

A Study of the History of the Development of Buddhist Iconography

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Abstract. Nowadays Buddhism is one of the world's major religions, and its means of transmission and artistic approach are diverse. As one of these means of communication, Buddhist statuary has also been passed on to the present day as an excellent form of art. The art of statuary is very rich, with different periods of statuary having different characteristics, which have been handed down from one generation to the next. The art of Buddhist statuary also varies from region to region. They have their own history of development, but they are not independent, learning from each other and from other regions and times. There is no clear lineage of the specific development of Buddha's statues and the specific history of their development in different regions and at different times. The aim of this paper is to trace the history of the development of Buddhist iconography, to sort out its development from Hellenism to its arrival in India and its subsequent introduction to China, and to clarify the influence of Greek sculpture on Indian Buddhist iconography and subsequently on Chinese Buddhist iconography.

Keywords: Buddhism, sculpture, Buddha statues.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, Buddhism is found all over the world and is also one of the main religions in China. With the spread of Buddhism comes the emergence of many temples and statues of Buddha. As a means of evangelism and a form of art, Buddhist statuary has spread widely through Buddhism in China, and there is no shortage of fine art to be found. The history of Buddhist statuary is traced back to the early days of Buddhism, when statues of cultic significance were not created for the reasons of their original teachings. As time passed, Buddhism began to flourish and become more widely known. During the Kushan dynasty, the rulers began to venerate Buddhism. This pushed Buddhism into the limelight and it was used directly as a ruling tool for the rulers. This made Buddhism begin to have a cult-like character. At the same time, in order to consolidate the rulers' power, Buddhist statues were created [1].

As ancient India was located at the crossroads of several civilisations at the time, it was an essential route between East and West Asia and was one of the important nodes along the Silk Road. This unique geographical location made ancient India itself a diverse and multi-ethnic place. In addition, after Alexander the Great's conquest, many ancient Greeks emigrated to West Asia, bringing with them the sculptural techniques and aesthetic culture of the time, resulting in a fusion of Eastern and Western cultures. It is in this context that the early Buddhist statues are typically Hellenistic in character. As the dynasties of ancient India changed, the statues were gradually localised, resulting in statues of Buddha with their own characteristics. The Silk Road also brought Buddhism to China. In addition to Buddhism, artistic images of the Buddha were also brought to China. In order to promote Buddhism in China, a large number of statues and temples were built. This led to a new development of Buddhist statues in China, and to their further localisation as the times changed [2].

In order to study the history of the development of Buddhist statues, this paper uses case studies and documentary analysis. The cases are selected from three representative sculptures from Greece, India and China. Similarities and differences are identified through comparative analysis. References and summaries of the collected literature are provided.

The aim of this paper is to facilitate a deeper understanding of the reasons for the development of the Buddhist statue's clothing and hair ornamentation and its form. By tracing the history, this paper

explores the reasons for the changes in the statues of Buddha. It is intended to facilitate the restoration and subsequent creation of Buddha statues.

2. Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece is best known for its sculpture. Because of its unique materials, it is still possible to visit museums to get a glimpse of ancient Greece in its glory days. The characteristics of sculpture in ancient Greece varied from one period to the next. The early sculpture of ancient Greece, the Homeric and Archaic periods, is too archaic to be known, and differs greatly from the later styles. The main reference here is to the Classical and Hellenistic periods of Ancient Greece.

The common denominator between these two periods of sculpture is that they are both realistic and at the same time solemn and serene. The *Vénus de Milo*, now in the Louvre, as it is known, is a product of the Hellenistic period. The vast majority of Greek sculptures are naked or partially naked, a fact related to the Greek climate, the humanist spirit and the aesthetic quest for a beautiful human body, which the author will not go into here, but will focus more on the sculptures themselves. The Greeks believed that 'gods and men are identical in form, which makes the gods in Greek sculpture indistinguishable from men and maximises the spirituality of the Greeks of the time. The sculpting of the features, with their high noses and deep eye sockets, is essentially the image of the Greek sculptor's face at the time, and an examination of the galleries of the Classical and Hellenistic Greece at the Louvre shows the overall facial features of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, as described above. The textures of the costumes and the movements of the figures are also very close to reality. The ideal style of Greek sculpture is reflected in the elegance and serenity of the realistic premise, while the dynamics of the sculpture are used to a more dramatic effect.

When Hellenistic art spread to Rome and India, the faces of the figures continued to be realistic, but with the addition of national characteristics in terms of clothing and costume.

3. Ancient India

Buddhist sculpture in ancient India itself is divided into three distinct periods: the Gandhara, the Maudhara and the Siddha periods. The Gandhara period was the first period in which Buddhist statues were created, and for the geographical and historical and cultural reasons mentioned above, the earliest Gandhara sculptures are distinctly Hellenistic in style. The Maudhara and the Siddhartha Period, on the other hand, incorporate more indigenous Indian art. The Shudra period is a continuation of the Maudra period and is generally similar in style. Therefore, the Gandhara period, which is distinctly Hellenistic, and the more localised Maudhara and Shudra periods will be divided into two sections and case studies.

3.1. Gandhara Period

The early stages of development in the Gandhara period were mainly influenced by three regional cultures and arts: Indian, Greek and Persian. The two most significant are Indian and Greek. As the birthplace of Buddhism, it is difficult to see any Indian influence in the early Gandhara period in the style of Buddhist iconography, which is more Hellenistic. The depiction of the Buddha in human form also received Greek influence, and it was also Greece that began to experiment with shaping statues of the Buddha and depicting it [3].

It is generally accepted that early Buddhist statues mainly depicted the Buddha, or Sakyamuni. In fact, the early stages of the development of Hellenistic-style Buddhist statuary did not begin with the depiction of Sakyamuni himself, but began with a preference for the depiction of the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva is clearly portrayed as being similar to Apollo - a depiction that follows the naturalistic and realistic aspects of Greek art [4]. At the same time, the characteristics of the native race were combined with those of Hellenistic sculpture, which in turn led to a style of sculpture characteristic of the early Gandhara period. This is evident in the 3rd-century Buddha from Pakistan,

Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, possibly Takht-i-bahi monastery, ancient region of Gandhara, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The face and hairdo of the statue are well preserved in the Hellenistic style. The bun is wavy, a distortion of the natural curls of the Hellenistic sculptural tradition. The overall facial features are more three-dimensional than those of an Asian figure, but unlike traditional Greek sculpture the eyes are protruding, they are not dissimilar to the Hellenistic life-size approach. The Apollo del Belvedere, now in the Vatican, is a late classical Greek sculpture. A comparison of the two sculptures makes it easier to understand that the 'bodhisattva is clearly portrayed as resembling Apollo', as mentioned above. On a superficial level, it is true that the early Gandhara portrayal of the Buddha is a strong imitation of Apollo in its stylistic approach and local features. Although the hairstyles are different, both figures make use of smooth lines to detail the hair, giving it a more wiry feel. The facial features have been slightly refined from the Hellenistic style, with the arch of the eyebrows becoming more curved and the eyes more convex which makes the eye sockets shallower than in the Greek sculpture. It is these details that form the distinctive Gandhara style of the Buddha statue, and it is also the use of Hellenistic life drawing techniques that make them more realistic and solemn [1].

Further Gandhara art is the portrayal of Greek representations of Mount Olympus, such as Athena, Dionysus, Hermes, Eros, and the less popular Atlantis or Triton [4]. Sculptures such as the Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya (Buddha of the Future), also in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and *Le Génie aux fleurs*, now in the Musée Guimet in France, are also products of the Kushan dynasty in the third century and are typical of Gandhara period iconography. Both are, however, very different from the perception of the Buddha. These go beyond the typical Buddha statue to more closely resemble the form of other Hellenistic gods' residences. *Le Génie aux fleurs* at the Musée Guimet in particular differs considerably from the traditional Buddha statue. The aforementioned Buddha is now in the Metropolitan collection, both in terms of hair and costume. In contrast, *Le Génie aux fleurs* no longer have a bun; the hair is closer to the natural curls of Hellenistic hair, and the clothing is more pronounced, differing somewhat from the tightly fitted body of most Gandhara Buddha statues, and more closely resembling that of Greek sculpture. This more dynamic form of the entire body is rarely seen in Buddhist statues and is more common in Greek sculpture. The dynamism is evident in the *Diane de Versailles* and *Diane de Gabies* in the Louvre, for example, and it is this dynamism that creates the drama of the sculpture. The form of the bust is also similar to that of the *Hermes Ingenui* sculpture in the Vatican Museums, in terms of the hairstyle and the manner of the figure. Some of the Greek gods also appear in early Buddhist sculpture, such as Heracles, who, in conjunction with the story of Heracles in Greek mythology, appears as a guardian of Sakyamuni and are portrayed as the Vajrapani he is known as today. A good example of this can be found in the Vajra-bearing gods and bhikkhus now in the British Museum [5]. In this sculpture, Heracles still maintains the traditional form found in Greek sculpture, but it is clear from the sculptures of others beside him that this Greek god has been well integrated into Buddhism. This is supported by the further Gandhara art mentioned above.

And in the field of architecture, the Corinthian Column developed into the Indo-Corinthian Column. Corinthian Column motif was also used in shallow reliefs, which served to separate one scene from another [4]. It is a way of blending Greek architectural symbols with Indian Buddhist sculpture, and reflects the influence of Hellenism on India. For example, the Corinthian pillar capitals with the Buddha, now in the Musée Guimet in France, have the image of the Buddha carved into the capitals [5]. In addition to this the Bodhisattva Maitreya in Tushita Paradise, also in the Musée Guimet, has the Corinthian column and Corinthian capital letters carved into the column in its image. This is a good example of the integration of the architectural field.

3.2. Maudhara and the Siddhartha Periods

The Motsutra is a variation of the Gandhara, a distinctly Hellenistic style of Buddhist iconography, and the Siddhartha period is a further variation of the Motsutra. Some have classified both the

Motsutra and Shudra periods as two separate styles of iconography, but the differences between the two periods are not so great that they are analysed here as the same period.

The style of the Buddha in this period is less Hellenistic and more closely resembles the typical Indian aborigines of the time, both in terms of the stylised features of the Buddha and his hair. For the reliefs of this period, there are a large number of cross-legged statues of the Buddha that resemble the image of the main Jain deity Maharaja of the same period [6]. The main features of Buddha statues from this period are: the Indian appearance, with half-closed eyes and lowered curtains with a deep meditative look; a high, straight nose; plump lips, especially the lower lips, with a natural smile at the corners of the mouth and elongated rectangular earlobes; a rounded, plump chin; and a neck with Three courses. The head is covered with a ring of neatly arranged right spiral hair, topped with a fleshy bun. The halo at the back of the head is large and ornate, with a lotus flower in the centre, surrounded by an array of floral motifs, scrolling grasses, bands of flowers and vines, interlocking beads and arcs, all interspersed like a brocade. The halo is also a symbol of the Buddha's spiritual state of contemplation, subtlety and profundity, and splendour [7]. The head of the Bodhisattva in the Tokyo National Museum shows a great transition from the Gandhara period to the Moksha period, especially in the five senses. As described above, the lips are thicker, and although the bridge of the nose is not well defined by weathering, the rounded chin and rectangularly elongated earlobes are typical of this Mādhāra and Sādhu period. The head of the Buddha at Sarnath, excavated in the New Delhi Museum, shows the eyes lowered and half-closed, especially in the bun, which has changed from the distinctly Hellenistic bob and two curls of the Gandhara period to the more widespread spiral bun of the present. This includes a reduction in the realistic style of the Hellenistic period and a more snug fit of the garments of the period. The overall features are more refined, revealing a supernatural serene calmness [8].

In a sense, the Motsutra and Siddhartha periods played a pioneering role for both indigenous Indian Buddhist statuary and Chinese Buddhist statuary, setting the trend for future Chinese Buddhist statuary.

4. China

Buddhism is not an indigenous religion to China but a foreign religion that spread via the Silk Road, yet it is more widely practised in China than indigenous Taoism. As a result, Buddhist art, such as statues, temple construction and frescoes, has achieved great success and has been passed on to the present day.

Geographically, Buddhism was the first to flow into Xinjiang and then into the region, where it was also introduced. An examination of Buddhist statues in the West also reveals that they inherited the Sado style [9]. The wooden statues of the seated Buddha found in the Kizil Caves in Xinjiang, whether in the form of simple, close-fitting clothing, the spiral bun on the head, or the lowered curtains with half-closed eyes, are very much in keeping with the Mādhāra and Shādhārāṇḍa periods.

There are, of course, some statues that incorporate a small amount of Gandhara style [9]. For example, the head of the Buddha excavated at the Seven Star Buddhist Temples in Yanqi, Xinjiang, and now in the Ermitage Museum in Russia, is more Gandhara in style. Firstly, the bun is wavy, similar to the Gandhara style. Secondly, the entire facial profile, although more rounded, is closer to the features, such as the trapezoidal nose and the shallow eye sockets formed by the protruding eyes. All of these points attest to the influence of the Gandhara style on Western Buddhist statuary.

When the mission reached the western corridor, the shape of Buddhist statues changed once more. The geography of the Hexi Corridor is long and narrow, which runs east to west and north to south. This led to a collision between the foreign art of statuary and the Chinese art of the Central Plains and Southwest China, and the formation of a new style of Buddhist statuary [1]. This artistic style had a great influence on the styles of the Wei, Jin and North-South dynasties, starting with the establishment of the Yungang Grottoes in Longmen. After Emperor Xiaowen took power in the Northern Wei, the importance attached to Buddhism increased. After he moved the capital to Luoyang, the style of

Buddhist portraiture was innovated. The evolution of the style of the 'clear statue with beautiful bones', Similar to the Yungang Grottoes, is an important feature of this historical period. The fusion of northern and southern Buddhist styles led to a series of paradigms represented by the Longmen Grottoes [9].

The Gandhara style is also present in the early caves of the Yungang Grottoes, as in the case of the main Buddha in Cave 18, where the overall costume is more Gandhara-inspired and the mouth of the statue is shaped like a Gandhara-style bird, with an inverted trapezoidal chin. The most obvious feature is that the eyes are not half-closed, as in the Mtsutra and Siddhartha periods, but have an elongated almond eye. Caves such as Cave 9 and Cave 12, which have flying celestial music, are clearly exotic, and in some cases more Greek in style.

The Longmen Grottoes, opened after the capital was moved to Luoyang, began a policy of Sinicisation, and Buddhist art was influenced by this and began a process of Sinicisation, with images of clean-cut, well-dressed figures becoming widespread [7]. The influence of Sinicisation also led to the incorporation of Chinese Zen thought into Buddhism, as well as traditional Chinese aesthetics into the modelling of Buddhist statues. The Lu Shena Buddha in the Longmen Grottoes, for example, has a more traditional Chinese aesthetic than the Gandhara studies of the Gandhara when it first entered the Middle Kingdom, the imitation of the Maodo and Shado styles in the Yungang Grottoes, or even some of the earlier caves in the Longmen Grottoes from the Northern Wei dynasty. It gradually moved away from the earlier 'clear bones' to a 'short and florid face' [9]. The Buddha's bones were gradually transformed into a 'short and florid face'.

Buddhist stone sculptures, such as those in the Longxing Temple Crypt in Qingzhou, have survived for their own special historical reasons. For example, in the late Northern Wei Dynasty, the round-headed, light-headed statue of the Buddha with its tall, straight nose and small mouth and thin lips was influenced by Gandhara sculpture of the classical period. The back-screen form of the Buddhist stone statues in the Qingzhou Cave is derived from ancient Greek relief carving. The right-hand spiral hair on the head of the Buddhist statue in Qingzhou can be seen to be influenced by the sculpture of the Maudhara and Shudra periods [10]. The brass technique was brought over via the Silk Road, which was also used in the shaping of Buddhist statues, adding to the material and making the statues last longer [11]. For example, the large Buddha in the Lower Huayan Temple in Datong, Shanxi province, during the Liao dynasty, and on the ground floor of the Yingxian wooden pagoda, were both made using this technique.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the history of the development of the Buddha's image by Using Greek sculpture as an entry point. It goes on to examine the development of Buddhist iconography in ancient India and China.

By tracing the origins of the Buddha's iconography, the earliest Greeks who made statues of the Buddha and the sculptural features of their own people are identified. After learning about the characteristics of Greek sculpture, a comparison is made with the Gandhara style, which is distinctly Hellenistic, and a brief explanation is given as to why it took root in the Gandhara region. The influence of the Hellenistic style on the Gandhara style can be drawn, and the stylistic characteristics of Gandhara's Hellenistic Buddha statues can be seen through the comparison of the cases. The comparison of the Gandhara style with the sculptures of the Mādhāra and Siddhartha periods leads to the conclusion that over time the sculpture of the Buddha became more localised, more archaic than the Greek Gandhara style, but also less human and more divine. When Buddhism was introduced to China, it collided with the long tradition of Chinese culture and Zen thought, resulting in a more dignified and solemn form of Chinese Buddhist sculpture, with a majestic and universal attitude.

Through the above analysis of literature and case studies and case comparisons, a deeper understanding of the reasons for the development of Buddhist statues and the process of their change

and history is gained. In turn, the development of Buddhist statuary as a whole is a development from imitation to creation, from natural to programmed, and from human to divine.

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