painted as a vignette in Vimalakirti Sutra representations as early as the Tang Dynasty, it was seldom painted independently over the course of many centuries. As an isolated theme, it could have appeared in the Song Dynasty but it seems that it did not become popular until the end of the eighteenth century when the traditional mode of representing the sutra declined.

5. Reasons for the Independence of the Heavenly Maiden Theme

The mode of representing the Great Layman facing Manjusri Bodhisattva in visualizing *The Vimalakirti Sutra* became less and less popular after the Yuan Dynasty. In comparison, independent depictions of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers became more and more prevalent since then, especially from the end of the eighteenth century. Some art historical, social and religious factors may be responsible for such changes.

1). The Transformation of Later Chinese Narrative Painting

From the perspective of art history, the transformation of later Chinese narrative painting is an important reason for the change. On the

one hand, as late as in the Ming Dynasty, the narrative representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* has usually been arranged in a huge landscape setting as can be seen in Tang Yin, Qiu Ying and Ding Guanpeng's paintings discussed above. In other words, although it still can be seen in the Ming and the Qing Dynasties, narrative representation of the sutra now gave an equal visual emphasis to the landscape setting of the painting.

On the other hand, along with the increasing influence of literati painters, the exacting narrative mode created by professional artists diminished. In other words, literati painters aimed to visualize a story by a more abstract and subtle way to differentiate themselves from professional artists and craftsmen. At the same time, their painting techniques were not as polished as those of professional artists to visualize stories in a detailed traditional narrative mode.

This author argues that a kind of transformed narrative painting became popular in later Chinese art. Traditional Chinese narrative paintings visualize stories in detail by the sequence of time or display the main episodes and scenes of stories. After the Song Dynasty, however, Chinese paintings that relate to stories and events go further and further

from such tradition. These later paintings do not display the whole story in detail and in order or at least the main scene of the story as previous narrative paintings do. In comparison, they would visualize a story or an anecdote or a famous event by simple depictions of the main characters and some related props.

For example, *Wang Xizhi Appreciating Geese* (Xizhi guan'e tu 羲之觀鵝圖) depicts only the great calligrapher Wang Xizhi 王羲之 standing in a pavilion looking at geese.²¹³ However, the painting refers to the fact that Wang Xizhi loved geese very much through his life and he once traded his calligraphic works for geese with a Daoist.²¹⁴ Other examples include *Dongfang Shuo Stealing the Peach* (Dongfang Shuo toutao tu 東方朔偷桃圖) by Wu Wei 吳偉 (1459-1508) and *Su Wu Grazing Sheep* (Su Wu mu yang 蘇武牧羊) by Huang Shen 黃慎 (1687-1768).²¹⁵ In the former, Dongfang Shuo is depicted running away with a peach without

²¹³ For the image, see the website of Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collections/search-the-collections/60007185?rpp=20&pg=1&ft=Xizhi&img=0> (accessed Oct. 1, 2011).

²¹⁴ The story is recorded in *Jinshu, Wang Xizhi zhuan* (The Book of Jin, Biography of Wang Xizhi). See Fang Xuanling (578-648), *Jinshu* (Xianggang: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe, 1999).

²¹⁵ For the images, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, xia*, 38 and 148. The former is in the collection of Mount Holyoke College Art Museum and the latter, Shanghai Museum.

other representations. But it actually alludes to the story that Dongfang Shuo once stole peaches from the Peach Garden of the Queen Mother of the West (西王母) and later by his clever argument was released. In the latter, Su Wu is represented as holding a mission pole beside sheep. It alludes to the story that Su Wu was caught by the Huns during his diplomatic mission and then grazed sheep in captivity for nineteen years without defecting.

Another example is the representation of the Luoshen 洛神 or Goddess of the Luo River. The story comes from a poem titled Luoshen fu 洛神賦 or *Goddess of the Luo River* composed by Cao Zhi 曹植 (192-232). It narrates the romantic encounter of the goddess when Cao is on his way back to his manor. One of the most famous paintings in Chinese art history is a handscroll depicting this story attributed to Gu Kaizhi. In the handscroll, the story is represented in the order of time as recorded in the poem. However, in later Chinese history, it is no longer the whole story but the image of the goddess herself that becomes most popular. For example, Yu Ji, who painted an independent image of the Heavenly Maiden, also painted an isolated image of Goddess of the Luo River.²¹⁶

²¹⁶ The hanging scroll is in a private collection. For the image, see Chou Ju-hsi and Claudia Brown ed., *The Elegant Brush: Chinese Painting*

In general, a lot of traditional narrative painting themes have been rendered in simplified and transformed modes by later Chinese artists, which this author refers to as transformed narrative painting. Under the art trend that lost interest in narrative, independent depiction of the Heavenly Maiden theme is one of the many transformed narrative paintings in later Chinese art.

2). The Prevalence of *Shinu Hua*

The independence of the episode of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers also has something to do with the prevalence of *shinu hua* 仕女畫 or beauties' images in later Chinese art. *The Vimalakirti Sutra* does not describe the Heavenly Maiden's facial features and never mentions if she is pretty or not. The reason for this is that she tests a religious concept. Buddhists such as Shariputra, like common people, regard flowers as secular things and would not allow them to attach to their bodies. However, enlightened Buddhists who understand the essence understand that if your heart is pure enough, secular things such as flowers will not disturb your soul. Ironically, because these

Under the Qianlong Emperor, 1735-1795 (Phoenix: Phoenix Art Museum, 1985), 250.

flowers symbolize secular life, their carrier, the Heavenly Maiden, is taken as a secular beauty, as well.

Flowers are like natural attributes of ladies and beauties in many cultures and it is not exceptional in ancient China. For example, one of the most famous ancient Chinese paintings is a handscroll titled *Zanhua shin utu* 簪花仕女圖 or *Ladies with Head-pinned Flowers*.²¹⁷ In the painting, these court beauties not only wear flowers in their hair but two of them are also holding flowers in their hands. In general, along with the popularization of *shinu hua*, the Heavenly Maiden, who holds and scatters flowers, is then painted separately as a beauty or *shinu*.

3). The Change in the Role of the Heavenly Maiden

In *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, the Heavenly Maiden is one of the many maidens in the house of the Great Layman. Her appearance is sudden and temporary to support Vimalakirti's demonstration of the Mahayana Buddhist Law. Gradually, however, she came to be regarded as the only and necessary partner of Vimalakirti. Two paintings that only represent the two of them from the Song Dynasty have been discussed in the previous chapter. Although they might have been part of a larger

²¹⁷ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji, shang*, 52. The painting is in the collection of Liaoning Museum, Shenyang.

iconography, at least the idea of singling them out has something to do with this change in the role of the Heavenly Maiden.

In fact, the Heavenly Maiden even became a model of a cultivated lady who can understand her man very well. In consequence, the Heavenly Maiden accompanying Vimalakirti becomes a symbol for a well-established couple and is thus a good example to follow, and appreciated by the literati. For example, the famous Song Dynasty scholar Su Shi compared himself and his concubine Wang Zhaoyun 王朝雲 to Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden many times in his poems. One of the sentences in his poem *For Zhaoyun* reads, “[we are like] the Heavenly Maiden and Vimalakirti who are always studying Chan together (Tiannu Weimo zong jiechan 天女維摩總解禪).” In other words, the Heavenly Maiden gradually becomes a literate lady accompanying not only a Buddhist layman but also a Confucian scholar.

The Song monk Shi Huihong 釋惠洪 (early of the 12th c.) wrote a prose-poem, *Shangu laoren zan* 山谷老人贊 (Eulogizing Senior Shangu) for the famous literati and calligrapher Huang Tingjian.²¹⁸ One sentence in the poem reads, “Qing ru Weimojie er qian sanhua zhi tiannu 情如維摩

²¹⁸ Shangu is Huang Tingjian’s alternate name. Shi Huihong, *Shimen wenzichan* (SKQS), *juan* 19, 24-25.

詰而欠散花之天女。” (Huang’s nature is like that of Vimalakirti but he lacks the Heavenly Maiden who scatters flowers). In other words, even the Buddhist monk Shi Huihong regarded the Heavenly Maiden as a necessary partner to the Great Layman just as every renowned scholar deserves a literate lady.

In the album by Gai Qi mentioned above, the poem corresponding to the painting the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers reads,

維摩榻畔會龍華， Vimalakirti meets with the Buddhist figures
beside his day bed,
未見繽紛上戒裳。 [You] cannot see the flowers stick to the
cassocks.
並蒂同心皆世幻， Twin flowers on one stalk and two people with
just one mind are both illusions,
散花須散晏殊花。 So when scattering flowers, [one] should
scatter Yan Shu’s flowers.

The album is half of a special commission by the literary couple Wang Qisun 王芑孫 (1755-1817) and Cao Zhenxiu 曹貞秀 (1762-after 1822). Wang and Cao composed a series of poems, respectively, and invited Gai Qi, their painter friend, to illustrate them. The album with sixteen leaves now in the collection of Roy and Marilyn Papp, on loan to Phoenix Art Museum, is the one representing the wife’s poems written by herself.

Because of this background, we can see that Cao assimilates Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden to twin flowers on one stalk, which

also refers to her own marriage. Because of this transition in the role, the status and importance of the Heavenly Maiden are raised and accentuated, which led ultimately to the independence of the Heavenly Maiden theme.

4). Influence of Daoism and Folk Belief

In later imperial China, the synthesis of Buddhism, Daoism and folk belief became more and more evident. Under such social trends in thought, the image of the Heavenly Maiden gradually became that of a Daoist fairy. Thereupon, the theme of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers is depicted independently as a symbol for good fortune.

On the one hand, it is usually the same group of artists or craftsmen who make both Buddhist and Daoist images. In fact, it is not uncommon to see that they confuse unintentionally or create intentionally Buddhist and Daoist figures together. For example, some Daoist figures including *xiwangmu* 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West) and *dongwanggong* 東王公 (King Father of the East) can be seen in the ceiling of Cave 249 in Dunhuang.²¹⁹

²¹⁹ For detailed discussion, see Duan, Wenjie. "Daojiao ticaishi ruhe jinru fojiao shiku de: Mogaocu 249ku kuding bihua neirong tantao," *Dunhuang shiku yishu lunji* (Lanzhou: Gansu ren min chu ban she, 1988), 318-334.

On the other hand, Vimalakirti is a unique and specific Buddhist figure while the Heavenly Maiden is a common name for any number of Buddhist beings. Most importantly, the name, *Tiannu*, literally does not necessarily suggest a Buddhist connection. On the contrary, it sounds more related to Daoism because of the character, *tian* 天. Many Daoist figures' names have this character *tian*. For example, one of the highest gods of Daoism is called *Yuanshi tianzun* 元始天尊 or the Original Heavenly God. Because of this, *Tiannu*, which is just a general Buddhist name, is more likely to be regarded as a Daoist figure by ordinary people.

In fact, the Heavenly Maiden is painted more and more like a Daoist *Xiannu* 仙女 or fairy in later Vimalakirti Sutra representations. In the *Yanjiao tu* attributed to Ma Yunqing but representing Li Gonglin's style, which has been discussed in the previous chapter, the Heavenly Maiden is painted solemnly and steadily standing on the ground beside Vimalakirti. In the album leaf attributed to Liu Songnian, also discussed in the previous chapter, the Heavenly Maiden is painted with her sleeves and sashes floating in the air. Later on, in the hanging scroll by Li Lin discussed above, the Heavenly Maiden is painted standing in clouds with her sleeves fluttering in the mist. Her hair style and dress are very close

to some Daoist female figures such as the one in the *Chuixiao nuxian tu* 吹簫女仙圖 (A Daoist Fairy Playing the *Xiao*) by Zhang Lu 張路.²²⁰ Furthermore, in Yu Ji, Gai Qi and Ren Xun's renditions, the Heavenly Maiden is represented flying in the clouds with her arms waving in the air.

This kind of floating image is typically Daoist as those can be seen in the handscroll by Wu Zongyuan 武宗元 (died 1050), *Chaoyuan xianzhang tu* 朝元仙杖圖 (Procession of Daoist Immortals Paying Hommage to the Primordial) and a hanging scroll by Zhang Wo 張渥, *Yaochi xianqing tu* 瑤池仙慶圖 (Celebration in the Daoist Fairyland).²²¹

What is more, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers gradually becomes a symbol representing auspicious meanings and good luck. In *Zhongguo jixiang tuxiang jieshuo* 中國吉祥圖像解說, under the entry *Tiannu sanhua* (the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers), the explanation is

The intention of the Heavenly Maiden's scattering flowers ordered by Vimalakirti is to test Buddhist levels of Bodhisattvas and

²²⁰ For the image, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji*, xia, 48.

²²¹ For the images, see Liu et al. ed. *Zhongguo renwuhua quanji*, shang, 122-123 and 226. The former, in a private collection in the U.S, is similar to a handscroll titled *Bashiqi shenxian tujian* 八十七神仙圖卷 (Eighty-seven Daoist Gods and Goddesses) attributed to Wu Daozi housed in the Xu Beihong Museum in Beijing. The latter is in the Palace Museum, Taipei.

disciples. However, secular people are enchanted by the Heavenly Maiden's elegant posture and the brilliant scene when scattering flowers. So they take it as a subject of auspicious patterns and stake on it their hopes of heavenly flowers flying in the sky while the whole world is in great celebration.²²²

The term *Weimo yanjiao* 維摩演教 or Vimalakirti Presenting the Buddhist Law obviously has a Buddhist indication. In contrast, the term *Tiannu sanhua* 天女散花 or the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers does not necessarily sound like it relates to Buddhism. Generally, things from Heaven, usually with their names having the word *tian* 天 or Heaven, symbolize good fortune and happiness. In fact, there are a lot of auspicious subjects similar to the Heavenly Maiden's Scattering Flowers. Instances include *Xicong tianjiang* 喜從天降 (A Fortune Is Sent from Heaven) and *Tianguan cifu* 天官賜福 (The Heavenly Official Bestowed Fortune).

In general, in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Vimalakirti Sutra representations reveal some new trends. On the one hand, narrative representations of the sutra are arranged in a huge landscape setting, which is due to the more and more important role landscape painting plays in later Chinese art. On the other hand, established narrative

²²² Zhang, Debao and Xianjian Pang huitu; Wanyan, Shaoyuan and Yongsheng Guo zhuanwen. *Zhongguo jixiang tuxiang jieshuo*. Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 1997, 180.

representation of the sutra became less and less popular whereas independent depiction of the Heavenly Maiden became a popular theme from the end of the eighteenth century. Such a change is caused by factors including the transformation of later Chinese narrative painting, the prevalence of *shinu hua*, the change of the role of the Heavenly Maiden and the influence from Daoism and folk belief.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has discussed about forty Vimalakirti Sutra representations discussed by various traditional Chinese art critics and recorded in catalogues from the fourth to the nineteenth centuries. By comparing these recorded paintings to extant ones of the same period of time, this author is able to rebuild a lineage of the evolution of Chinese representation of this important Buddhist classic.

In 364, Master Gu Kaizhi created an image of Vimalakirti as a mural in Waguansi Temple in Nanjing, which seems to be the earliest visualization of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. During the Huichang Persecution in 845, it was moved to Ganlusi Temple in Zhenjiang and secretly stored there by some Buddhists until it was sent to the Tang palace in Shaanxi when Emperor Xuanzong ascended the throne. However, it was lost around the 10th century probably with the destruction of the Waguansi Temple in the battles of the Five Dynasties period.

However, thanks to Du Mu's copies of this original painting in the 9th century before it was transported to Ganlusi Temple, Gu's creation was widely known. Some records on copies of this mural in Anhui and

Guangdong Province indicate the wide spread of this first image of Vimalakirti created in Jiangsu Province. Also based on a copy of the original, this mural was restored in a rebuilt Waguansi Temple, which was renamed the Jietansi Temple in the 12th century.

A record by a Song scholar, Su Song, who probably saw one of the first-hand or a second-hand copy of Gu's original, described that the clothes and utensils in the painting were all those of Gu's time. In other words, the image of the Great Layman created by Gu Kaizhi is that of a Six Dynasties' figure. Furthermore, this image is highly possible to be that of a Six Dynasties' scholar good at pure conversation like the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. On the one hand, Vimalakirti, as a great layman, leads an exemplary life for Chinese scholars staying in the secular world while pursuing Buddhist teachings. On the other hand, this author argues that Vimalakirti's successful demonstration of the law of Buddha to many Buddhist figures in the sutra also sets up a model for Chinese scholars of the Six Dynasties period involved in pure conversation.

By examining early viewers' descriptions, the wall painting created by Gu was probably an image of Vimalakirti without other figures

represented. This fashion of the depiction of a single image of the Great Layman is followed by the narrative mode in the format of the scroll, initiated by Yuan Qian and probably his teacher Lu Tanwei in the early part of the fifth century.

It is recorded that Lu Tanwei painted an *Anan Weimo tu* or Ananda and Vimalakirti, probably a narrative depiction of the minor scenario Ananda Asking for Milk narrated in Chapter Three of the sutra. Since this is such a minor scene from the sutra, it is hard to believe that Lu Tanwei only painted this narrative illustration without visualizing other scenarios of the classic. Lu's student, Yuan Qian, is said to have painted a handscroll that illustrated "more than a hundred events" of *The Vimalakirti Sutra*. This author believes that it is highly possible that Yuan's full narrative representation of the sutra is based on a model by Lu.

Since Yuan's scrolls visualized the sutra in a very detailed way, both the painter and the intended viewers must have read the sutra very carefully. In fact, this author would assert that it might have been used as a visual guide for religious activity such as reciting the sutra. On the

other hand, such a detailed representation could have functioned as a *fenben* or sketch for later wall paintings and scrolls.

Although the specific dates of their lives are unknown, Yuan Qian is said to have learned from Lu Tanwei and Lu to have learned from Gu Kaizhi. Gu was probably older than Lu and Yuan in Chinese convention. Thus, a development in early representations of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* can be drawn. In general, a single figure of Vimalakirti was painted by Gu Kaizhi. By Lu Tanwei and Yuan Qian's lifetime, a narrative representation of the sutra appeared.

One of the earliest known extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations is a mural in Cave 169 of the Binglingsi Temple in the Yongjing County, Gansu Province painted in 420. It is roughly from the same period as Yuan and Lu's narrative illustrations. In the Binglingsi representation, some Chinese features can be noticed such as the symmetrical composition, the hierarchical scale and the use of inscriptions next to each figure. At the same time, some differences can be noticed when comparing the iconographies of the Binglingsi representation and most of the other extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations. This author argues

that the hair style, the outfit and facial features suggest a separate tradition probably from Central Asia or India.

In the following centuries, both the manner of depicting a single image of the Great Layman and the narrative mode were employed by major artists. But the latter seems to have been extremely popular. As early as the sixth century, the narrative mode of Vimalakirti Sutra representation was applied to wall paintings. The similarities in composition and iconography of most extant Vimalakirti Sutra representations of the Sui Dynasty to the Five Dynasties suggest that they have used similar *fenben* or sketches. This author believes that the handscroll representing the sutra in detail by Yuan Qian and its copies might have served as such a model.

To adapt to the new format of mural, the meeting of the Great Layman and Manjusri Bodhisattva was selected and settled as the main composition from the very beginning. In other words, more than a hundred scenes should have been depicted equally in a sequence in Yuan's handscroll. But when they are transferred to a wall painting, apparently they cannot be represented all at once in a limited space. So the meeting of the two protagonists, which first happens in Chapter Five

and lasts until the eleventh chapter of the sutra, was selected as the main composition.

Depictions of some other scenarios, then, are selected by the artists or the patrons according to their own preference to be added as vignettes. Finally, a panoramic representation usually painted on one big wall came into being in the end of the seventh century. Among those vignettes added to the main composition, the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers is one of the earliest and the primary one to be visualized as early as the seventh century.

At the same time, it can be noticed that starting from the Sui Dynasty, Vimalakirti images in the murals at Dunhuang were not painted with halo, although Manjusri was. This author argues that Vimalakirti without a halo accentuates his identity as a *jushi* or lay Buddhist instead of a Buddhist supernatural figure equal to Bodhisattvas. This adjustment is to cater to Chinese scholars' self-identity as a *jushi* like Vimalakirti.

The Tang Dynasty is undoubtedly the era of greatest popularity for representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, in both the capitals and the frontier such as Dunhuang and Sichuan. It seems that representations painted in these different areas have influenced each other to a great extent. Some

even suggest a direct copying relationship. In the meanwhile, as for the iconography, Vimalakirti's being depicted as having an appearance of illness created by Gu Kaizhi is a popular approach. Other times, he is represented as a healthy middle-aged man with a round face and fresh red lips, which caters to the aesthetic taste of the Tang Dynasty.

During this period of time, most Vimalakirti Sutra representations were painted by professional artists for religious purposes, usually as wall paintings in a Buddhist temple or cave. However, amateur artists such as Wang Wei started to visualize the sutra for self-cultivation. In the Song and the Yuan Dynasty, this trend of representing the sutra for a personal function as self-expression gradually became the mainstream. Monks as amateur painters of the Vimalakirti theme also appeared in the Song Dynasty. Although they were still painted in temples and collected by Buddhists, it seems that Vimalakirti Sutra representations were getting less attention for religious purposes. By contrast, it seems that the Vimalakirti theme was more and more favored by the literati class, sometimes as gifts between scholars, usually in the format of scroll.

Accordingly, a second format adaptation from mural to scroll occurred in the Song Dynasty when many vignettes are omitted while the

main composition is preserved. The necessity of the Heavenly Maiden theme became even more obvious when it usually appeared as the only minor scenario depicted in Vimalakirti Sutra Representation since this period of time.

In the Ming Dynasty, narrative representations of the sutra are often arranged in a huge landscape setting as seen in a hanging scroll attributed to Tang Yin and a handscroll by Qiu Ying. In fact, it is during this period of time that narrative representations are usually arranged in a huge landscape background. A hanging scroll by Ding Guanpeng followed this trend of placing the narrative representation of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* in a full landscape setting. But one special thing about Ding's painting is that Vimalakirti's facial features are not like those in any of the previous paintings. In fact, it is the face of the Qianlong emperor himself. This author argues that Chinese scholars' self-identity as a layman or *jushi* following a model established by Vimalakirti was revealed in this painting. In other words, previous literati saw themselves in the image of Vimalakirti and Emperor Qianlong went further to actually have himself painted as the Great Layman.

The tradition of a symmetrical composition of Vimalakirti and the Heavenly Maiden versus Manjusri and the Buddhist disciple Shariputra is superseded in a hanging scroll by Li Lin. Shariputra is omitted here with the other three figures forming a triangular composition. Importantly, the Heavenly Maiden is now depicted in the clouds above the other two figures. This elevated position and heavenly depiction obviously strengthened the special status of the image of the Heavenly Maiden.

The end of the eighteenth century witnessed a new fashion in representing *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, which is an independent depiction of the scenario of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers. This author points out that four aspects of art historical, social and religious factors may be responsible for the independence of the Heavenly Maiden theme. First is the transformation of later Chinese narrative painting. This author argues that many later narrative paintings do not display the whole story in detail and in order or at least the main scene of the story as previous narrative paintings do. In comparison, they would visualize a story or an anecdote by simple depictions of the main characters and some related props. In other words, a lot of traditional narrative painting themes have

been rendered in simplified and transformed modes by later Chinese artists.

Secondly, the change in the role of the Heavenly Maiden is important to the independence of the Heavenly Maiden theme. In *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, the Heavenly Maiden is one of the many maidens in the house of the Great Layman. Her appearance is sudden and temporary to support Vimalakirti's demonstration of the Mahayana Buddhist Law. Gradually, however, she came to be regarded as the only and necessary partner of Vimalakirti. In fact, the Heavenly Maiden even became a model of a cultivated lady who can understand her man very well. In consequence, the Heavenly Maiden accompanying Vimalakirti becomes a symbol for a well-established couple and is thus a good example to follow, and appreciated by the literati. Because of this transition in the role, the status and importance of the Heavenly Maiden are raised and accentuated, which led ultimately to the independence of the Heavenly Maiden theme.

In later imperial China, the synthesis of Buddhism, Daoism and folk belief became more and more evident. Under such social trends in thought, the image of the Heavenly Maiden gradually became that of a

Daoist fairy. Many Daoist figures' names have the character *tian*. This makes *tiannu* or the Heavenly Maiden sounds more related to Daoism. Thus the Heavenly Maiden is painted more and more like a Daoist *Xiannu* or fairy in later Vimalakirti Sutra representations. On the other hand, things from Heaven, usually with their names having the word *tian* or Heaven, symbolize good fortune and happiness. Thereupon, the flowers the Heavenly Maiden scatters are regarded as one of these auspicious things from the heaven. This resulted in the independence of the Heavenly Maiden theme as a symbol for good fortune.

The independence of the episode of the Heavenly Maiden Scattering Flowers also has something to do with the prevalence of *shinu hua* or beauties' images in later Chinese art. *The Vimalakirti Sutra* does not describe the Heavenly Maiden's facial features and never mentions if she is pretty or not. The reason for this is that she is a religious figure testing the Buddhist notion of illusion. However, since flowers are like natural attributes of ladies and beauties in ancient China, the Heavenly Maiden, who holds and scatters flowers, attracted the male gaze and came to be painted separately as a beauty.

In general, Vimalakirti's image established a male model of staying in the secular world while pursuing Buddhist law for Chinese scholars since the Six Dynasties period. However, his identity as a religious role model was weakened later on. Instead, the Heavenly Maiden, who helped him to demonstrate the law as his female representative, gradually accumulated the qualities of a fairy or beauty and finally become a separate theme in Chinese painting.

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