
Title of Object

Standing Buddha

Photo of Object (optional)



Object Information

Artist: Unknown

Culture: China (Northern Qi)

Date of Object: Late 6th century

Country: China

Accession Number: 2000.207

File Created: 5/17/2016

Material/Medium: Limestone, sculpture

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Tour Topics

Group 4 tour, ancient culture, architecture, cultural encounters/exchanges, fashion/dress, funerary/afterlife, gods/goddesses, ritual/ceremony, spirituality/sacred, symbolism, Buddhism

Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. What is your first thought when you look at this statue?
 2. Where would you find a statue like this?
 3. How do you think it was used?
 4. Do you see something like this in your daily routine?
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Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)

This Buddha is from Northern Qi dynasty (AD -550-77) in China. There were many techniques used in creating these statues. This is made of limestone and is exceptionally fine in structure and carved

presentation of the sheer and flowing gown worn. There is little to define the body, which is column like and slender. The head is well articulated with fine curls and the presence of a third eye is slightly visible. The hands probably would have been presenting signs (mudras) of engagement.

Two important trends were to render bodies in these divine images in a fuller, fleshier manner, and to free them from their dependence on the shrine or stele so that they were no longer always in high-relief against a niche or other background. While the earliest Buddha images were a single statue, during the Six Dynasties period (220-589) groupings of a Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas became increasingly popular. According to Tan Huism, deputy director at the Asian Civilisations Museum, "In the late Northern Wei period, the Buddha has a very formal and stiff posture with a flattened body. You have no sense of the body beneath the robe. But in the Northern Qi style, you can see the contours of the body under thin robes. The style becomes much more naturalistic." (See NYT article.)

There were no named artist, but the craftsmen learned their skills from masters. The statues were made to be worshipped. The making of a Buddha statue brought manifold blessing to the person who commissioned it.

The statue was not the deity but the manifestations in which to revere the deity.

Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)

Buddhism is a complex with a variety of doctrines and practices. Most share an ultimate goal: the attainment of nirvana or salvation and the escape from the cycle of rebirth. The flexible nature of Buddhism and the absence of a single authority have allowed the religion to flourish in cultures as different as Japan, Tibet, and Sri Lanka. The diversity of societies has allowed Buddhism to be adapted to different cultures but maintain the traditional thread of Buddha's teachings.

Buddhism rejects the belief in soul, yet it should not be taken to mean that it rejects the belief in the afterlife, morality or a transcendent reality. There are extended and altered patterns in Buddhism in teaching.

Buddhas like this were not used as tomb figures, per se. Even though Buddhism was about the releasing of all worldly goods to reach the perfect state of nirvana, oftentimes the cultural side of life did not interfere with the religious beliefs. Early on, Confucianism was the national religion so when people were preparing to die and go to the afterworld, they would take their worldly possessions with them, i.e. a small Buddha.

Buddhists are usually cremated so as the religion grew that funerary tradition was more practiced in China.

"The brief Northern Qi dynasty witnessed tremendous change in Chinese art and material culture. In fact, many researchers have described it as one of the most pivotal periods in all of Chinese history, forming the roots of the cosmopolitan culture that matured during the later Sui (581–618) and Tang (618–907) dynasties." (Freer Sackler Museum)

"The Northern Qi period witnessed a transformation in Buddhist sculptural style, particularly in regards to drapery, from the earlier Northern Wei period. While the artisans of the Northern Wei depicted the Buddha's robes with a deep neck and voluminous, rippling folds, Northern Qi robes are soft and diaphanous, revealing the contours of the body beneath. The Northern Qi style is an indirect

interpretation of the Indian Gupta style, particularly the Sarnath School, transmitted to China via the Central Asian trade routes. The adoption of the foreign style reflects the socio-political changes that occurred at the beginning of the Northern Qi period, when its rulers looked to non-Han stylistic traditions. This was in marked contrast to the Northern Wei rulers, who sought to acculturate themselves within the Han polity through a process of Sinicization.” (christies.com)

Current Mia Label Information (optional)

During the late 6th century under the Northern Qi dynasty (550-577), a reserved, subtle style of Buddhist sculpture evolved from the foundation laid by Northern Zhou and Northern Wei sculptors. The new style manifests a solemn expression, smooth planes, and a miraculously thin garment that clings to the body like a second skin.

While the earliest Buddha images were a single statue, during the Six Dynasties period (220-589) groupings of a Buddha flanked by two Bodhisattvas became increasingly popular. These figural triads were either sculpted in high relief from a single stone or carved independently and placed on a common stone pedestal usually in front of a flame-shaped backdrop called a mandorla similar to this arrangement.

These three figures were not carved as parts of the same triad, but they are the same age and carved in the Northern Qi style. They are also the correct sizes to be placed next to each other as the flanking Bodhisattvas were always smaller than the central Buddha image. This Buddha is carved from grey limestone typical of Northern Qi figures from Shantung province, while the pair of bodhisattvas are fashioned from a white marble common to the Tingzhou region of Hopei province.

Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Appreciating China, MIA, Robert Jacobson

Oxford on line art: Buddhism, Introduction

Here is a link to a Khan Academy discussion of a Northern Qi Bodhisattva at the Met Museum, in which they discuss the style of the Northern Qi carved sculptures:

<https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/art-asia/imperial-china/northern-qi/v/bodhisattva-probably-avalokiteshvara-guanyin-northern-qi-dynasty-c-550-60>

This is a link to that bodhisattva at the Met: <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/42718>

Article from Christies (see Lot Notes): <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/lot/a-polychrome-and-gilt-limestone-figure-of-buddha-5878155-details.aspx>

The changing face of Buddhist sculptures, by SONIA KOLESNIKOV-JESSOP, January 21, 2009:

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/21/arts/21iht-jessop.1.19554771.html?_r=0

Freer Sackler symposium: <http://www.asia.si.edu/events/XTSymposium.asp>