The Development of Buddha Images

Qing MING

Yunnan Normal University, Kunming, Yunnan, China
1965295347@qq.com

Keywords: Buddha Images, Sakyamuni Buddha, Mathura Style.

Abstract. Buddhism was founded in the sixth century B.C., and Buddha images began with representations of Sakyamuni Buddha. After the Buddha’s parinirvana, Buddhism started to spread out of India to the north and south, passing through Central Asia, Japan, Korea, and so on. Following the spread of Buddhism, Buddha images have developed according to time period, geographic location, and cultural traditions of an area. Responding to religious belief, local craftsmen and artisans created differing Buddha images that were both imposing and tranquil in appearance. This paper intends to show an evolution of Buddha images from non-iconic to iconic times, and the variation in form, garments and decorations used. From these, we can see the many different styles used and varying appearances of the Buddha according to different people.

1. King Mucalinda Venerating the Buddha (Late 2nd Century B.C.; India)

The bodhi tree, regarded as a sacred tree in Buddhism, and the pedestal sprinkled with flowers are symbols of the Buddha. On the lower left, King Mucalinda is shown paying worship to a stupa, an early representation of the Buddha.

2. Footprint of the Buddha (Pakistan - Peshawar; 3rd to 5th Century)

This is an image of the Buddha’s footprints carved on stone. Worshipping the Buddha’s footprints was analogous to worshipping the Buddha himself and was said to erase the effects of boundless sins. Here, the soles of the feet are carved with a thousand-spoked wheel (one of the thirty-two main features of a Buddha) and with other auspicious patterns: the tree jewels, the lotus. And the “卐卐” on both sides of the footprints are Indra and Brahm in with elaborate hair arrangements and long robes, typical of the Gandhara style.

3. India - Seated Buddha (2nd Century)

This Buddha is sitting cross-legged on a lion throne with his right hand displaying the fearlessness mudra and his left hand displaying the earth-touching mudra. The statue has a large-
spiral shaped topknot and wears a thin robe that reveals the right shoulder. It is one of the representative Buddha images of the Mathura style.

4. India - First Sermon of the Buddha (5th Century)

This Buddha has a topknot, round cheeks, wide shoulders and a broad chest. He is wearing a kasaya that covers both shoulders and is seated on a pedestal with his hands displaying the Dharma-teaching gesture. The pedestal is carved with a Dharma wheel in the center and five monks, mother and son devotees, and a deer at the sides, symbolizing the Buddha’s first sermon at Deer Park.

5. Afghanistan-double Transformation (3rd - 4th Century)

In this relief, the “double transformation” refers to the miraculous power of the Buddha. By which fire and water issue from his upper and lower body in order to subdue the stubborn heterodoxies of kingdom of Sravasti. The composition of this figure is symmetrical and traces of gilt can be seen. Both the spiral headdress and the drapery of the garments are well arranged and balanced. This piece is representative of work from the Kapisa region.

Figure 2. Afghanistan-double Transformation, Nepal-standing Buddha and Myanmar-Buddha Sheltered.

6. Nepal - Standing Buddha (7th - 8th Century)

This statue depicts the Buddha with downcast eves, displaying the bestowing mudra with his right hand and holding his robes with his left hand. The thin robes that cling to the Buddha’s body are depicted by a few simple lines, and the figure’s posture is triple-bent, with the weight of the body on the right foot. Together with the low topknot, the features of this Buddha statue show the spread of the Mathura style of the Gupta period to Nepal.

7. Myanmar - Buddha Sheltered by King Mucalinda (Early 14th Century)

The Buddha is seated on a double-layered square lotus throne with his right hand in the earth-touching mudra and his left hand in the meditation mudra. The short neck and low topknot of the statue is characteristic of sculptures of the late Pagan period. A nine-headed Mucalinda is seen with his mouth wide-open, as if ready to protect the Buddha. Surrounding the Buddha are eight dragonheads that from an aureole and appears lively, displaying skill and creativity.
8. Sri Lanka - Aukana Buddha (5th Century)

Found on the head of this statue is a flame-like shape that represent transcendental wisdom. This statue depicts the Buddha with round cheeks and his eyes closed. The Buddha wears a long robe that clings to his body under the thin kasaya that reveals his right shoulder. The right hand displays the fearlessness mudra while the left hand rests on his shoulder, pulling gently at the end of his robes. This is one of the tallest standing figures in Sri Lanka and displays features of the Mathura style of the Gupta period.

9. Thailand - Phra Achana (13th - 14th Century)

This is one of the largest statues in Thailand. The Buddha is seated in the lotus position on a throne with a slight smile and peaceful expression on his face while his right hand displays the Mara-subduing mudra. The Buddha has a curly topknot, half-closed eyes, and arch-shaped eyebrows. Exhibiting features that are characteristic of the Thai Buddhist art style that developed after the 13th century, the statue’s appearance is imposing and dignified.

10. Indonesia - Seated Buddha (8th - 9th Century)

This seated Buddha statue displays lively features and was carved with fine and delicate lines. The sculpting skill is mostly that of the Gupta period while the outfits of the figures in the relief characteristics of the Java style.

11. China - Seated Sakyamuni Buddha (5th Century)

This statue depicts the Buddha with a high topknot, long earlobes, bright eyes, and a solemn expression. Sitting cross-legged with his hands in meditative gesture, the Buddha wears a kasaya that reveals his right shoulder. The statue appears imposing and carries the air of an emperor. The status is the representative and also the landmark of the Yungang grottoes.

12. Korea - Seokguram Grottoes Seated Buddha (8th Century)

This statue depicts the Buddha seated in meditation with his right hand displaying the Mara-subduing mudra. This statue has long eyebrows, slightly smiling lips, and slightly downward cast eyes. The carving skill of the statue is simple depicts the robe of the Buddha with neat flowing lines. The statue is the most important national treasure of Korea and is listed as one of the world’s masterpiece sculptures.

Also known as the “Askua Big Buddha,” it was created by Tori, the top sculptor of the Asuka period under the order of Empress Suiko. Standing 2.75 meters in height, this statue was sculpted based on the Northern Wei dynasty style, and is now enshrined in the Golden Hall of Asukaji. The intricate and symmetrical pattern of the drapery is unique to Tori, and is called “Tori Style.”

Figure 4. China - Seated Sakyamuni Buddha, Korea - Seokguram Grottoes Seated Buddha and Japan-Seated Sakyamuni Buddha.

Conclusion

In conclusion, before the first century, footprints, stupas, Dharma wheels, diamond seats, and bodhi trees were used to represent Sakyamini Buddha. During the Kushan Empire, King Kaniska constructed many Buddhist temples and stupas, and sculpted numerous statues of the Buddha. Following the spread of Buddhism, Buddha images have developed according to time period, geographic location, and cultural traditions of an area. Responding to religious belief, local craftsmen and artisans created differing Buddha images that were both imposing and tranquil in appearance.

References