

THE ICONOGRAPHY AND EXPRESSION OF THE *AMIDA JŌDO-ZU* OF THE NARA NATIONAL MUSEUM

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This article is a study of the *Amida Jōdo-zu* (Amitābha's Pure Land) in the collection of the Nara National Museum. Although the *Amida Jōdo-zu* of the Nara National Museum is recognized as an example of a late-Heian or early-Kamakura period painting of Amida's Pure Land, it has not been thoroughly investigated and thus there has been no opportunity to elucidate the iconography, which has been rendered with great precision, in detail. I have therefore taken up this painting. Having clarified the iconography, I attempt fundamental considerations of the special characteristics of the iconography, its expression, and the theme of the painting.

As a result of these considerations, it has become clear that in terms of both iconography and expression this painting demonstrates the influence of Song Chinese Buddhist painting. One sees in particular that there are a great number of similarities with the type of Song Pure Land paintings that are called "Kangyōjūrokukan hensōzu" (Transformation scenes of the sixteen contemplations from the Contemplation Sutra). This type reflects the Pure Land thought of the Northern Song priest Precept Master Yuanzhao (J. Ganjō Risshi). Examples of this type of painting in Japan are found at the Chōkōji and Amidaji. It can be assumed that it is very likely there would have been an early copy of such a painting or a painting of the Pure Land image that was produced in an environment close to such paintings in the vicinity when the Nara National Museum version was painted.

We clearly recognize not only the adoption of the Song style Pure Land (Amidist) painting, but in addition the Nara National Museum painting also carries on the iconographic tradition of the Heian-period Pure Land imagery with its *suhamas*, sandbars, and dragon-headed and *geki*-headed boats. It might be said that a painting has been created in such a way that the traditional iconographic expression of the Heian period and the newly adopted Song type have been deftly intertwined.

There was undoubtedly a specific reason behind the fact that this painting was composed of these images. In short, is this not because the required iconography differed from the painting that was adopted? Is not the theme of this painting to be found in the scene of an offering service to Amida by the heavenly host in Amida's Pure Land that is depicted in the most popular scriptures of believers in Amida's Pure Land during the Heian period, the *Ōjōyōshū* (Essentials of Salvation) and *Gokuraku Rokujisan* (In Praise of Paradise) of Eshin Sōzu Genshin rather than in the scenes of the painting. There are no extant examples of a painting that depicts one scene from the Amida's Pure Land in this manner. But it can be confirmed from written sources that during the period when the Nara National Museum's painting was executed, such paintings were in fact created, and it is possible to locate this painting in its art historical context by understanding it as a rare example of *Amida jōdo-zu* with a single clear theme.

In addition, in regard to the iconography of the Nara National Museum's painting whose creation was influenced by the reception of Song Pure Land painting, we see that there were other works through the Kamakura period that can be said to have thereafter formed one stream in the same lineage on the basis of a common iconography. Having clarified the character of this painting, it may be said that in regard to their iconography it is now possible to consider them from a new point of view.