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***Tiangong Louge* in Eastern Pure Land Illustrations of the  
Medicine Buddha – A Secondary Publication****Yiming You, Yongchun Zhu***School of Architecture, Fuzhou University, Fuzhou, Fujian, China***Corresponding author:** Yongchun Zhu, School of Architecture, Fuzhou University, Fuzhou, Fujian, China. Email: zyc4246@163.com**Citation:** You Y, Zhu Y, 2022, *Tiangong Louge* in Eastern Pure Land Illustrations of the Medicine Buddha – A Secondary Publication. *Journal of Chinese Architecture and Urbanism*, 4(2): 192. <http://dx.doi.org/10.36922/jcau.v4i2.192>**ABSTRACT**

After the arrival of Buddhism in China, the foreign concept of heavenly buildings merged with the indigenous Tang-Song architecture into what became known as *tiangong louge* (heavenly palaces). Through comparison with Song building standards (*Yingzao Fashi*), this paper analyzes the architectural representations of *tiangong louge* in Eastern Pure Land illustrations of the Medicine Buddha. What becomes immediately apparent is that *Yingzao Fashi* describes only a few specific buildings (*dianshen, chalou, jiaolou, xiewu, xinglang*), whereas the Pure Land illustrations depict a greater diversity and variety of forms (for example, *sanmen*). A possible reason for this is that the idea of the Eastern Pure Land underwent significant changes before the *Yingzao Fashi* was compiled. Another reason is that the belief in the Eastern Pure Land was always rooted in reality and the actual conditions of the site. Additionally, Eastern Pure Land illustrations reveal four different types of clustered design: open foreground, one courtyard; open foreground, two courtyards; closed foreground, one courtyard; and closed foreground, two courtyards.

**Keywords:** Eastern Pure Land illustrations; *tiangong louge*; *Yingzao Fashi*

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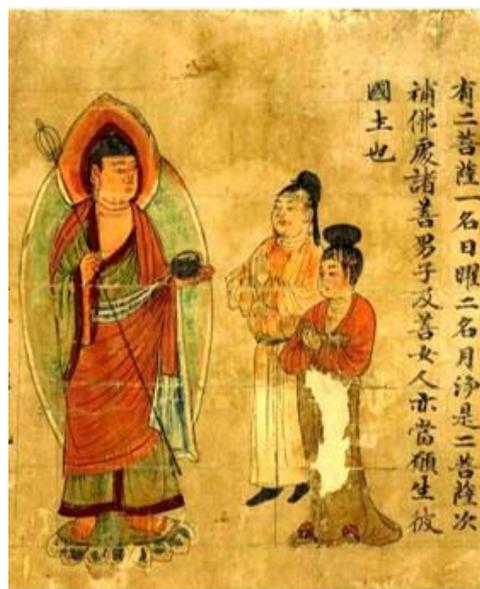
“*Tiangong louge*” is the translation of Blissful Abode in the Buddhist belief of Pure Land; it is a form of “*Tiangong*” (Heavenly Palaces) created according to the image of Chinese architecture after integration into the traditional concept of spirits and gods in China in the Buddhist expansion process in East Asia. Beginning in the Han (206 BCE – 220 CE) and Jin (265–420) dynasties, thriving in the Tang dynasty (618–907) and stagnating in the *Yingzao Fashi* of the Song dynasty (hereinafter referred to as *Yingzao Fashi* or *Fashi*, which is a technical treatise on architecture and craftsmanship), the formally named “*Tiangong louge*” is the highest level of curtains and recesses in the *Fashi*.

## 1. “LAPIS LAZULI” AND TIANGONG LOUGE IN EASTERN PURE LAND ILLUSTRATIONS

### 1.1 Medicine Buddha and *Sutta pitaka*

Medicine Buddha (Sanskrit: Bhaisajyaguru), whose full name is Bhaisajyaguru Vaiduryaprabha (Medicine Buddha of Lapis Lazuli Crystal Radiance), is the leader of the Eastern Pure Lapis Lazuli Land in Buddhism. The *Sutta pitaka*, on which the method of the Master of Healing is based, is the Sutra of the Master of Healing. During its flow into China, there had been five editions of Chinese translations of it, with four preserved but one lost. The first translation is the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Abhieka*, which eliminates faults of the past and confers freedom from birth to death (*Fo shuo guanding bachu guozui shengsi dedu jing*) by Po-Srimitra (?–342) in the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420). The second is the *Sutra on the Master of Healing of Lapis Lazuli Radiance* (*Yaoshi liuli guang jing*) (already lost)<sup>1</sup> by Hui Jian in the Liu Song period of the Southern and Northern dynasties (420–581) [Figure 1]. The third is the *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Primal Vows of the Master of Healing* (*Fo shuo Yaoshi rulai benyuan jing*) re-translated by Reverend Dharmagupta (?–619) from India in the Sui

dynasty (581–618). The fourth is the Sutra on the Merits of the Primal Vows of the Masters of Healing of Lapis Lazuli Radiance (*Yaoshi liuli guang rulai benyuan gongde jing*) by Xuanzang (602–664) in the Tang dynasty (618–907). And the fifth, which is a little later than the fourth, is the *Sutra on the Merits of the Primal Vows of the Seven Buddhas, the Masters of Healing of Lapis Lazuli Radiance* (*Yaoshi liuli guang qifo benyuan gongde jing*) by Yi Jing (635–713) in the Tang dynasty.



**Figure 1.** Medicine Buddha and Suryaprabha and Candraprabha. The *Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Abhi-eka* which eliminates faults of the past and confers freedom from birth to death by Po-Srimitra, Dunhuang manuscript, Dharma treasury P2013.

The contents of the *Sutra of the Master of Healing* can be divided into two parts: the first part depicts that the honored Shakyamuni preached under the Joyful Tree of Musical Breezes in the city of Vaishal and requested by Manjushri, narrated Master of Healing of the Eastern Lapis Lazuli Radiance’s twelve primal vows. The second part is about merits and good results gained by believing in this sutra. The so-called “primal vows” are the vows made by bodhisattvas to rescue beings before attaining Buddhahood through

<sup>1</sup> Jian Hui, bhiksu of Luye Temple, Moling (today’s Jiangning district, Nanjing), the dates of birth and death are unknown. It is said that Jian Hui Translation was typewritten from the translation of Po-Srimitra. There are four assertions.

practice, including “universal vows” of all bodhisattvas and “specific vows” of various bodhisattvas for their respective pure lands, such as Amitabha’s forty-eight vows, Maitreya’s ten good vows. Central to the twelve vows of Medicine Master Buddha is to eliminate all the suffering and afflictions of sentient beings in their present life, heal diseases, remove calamities, and extend life expectancy. The resultant Medicine Buddha faith is secular and utilitarian in nature.

Although all the translations of the *Sutra of the Master of Healing* are almost the same in terms of basic contents, difference and preference in contents are shown in the Healing Master Sutra illustration due to the trade-off with the *Sutta pitaka* made by the translators, and difference in their understanding of the *Sutta pitaka*. For example, Xuanzang’s translation only describes the Master of Healing, and in the illustration based on this are usually the so-called “Three Sages of the East,” with the Medicine Buddha standing in the middle and Sūryaprabha and Candraprabha at the left and right as retinues. And Dharmagupta’s

translation depicts the Master of Healing as seven bodies, and in the Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north wall of Cave 220 in Dunhuang, which was painted based on this, are seven Buddhas [Figure 2]. In Dunhuang, the Sutra of the Mastering of Healing is the *Sutta pitaka* that circulates widely. It is estimated that there are up to 295 copies of the Sutra of the Master of Healing in the remains of Buddhist manuscripts and 128 extant “Healing Master Illustrations.” Among the five translations, Po-Srimitra and Xuanzang’s translations had the highest influence early, but the “Healing Master Illustration” painted in Po-Srimitra’s translation is in the trial stage with no image of *tiangong louge*, such as Dunhuang Cave 394, which was painted in the Sui dynasty (581–618) according to the Sutra Spoken by the Buddha on the Abhi-eka which eliminates faults of the past and confers freedom from birth to death (*Fo shuo guanding bachu guozui shengsi dedu jing*). *Tiangong louge* in the “Healing Master Illustration” was only created after the High Tang era (618–907), which was mainly based on Xuanzang’s translation.

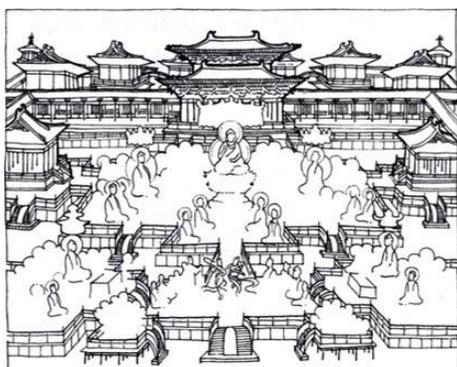


**Figure 2.** Seven Buddhas, the Masters of Healing on the north of Cave 220, Dunhuang during the early Tang dynasty, which was painted based the text of the translation by Yi Jing. Source: Dunhuang Academy, *Chinese Rock Caves: Dunhuang Mogao Caves III*.

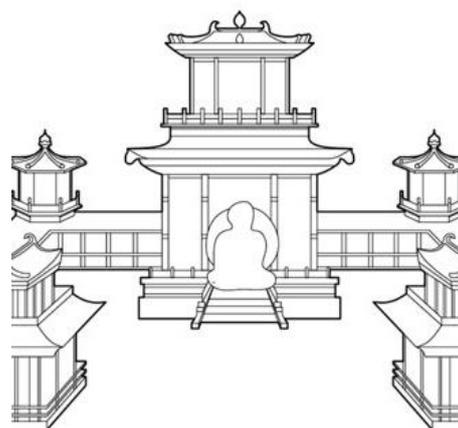
The Sutra of the Master of Healing depicts the buildings in the Eastern Lapis Lazuli Pure Land very briefly and it does not mention buildings in its crucial twelve primal vows of Medicine Buddha, only putting a passage behind it: “The Buddha’s land...The ground is made of vaidurya, with golden cords lining the roads. The city, watchtower, palace, pavilion, verandas, windows, and latticework are all made of the seven treasures. The merit, virtue, and adornments of this land are identical to those of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss”<sup>[2]</sup>. This scripture contains two key points:

First, the main architectural types of “city, watchtower, palace, and pavilion” are largely given<sup>[3]</sup><sup>2</sup>.

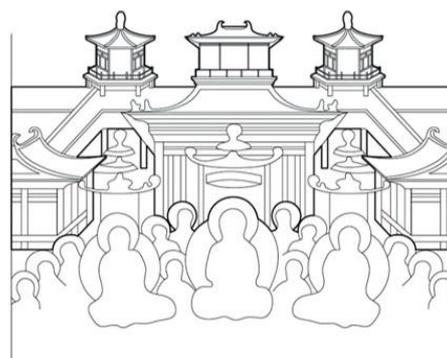
Second, it is noted that the buildings in the world of the Eastern Pure Land are “identical” to those in the Western Pure Land. Therefore, *tiangong louge* can be painted with reference to the Western Pure Land. It appeared in the Healing Master Sutra illustration on the east wall of Mogao Cave 148 in Dunhuang for the first time [Figure 3], which directly imitates the composition of the Western Pure Land illustration and shows a grand scene when appearing, unparalleled in any of the subsequent Healing Master Sutra illustrations for a very long period of time, such as Mogao Cave 231 [Figure 4] and 112 [Figure 5] in the mid-Tang dynasty.



**Figure 3.** Healing Master Sutra illustration in the east of Cave 148 in Dunhuang during the High Tang era. Source: *Research on buildings in Dunhuang* by Xiao Mo.



**Figure 4.** Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north wall of Cave 231 in Mogao Caves (the mid-Tang dynasty). Source: Drawing by the author.



**Figure 5.** Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 12 in Mogao Caves (mid-Tang dynasty). Source: Drawing by the author.

## 1.2 From “Painting of Sermons” to “Pure Land Illustration”

The Pure Land Illustration of the Eastern Master of Healing broadly went through three stages: “Painting of Sermons” as a predecessor, pure land illustration that only reflects Buddha’s sermons, and eastern lapis lazuli pure land illustration with vast building clusters as its background. Only in the third stage exists *tiangong louge*.

The so-called “Painting of Sermons” generally refers to the painting of figures with Buddhas (or Bodhisattvas) preaching the dharma with their thumb and index fingers touching to form a circle as the main figure and retinues arranged in the left and right, mostly without inscriptions or distinct image

<sup>2</sup> “Verandas, windows, and latticework” in the scripture are not individual types of buildings. “Verandas” are corridors with decorations and a part of buildings, like “windows,” so they are collectively referred to. “Latticework” refers to a network-shaped structure in buildings, which was very popular in the Han dynasty, known as “Fusi” (a screen outside the gate).

representation. “Many figure names are untraceable. As it is impossible to know from the picture the name of Buddha figures painted, whether there is the specific subject of sermons, and whether the scene painted is a specific scene or contents, it is just roughly referred to as the painting of sermons”<sup>[4]</sup>. “Painting of Sermons” should definitely not be classified as pure land illustrations due to uncertainties in most of its contents, but the image of its figure “preaching the dharma” is at the heart of the composition of the picture of subsequent pure land illustration.

A group of pictures that depict contents stated in Buddha sutras are referred to as Sutra illustration pictures, or Sutra illustration. A picture painted based on the Flower Adornment (*Avatamsaka*) Sutra is referred to as an illustration of the Flower Adornment (*Avatamsaka*) Sutra. The picture of Maitreya in the Tuṣita Heaven (Heaven of Joy) painted according to the *Tuṣita Sutra of the Contemplation of Maitreya Bodhisattva's Ascent to Tushita Heaven Spoken by the Buddha* is referred to as illustrations of Maitreya's ascent<sup>3</sup>. The picture of the Western Pure Land painted based on *Three Pure Land Sutras* (the Longer Sukhavativyuha Sutra [Infinite Life Sutra], Amitayurdhyana Sutra [Contemplation Sutra] and the Shorter Sukhavativyuha Sutra [Amitabha Sutra]) is referred to as Western Pure Land illustration. The Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustration in question is based on the *Sutra of the Master of Healing*,

and the illustration probably appeared in the Sui dynasty (581–618). There are four extant Healing Master Pure Land illustrations (Cave 394, 417, 433 and 436) in Dunhuang. Pure Land illustration in its infancy mainly reflects Medicine Buddha's sermon and Dharmapāla (dharma protectors). Take Dunhuang Cave 394 as an example [Figure 6], in the middle are Medicine Buddha and retinues Suryaprabha and Candraprabha, and on both sides are 12 generals as guardians holding a burning lamp in their hands, who are “Twelve Yaksha Generals” described in the *Sutra of the Master of Healing*. In addition, there are just very few objects of Eastern Healing Master Pure Land like treasure tree and no buildings. Cave 220 of the early Tang dynasty is an important work in the transitional period, and the picture on it can be divided into upper, middle, and lower segments. The upper segment is about taking flight, the cradle of “Void and adornment” discussed below, heralding appearance of *tiangong louge*. The middle segment has Masters of Healing (seven Buddhas and eight bodhisattvas) on the jeweled platform. The base with carved balustrades is one of the first buildings in the Healing Master illustration, which is flanked by 12 Yakshas and treasure trees. And the lower segment contains burning lamps, jewel ponds, and musicians and performers, with two dancers at both the east and the west with flowing scarves and ribbons. The dance they perform is called Hu whirling dance. It must have been painted based on real models.



**Figure 6.** Healing Master Sutra illustration on the east wall of Cave 394 in Dunhuang during the Sui dynasty. Source: *Painting art of Dunhuang Sutra illustrations of the Sui dynasty* by Zhao Shengliang.

<sup>3</sup> *Maitreya Sutra* is divided into two parts: the *Sutra of Maitreya's Ascent*, which depicts that Maitreya Buddha preach the dharma in “Tushita Heaven,” and the *Sutra of Maitreya's Descent*, which depicts Maitreya attained Buddhahood. Therefore, what is associated with “tiangong louge” is mainly Maitreya's Ascent Sutra illustrations.

### 1.3 “Palace of the Heavenly Joy” in the Maitreya Pure Land illustration

There is a close relationship among the illustration of Maitreya’s Birth, the Western Pure Land illustration, and the Healing Master of Sutra illustration. They are often arranged opposite one another in Dunhuang Cave. For details, see Appendix 2 in the *Research on Suo Yibian Cave of Dunhuang Mogao Caves* by Li Jinjuan: “Correspondence Table of the North and South Walls of the Main Chamber of Mogao Caves (after the Sui dynasty)”<sup>[5]</sup>. It can be seen that the Palace of the Heavenly Joy in the illustration of Maitreya’s Birth, the “Void and Adornment” in the Western Pure Land illustration and the Healing Master Sutra illustration are paralleled to *tiangong louge* in Buddha niches in *Yingzao Fashi*.

In Buddhism, “heaven” is divided into 28 levels. These 28 heavens exist within three different realms: the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm. The fourth heaven in the desire realm is Maitreya’s “Heavenly Joy.” In the three realms of Buddhism, the formless realm cannot be depicted graphically and the desire and form realms are basically nominal except “Heavenly Joy.” “Heavenly Joy” had been gradually understood in a Chinese way, for example, in the *Romance of the Western Chamber (Xixiang Ji)* by Wang Shifu in the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368), there is a dialogue: “This is Tushita Palace. Don’t assume it to be the heaven of Separation’s Regret.” The heaven of Separation’s Regret is the highest of the 33 heavens in Daoism, the altar of the Supreme Venerable Sovereign (Taishang Laojun). In Wu Cheng’en’s novel the *Journey to the West (Xi You Ji)* of the mid-Ming dynasty, the Supreme Venerable Sovereign was simply placed in the Tushita Palace.

The depiction of “Tushita Palace” in the illustration is mainly based on three passages in the *Sutra of the Contemplation of Maitreya Bodhisattva’s Ascent to Tushita Heaven Spoken by the Buddha*:

(1) Maitreya was reborn in the Palace of the Heavenly Joy, where “there are 50

billion Sons of Heaven, who build palaces with divine rapture to donate Maitreya Bodhisattva who is in the Stage of One Life to Replacement.”

- (2) When Maitreya was born by transformation, “he sat on the lion seat in the Mani Hall in the Seven-Jewel-Tower in the Tusita Heaven and was suddenly born by transformation, sitting cross-legged atop lotus flowers.”
- (3) There is a deity named Rddhibhadra. He built the “Good Dharma Lecture Hall” (Sudharman) for Maitreya to preach the dharma.

By rounding up these scripts, it can be seen that there is a majestic palace in the Tushita Heaven, which was built by 50 billion Sons of Heaven using bhagyata (luck, power of wisdom) to donate Maitreya Buddha and has Mani Hall in it. The lion seat in the Seven-Jewel Tower in the Mani Hall is where Maitreya was born by transformation. He sat cross-legged atop lotus flowers the moment he was born. There is also the “Good Dharma Lecture Hall” (Sudharman) in the palace for Maitreya to preach the dharma. As for individual buildings like the palace, the Mani Hall and the Good Dharma Lecture Hall in the scripture, as Xiao Mo pointed out:

For a majority of the pictures that depict the image of buildings, their original aim is not to demonstrate buildings in man’s world, but to demonstrate the “Kingdom of Heaven”, i.e., the Western Pure Land and the Tushita Palace described in the Amitayurbhavana Sutra, the Amitabha Sutra, the Previous Life of the Maitreya Bodhisattva Sutra...But the root of the Kingdom of Heaven is not in heaven, but on Earth. The so-called Kingdom of Heaven is created by people according to the mode of the real world. As a particular mural image, they are even likely very accurate reflection of real-world things<sup>[7]</sup>.

Bai Huawen also argued that they were “mostly dramatized and idealized based on large Buddhist temple buildings between the Southern and Northern dynasties [420–581] and the Sui and Tang dynasties [581–907]”<sup>[8]</sup>. This means that buildings in illustrations like

the Tushita Palace are based on the blueprints of large Buddhist temples in China back then (when illustrations were painted), and not the realistic portrayal of certain Buddhist temples.

This passage can be supplemented by three points. First, the Sui and Tang dynasties in the lower limit of the timeline should at least be extended down to the Song dynasty (960–1279) and the Xixia dynasty (1038–1227), for example, the buildings in the illustration in the Dunhuang Mogao Caves and the Yulin Caves of the Xixia dynasty, as well as the Dazu Rock Carvings. Second, the buildings in illustrations between the Southern and Northern dynasties and the Song dynasty are not stationary, which keenly reflects the subtle changes in the buildings of that time. Third, the *Sutra of the Contemplation of Maitreya Bodhisattva's Ascent to Tushita Heaven Spoken by the Buddha* depicts the magnificence of the “wall” of the Tushita Heaven on several occasions, and it was a popular activity to donate houses as temples in the Southern and Northern dynasties, the Tushita Palace in the illustration appears as a courtyard-style building.

#### 1.4 The So-called “Void and Adornment” and “Tiangong Louge”

The picture of Pure Land illustration is usually divided into the upper, middle, and lower layers. For those on the upper layer, they are named “Void and Adornment” by today’s researchers, and demonstrated mainly based on the scripture of Three Pure Land Sutras, such as Thirty-Second Vow (Majestic Adornments Surpassing Those of All Heavenly Beings) in the *Sukhavativyuha Sutra*:

When I attain Buddhahood, everything in my land, from the ground to the void, such as palaces, pavilions, ponds, streams, flowers, and trees, are made by integrating countless precious substances, and a hundred thousand kinds of fragrance marvelously adorned, surpassing anything in the realms of devas.

It can be seen from the scripture that:

- (1) There are three tiers of underground, ground, and “void” in the Western Pure Land, and the “void” is the highest tier.
- (2) The “void” coincides with the “Heaven” in traditional Chinese culture. Palaces and pavilions are wondrously decorated, surpassing anything in the realms of devas.

It is also necessary to understand the Buddhist term “Magnificence.” According to verification by Bai Huawen:

When Buddhist scriptures were translated in the Southern and Northern dynasties, the word “Magnificence” was used to paraphrase Sanskrit *vyūha*, *alamkṛta* or *bhūṣita*. As a noun, it meant the demonstrated decorations with Buddhist characteristics were splendid, as the *Amitabha Sutra* describes: “The realization of the land of Ultimate Bliss is thus meritoriously magnificent,” or it referred to the brilliance, vastness, and splendidness exhibited by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and so on, as a whole from inside to outside, and even to the environment <sup>[8]</sup>.

In the “void” of the Pure Land illustration, palaces and pavilions take up a large part of it, which some scholars called “Building adornments” <sup>[5]</sup>. With the existence of “Void adornment, it is easy to associate the Pure Land with the Heaven” in Chinese notion. Through combination with the concepts of supernatural beings in traditional Chinese culture, “Rebirth” in Buddhism is construed as “Attain immortality” and palaces and pavilions in the Pure Land illustration is translated as “Tiangong louge.”

## 2. INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS OF “TIANGONG LOUGE” IN THE EASTERN PURE LAND ILLUSTRATION

Although the *Sutra of the Mater of Healing* downplays buildings, its aims of eradicating sufferings of beings in the present, healing diseases, removing disasters, and extending lifespans, have a profound influence on

*tiangong louge* in illustrations. In the “theory” of the *Commentary on the Sutra of the Master of Healing*, Master Taixu argued:

The method of Master of Healing and Amitabha Buddha is to entrust the task of rescuing sentient beings to Eastern Healing Master, and entrust the task of traversing death to Western Amitabha. East ranks number 1 of the four cardinal directions and represents spring in the four quarters, which denotes the growth of everything, and the task of nurturing life and extending life is assigned to it. West ranks number 3 in the four cardinal directions and represents autumn in the four quarters, in which everything looks declining, so the task of saving from death and traversing death is assigned to it <sup>[10]</sup>.

The essence of rescuing the living beings by Eastern Healing Master is to keep its illustration closer to the present life, including the selection of individual buildings in the *tiangong louge* in it.

In addition, it is worth noting that, in the timeline, Eastern Pure Land illustration is a process of gradual evolution starting from the Sui dynasty (581–618), while *tiangong louge* in *Fashi* is the “well-established” product in the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Murals and rock carvings as the carriers of Pure Land illustration are more abundant than joinery work (Xiaomuzuo) in the *Fashi* in spatial expression modes. To more comprehensively reveal its correlation with *Fashi* and its own peculiarities, in this paper, we analyze individual elements of “*tiangong louge*” in the Eastern Pure Land illustration by following two clues, with *Fashi* as a reference system.

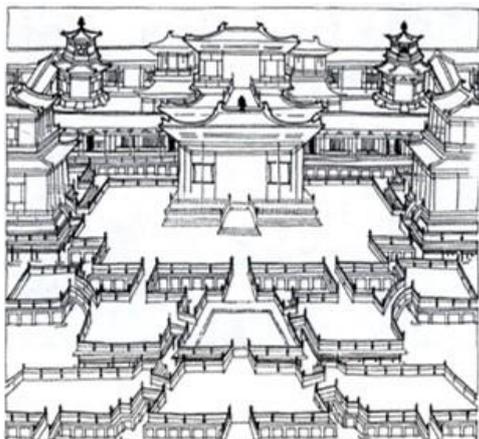
## 2.1 Clue 1: Types of existing individual buildings in the *tiangong louge* in *Fashi*

Six kinds of individual elements that constitute “*tiangong louge*” are given in the *Fashi*: hall bodies, teahouses, corner towers,

tortoise-head porches, and corridors. Except the tortoise-head porches, all other elements are in the Eastern Pure Land illustration, but with slight differences in usage. Furthermore, there are rainbow bridges that are not mentioned but exist in drawings.

- (1) Hall body (or hall): The hall body is the highest level of individual building type in *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi*. *Fashi* stipulates that the hall body should be a 3-story building <sup>4</sup>. As it is a multi-story building, *Fashi* calls it “hall body” to distinguish it from a single-story “hall.” Moreover, *Fashi* also provides that the hall body should be on the central axis with a nine-ridge roof of double eaves, flanked by wing rooms and sometimes additionally equipped with tortoise-head porches. Most of the hall bodies in the Western Pure Land illustration meet these conditions, but those in the Eastern Pure Land illustration rarely meet the conditions, except those buildings as the main part of the central axis. Generally, they do not have roofs of double eaves and do not have tortoise-head porches, and even have only one story [Figure 3]. Wing rooms are rare in the front tier [Figures 3 and 4], but occasional in the rear tier, such as Cave 85 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves [Figure 7]. Seemingly, the “hall body” in the Healing Master Pure Land illustration is at a lower level, actually it is because buildings in the Healing Master Pure Land illustration are secularized. It is important to note that in the picture of illustrations, including Healing Master Pure Land illustration, the column grids on the upper and lower floors of the tower are not aligned with each other. They are constructed in accordance with the logic of “storied house,” with the column grid of the upper floor standing on the balcony, an equivalent of the platform of the upper floor.

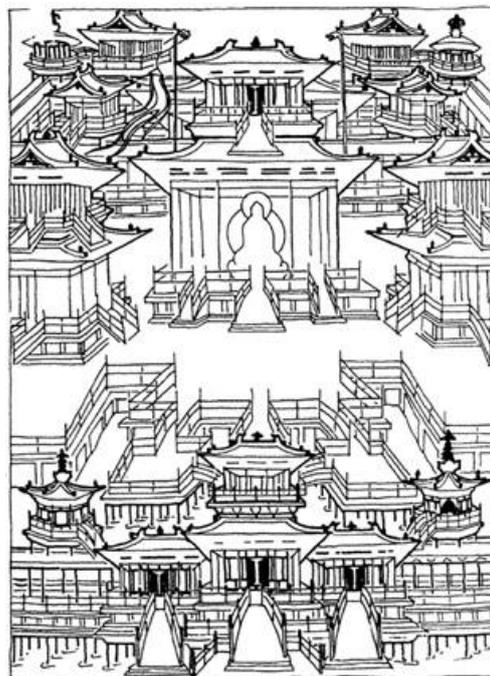
<sup>4</sup> The balcony in *Fashi* amounts to a one-story building, actually it is a two-story building.



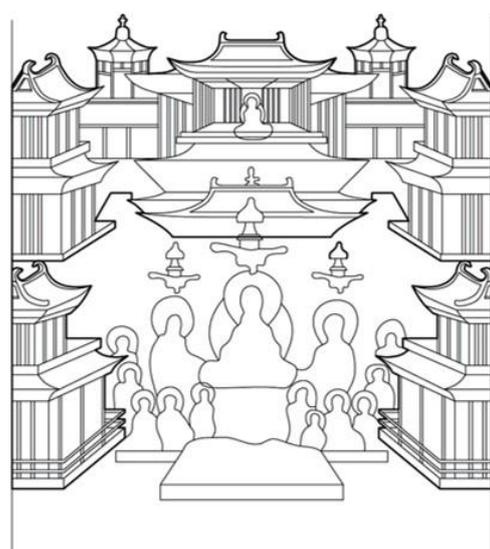
**Figure 7.** Cave 85 of Mogao Caves, Dunhuang (the late Tang dynasty). Source: *Research on buildings in Dunhuang* by Xiao Mo.

- (2) Teahouse: In *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi*, teahouses are the second highest-level buildings after the “hall bodies,” which can serve as the main part of the building cluster, for example, the “teahouse” in the rotating library in the *Fashi*. Its nine-ridge roof with a single eave should be 3-storied, and it is permissible to be accompanied by wing rooms. The designation “teahouse” ought to be earned by changing the name of “tearoom.” “Tearoom” is used to handle external liaisons and normally a single-storey building in Chinese Buddhism. “Teahouses” totally loss their function of reception in *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi* and are placed opposite to one another on the flanks of the hall body. Their forms basically remained unchanged from the High Tang era [Figure 3], the mid-Tang dynasty [Figure 4], the late Tang dynasty [Figure 7], the Five dynasties [Figure 8], the Song dynasty [Figure 9] and the Xixia dynasty [Figure 10].
- (3) Corner tower: In *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi*, “corner tower” consists of a base tower (name of the ground floor), balconies, floor structures, and a nine-ridge roof with a single eave. Unlike those in the *Fashi*, corner towers in the Eastern Pure Land illustration are almost all pavilion-shaped, with a round [Figures 4 and 8], octagonal, or

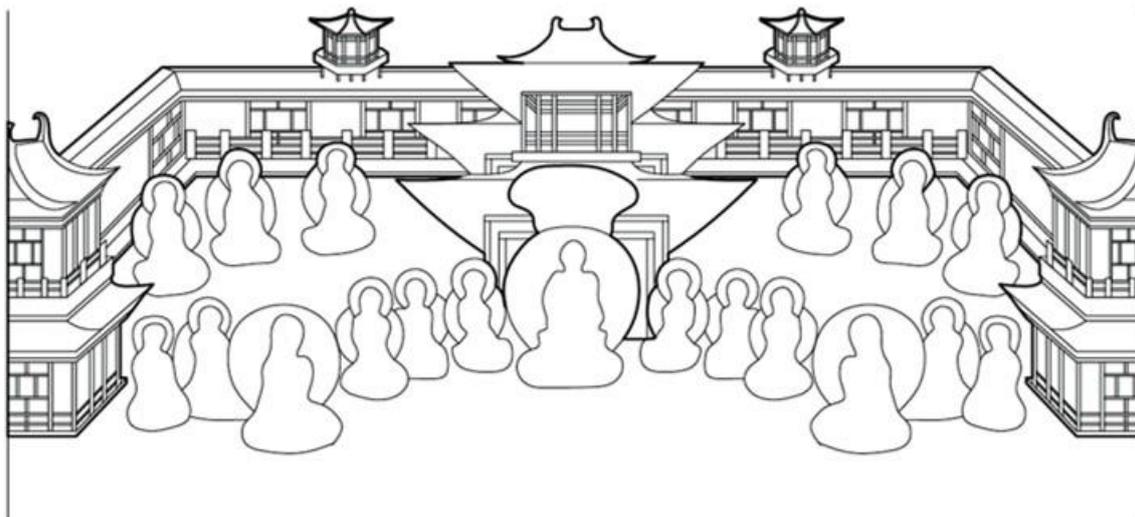
pyramidal hexagonal pointed roof [Figures 4,5,7]. This phenomenon is not occasional. The significance of pavilions in the Eastern Pure Land illustration is elaborated in the following paragraphs.



**Figure 8.** Cave 146 of Mogao Caves, Dunhuang (the Five Dynasties). Source: *Research on buildings in Dunhuang* by Xiao Mo.



**Figure 9.** Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north wall of Cave 55 in Mogao Caves (the Song dynasty). Source: Drawing by the author.



**Figure 10.** Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 400 in Mogao Caves (the XiXia dynasty). Source: Drawing by the author.

- (4) Corridor: In *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi*, corridors serve as a link between hall bodies, teahouses, and corner towers. As we know, buildings in the Qin (221–206 BCE) and Han (206 BCE – 220 CE) dynasties were not free of high platforms, and palace halls were mostly two-stories with bottom-overhead design<sup>5</sup>, so that buildings were jointed through a bottom-overhead colonnade<sup>[11]</sup>. The Tang dynasty was a transitional period when corridor gradually replaced colonnades. Generally speaking, in the Western Pure Land illustration from the early Tang dynasty to the High Tang era, it is possible to see loft railing architecture and colonnades used in connection, such as the Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration in Cave 217 of the early Tang dynasty and Cave 172 of the High Tang era in Dunhuang Mogao Caves. *Tiangong louge* in the Eastern Pure Land mostly dates back to as late as the mid-Tang dynasty and onwards, and it is possible to see that corridors had basically replaced colonnades, for example, Cave 85 of the late Tang dynasty in Dunhuang Mogao Caves. Despite maintaining the relic of
- colonnades, the height of the bottom-overhead portion is greatly reduced [Figure 7]. There are also illustrations where colonnades were enclosed, such as Healing Master Sutra illustration in Cave 360 in the Mogao Caves. This is roughly identical to the corridors in the drawings of the *Fashi*.
- (5) Wing rooms: A wing room, also known as a wing hall, is a single-story, half-sized and small building originally attached to the hall. But in *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi*, it is attached to the main hall body, in addition to being attached to teahouses and corner towers, and having multiple stories. In the Eastern Pure land illustration, there are only wing rooms at the Shanmen (hill gate) [Figure 8] or the rear side [Figure 7]. Shanmen (hill gate) used to be known as “Sanmen” in the past.
- (6) Rainbow bridge: An arch bridge used for connection, earned its name for looking like a rainbow. In the Healing Master Sutra illustration, rainbow bridges are used in connection between landscape buildings. For example, in the Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north wall of Cave 361 in Dunhuang Mogao

<sup>5</sup> Such as E'pang palace, “can accommodate ten thousand people on the upper floor and can build a five-zhang (a unit of height, 2.3 m) flag on the lower floor.” See the Annals of Qin Shihuang of the Records of the Grand Historian by Sima Qian.

Caves, rainbow bridges are used in connection among pavilions, terraces, towers, and pagodas on the front and rear corridors. The system of *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi* has not dealt with rainbow bridges, only in the drawings of Buddhist shrines in *tiangong louge*, hall bodies, teahouses, and corner towers are connected through the rainbow bridges [Figure 11].

## 2.2 Clue 2: Type of Individual Buildings Nonexistent in *Tiangong Louge* in the *Fashi*

These types of buildings mainly include pavilions, pagodas, Sanmen (three gates), bell and scripture towers, and balconies. In addition, there are round bridge-type stairways in constructions. Numerous pavilions, pavilion-shaped corner towers, bell towers, scripture towers, and pagodas are found in the Eastern Healing Master Sutra illustration [Figure 12].

(1) Pavilion: When “pavilion” is explained in Volume 1 of the *Fashi*, a passage of the *Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Mores* was invoked, which reads: “According to the Discourses of the States of the Spring and Autumn period, there is a ‘border post’ (寓望, *yuwang*), now known as ‘pavilion’”<sup>[13]</sup>. The so-called “border post” was a building set up on the border for lookout and accommodation in the Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE). *The Comprehensive Meaning of Customs and Mores* was compiled by Ying Shao in the Eastern Han dynasty (c.153–196), which means that “pavilion” had no sightseeing and recreation functions at that time. This situation did not change fundamentally until the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) dynasties.

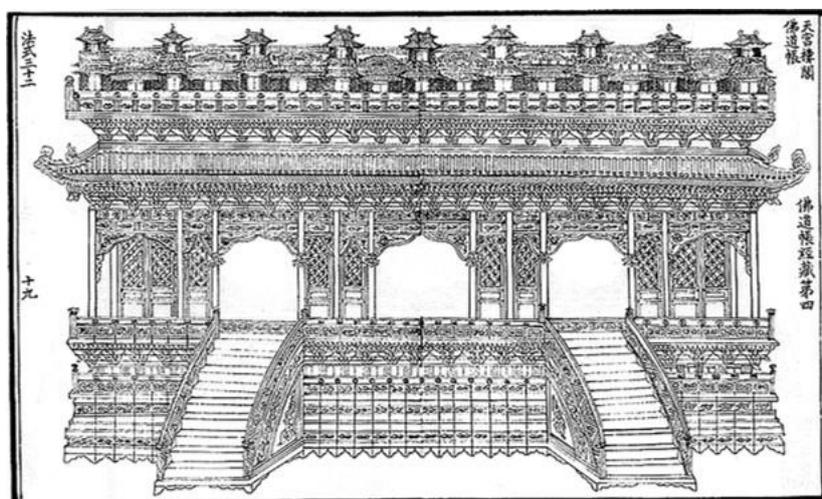
Pavilions emerged in the Eastern Healing Master Sutra illustration at a large scale, which firstly is a reflection of secularity of the Healing Master’s faith in the use of pavilions for sightseeing and recreation in the physical world, such as the Healing Master Sutra illustration on

the north wall of Cave 361 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves, where pavilions, terraces, towers, and pagodas are connected in a serial way through a rainbow bridge to form a tour route for sightseeing and enjoyment [Figure 12], which ought to originate in real life. In addition, it is necessary to consider the relationship between “pavilions” and ancient Chinese medicine. The Huazu Temple in Bozhou, Anhui Province, was set up to commemorate the great physician Hua Tuo (c.145–208). Built in the first year of the Tianyou period (904) of the Tang dynasty, the temple features a “Self-Amusing Pavilion,” a place where Hua Tuo could rest. Of course, this is less-than-believable, but it revealed the thought of the builder that there should be a pavilion in the temple of the medical sage Hua Tuo. There are two reasons that pavilions are associated with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). One is that medical plants are easy to grow in a landscaped garden, another is that washing medical herbs and making medicine require water. Therefore, from the Wei (220–265) and Jin (265–420) dynasties to the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, a “pavilion” was usually built on top of the well, from which water was fetched.

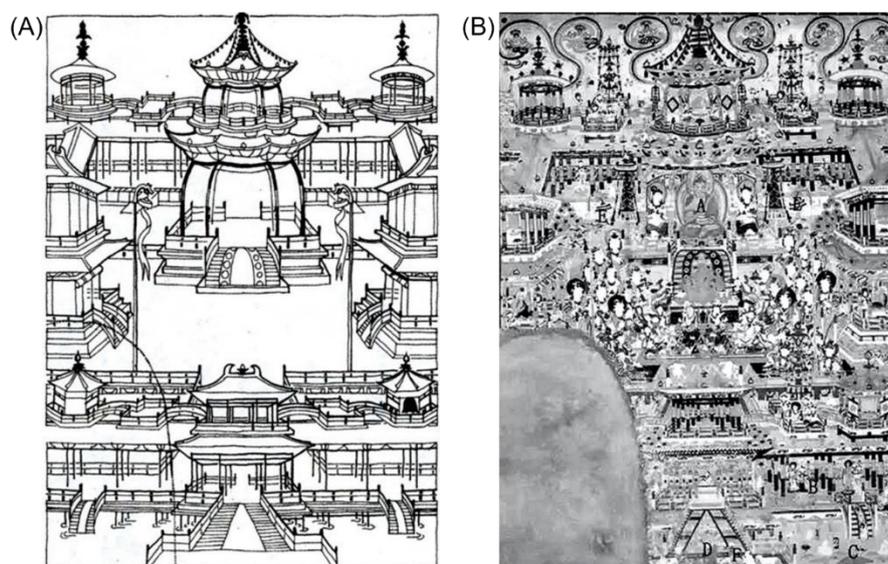
(2) Pagoda: The Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustration has much more pagodas than other Sutra illustrations, and even occasionally replaces the main hall with a pagoda [Figure 12]. When “void and adornment” was demonstrated, the pagoda floating in the cloud was also drawn on the upper part of the Sutra illustration. After pagodas entered China, building pagodas to pray for good luck and avert disasters became a folk custom. It is said that the Healing Master’s faith has secular utility in eliminating sufferings of sentient beings, healing diseases, removing calamities, and extending life. Pagoda buildings in the Healing Master Pure Land illustration are exactly a reflection of such activity to

pray for good luck and avoid disasters in real society. Although the Healing Master's pagodas of this period no longer exist in China today, there are accounts of praying for good luck and avoiding disasters in reliance of pagodas in Dunhuang manuscripts. The East Pagoda of Japan's Yakushiji (Healing

Master) Temple was built in 718 CE, a year of the Nara period with Japan fully emulated China. It was constructed because Emperor Tenmu vowed to build a pagoda for the recovery of his sick wife, evidence that there must be similar Healing Master's pagodas early in China.



**Figure 11.** Plate of *yingzao fashi* “Buddhist shrine of *tiangong louge*” Source: *Yingzao Fashi* by Li Jie.



**Figure 12.** Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 361 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves. Source: *Research on building in Dunhuang* by Xiao Mo. (A) Line drawing and detailed reproduced picture<sup>6</sup>. (B) Present state of the original picture.

<sup>6</sup> When drawing this picture, Xiao Mo: (1) restored the damaged parts at the bottom left corner according to symmetry; (2) changed the upper and lower floors of Sanmen to the same point of view (The upper layer of the original picture clearly depict the decentralized structure of columns due to variable points of view); (3) predicted hooked railings hidden on the back of the pagoda; (4) deleted lamp wheels on the front and rear four independent balconies. It is important to note that burning lamp to pray for good luck and remove calamities is the most important feature of Healing Master Sutra illustrations.

- (3) Sanmen: It is the gate at the main entrance of a temple, nowadays called “Shanmen” (hill gate), in the Tang dynasty, it was called “Sanmen”(three gates), also called “Zhongmen”(middle gate). For the origin of the name Sanmen, Xiao Mo (萧默) made an assumption that “One possible explanation is that, generally, the temples of that time really have three gates” based on mutual verification between Dunhuang murals and literatures. But the Samen of the Buddhist temples only have one gate. Xiao Mo also proposed that, according to *Buddhabhumi Sutra*, there are three gates of liberation, which are emptiness, formlessness, and aimlessness. “Therefore, based on this kind of religious understanding, whether there really are three gates or one gate, the main gate of the temple can be called ‘Sanmen’ ” [11].

As for “Sanmen” in Dunhuang murals, Xiao Mo had carried out full textual research and only two supplements are made here: first, the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustration mentioned that there are three gates at the entrance, but this is mostly inaccurate. Actually, there is only one gate equipped with two wing rooms, as in the Healing Master Pure Land illustration [Figure 8] on the north wall of Cave 146 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves, where there are wing rooms on both sides. It is important to note that the wing rooms in the present physical remains are all one-storied, only because one-storied halls had replaced three-storied hall bodies since the Song dynasty (960–1279). But the *Tiangong louge* system in the *Fashi* retains the practice of the Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties, in which wing rooms can be a multi-story building. Second, “Sanmen” was mostly three-storey in the early stage and the Healing Master illustrations in Dunhuang show that it is a decentralized structure, such as the Healing Master illustration on the

north wall of Cave 361 in Mogao Caves, referring to the annotation of this picture. “Sanmen” in Japanese Buddhist architecture is still called “Zhongmen” today, which are mostly decentralized structures, for example, the Zhongmen of Shitennoji Temple, Kawara-dera Temple, Yakushiji Temple, Yakushiji Temple and Todaiji Temple; the counter examples are only those of Asuka-dera Temple and Horyuji Temple. Since the Song (960–1279) and Yuan (1271–1368) dynasties, Shanmen has been changed to single-story, but this decentralized structure has still been retained.

- (4) Bell and scripture towers: In the Pure Land illustration that shows bell and scripture towers are usually placed symmetrically on both sides of the Sanmen. Unlike subsequent Buddhist temples, where the bell tower and the drum tower are arranged opposite to each other, those of the early stage were built with the bell tower located opposite to the scripture tower. Although physical objects of the early stage no longer exist, but in the Buddhist temples that were introduced to Japan from China in the Asuka and Nara periods, this configuration was still retained. As previously stated, in the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustrations, bell and scripture towers were usually made into a pavilion shape, for example, the Healing Master Sutra illustrations in Cave 146 [Figure 8] and 361 [Figure 8] in the Mogao Caves.
- (5) Balcony: refers to balcony used independently as platform, not the portion that used for connection between the upper and lower floors. Liang Sicheng analyzed this kind of balcony as platform or above-water platform in his *Annotated Yingzao Fashi*. There are three kinds of balconies independently used as platforms: above water [Figure 7], sitting flat on the glazed ground [Figure 7] and sitting flat on the corridor [Figure 12]. In the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustrations, dance

and music and burning lamps are usually arranged on such balconies, which obviously is a reflection of the real life of that time.

- (6) Stairway-based round bridge: Stairways are mostly arc-shaped in the buildings in Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustrations. Take the Healing Master Sutra illusion on the north wall of Cave 361 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves [Figure 12] as an example, towers as hall bodies, left and right symmetrically placed teahouses, corridors, and stairways that are all arc-shaped. The stairways of the Buddhist shrines in the *Fashi* are also arc-shaped [Figure 11], known as “Stairway-based round bridge,” but not seen in *Tiangong louge*.

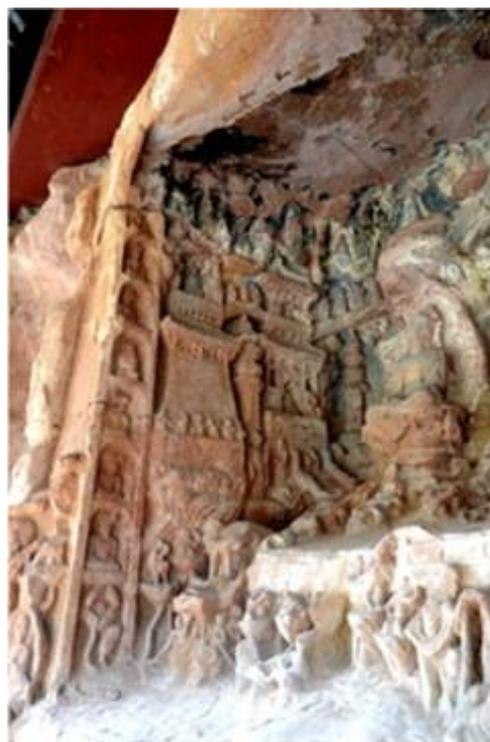
### 3. GROUP OF “TIANGONG LOUGE” IN THE EASTERN PURE LAND ILLUSTRATION

*Tiangong louge* in the Eastern Pure Land illustration can be divided into open foreground and closed foreground types. The discussion along the line of these two types is carried out in the following paragraphs.

#### 3.1 Open foreground type

Open-foreground type of pattern is an imitation of the Western Pure Land illustration. According to the *Three Pure Land Sutras* based on the Western Pure Land illustrations, the Western Pure land is flat and vast without dirt mountains, rock mountains, or hills. The so-called view of the “meditation on the water of eight meritorious virtues” suggests that there are eight lotus ponds. “The water of eight meritorious virtues” is commonly expressed by setting three layers of above-water platforms, with the foreground open and towers arranged on both voids to form an enclosed shape in the Western Pure Land illustrations. Tower boats are generally placed between the second and third floors on both flanks as a foreground of the tower in the composition of a certain number of Western Pure Land illustrations in Sichuan, such as Pantuo Temple, Qionglai [Figure 13] and Cave 4 of Shisun Mountain.

There is also the notion of “Meditation on ice” that there is clean water in the Western Pure Land that forms crystal-clear ice, and ice turns into a glazed ground. This appears in the Western Pure Land illustrations as follows: the foreground has a certain number of balconies, which are on water, or on the platform adorned with seven treasures to form open foreground-type of compositions. As the Healing Master Sutra suggests that the Eastern Pure Land and the Western Pure Land are “identical;” emulating the Western Pure Land becomes one of the main types, such as the aforementioned Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north of Cave 148 [Figure 3], the Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 112, the Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 85 [Figure 7], and the Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 400 [Figure 10]. Open foreground-type *tianhong louge* can be further classified.



**Figure 13.** Western Pure Land illustration of Pantuo Temple, Qionglai, Sichuan (Detail). Source: Photo by the author.

**(A) One-rise courtyard type**

What is basically manifested in this type is that the hall body is equipped with two teahouses, which are connected or combined to form a U-shaped courtyard. On this basis, certain sub-types are formed by adding elements, modifying the morphology of elements but not changing this characteristic of one-rise courtyard.

This type has a clear trail of occurrence and deduction. One hall body equipped with two teahouses is the most fundamental form. This “One Hall with two Towers (including gate towers)” configuration is adopted in Maitreya Sutra and the Western Pure Land illustrations not later than the Sui dynasty (581–618). Thereafter, one hall body with two teahouses are combined to form a U-shaped courtyard, with a corner tower set up at the turn. Corner towers are usually in the form of pavilions in the Eastern Pure Land illustrations. Typical cases include the Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north wall of Cave 231 in Mogao Caves [Figure 4].

Let us see several sub-types of this type.

In the Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 400 [Figure 10] in Dunhuang Mogao Caves, the main part is configured with one hall body and two teahouses, with corridors behind the hall. Pavilion-shaped corner towers are moved inward along the corridor, or used in bell and scripture towers. This cave is chiseled in the Xixia dynasty (1038–1227) and at that time, corner towers in the temple were phased out and the use of pavilions, terraces, towers, and pagodas in admiration became more ubiquitous. The Sutra illustration sensitively reflects this change.

In the mid-Tang dynasty, the Healing Master Sutra illustrations of Cave 112 and Cave 231 in Mogao Caves were basically the same, but the pictures show the rear corridor stretches to the left and the right, which indicates there are courtyards on both sides. Viewed from the clear and complete image in the Sutra illustration, both are basically the same and still comply with the definition of one-rise courtyard. For simplicity, it is possible to regard it as the sub-type of this type.

Since the Song dynasty (960–1279), buildings clusters have seen an increase in the length of axis lines and the number of halls along the axis, which are also reflected in the Pure Land illustrations, resulting in a sub-type of “multiple halls (bodies) and four teahouses combined into a one-rise courtyard.” Taking the Healing Master Sutra illustration [Figure 9] of Cave 55 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves as an example, three great halls rest side by side on the axis, on both flanks of the rear one are wing rooms that join corridors. There are pavilion-shaped bell and scripture towers in the corridor and two teahouses on each of the two spaces of the courtyard.

**(B) Two-rise courtyard type**

What’s distinctive in this type is that a closed courtyard is added on the back of the one-rise courtyard to become a two-rise courtyard, which is illustrated with the following two examples.

Take a look at *tiangong louge* [Figure 3] of the Healing Master Sutra illustration on the east wall of Cave 148, Dunhuang, which consists of front and rear courtyards. There is a large hall on the forward central axis with teahouses on its two flanks and a corridor on its back to form a U-shaped courtyard, the foresaid type of one-rise courtyard. In the two-rise courtyard behind it, a hall body rests on the central axis, with two teahouses on each of the two flanks. There is a round pavilion-shaped corner tower at the turn of the enclosed corridor.

Then take a look at *tiangong louge* in the Healing Master Sutra illustration [Figure 7] of Cave 85 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves, which is comprised of front and rear two-rise courtyards.

**3.2 Closed foreground type**

Its foreground is made into a closed shape through encompassment with Sanmen and a corridor [Figure 8]. This pattern possibly is a product of adornment and idealization based on Buddhist temples. Closed foreground-type *tiangong louge* can also be further classified.

**(A) One-courtyard type**

What is basically manifested in this type is that one hall body including foreground Sanmen and the main part is accompanied by two teahouses that are connected through a corridor to form a closed courtyard. On this basis, it is possible to form certain sub-types by adding certain elements or changing the morphology of elements, but not changing the characteristics of the one-rise closed courtyard.

Take the Healing Master Sutra illustration [Figure 12] on the north wall of Cave 361 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves as an example, the hall body of its main part has changed to the tower, and bell towers, scripture towers, corner towers, balconies and rainbow bridges are added on the corridor, but the characteristics of the one-rise courtyard has not changed, so it belongs to this type.

**(B) Two-rise courtyard type**

What's distinctive in this type is that one closed courtyard is added to the back of the front closed one-rise courtyard to form a type of two-rise courtyard. It is also possible to add certain elements on this basis or change the morphology of elements, but not to change the characteristics of two-rise courtyard, such as Cave 146 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves [Figure 8].

#### 4. CASE ANALYSIS FOR “TIANGONG LOUGE” IN THE EASTERN PURE LAND ILLUSTRATIONS

Individual elements of composition of and basic grouping mode of *tiangong louge* in the Eastern Pure Land illustrations have been analyzed in the above paragraphs. The general method for generating and grouping of these elements has its particular cultural background, and the logic of its own revolution does not even rule out some occasional elements. Therefore, several cases of “*tiangong louge*” in the Eastern Pure Land illustrations will be chosen and reconstructed

for image analysis in their cultural background.

#### 4.1 Healing Master Sutra Illustration on the North Wall of Cave 148 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves (Figure 14 in the High Tang era)

This sutra illustration is the first case of “*tiangong louge*” that appears in the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustration and also the only one in the High Tang era.



**Figure 14.** Healing Master Sutra illustration on the east wall of Cave 148 in Mogao Caves, Dunhuang. Source: *Chinese Rock Cave: Dunhuang Mogao Caves IV* by Dunhuang Academy.

This cave was chiseled in the 11th year of the Dali period of the High Tang era (776) and re-painted and restored in the mid-and late-Tang dynasty and the Xixia dynasty. It is a rare Nirvana cave with an arched roof. The Healing Master Sutra illustration is located on the north side of the east wall, opposite to the Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration<sup>7</sup> on the south of the east wall.

The Healing Master Sutra illustration and *tiangong louge* in it emerged late, with the only illustration in the early Tang dynasty and one illustration in the High Tang era. There is no *tiangong louge* [Figure 2] in the

<sup>7</sup> There are three Sutras for Pure Land, so there are three corresponding kinds of Pure Land illustrations painted according to them: Amitayurbhavana Sutra, Amitabha Sutra and Sutra of Immeasurable Life illustrations.

Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 220 of the early Tang dynasty. This illustration is the first case of “*tiangong louge*” in the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustration. In the meantime, it is also the largest and most complicated illustration in all the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustrations, in which *tiangong louge* shows a grand momentum on its presence, with vast and complicated compositions far beyond subsequent pure land illustrations of the mid- and late-Tang dynasty, because it is the first time that the Eastern Healing Master Sutra illustration demonstrates “*tiangong louge*,” and there was no past experience to draw upon, and it is symmetrically placed together with the Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration. According to the Sutra of the Master of Healing “The ground is paved with glaze, with golden cords lining the roads. The city, watchtower, palace, pavilion, verandas, windows, and latticework are all made of the seven treasures. The merit, virtue, and adornments of this land are identical to those of the Western Land of Ultimate Bliss” [12], this picture actually emulates the Western Pure Land illustration. It is nearly the same as the Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration, except that the main figure has changed to the Healing Masters, Suryaprabha and Candraprabha.

The group of its *tiangong louge* has been analyzed in the previous paragraphs and belongs to “opened foreground-type two-rise courtyard mode.” It is divided into front and rear two-rise courtyards. The front courtyard is open and the foreground has certain platforms adorned with seven treasures on the lotus pond, ascending floor by floor. This emulates the notion of “meditation on the water of eight meritorious virtues” in the Amitayurdhyana Sutra illustration. In the middle is a two-storey hall with a hip roof, which is connected to a one-storey side hall with a nine-ridge roof on the platform on both sides through a long corridor to form a large courtyard in the form of “grouping of the hall body and teahouses.” In the center is also a hall with a hip roof, but with wing rooms on both flanks. There are rainbow bridges on the

left and right wing rooms, which lead to the teahouses with a nine-ridge roof, and there are two other teahouses in front of the two teahouses that form an enclosed courtyard.

It is important to note that the picture depicts *tiangong louge* in imagination, “void and adornment” that rest on the top floor, one Buddha and two retinues sitting on the cloud and apsaras, music instruments floating in the sky, which represent the so-called “Self-buzzing without playing drums,” and towers and pagodas floating on the cloud, which of course do not completely exist in reality. Xiao Mo removed it when redrawing the line drawings [Figure 3], possibly because he thought it was not authentic, but drawers selected these two performances from many building types just because they are correlated with the Healing Master’s faith in the real world.

#### 4.2 Healing Master Sutra Illustration on the North Wall of Cave 360 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves (Figure 15 in the Mid-Tang Dynasty)

Dunhuang was occupied by the Tibetans in the mid-Tang dynasty, who also adhered to Buddhism and chiseled a lot of rock caves and introduced new elements, including Esoteric Buddhism. There were 24 Healing Master Sutra illustrations in their infancy. Cave 360 and 361 in Mogao Caves were chosen as examples for this analysis. These caves were chosen because they are exploring works of the startup period of *tiangong louge* in the Healing Master Sutra illustrations, based directly on the Sutra of the Master of Healing, unlike Cave 148 in Mogao Caves, which straightforwardly emulates the Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration.

The form of this cave belongs to the most popular cave of niches carved into four faces, with a truncated pyramidal roof. There are three illustrations on the south wall: Shakyamuni Mandala, Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration, and Maitreya Sutra illustration. There are also three illustrations on the north wall: Manjusri of a Thousand Bowls, Healing Master sutra illustration and Questioning Devas Sutra illustration. It can be

seen that the Healing Master Sutra and Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustrations are placed symmetrically.



**Figure 15.** Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 360 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves. Source: *Chinese Rock Cave: Dunhuang Mogao Caves V* by Dunhuang Academy.

The foreground of sutra illustration still belongs to the opened type, but abandons ponds and emulation of the notion of “meditation on the water of eight meritorious virtues” in Amitayurbhavana Sutra illustration. In front of the main figure Healing Master, is seemingly burning lamps. Burning a lamp to pray for good luck and avoid disasters was a custom of that time. There are some “Burning lamp texts” in vow texts in Dunhuang documents, which were prepared when burning lamps to pray for good luck and avoid disasters at that time<sup>8</sup>. The hall body of the foreground on the main axis is three bays wide and stands on the platform with wooden hooked railings. There is a round bridge-type stairway on the left and right side of the platform. It is particularly important to note that, as for setting a finial on the top of the hall, the finial with the sign wheel holding the jewel is attached with a chain, to which a colorful ring is hung, and the other end attached to the corner of the house.

This non-pagoda and non-hall building is either an already lost “pagoda” of the transitional period, or a building in people’s imagination of that time. There is a pair of bell towers and scripture towers at the back of the courtyard, and a finial on top of the house.

The way of grouping this Sutra illustration is the “opened foreground type of two-rise courtyard mode.” The front courtyard has one hall and two teahouses to form a U-shaped enclosed courtyard through a corridor. There are two doors on the corridor, which lead to the rear courtyard. The hall in the rear courtyard has a nine-ridge roof, with bell towers and scripture towers opposite to each other on the left and right. The ground floor is octagonal in shape, and the transitional floor is a round shape. The corridor in the rear courtyard is stretched to the left and the right, which indicates there are courtyards on both sides.

#### 4.3 Healing Master Sutra Illustration of Cave 361 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves (Figure 12, in the Mid-Tang Dynasty)

The form of Cave 361 in Mogao Caves also has niches carved into the four faces, with a truncated pyramidal roof. There are two Sutra illustrations on the south wall: Amitabha Sutra and Diamond Sutra illustrations. There are also two Sutra illustrations on the north wall: Healing Master Sutra and Maitreya Sutra illustrations. The Healing Master Sutra and Amitabha Sutra illustrations are placed symmetrically. The form of the Healing Master Sutra illustration in this cave was also an exploration work of the startup period. The buildings in the Sutra illustration nearly occupy the entire picture [Figure 12]. From the perspective of grouping, it belongs to “one-rise courtyard type with closed foreground.” The foreground still retains the notion of “meditation on the water of eight meritorious virtues” in the Western Pure Land illustrations, but it abandons open platforms, and is enclosed by Sanmen and a corridor hanging on the pond to form a courtyard.

<sup>8</sup> For example, the burning lamp text reads: “As regards to the treasure pagoda, burn the lamp for worship. The donor perceives: wish the body is constantly clean and bright, like a jade tree; the body is constantly strong and solid...” (Dunhuang documents P2588), which reflects the scene of burning lamps to make a wish in front of the treasure pagoda.

There are two points worth noting in this Sutra illustration: first, special expression modes of the Healing Master are explored. There is a streamline through which the rainbow bridge connects Sanmen, bell towers, scripture towers, and balconies on the front corridor of the Sutra illustration. There is a streamline through which the rainbow bridge connects pavilion-shaped corner towers and balconies on the rear corridor [Figure 12a]. The burning lamp on the balcony and a pair of flagpoles with a floating banner can be considered as burning lamps to pray for good luck and avoid disasters. Second, the hall body has changed to a pagoda, and the pagoda is special-shaped whose upper and lower stories have bent columns. According to the analysis of Xiao Mo, the morphology of this pagoda is a shadow of “inverted bowl,” and regarded as esoteric Buddhism with reference to Tahoto (multiple-treasure pagoda) and thus named “esoteric Buddhist pagoda.” Considering that the elements of esoteric Buddhism were introduced during the Tibetans’ occupation. This assertion may be justified.

#### 4.4 Healing Master Sutra Illustration of Cave 85 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves (Figure 16 in the Late-Tang Dynasty)

In Dunhuang studies, the period of late Tang dynasty is usually demarcated as 848–914 when Zhang Yichao led the crowd to rise up and the Tang Imperial Court appointed him regional military governor (Jiedushi) of the Guiyi Arm, also known as the Guiyi Arm period. There are 33 Healing Master Sutra illustrations in the rock caves that were chiseled during more than 60 years of the Guiyi Arm period, reaching a peak. These rock caves were mostly caves of aristocratic families, and many of them were named after the owners of the caves. Representatives are Zhao Yichao Cave 156, Suo Yibian Cave 12 and Zhai Farong Cave 85.

Cave 85 was constructed in the Guiyi Arm period of the late Tang dynasty, and the construction began in the 3rd year of the Xiantong period and ended in the 8th year of the Xiantong period (867). Zhai Farong, the

second General Buddhist Commander in the Guiyi Arm, cultivated discipline, meditation, and wisdom, and was a Dunhuang Buddhist leader. Meanwhile, Zhai Farong was also a medical Buddhist monk “proficient in the Shennong Bencao Jing (The Divine Farmer’s Materia Medical Classic) and eight medical skills.” He practiced medicine for the general public, healing diseases, and promoting the theory of law, with a good reputation. This is the cave of meritorious virtues for celebrating his becoming of General Buddhist Commander.



**Figure 16.** Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 85 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves. Source: *Chinese Rock Cave: Dunhuang Mogao Caves V* by Dunhuang Academy.

The form of this cave belongs to the Buddhist altar-centered type, with three Sutra illustrations on the south wall: Returning Favor Sutra, Amitabha Sutra, and Diamond Sutra illustrations. There are also three illustrations on the north wall: Avatamsaka Sutra, Healing Master Sutra, and Siyi Brahma’s Questions Sutra illustrations. The Healing Master Sutra and Amitabha Sutra illustrations are placed symmetrically at the respective centers.

The group of *tiangong louge* in this Sutra illustration belongs to “Two-rise courtyard type with open foreground” [Figure 16]. The foreground is an open composition formed by

a series of seven-treasure platforms rising floor by floor, which abandons depiction of the pond, that is, the notion of “meditation on the water with eight meritorious virtues,” resulting from the reflection of water notion in the Western Pure Land illustrations. By comparing it with Cave 148 that emulates the Western Pure Land illustrations [Figure 14], it is possible to see the differences. Its front side is comprised of two hall bodies and two teahouses, and the two hall bodies are arranged side by side each with a hip roof. The two teahouses opposite to each other and both have nine-ridge hall roofs. The front and rear courtyards are separated by a corridor, with the door in the corridor leading to the rear courtyard. There are three-storey wing rooms on the left and right of the hall body in the middle of the rear courtyard. On the left and right of the courtyard are the bell and scripture towers.

#### 4.5 Healing Master Sutra Illustration on the North Wall of Cave 146 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves (Figure 17, in the Five Dynasties)

In Dunhuang studies, the late stage refers to the Five Dynasties (907–979), Song (960–1279), Xixia (1038–1227), and Yuan (1271–1368), spanning four dynasties, but for the regular pattern governing the development of Dunhuang artistic style, it is not a simple dynastic change. Researchers have divided it into two phases: the Cao Painting Academy period of the Five Dynasties and the Song dynasty; the Minority Nationality Regime period of the Xixia and Yuan dynasties<sup>[15,16]</sup>.

Not long after the fall of the Tang dynasty (618–907), Cao Yijin (?–935), administrator of Shazhou and deputy regional military governor (Jiedushi) of Guiyi Arm, took over the Zhang Shi regime. The Cao regime lasted five generations, ruling Hexi for more than 140 years. During this time, it maintained a close relationship with regimes in the Central Plains and preserved institutions and culture in the Central Plains. The Cao family chiseled many new caves and restored plenty of previous caves. There are 29 Eastern Healing Master Pure Land

illustrations of that period, the largest number among the Sutra illustrations. To build rock caves, the Cao regime emulated the Central Plains and set up painting academies. “As a batch of highly skilled craftsmen uniformly planned and collectively created works, rock caves chiseled during the period of the Five Dynasties and the Northern Song dynasty have a unique and united style”<sup>[15]</sup>. Due to the uniform style, in this paper, we analyzed *tiangong louge* of the Cao Painting academy period [Figures 8 and 17], with the Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 146 in Mogao Caves as an example.



**Figure 17.** Healing Master Sutra illustration on the north wall of Cave 146 in Dunhuang Mogao Caves. Source: *Chinese Rock Cave: Dunhuang Mogao Caves V* by Dunhuang Academy.

The form of this carve belongs to the central Buddhist altar back screen type, with four Sutra illustrations on the south wall: Maitreya Sutra, Amitabha Sutra, Saddharma Pundarika Sutra, and Returning Favor Sutra illustrations. There are also four illustrations on the north wall: Questioning Devas Sutra,

Healing Master Sutra, Avatamsaka Sutra, and Siyi Brahma's Questions Sutra illustrations. The Healing Master Sutra and Amitabha Sutra illustrations are placed symmetrically.

By observing *tiangong louge* [Figures 8 and 17] in this Sutra illustration, it can be seen that the degrees of realism have been further improved, with less decorative elements in the imagination. The shapes of the buildings are accurate and the depictions meticulous, such as the upward curvature of the eaves, the owl's-tail-shaped ornaments, doors and windows, hooked railings, table valances, *tiangong louge* has its front courtyard located on the lotus pond, which is obviously an imitation of the notion of "meditation of the water of eight meritorious virtues" in the Western Pure Land illustrations. It was made into a closed foreground, especially with lamp wheels in front of the stairway of Sanmen and banners behind the hall body, which also indicates that this is the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land.

The grouping of *tiangong louge* in this Sutra illustration belongs to "two-rise courtyard type with closed foreground" [Figure 17], with overhead three floors and three doors as the foreground, and one-storey wing rooms on the left and right of the Sanmen. There are round bridge-type stairways in the Sanmen and the wing rooms. The front courtyard has one hall with a hip roof and two teahouses, and the rear courtyard has four teahouses. There are pavilion-shaped towers in the front and back of the corridor, with octagonal pavilion-shaped bell towers and scripture towers in the front, and round pavilion-shaped corner towers at the back.

#### 4.6 Healing Master Sutra Illustration of Cave 7 in the Thousand-Buddha Cave in East Dunhuang (Figure 18, in the Xixia Dynasty)

In the 11th century, the aristocrats of the Dang Xiang ethnicity established the Xixia dynasty (1038–1227) that covered today's Gansu, Shannxi, Ningxia, and other provinces and autonomous regions in China. In nearly 200 years after the establishment of the Xixia

dynasty, Dunhuang was basically in its jurisdiction. The rulers of the Xixia dynasty vigorously advocated Buddhism and requested to the Song Imperial Court many times to purchase the Buddhist Tripitaka and to build Buddhist temples widely. As the *Fashi* was published in this period, the forms of the temples mostly and closely adhered to the *Fashi*, which was also reflected in *tiangong louge* in the Healing Master Sutra illustrations. In this paper, only the Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 7 in the Thousand-Buddha Cave in east Dunhuang has been taken as an example [Figure 18].



**Figure 18.** Healing Master Sutra illustration of Cave 7 in the Thousand-Buddha Cave in east Dunhuang. Source: "Medicine Buddha in murals of the Xixia dynasty in east Thousand-Buddha Cave and its aesthetic implication" by Shi Wei.

The foreground of this Sutra illustration is a courtyard in front of the gate, which is comprised of the Sanmen and two teahouses. Therefore, this group naturally belongs to the "Two-rise courtyard type with an open foreground." As its main figure Medicine Buddha is located in the second-rise courtyard, the depiction of this Sutra illustration focuses on the second-rise courtyard, which is a hall with four teahouses. There is a rectangle pond

behind the Sanmen. The Hall and the Sanmen have a nine-ridge roof with double eaves, with an apparently retracted hip. The other individual buildings in the group are elegant and strong, close to the standard set in the *Fashi*. The building groups are highly clustered, with extended central axes, exhibiting the Song-dynasty style of buildings.

## 5. CONCLUSION

After Buddhism was introduced to China, the “tiangong louge” was a form of buildings based on the blueprint of the Tang and Song buildings and incorporated the notion of “Heaven” in traditional Chinese culture. The *tiangong louge* in the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustrations was painted according to the *Sutra of the Master of Healing*, with reference to the composition in the Western Pure Land illustrations, especially the open foreground-type of groupings. But the aims of the *Sutra of the Master of Healing* are to eliminate the sufferings of sentient beings in the real world, heal diseases, remove calamities, and extend life, which have had a profound influence on the design of *tiangong louge* in Sutra illustrations.

Viewed from the elements of individual buildings that constitute *tiangong louge*, the Eastern Healing Master of the Pure Land illustration contains five individual elements in the *Fashi*, except the “tortoise-head porches”: hall body, teahouses, corner towers, wing rooms, corridors, only their uses are slightly different. In addition, pavilions, pagodas, Sanmen, bell towers, scripture towers, balconies, and round-bridge stairways, are also included, which are missing in *tiangong louge* in the *Fashi*. They reflect the individual building elements in the real-world Buddhist temples from the Wei (220–265) and Jin (265–420) dynasties to the early Song dynasty (960–1279).

Viewed from the *tiangong louge* group, it can be divided into two categories and four types: open foreground type with one-rise courtyard, open foreground type with two-rise courtyard, closed foreground type with one-rise courtyard, and closed foreground type with two-rise courtyard.

The *tiangong louge* in the Pure Land illustrations, albeit called “tiangong” (Heavenly Palace), was actually built based on real-world Buddhist temples. Changes that occurred in *tiangong louge* in the Eastern Healing Master Pure Land illustrations from the High Tang era to the Xixia dynasty have sensitively communicated the transformations in Buddhist temples during this period of time.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None.

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