A remarkably well-preserved Manichaean silk painting, most likely from the era of the Yuan dynasty, has been identified recently in the collection of a renowned Japanese art museum, the Yamato Bunkakan. While earlier it had been considered to be a Buddhist work of art, today, the Manichaean origin of this Chinese image is unquestionable.


2 The definite Manichaean attribution of the painting has been first offered by Yutaka Yoshida, 'A Manichaean Painting from Ningbo: On the Religious Affiliation of the so-called Rokudōzu of the Museum Yamato Bunkakan,' Yamato Bunka 119 (2009), 3–15 (in Japanese). His pioneering study formed the foundation of the thematic volume of the Journal of the Yamato Bunkakan dedicated to the Chinese Manichaean silk painting in its collection. Also see his 'A newly recognized Manichaean painting: Manichaean Daena from Japan,' M.A. Amir-Moezzi, J.-D. Dubois (éds.), Pensée grecque et sagesse d’Orient. Hommage à Michel Tardieu, Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes, Sciences Religieuses, BEHE 142 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 697–714. In his lecture given at the 7th International Congress of Manichaean Studies (Sept. 8th–11th, 2009, Dublin, Ireland, proceedings are forthcoming), Yoshida reported about the identification of now a total of seven Chinese Manichaean silk paintings preserved in various Japanese collections. His Japanese language publication on these paintings, written in collaboration with K. Furukawa, is forthcoming in Yamato Bunka: Biannual Journal of Eastern Arts [= 大和文華], 121 (2010).

3 The initial Buddhist interpretations of the painting, including its overall theme as the ‘Six Buddhist Realms’ and its main scene as the ‘Meeting of the Three Religions’ (i.e., Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism), were reviewed by Takeo Izumi. Although Izumi raises the possibility that the main figure could be Mani, due to its similarity to the basic iconography of the Mani statue from 1339 near Quanzhou, he urges further study before a secure Manichaean identification could be affirmed. He writes: ‘I should like to wait for the definitive answer to the question who is represented in the Yamato Bunkakan painting and to the problem of its religious affiliation’ (‘A Possible Nestorian Christian Image: Regarding the Figure Preserved as a Kokuzō Bosatsu Image at Seiun-ji,’ Kokka 1330 [2006], 10–12).
for three principal reasons: (1) its dedicatory inscription that bestowed the object on a Chinese Manichaean temple, probably at Ningbo, in Zhejiang province;\(^4\) (2) the iconography of its main deity, Mani, as well as that of the elect, who are shown in Chinese versions of characteristically Manichaean attire;\(^5\) and (3) the significant amount of documentary evidence on the worship of Manichaean deities (Mani and Jesus), including actual devotional works of art, that survive from southern China, especially Fujien and Zhejian provinces from between the 10th and 17th centuries.\(^6\)

The painting itself is a ca. 5-feet tall hanging scroll, consisting of five clearly demarcated registers of varying heights that together convey a subject that we may call *Sermon on Mani’s Teaching of Salvation* (Fig. 1). At the very top, register 1 depicts heaven through a palace building that forms the focus of a narration of events with repeated figures of a few mythological beings.\(^7\) In a technique known as continuous narration, this composition shows how the Light Maiden and her entourage conduct their business: arriving on the left, while being greeted by an unidentified female host; visiting with the host, while seated inside the palace at the center; and then departing on the right, while being seen off by the host. This scene may be titled: *The Light Maiden’s Visit to Heaven.* Register 2 depicts a sermon performed around the statue of a Manichaean deity

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\(^4\) As part of the Manichaean identification of the image, the inscription is discussed by Yoshida (‘A Manichaean Painting from Ningbo,’ 8), who provides a Japanese translation by T. Moriyasu, the English equivalent of which is as follows (Yoshida, personal communication): ‘Zhang Siyi from a parish(?) called Dongzheng, who is a leader of the disciples, together with his wife Xinniang [from] the family of Zheng make a donation and present respectfully a sacred painting of Hades to a temple of vegetarians located on the Baoshan mountain. They wish to provide it as their eternal offering. Accordingly, peace may be kept. [In the year . . . and in the . . . -th month].’ The characters for the date are illegible.

\(^5\) Yoshida interprets the main figure as Mani, and the repeated image of the female figure as the Light Maiden (Sogdian *Daēnā*). Regarding the overall subject of the painting, he suggests that it is an illustration of Manichaean doctrine on the individual eschatology, and thus could be viewed as a scene inspired by a theme depicted in Mani’s *Picture-Book* (‘A Manichaean Painting from Ningbo’ 5–10). The Manichaean iconography of the main figure and the elects in connection with other southern Chinese Manichaean presentations are also discussed by Gulácsi (‘A Manichaean Portrait of the Buddha Jesus: Identifying a Twelfth–Thirteenth–century Chinese Painting from the Collection of Seiun-ji Zen Temple.’ *Artibus Asiae* 69/1 (2009): 91–145).

\(^6\) The textual evidence on southern Chinese Manichaean pictorial art is surveyed in Gulácsi, ‘A Manichaean Portrait of the Buddha Jesus,’ 10–18.

\(^7\) For more on this scene and the discussion of the Light Maiden (Sogdian *Daēnā*), see Yoshida, ‘A Manichaean Painting from Ningbo,’ 9–10.