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## THE IMAGE OF THE LOTUS IN THE ICONOGRAPHY OF THE PAINTING «MEDICINE BUDDHA BHAISAJYA-GURU» (1271–1368)

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*The study is dedicated to analyzing the role of the lotus in the iconography of the monumental mural «Medicine Buddha Bhaisajyaguru (Yaoshi Fo)» (1271–1368). The mural exhibits atypical iconography. It has been established that this is due to its creation during the era of Mongol rulers, a time when Chinese art was influenced by Himalayan and Tibetan trends. The lotus, as a symbol of spiritual purity, forms the basis of the compositional connotations significant in Buddhist art. The flower is depicted in several variations: as lotus thrones for Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, as garlands adorning the grand pedestal, and as small lotus pedestals bearing offerings.*

**Keywords:** China, Buddhism, lotus, iconography, Medicine Buddha Bhaisajya-guru (Yaoshi Fo).

### INTRODUCTION

Chinese art possesses a rich and complex history that reflects the social, aesthetic, and philosophical tenets of Chinese civilization, as well as the influences of other cultures. Despite the existence of numerous studies on various aspects of Chinese art, the examination of the iconography of the lotus in compositions depicting the Buddha remains a relevant subject for comprehensive investigation, given its profound religious and philosophical significance.

### MISSION STATEMENT

The aim of the research is to analyse the features of the lotus image in a figurative composition «Buddha of Medicine Bhaishajyaguru», created during the time of Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368).

### RESEARCH RESULTS AND THEIR DISCUSSION

An example of the depiction of lotuses in sacred compositions of a later period is the painting «Medicine Buddha Bhaisajyaguru» (1271 – 1368) from the eastern pediment of the lower Guangsheng Temple in Shanxi Province, which contains a repeated image of lotus flowers in different interpretations (fig. 1,2). The painting was created during the Mongol reign, a period in which Chinese court art was influenced by Himalayan and Tibetan trends. Despite the fact that the iconography in temples and monasteries remained unchanged because paintings (as well as sculpture) on Buddhist themes were always created by artists under the supervision of monks, «The Buddha of Medicine Bhaisajaguru» is atypical: the subject and iconography raise many questions among experts. Since the role of the



Yuan Dynasty «was to unify China, which influenced artists» access to new, borrowed styles of painting, especially Tibetan Buddhist art» it is likely that the atypical plot and iconography were the result of a combination of Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucian art traditions [2].



**Fig. 1.** Buddha of Medicine Bhaishajyaguru (Yaoshi Fo). Water-based pigment (clay mixed with straw). Height 751.8 cm; width 1511.3 cm. Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368). Around 1319. Metropolitan Museum of Art. USA.



**Fig. 2.** Buddha of Medicine Bhaishajyaguru (Yaoshi Fo). The arrangement of the deities.

- A. Bhaishajyaguru (Yaoshi fo). Buddha of Medicine.
- B, C. Bodhisattvas: Chandraprabha (B) and Suryaprabha (C).
- D, E. Two Bodhisattvas carrying a monk's staff and a medicine cup are traditional attributes of Bhaishajyaguru.
- F. Twelve main guardians.

The centre of the composition depicts Buddha Bhaishajya Guru in monk's clothes, symbolising his exit from earthly life. He is seated on a lotus throne in the



lotus position. Next to him are the Bodhisattvas in rich robes, indicating their connection to the earthly realms and their intention to help sentient beings overcome the wheel of samsara, and they are also depicted on a lotus throne. They stand on a large pedestal decorated with lotus flowers. In the lower part of the composition, small lotus pedestals with gifts are depicted. It is noteworthy that it was in this temple that the sacred Buddhist texts of the «Lotus Sutra» were found in 1930.

The Lotus Sutra is a significant Mahayana Buddhist scripture that was compiled in the first century. With the spread of Buddhism, it came to China and was translated by monks many times. During the Eastern Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties, the influence of the Lotus Sutra spread widely in central China, which is discussed in the article by Zhou J., where the author reveals the content of the ritual of «transforming all forms and bodies of those who have heard the power of the Lotus Sutra» [4].

Based on the text of the Lotus Sutra, he summarises the Buddhist idea that a person who has led a pious life will be able to return to the peaceful land of the Buddha after death. In that land, Amitabha Buddha, surrounded by many great Bodhisattvas, is born from a lotus flower and sits on his throne. He is no longer irritated by greed, anger, ignorance, envy and other defilements. He has attained the power of a Bodhisattva and is not intolerant. After reaching this state, his eyes become pure and flawless [4].

### **CONCLUSIONS**

As a result of the analysis of the lotus depiction in the iconography of the monumental painting «Medicine Buddha Bhaiṣajyaguru (Yaoshi Fo)» (1271–1368 CE), it has been established that the composition was created under the influence of Himalayan and Tibetan artistic trends. The lotus, as a symbol of spiritual purity, is a pivotal element in the Buddhist art of Asia and serves as the foundation for the semantic connotations of the composition. The flower is depicted in several variations: as lotus thrones for the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, as lotus garlands adorning the grand pedestal, and as small lotus-shaped pedestals bearing offerings.

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