



THE ORIENTAL CERAMIC SOCIETY OF HONG KONG LIMITED

“THE 5TH AND 6TH CENTURY SILK ROAD AND BUDDHIST ARTS IN GANSU: A DISCUSSION CENTERED ON THE BINGLING TEMPLE AND MAIJISHAN GROTTOES”

by
DR. WEI WENBIN

(IN PUTONGHUA WITH SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION BY ANTHONY LIN)

Date: Wednesday, 3 December 2008
Venue: The Hong Kong Club
Jackson Road, Central, Hong Kong
Time: 18:00 Reception; 18:30 AGM; 19:00 Lecture; 20:15 Dinner
Cost: Lecture HK\$100 for non-members
Dinner HK\$450 (members); HK\$500 (guests)

The Silk Road was a vital route by which communication occurred between China and the outside world, enabling the spread of Buddhism and its art from India to China. Buddhism prospered in China during the 5th and 6th centuries, increasing the popularity of Buddhist art. Gansu province is situated at a strategically important section of the Silk Road and became a centre for the development of Buddhist art during that period. In addition to the famous Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, Gansu is home to the Bingling Monastery and a total of 170 grottoes in Maijishan. These grottoes laid the foundation of Buddhist art and record its development from the beginning to its eventual decline.

Bingling Monastery and the Maijishan grottoes are situated in Linxia (ancient Hezhou) and Tianshui (ancient Qinzhou) in Gansu. They were built in the early 5th century, flourished between the 5th and 6th centuries and reached their zenith by the Tang period. The grottoes in these two places are in the proximity of Guanzhong, an area of strategic importance on the Silk Road which allowed Buddhist art to propagate throughout the region. The grottoes are of particular significance in reflecting the process of development of Buddhist art in China under various foreign artistic influences and in documenting the greatness of civilization that flourished on the Silk Road.

This was also a historically important time when many different ethnic minority groups migrated to China. Bingling Monastery and the Maijishan grottoes were built by the Xianbei tribe of the Western Qin and the Qiang tribe of the Later Qin. Rulers from the Western Qin and Later Qin embraced and supported Buddhism, and employed eminent monks at Bingling Monastery and the Maijishan grottoes to translate Buddhist scriptures.

During the 5th century the Buddhist art at Bingling Monastery and the Maijishan grottoes demonstrated a strong Gandharâ and Mathurâ flavour which combined with influences of traditional Chinese culture to evidence an historical east-west exchange. Since the 6th century, due to cultural changes implemented by the Northern Wei dynastic court and the influences of art from of Southern Qi dynasty, Buddhist art in the Bingling Monastery and Maijishan showed further characteristics of Chinese culture, including secularist elements, as seen in many well-recognized and lively clay Buddhist sculptures at the Maijishan grottoes.

WEI Wenbin was born in Dingxi, Gansu Province, and has a Masters degree from Peking University, where he studied archaeology and history. In 2007, he obtained a PhD from Lanzhou University for his research on Dunhuang. Dr. Wei has held posts with various organizations including the Archaeological Research Institute and Bureau of Cultural Relics, Gansu Province. Dr. Wei is currently the deputy director of the Maijishan Grottoes Art Research Institute; executive secretary of the Gansu Dunhuang Society; secretary of the Gansu History Society; secretary of the Chongqing Dazu Rock Carvings Research Institute; and vice president of the Maijishan Grottoes Art Research Society, amongst other positions. He conducts archaeological excavations at grottoes and research in Buddhist art. Dr. Wei is the author of *The 169 Grottoes at Maijishan*, and over 50 academic papers.

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N.B. Due to The Hong Kong Club's regulations, any dinner reserved will be charged irrespective of attendance unless at least 48 hours' notice of cancellation is given.

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