

How Was Visualization Visualized?: A Comparative Study of Guanjing bianxiang MG17669 and Dx316 through Digital Restoration

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Abstract

One of the best known texts about Buddhist visualization in East Asia is *Guanwuliangshou jing* (*Amitāyus Visualization Sūtra*), and, not surprisingly, many paintings were executed based on this sūtra. These paintings are usually called Guanjing bianxiang, or "Transformation Tableau Based on *Amitāyus Visualization Sūtra*." However, the relevance of these paintings to the actual practice of visualization is not obvious and needs to be examined carefully. In this paper, I shall focus on MG17669, which is a silk Guanjing bianxiang painting from Dunhuang stored at Musée Guimet. Since this painting has faded badly, detailed observation is difficult in its current state. However, by using the technology of digital restoration, we can restore the images and make them much clearer. When we compare the clearer images of MG17669 thus restored with another Guanjing bianxiang, also from Dunhuang, stored at the State Hermitage Museum, we find significant stylistic similarities. In this paper, I shall compare these two pieces carefully and discuss the exact relationships among paintings, text, and (monks' and painters') practice.