Amitābha Buddha Revisited: Into the Twenty-first Century Modern Science

Author(s): Hyun Choo, Jay J. Choi
Subject(s): Philosophy, Theology and Religion, East Asian Philosophy
Published by: Ideas Forum International Academic and Scientific Association
Keywords: Amitābha Buddha; Buddhism; Quantum; Physics; Nonlocality; nonduality; wholeness;

Summary/Abstract: Buddhism and quantum physics share many points of contact. New scientific evidence regarding nonlocality has made possible an insightful understanding of nonduality and wholeness. In light of this discovery, modern intellectuals may become comfortable with the Mahāyāna concept of Buddha's meritorious qualities. Particularly, Amitābha Buddha symbolizes the Buddha of Infinite Light and Infinite Life, representing the transcendence of time and space. Specifically Amitābha signifies both wisdom and compassion, while the field of quantum mechanics reflects sufficiently the wisdom aspect of Amitābha. However, compassion has not been incorporated in science due to its non-objective nature. Can modern intellectuals understand the wisdom comfortably to encompass compassion? This article develops and employs a novel conceptual approach to address a broader understanding and acceptance of modern science for scholars of religion. We argue that the concept of nonlocality, with its extension into a sequence of nonlocality–nonduality–wholeness, enables Amitābha's wisdom and compassion to fit reasonably within the framework of modern science. Thus, Amitābha Buddha can be said to re-appear with a scientific face in the 21st century.
In Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, Buddha Amitabha, also known as Amitayus or Amida, is considered one of the five Dhyani Buddhas (together with Amoghasiddhi, Akshobhya, Vairocana and Ratnasambhava) or 5 wisdoms of the Buddha, who is associated with the western direction and the skandha of saṃjna, the aggregate of distinguishing and the deep awareness of individualities. Amitayus Buddha is the head of the Lotus family. This family includes some of the most famous Bodhisattvas and Buddhas, including Padmasambhava, Avalokiteshvara, Tara, and Shakyamuni Buddha. Dharmakara then resolved to become a Buddha and so to come into possession of a buddha-field of many perfections. 

1: Buddha Amitābha with inscribed pedestal, dated 746. It is reasonable to further divide iconic representations into more general depictions of the Buddha in human form and the Buddha’s true icon in particular. For the latter group, a discussion about Byzantine icon theories may prove especially rewarding. An example for the first kind of aniconic representation is the Veneration of the new-born bodhisattva by gods, a relief on the Ajātaśatru Pillar of the stupa from Bārhut in India from the second century BC (Snellgrove 1978, 30, plate 8). The new-born bodhisattva, Buddha Sākyamuni, in his last rebirth as Gautama Siddharta, occupies the center of the relief but remains. The conservation of the Amitābha Buddha is made possible by funding from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Project. The British Museum has finished conservation on the Amitābha Buddha, made possible by funding from the Bank of America Merrill Lynch Art Conservation Project. This colossal Buddha is one of the highlights of the British Museum's collection, and is on public display in the centre well of the North stairs. British Museum experts have for the first time, been able to fully read an
inscription on the plinth of the Amitābha Buddha. The script names the Buddha’s original location in Chongguang Temple in what was then Hancui Village, Hebei Province, Northern China.