

**The Siwei Bodhisattva:
The Contemplating Image in Popular
Buddhism of Sixth Century China**

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the visual characteristics and religious background of a distinctive Buddhist iconographic form, the contemplative or pensive image (*banjia siwei xiang* 半跏思惟像). This dissertation aims to shed new light on the long-standing scholarly debates regarding the pensive figure's identity, but more importantly to understand the way in which the image's changing forms and the changing meanings assigned to the image were linked to the formation of a new and distinctive complex of religious beliefs and practices.

This dissertation is based on an examination of more than two hundred sculptures of the pensive image, many of which are accompanied by dedicatory inscriptions. Approximately one-third of the images and inscriptions have not previously been described in any scholarly publication. The geographic and chronological coverage ranges from early Gandhāra (the first to third centuries), Dunhuang and Jingta examples (c. 400-470 AD), through the Yungang, Maijishan and Longmen cave-temple complexes (c. 460-530 AD), to sixth-century examples from Shanxi, Hebei and Shandong.

The iconographic development shows a clear progression in the pensive figure's importance, from a minor role as attendant to a prominent deity in its own right. At the same time, my analysis of the accompanying inscriptions reveals that the figure gradually began to take on a distinct religious significance. To reconstruct the religious concepts that the Siwei Bodhisattva represented, I examine both textual and visual evidence relating to this figure, showing how it embodied ideas about mental discipline in pursuit of enlightenment and the belief in Pure Lands. By reconstructing the religious beliefs and practices surrounding the cult of Siwei, I illustrate the ways in which Chinese religion was constituted through the interaction of texts, images and ritual practices.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

During the fifth and the sixth centuries, Buddhist image-making activities in China reached their first historical peak. People from all strata of society commissioned various divine figures to be portrayed and worshipped in different settings for various occasions. These deities are usually represented either standing or seated in meditating posture, but a unique posture distinct from both traditional standing and seated figures started to become popular from the mid-fifth century onwards. In this posture, the deity sits with one leg pendant and the other folded laterally with the ankle resting on the knee of the pendant leg; moreover, one of his hands supports his head or fingers point to his cheek or temple, as if the figure is absorbed in contemplation (Fig. 1.1).



Fig. 1.1 A contemplative bodhisattva statue, Hebei, dated to the Northern Qi (550-77), H. 30 cm, Freer Gallery



Fig. 1.2 A contemplative bodhisattva statue, Gandhāra, H. 67.8 cm, Matsuoka Museum of Arts 松岡美術館, Tokyo

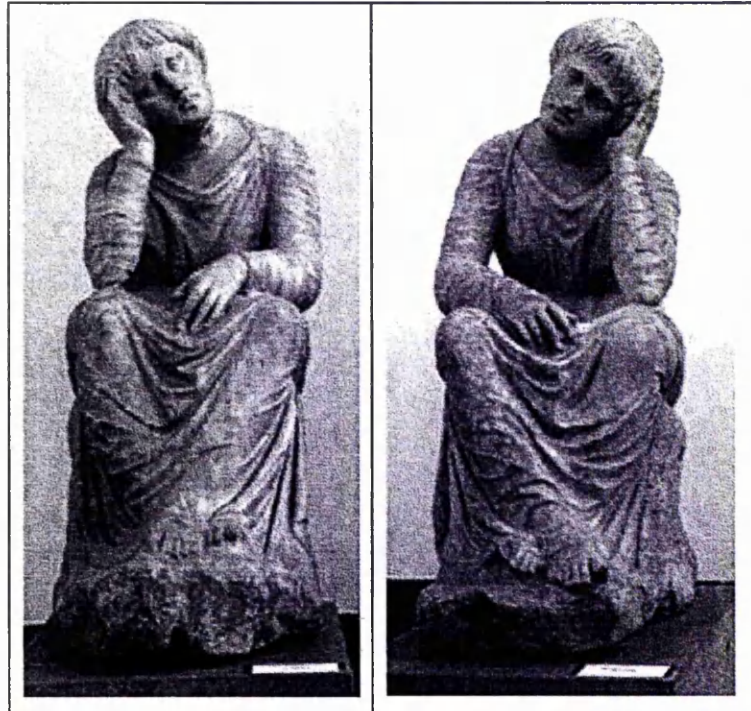


Fig. 1.3 A pair of sculptures of mourners for a grave, Menidi, Attika, Greece, 330-20 BC, Pergamon Museum, Berlin

Images depicting deities seated in this posture probably first appeared in Gandhāran Buddhist art from the first to the third century, both included in narrative scenes and as independent sculptures in the round (Fig. 1.2).¹ But this sitting posture in visual representations can be traced to earlier examples in Greek and Greco-Roman sculptures as thinkers or mourners (Fig. 1.3).² Although this posture became widely adopted in Gandhāra, today's Pakistan, it was rarely depicted in the contemporaneous Buddhist image-making centre in East India, Mathurā.³ With respect to Chinese instances, the earliest pensive image

¹ Lee Junghee suggests that this posture in Buddhist art occurred "in areas associated with Kushān dynasty (first-third century AD)". Lee Junghee, "The Origins and Development of the Pensive Bodhisattva Images of Asia," *Artibus Asiae* 53.3/4 (1993): 311.

² Lee Junghee, "The Origins and Development" 312.

³ Lee Junghee has discovered only three pieces from Mathurā. Lee Junghee, "The Origins and Development" 315. One of them is identified as Avalokitēśvara by Martin Lerner, *The Flame and Lotus: Indian and Southeast Asian Art from the Kronos Collection* (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1984) 30-35. .

was discovered on a bronze mirror dated to the early fourth century,⁴ but it was only from the beginning of the fifth century that the pensive image started to be reproduced extensively in China proper. In China it developed from a secondary figure in iconographical settings in the early fifth century to a primary or independent deity by the beginning of the sixth century. From approximately 530 to 580 the contemplative image reached its final stage of development and peak of popularity in Hebei, where it was carved as sculptures in the round or positioned as a central deity in iconographical settings. By the end of the sixth century it could be found in Korea and Japan.

From Gandhāran to East Asian images, the question that has intrigued scholars most and to which they have devoted much effort is that of the figure's identity. With respect to the Gandhāran images, there is no inscription attached to such images, and scholars have had to rely on iconographical analysis to determine the identity of this figure. They have proposed several possibilities, including Prince Siddhārtha, Maitreya, Avalokiteśvara, Padmapāni, or anonymous listeners of Dharma preaching.⁵ Kim Inchang concludes, “[the contemplative image type] was used for the Maitreya images alone at Mathurā, but for the Bodhisattva Siddhārtha as well as Maitreya in Gandhāra. In Gandhāra around the beginning of the third century AD, this particular attitude seems to have been employed only for Bodhisattva Padmapāni, and thenceforth Avalokiteśvara becomes the most characteristic deity to be depicted in the contemplative attitude.”⁶ Kim's conclusion suggests that before this image was transmitted to China, it had been employed to represent a number of different deities. In other words, the contemplative bodhisattva image China received at the beginning of the fourth century was a hybrid which had layers of meanings. This probably

⁴ Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一, “Chūgoku ni okeru butszō no hajimari 中國における仏像のはじまり,” 1940, *Chūgoku no bukkyō bijutsu* 中國の佛教美術 (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1968) 24.

⁵ Kim Inchang, “Controversies in the Iconography of Maitreya,” *The Future Buddha Maitreya* (New Delhi: D.K. Printworld, 1997) 223-28. Lee Junghee, “The Origins and Development” 312-25.

⁶ Kim Inchang 227-28.

gave Chinese artisans and Buddhists certain flexibility to use it in different occasions and to represent distinct deities.

In modern scholarship, this image is usually described as *banjia siwei xiang* 半跏思惟像 in Chinese.⁷ The term, *banjia* 半跏, refers to the unique sitting posture which derives from the term, *jiapu* 跏趺, indicating the meditation posture in which the figure, sitting on the floor or a throne, bends his legs at the knees and crosses the lower legs horizontally. Since the contemplating figure sits with only one leg folded and the other pendant, the posture is called “*banjia*”, namely a half-cross-legged position. The term *siwei* 思惟, meaning contemplation, refers to the figure’s hand gesture. This term, *siwei*, is inscribed on approximately forty pieces of the contemplative statues from Hebei province. Scholars thus conveniently use the term prescribed by the inscriptions to name this image. The term “*banjia siwei*” thus refers to the figure’s sitting posture and hand gesture.

Two leading theories regarding the Chinese contemplative bodhisattva images have been that the image represents either Prince Siddhārtha or Maitreya. In attempting to develop a definitive answer, scholars have put much emphasis on examination of sutra passages that seemed to bear relevance to the deity’s identity. When they started to undertake their research, these scholars started from two basic assumptions: first, that creation of the images of a religious figure must proceed from text to image; and second, that the contemplating figure must have a clear identity that can be reasonably and consistently explained by texts. Since texts predating the appearance of the contemplative image do not contain any reference to a “Siwei Bodhisattva”, scholars have tended to read the term *siwei* in the inscription as an adjective describing the state of the figure, or as a verb indicating what the figure is doing.

⁷ For example, Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, “*Banjia siwei xiang zaitan* 半跏思惟像再探,” *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 3.3 (1986): 41-55.

These scholars' methodology has been constrained by the ways in which they have framed their questions and the assumption that images must always be explained by canonical texts. Studies that overemphasise the authority of literary sources have inevitably treated the images merely as an illustration or appendage to the texts. This method also limits the vision and possibility of discovering the variety and complexity of the images and the formation of a cult.

This thesis aims to delineate the transformation of the contemplative image in China in the fifth and sixth centuries and to reveal the religious significance that this deity represented. It goes beyond answering the question of the identity of the figure, attempting also to answer the question of what religious contents the figure was intended to represent and to study the formation of beliefs centred on the pensive image. This introductory chapter first reviews earlier literature on the contemplative bodhisattva image and explains the layout of the chapters of this thesis.

The earliest identification of the contemplative image produced in China was set out by Osvald Siren in his *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, published in 1925, in which he identifies the image of a pensive figure with a kneeling horse in Yungang Cave 6 as "the farewell of Kanthaka", referring to Siddhārtha's farewell to his mount Kanthaka (Figs. 3.16 and 3.17).⁸ Siddhārtha is Śākyamuni's secular name before becoming a monk. In Śākyamuni's biographies, including the *Scripture on Past and Present Causes and Effects* (*Guoqu xianzai yinguo jing* 過去現在因果經), when Śākyamuni bids farewell to his horse Kanthaka and groom Chandaka before becoming a monk, Kanthaka kneels and licks Siddhārtha's foot.⁹ On the basis of this text, Siren identified the image in Yungang Cave 6 as this farewell scene.

⁸ Osvald Siren, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, vol. 1 (1925; Bangkok: SDI, 1998) 11 and PL. 29.

⁹ T 189.3.633b.

In 1940 Mizuno Seiichi 水野清一 published an article in which he proposes two pieces of textual evidence from Śākyamuni's biographies and identifies the contemplative figure under a tree as Prince Siddhārtha.¹⁰ Based on the *Scripture on Past and Present Causes and Effects* and the *Acts of the Buddha* (*Fo suo xing zan* 佛所行讚), one day when Prince Siddhārtha was watching the peasants ploughing the field, a deity referred to as *jing ju tian* 淨居天, incarnated himself as a worm in the soil and was immediately pecked by a bird as the peasant ploughed through. Prince Siddhārtha witnessed this scene and felt profound sympathy for all living creatures that hunt and eat each other. The prince then entered into a state of contemplation, through which he transcended the Realm of Desire (*yu jie* 欲界) and reached the fourth level of meditation (*si chan di* 四禪地). Meanwhile, the tree bent its branches to follow the sun's movement, thus shading the prince from the sun's rays.

In the *Acts of the Buddha*, the scenario is the same as that in the *Scripture on Past and Present Causes and Effects*, but it additionally remarks on Siddhārtha's compassion for the peasants' toil and the cattle's tiredness. Siddhārtha sighed and sat on the ground; he then observed the sufferings and contemplated upon the law of life and death. In both texts, the ploughing scene is only one of several scenes that inspired Siddhārtha to enter the contemplative state. The prince also contemplated when he saw the scenes of life, death, illness and a monk when touring in the city. Mizuno therefore argued that contemplation is the essential characteristic of the young aristocrat Prince Siddhārtha, and the contemplating figures in the Northern Dynasties, such as those in the Yungang Caves, are representations of Prince Siddhārtha.

Mizuno's article also drew attention to a record contained in the *Collected Records*

¹⁰ Mizuno, Seiichi, "Hanka shiyui zō ni tsu i te 半伽思惟像について," 1940, *Chūgoku no bukkō bijutsu* (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1968) 243-250.

of the *Miraculous Responses of the Three Treasures in the Sacred Region* [i.e. China] (*Ji shenzhou sanbao gantonglu* 集神州三寶感通錄), composed by Monk Daoxuan 道宣 in 664,¹¹ showing that the contemplative image was circulating in both the Northern and the Southern Dynasties. This record documents the provenance of a statue of the crown prince contemplating, *taizi siwei xiang* 太子思惟像, in the Wu Temple 吳寺 in Xuzhou 徐州 of the Eastern Jin dynasty (316-420).¹² According to the description, Wu Cangying 吳蒼鷹, Faxian's 法顯 (c. 340-420) contemporary, received this statue from an Indian monk and housed it in Xuzhou. Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei 北魏孝文帝 (r. 471-99), asked for this statue from southern China and housed it in the Northern Wei capital, Pingcheng 平城 (present-day Datong 大同, Shanxi province). The last Northern Qi emperor, Hou Zhu 後主 (r. 565-77), moved it to his capital Ye 鄴 (in modern Hebei province). Mizuno argued that this story explains why the image circulated in both southern and northern China.

An alternative identification of the contemplative figure was hinted at by Matsubara Saburō 松原三郎 in an article published in 1966. Although Matsubara hinted that the figure might be identified not as Siddārtha but as Maitreya, he did not elaborate on this idea but instead tended to agree with Mizuno's identification of the figure as Siddhārtha.¹³ It was only four decades later that Lee Yu-min was to provide a more extensive argument for this second theory, in her 1983 dissertation and in a 1986 article based on this dissertation.¹⁴ Lee reviews Mizuno's analysis and presents relevant sutra texts about Maitreya, raising reasonable doubts regarding the Prince Siddhārtha theory. According to these sutras,

¹¹ T 2106.52.404a-435a.

¹² T 2106.52.417a.

¹³ Matsubara Saburō 松原三郎, "Hokusei no Teiken yōshiki hakukyoku zō: tokuni hanka shiyuizō nitauite 北齊の定鼎様式白玉像—特に半跏思惟像について," *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū* 中国仏教彫刻史研究, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1966) 129-48. Another article by Matsubara focuses on the provenance of the style: Matsubara Saburō, "Tōgi Hokusei no hakukyoku hanka shiyuizō ni tsu i te 東魏・北齊の白玉半跏思惟像について," *Bijutsu kenkyū* 189 (1955): 25-38.

¹⁴ Lee Yu-min, "*Banjia siwei xiang*" 41-55. Lee Yu-min, "The Maitreya Cult and Its Art in Early China," diss., Ohio State U, 1983, 301-15.

Maitreya has a life story identical to that of Śākyamuni, and will also attain his enlightenment after contemplating under a tree. Mizuno's identification of the image as Siddhārtha is thus at best ambiguous. Lee devoted further attention to the iconography of surviving images, including the images at Yungang, where the contemplating figures usually flank the cross-legged bodhisattva, and a stele having a Maitreya on the obverse and two pensive bodhisattva images on the reverse. Lee notes the unusual relationship between Maitreya and contemplative bodhisattva, and suggests that since attendants can be considered as manifestations of the main deity, the contemplative figures could be the manifestations of the cross-legged bodhisattva, Maitreya, and therefore can also be identified as Maitreya.

In 1975, Sasaguchi Rei devoted her entire PhD dissertation, "The Image of the Contemplating Bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhist Sculpture of the Sixth Century", to analysing this iconography.¹⁵ In contrast to earlier studies focusing on images from only one or two sites, Sasaguchi's dissertation was the first attempt of examining the contemplative bodhisattva image from northwest to northeast China including those from Mogao 莫高, Yungang 雲岡, Longmen 龍門 and several sites in today's Hebei province. In her case studies, however, she treats the contemplative bodhisattva images of the fifth century at different sites or in different steles as individual works with little concern about the possible interaction in iconography or religious contents among them.

For example, she identifies all the contemplative figures at Mogao as "different forms of Maitreya Bodhisattva in the Tusita Heaven" (Figs. 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 2.8 and 2.10) without providing much reasoning but simply puts that there is no reason why they should not be regarded as representations of Maitreya.¹⁶ With respect to the contemplative figures

¹⁵ Sasaguchi Rei, "The Image of the Contemplative Bodhisattva in Chinese Buddhist Sculpture of the Sixth Century" diss., Harvard U, 1975.

¹⁶ Sasaguchi 32.

with horses in Yungang Cave 6 (Figs. 3.16 and 3.17), she cites Śākyamuni's biographies and identifies the contemplative figures in Yungang Cave 6 as Prince Siddhārtha.¹⁷ As to the contemplative figures at Longmen in the Weizi 魏字 and Lianhua 蓮花 Caves (hereafter, Lotus Cave), these "should be regarded first as the reminders of how Prince Siddhārtha attained Buddhahood under the *āsvattha* tree", and should also "be considered to embody Siddhārtha performing the bodhisattva's practices and pursuing the way of the bodhisattva, which led him ultimately to enlightenment" (Figs. 4.12, 4.13, 4.17 and 4.18).¹⁸ Furthermore, these images "may be interpreted also as the representations of any bodhisattvas performing the bodhisattva-carya (the bodhisattva's practices) or pursuing the bodhisattva-mārga (the way of the bodhisattva), initiated by Śākyamuni Buddha and formulated in Mahāyāna Buddhism".¹⁹

Sasaguchi devotes much effort to explain the meaning of the trees in the images at Longmen. In contrast to earlier scholars who tend to interpret the image of Siddhārtha's first meditation under a tree, Sasaguchi thinks that it is the representation of Śākyamuni attaining enlightenment under a tree because the enlightenment is the most important event in the Buddha's life.²⁰ Moreover, after attaining enlightenment, the Buddha remained in *samādhi* under the *āsvattha* tree for seven days, and sat under *ajapāla* tree, *mucilinda* tree and *rājāyatana* tree for another seven days each.²¹ Meditating at a cool spot under a tree was widely practiced in ancient India, and Śākyamuni followed this tradition.²² This practice was also applied to "the course of discipline for bodhisattva toward

¹⁷ Sasaguchi 35.

¹⁸ Sasaguchi 47. Naitō Tōichirō 内藤藤一郎 thinks that the pensive bodhisattvas in Weizi and Lotus Caves are anonymous bodhisattvas. Naitō Tōichirō, "夢殿秘仏と中宮寺本尊 Yumedono hibutsu to Chūgūji honzon," *Tōyo bijutsu* 6 (1930): 73.

¹⁹ Sasaguchi 48.

²⁰ Sasaguchi 38.

²¹ Sasaguchi 39-40.

²² Sasaguchi 40.

enlightenment”.²³

Sasaguchi further proposes evidence from the *Sutra on the Names of the Buddhas*, *Foming jing* 佛名經, and inscriptions of “Siwei Fo 思惟佛” and “Xinwei Fo 心唯佛” and suggests that the contemplative bodhisattva images formed a unique category, *siwei*, and used as a name of a Buddha during the Zhengguang 正光 reign (520-24) in Luoyang.²⁴ This innovation was brought to Hebei after the collapse of the Northern Wei and the transfer of the capital of the Eastern Wei (534-50) to Ye in 534. Gao Cheng 高澄, who seized the political and military power of the Eastern Wei, promoted this image and the practice of *siwei* in Hebei, which led to the popularity of the contemplative bodhisattva image.²⁵

Proposing that the inscriptions Siwei Fo and Xinwei Fo used as Buddhas’ names is a breakthrough of the study on the identity of the contemplative figure, as Sasaguchi offers an new aspect to observe the inscriptions and to reconsider the way of creating and naming a deity. However, she does not elaborate the concept and seems inconsistent with regard to the idea of the terms Xinwei Fo and Siwei Fo signifying Buddhas’ names. In her discussion of the stele dated 554, in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, she states that the inscription “Xinwei Fo” beside the contemplative bodhisattva image refers to Maitreya because a monk image is carved on the opposite side of the stele, which represent Mahākāśyapa (Dajiashe 大迦葉), Śākyamuni’s disciple who according to sutras awaits Maitreya’s descent to the world.²⁶ In this case, she returns to the framework formed by earlier scholars, fitting the images into the canonical descriptions.

Lee Junghee in her 1984 PhD dissertation took Mizuno’s theory as a starting point and identified all the contemplating figures under a tree and those depicted with a horse as

²³ Sasaguchi 40.

²⁴ Sasaguchi 96.

²⁵ Sasaguchi 99-104.

²⁶ Sasaguchi 141.

Prince Siddhārtha.²⁷ As for other pensive figures, not under a tree nor with a horse, she explains their identity as Prince Siddhārtha by referring to various stories in Śākyamuni's biographies, mainly the *Scripture on Past and Present Causes and Effects* and the *Sutra on the Origin of the Auspicious Fulfilment of the Crown Prince* (*Taizi ruiying benqi jing* 太子瑞應本起經). With respect to those which cannot be explained by texts such as the attendants to Maitreya at Yungang, Lee Junghee simply states that these are anonymous bodhisattvas.

In 1986 Denise Leidy devoted a chapter of her dissertation to discussing the contemplative image, and revised and published it in 1990.²⁸ In them she draws attention to the rise of the Dilun Sect 地論宗 and the Pure Land School in the sixth century. Dilun Sect focuses the study on the *Shidijing lun* 十地經論 (*Daśabhūmikasūtra Sastra*), a commentary on the *Shidi jing* 十地經 (*Daśabhūmika Sutra*),²⁹ translated by Bodhiruci (Butiliuzhi 菩提流支), who worked in Luoyang and Ye during c. 508-37. The *Shidijing lun* “clearly delineates the path to bodhisattvahood”, and also “promotes the possibilities of salvation through grace acquired by the transferal of merit from others”.³⁰ Leidy proposes that these two points respectively played an important role in the development of the Dilun Sect and the Pure Land School at Ye in the second half of the sixth century.

The *Shidijing lun* explains that at the eighth stage of one's spiritual development, “each bodhisattva inhabits and purifies his paradise or pure land; while during the ninth stage he inhabits the Tusita Heaven awaiting his final rebirth in which he will become a

²⁷ Lee Junghee, “The Contemplating Bodhisattva Images of Asia, with Special Emphasis on China and Korea,” diss., UCLA, 1984. Lee Junghee, “The Origins and Development of the Pensive Bodhisattva Images of Asia,” *Artibus Asiae* 53.3/4 (1993): 311-57.

²⁸ Denise Leidy, “The Ssu-wei Image in Northern Ch'i Sculpture,” in “Northern Ch'i Buddhist Sculpture” diss., Columbia U, 1986, 64-105. Denise Patry Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure in Sixth-Century A.D. Chinese Buddhist Sculpture,” *Archives of Asian Art* 43 (1990): 21-37.

²⁹ *Shidijing lun* T 1522.26.123a-203b.

³⁰ Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 23.

Buddha”.³¹ “Given the prominence of the Ti-lun in northeast China during the late sixth century, it is likely that the numerous Northern Ch’i images of ssu-wei figures represent the innumerable bodhisattvas, including Maitreya, who are the current inhabitants of Tusita”.³² Although the rise of the Dilun Sect coincided with the popularity of the contemplative bodhisattva image, Leidy’s argument does not explain why this particular image was favoured by the Dilun Sect to represent divine beings in the Tusita Heaven.

Leidy identifies the contemplative figures flanking the cross-legged Bodhisattva at Dunhuang and Yungang as representing Maitreya and other bodhisattvas enthroned in the Tusita Heaven. With respect to the pensive figures on the reverse of the bronzes from Hebei (Fig. 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4), Leidy explains that they represent the primary deity on the obverse of the bronze, Avalokiteśvara, in his heaven.³³ As to the altarpiece dated 524, in the Metropolitan Museum, Leidy claims that the standing figures represent Maitreya and his accompanying bodhisattvas from the Tusita Heaven, while the pensive figures represent the paradise itself.³⁴ Leidy does not give any explanations of her identifications.

Leidy further argues that the transformation of the pensive images from subsidiary images to primary icons in the second half of the sixth century reflected the shift of belief from the messianism of the Maitreya cult to pure lands such as Tusita Heaven and *sukhāvatī*, namely the paradise of the Amitābha Buddha.³⁵ The small figures on buds in a lotus pond such as those in the base of the sculpture in Fig. 1.1 “represent souls reborn in paradise inhabited by the pensive bodhisattva”.³⁶ She does not explicitly identify the pensive bodhisattva as any particular deity. As to another sculpture in the collection of the Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne, dated to the mid-sixth century, containing a double

³¹ Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 23.

³² Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 24.

³³ Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 24.

³⁴ Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 24.

³⁵ Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 24.

³⁶ Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 24.

standing bodhisattva on the obverse and a pensive bodhisattva on the reverse (Fig. 6.10 and 6.11), Leidy believes that the pensive deity represents the heaven from which the paired bodhisattvas on the obverse have descended.³⁷ Again, Leidy does not provide any explanations for the identifications.

Denise Leidy has attempted to identify the pensive bodhisattva images and explain their popularity with the rise of the contemporaneous Buddhist beliefs, the Dilun Sect and the Pure Land School. She also mentions the term *siwei* was used as a suffix and prefix to the names of a variety of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.³⁸ However, there were a great number of images of different identities produced at the time when the Dilun Sect and the Pure Land School were becoming popular. Leidy's paper does not demonstrate the irreplaceable connection between this particular figure and the religious background she emphasises.

More recently, Eileen Hsu has proposed another theory as to the contemplative figure's identity. Focusing on the images from Hebei, Hsu argues that these images should be interpreted as self-portraits of devotees of the Maitreya cult.³⁹ Hsu examines the images in the context of visualisation meditation practice, and suggests that the contemplating images were a visual aid, designed to enable the practitioners to visualise themselves in the presence of Maitreya. To support her assertion, Hsu also refers to the sutras, and in particular the commentary by Korean monk Wǒnhyo 元曉 on the *Visualizing Maitreya Sutra* (*Mile shangsheng jing zongyao* 彌勒上生經宗要).⁴⁰ However, Hsu's proposal is doubtful for three reasons: First, the contemplative statues are often depicted with haloes to signify their divine status; in the fifth and sixth centuries China patrons did not portray themselves with haloes as celestial beings. The pensive figures therefore are unlikely to be

³⁷ Leidy, "The Ssu-Wei Figure" 26.

³⁸ Leidy, "The Ssu-Wei Figure" 23.

³⁹ Eileen Hsiang-ling Hsu, "Visualization Meditation and the Siwei Icon in Chinese Buddhist Sculpture," *Artibus Asiae* 62.1(2002): 8.

⁴⁰ *Mile shangsheng jing zongyao* T 1773.38. 299a-303a.

portraits of lay devotees as Hsu asserts. Second, almost all accompanying inscriptions state that the images were made for the purpose of producing religious merit for deceased family members, and this indicates that the contemplative images are likely to be deities not lay people. Third, the character *jing* 敬 used in the inscriptions, meaning respect or reverence, is a character that would never be used with reference to oneself.

These previous academic studies have, in the main, treated the contemplative figure from different sites as independent works with little mutual relevance and sought to answer the question of the contemplative figure's identity by reference to the Buddhist sutras. This study aims to examine the pensive images in the context of the formation of a belief, and takes a fresh approach by relying much less on sutras and instead paying close attention to the images themselves and their accompanying inscriptions. I argue that the contemplative image developed over approximately two hundred years from a minor unnamed figure to a central iconographic element and finally to recognition as an independent deity named Siwei. I therefore aim not only to propose a new theory as to the figure's identity, but also to clarify its religious significance, thereby contributing to the understanding of Buddhist art and religious practice in fifth and sixth century China.

In order to examine the transformation of the contemplative bodhisattva image as an independent deity and the establishment of the belief centred on this deity, I lay out this thesis in approximate chronological and geographical order, from Gansu in northwest China to Yungang, Longmen and Nannieshui in northern China, and to Hebei and Shandong in northeast China, from the beginning of the fifth century to the end of the sixth century. This layout to an extent reflects the shift of political centres of the time. During this period, the shift of centres of Buddhist image-making activities was closely connected with socio-political and economical developments. From the regime of the Northern Liang 北凉 in Gansu of the early fifth century, to the first Northern Wei capital Pingcheng

(Yungang Cave-temples) from the mid-fifth century and second capital Luoyang (Longmen Cave-temples) from 494 to 534, and to the Eastern Wei and Northern Qi capital Ye in Hebei during 534-77. Sutra translation, construction of Buddhist cave-temples and production of images were enthusiastically sponsored by imperial families, local rulers and aristocrats.

During the late fourth and early fifth century, the support of pious Buddhist kings of local regimes meant that Gansu became the first region in China in which cave-temples were carved. In Chapter Two, I discuss the contemplative bodhisattva images in four cave-temples in Gansu dating from the fifth century. In this period, the contemplative bodhisattva statues were set as minor deities in caves, but they reveal a close connection with the cross-legged Maitreya, either as Maitreya's attendants or as his counterparts.

With the growth of the Northern Wei dynasty and its conquest of the regional powers, the first capital of the Northern Wei, Pingcheng, became the next major centre of Buddhist image-making activities. Chapter Three focuses on the images at the Yungang Cave-temples, located near Pingcheng, where contemplative bodhisattva images appear to be utilised in only two iconographical contexts: as Maitreya's attendants and as representations of Prince Siddhārtha. At this stage, the contemplative figure was still a minor deity in the iconographical settings, but with the growth of Buddhism, they became widespread in northern China.

After the Northern Wei moved the capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang in 494, Luoyang became a centre of image-making activities. Chapter Four discusses the images produced in and near the Luoyang metropolis, mostly at the Longmen Cave-temples. During this time, Buddhists and artisans took much liberty in experimenting with novel contemplative images. At this stage, within iconographical settings the pensive deity's status was elevated—some of them were placed at the same level with Buddhas in a niche, while others were depicted with worshippers displaying devotion to the pensive figure.

From the end of the fifth to the early sixth century around the Luoyang metropolis, the uses and iconographical settings of the contemplative bodhisattva image had become much more diverse. In some cases, the pensive figures even appear alone as an independent deity without other characters in the settings, for example that in the Guyang Cave (Fig. 4.30 and 4.31), which indicates that a new identity of this deity had gradually emerged.

At another contemporaneous site of Longmen, Nannieshui in Shanxi, several visual elements, such as meditating monks and reborn beings, were for the first time incorporated into the iconographic settings of the pensive deity. Chapter Five analyses possible sources of these visual elements and the significances they might have injected to the belief of the contemplative bodhisattva image represented. In addition, the contemplative images were also represented as an independent deity from the mid-sixth century at this site.

The Northern Wei dynasty collapsed in 534, with the richer and more powerful part of the court moving the capital to Ye in Hebei and stimulating a peak of Buddhist image production in this region. Chapter Six analyses the images from Hebei, where from the 530s the contemplative bodhisattva images started to be cut as sculptures in the round and with dedicating inscriptions. It was at this stage that the pensive deity finally began to be treated as a primary deity in iconographical settings with inscriptions to commemorate the image-making event and to dedicate the religious merits to deceased family members. And it is in Hebei where the common use of a proper noun, Siwei, identifies the pensive deity.

Chapter Seven discusses images from Shandong, where the pensive statues were also carved as sculptures in the round, but, in contrast to Hebei, surviving inscriptions from Shandong are scarce. Almost all Shandong statues were executed as free-standing statues lacking an identifiable iconographic context or inscription. This chapter is categorised by archaeological sites.

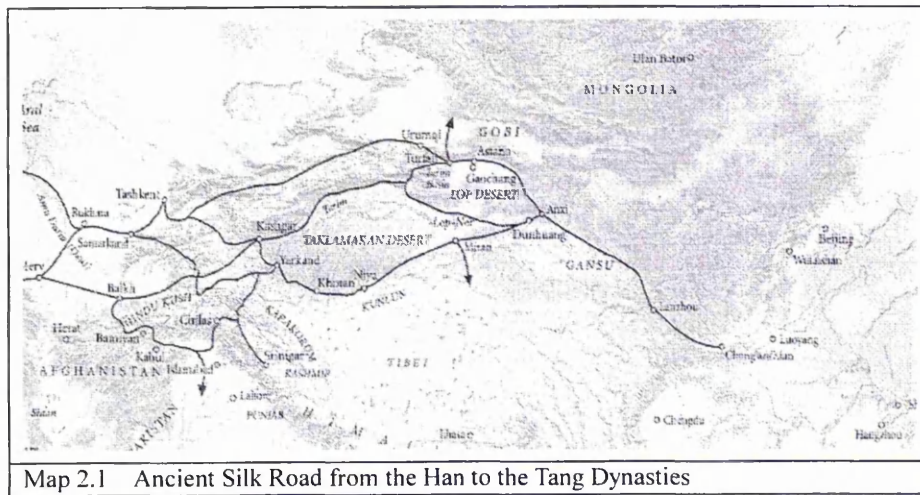
Chapter Eight is a comprehensive discussion of the images and inscriptions

examined in previous chapters. An analysis of the inscriptions accompanying the contemplative images reveals that in many cases, images of the contemplative bodhisattva should be understood as representing an independent deity, Siwei Bodhisattva. This deity apparently emerged as a result of popular demand among Chinese Buddhists. An analysis of the term *siwei* in sutras and of visual elements in the pensive images reveals that this deity represented the intellectual path to enlightenment. Contemplation upon the Buddha's teaching is not a practice restricted to any particular figure, but a practice encouraged by Śākyamuni and exercised particularly by monks. Some inscriptions reveal that this image could also represent Prince Siddhārtha, Maitreya and Indian Buddhist master Longshu (Nāgārjuna), possibly to emphasise the intellectual path they take to attain enlightenment.

Chapter 2 Sites in Gansu

This chapter introduces the surviving contemplative images in today's Gansu province, including the Hexi Corridor 河西走廊 and a part of the Longtu Plateau 隴土高原. In this introduction, I will survey the geographical characteristics of Gansu and its Buddhist history of the fourth to fifth centuries. Each section of this chapter will discuss the local history of sites where the contemplative bodhisattva images survive and provide an analysis of surviving evidence.

In western Gansu, the Hexi Corridor (also known as the Gansu Corridor) is a long valley formed by the Qilian 祁連山 and Aejin 阿爾金山 mountains on its south, and the Heli 合黎山 and Longshou 龍首山 mountains to the north. It served as the route connecting the Chinese empire and Central Asia, in the *Han shu* 漢書 also known as the Western Regions 西域.¹ Southeast Gansu occupies part of the Longtu Plateau, with the Chinese political centres Chang'an and Luoyang (in today's Shaanxi and Henan provinces respectively) further to the east. The Hexi Corridor and Longtu Plain played an important role in cultural exchange, both forming part of the ancient Silk Road (Map 2.1).



Map 2.1 Ancient Silk Road from the Han to the Tang Dynasties

¹ *Han shu* 3871.

After the Han empire collapsed at the end of the second century, China fell into nearly four centuries' disruption. The nomads, resisted by the Han empire to the north, entered China and from the early fourth to the sixth century centuries established their regional regimes.² Those occupied the area of today's Gansu including the Former Zhao (318-29), Former Liang (313-76), Western Liang (400-21), Northern Liang (397-439), Southern Liang (397-414), Later Liang (386-403), Former Qin (351-94), Later Qin (384-417) and Western Qin (409-31). Those who seized the Hexi Corridor entitled their regimes as Liang 涼, and those who captured the Longtu Plateau entitled their regimes as Qin 秦.

When Buddhism started to flourish in China from the third century, both Chinese pilgrims to India and Indian and Central Asian missionaries to China travelled through this passage. Early Buddhist cave-temples, possibly dating to the late fourth century, were built along the Hexi Corridor and the Longtu Plateau in Gansu, not only because this was the path through which monks travelled, but also because the rulers of the kingdoms occupying this region were devout Buddhists.

According to the accounts in the *Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism*, *Shilao zhi* 釋老志, in the *Weishu* 魏書, Buddhism was widely accepted in this region during and after the administration of Zhang Gui 張軌:

涼州自張軌後，世信佛教，敦煌地接西域，道俗交得其舊式，村塢相屬，多有塔寺。³

In Liangzhou, the generations after Zhang Gui had faith in Buddhism. The land of Dunhuang, from its contacts with the monks and laity of the western countries, adopted these old models, and the villages all alike had many stupas and

² Mark Edward Lewis, "China and the Outer World," *China between Empires: The Northern and Southern Dynasties* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard U P, 2009) 144-69.

³ *Wei shu* 3032.

monasteries.⁴

Zhang Gui (255-314) was appointed as the Regional Inspector (*cishi* 刺史) of Liangzhou, the Hexi Corridor, by Emperor Hui 惠帝 of the Western Jin, and settled at the regional capital, Guzang 姑臧 (today's Wuwei 武威), around 301 when the Western Jin was still in control of the area.⁵ His biography in the *Jin shu* does not include any reference to Buddhist development in Liangzhou, nor does it mention whether he was a Buddhist, but notes that he was a good administrator.⁶ After Zhang Gui's death in 314 and the collapse of the Western Jin in 344, the Zhang family continued to control the Hexi Corridor, maintaining peace in this region until 376, when they were conquered by the Former Qin. The Zhangs' regime is referred to as the Former Liang period in official histories.⁷

Even before Zhang Gui's arrival at Liangzhou, Buddhist activities in this region were dynamic, and it is likely that they continued to develop during his period as Regional Inspector. The earliest textual record that links Buddhism to Dunhuang is found in the *Lives of Eminent Monks* (*Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳), compiled in 519, which states that Monk Dharmaraksa (230?-316, Zhu Fahu 竺法護), perhaps the most important translator before Kumārajīva, was born in Dunhuang c. 230.⁸ Dharmaraksa became a monk at the age of eight and studied under Zhu Gaozuo 竺高座 in Dunhuang.⁹ Erik Zürcher points out that "Gaozuo" was probably an honorific title for the Buddhist master, suggesting that the presence of Buddhism in Dunhuang predated the time of Dharmaraksa himself.¹⁰

⁴ The translation is adopted from James R. Ware, "Wei shou on Buddhism," *Toung pao* 30 (1933): 100-81.

⁵ *Jin shu* 434.

⁶ *Jin shu* 2221-26.

⁷ *Wei shu* 2265.

⁸ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959) 66-67.

⁹ *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳 compiled by Huijiao 慧皎 in 519, T 2059.50.326c.

¹⁰ Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest*, 65.

Dharmaraksa later went to the Western Regions to learn their languages and to collect scriptures, but his biography does not specify the dates when he set out and returned. After returning to Dunhuang and staying for some time, he went eastwards to Chang'an, presumably through the Hexi Corridor along the ancient silk route, translating scriptures as he travelled.¹¹ He settled in a monastery in Chang'an, but probably travelled regularly between Chang'an and Dunhuang: literary evidence suggests that he translated two works in Dunhuang in 284 and one in Jiuquan 酒泉 in 294.¹² In addition to travelling between the monastery in Chang'an and his hometown, Dharmaraksa may also have instructed his disciple Zhu Fasheng 竺法乘 to promote Buddhism and establish a temple in Dunhuang, possibly as a branch of the Chang'an monastery.¹³

After Dharmaraksa, Zhu Fasheng continued to propagate Buddhism in Dunhuang and possibly influenced the entire region of today's Gansu province. Zhu Fasheng's biography states that "he caused the cruel and fierce people to reform their hearts and the western barbarians to know propriety."¹⁴

Under the influence of Dharmaraksa and Zhu Fasheng's efforts, Buddhism in the Hexi Corridor developed steadily and rapidly. The strength of Buddhism during this period can be pictured in the example of the circulation and preservation of the *Hymn of Brightness Sutra* (*Guangzan jing* 光讚經) in the fourth century. This scripture was once lost from central China during the invasion of the Xiongnu tribe between 311-16 but remained intact at Hexi. It was from Hexi that the scholarly monk Daoan 道安 (312 or 314-85) received a copy of this text in 376.¹⁵

The Former Qin maintained unity in Northern China from the time of its conquest

¹¹ *Gaoseng zhuan* T 2059.50.326c. "沿路傳譯，寫爲晉文".

¹² Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest* 67.

¹³ *Gaoseng zhuan* T 2059.50.347c. "立寺延學".

¹⁴ *Gaoseng zhuan* T 2059.50.347c. "使夫豺狼革心，戎狄知禮，大化西行，乘之力也".

¹⁵ Zürcher, *Buddhist Conquest* 68-70.

of the Former Liang until its own collapse (376-383). After 383, Northern China again sank into the turmoil of war and fractured into multiple regional kingdoms. Many rulers of these kingdoms had great influence over the development of Buddhism at Hexi. Amongst them, Juqu Mengxun 沮渠蒙遜 (r. 401-33) of the Northern Liang was most significant.

Mengxun enthusiastically sponsored Buddhist activities, including constructing images and temples, and translating sutras. According to Daoxuan's 道宣 seventh-century accounts, Mengxun had "auspicious images", *ruixiang* 瑞像, carved into cliff faces and cut cave-temples in the mountains.¹⁶

Juqu Mengxun was also an active patron of sutra translation. Mengxun housed the Indian magician-monk Dharmaksema (Tan Wuchen 曇無讖, 385-433) in his capital city Guzang, and sponsored Dharmaksema's translation of several significant scriptures, including the *Mahāparinirvāna Sutra* (*Daban niepan jing* 大般涅槃經). Mengxun also established a library and was keen to enrich his collection, of which Buddhist scriptures were a significant part.¹⁷ This library's Buddhist collection, "the Dharma treasure of the twelve Mahayana scriptures of the Juqu empire", was named in a list with other important libraries in India and the Northern Wei, but was lost during the wars with the Northern Wei in 439.¹⁸ The author of the *Gaoseng zhuan*, Huijiao 慧皎 (497-554) who was born and active in the Southern Dynasties, expressed his sorrow at this loss:

.....有頃魏虜託跋壽[燾]西伐姑臧，涼土崩亂，經書什物皆被焚蕩。¹⁹

Later when the Wei barbarian Tuoba Tao attacked Guzang to the west, the territory of the Liang fell into chaos, and scriptures, books and many objects were

¹⁶ *Ji shengzhou sanbao gantong lu* T 2106.52.417c-418a.

¹⁷ In 426 Mengxun sent ambassadors to the Song court and asked for the *Book of Change* 周易 and other books of the *zi* 子 and *ji* 集 categories. *Song shu* 2415. In 437 Mengxun's son Maoqian 茂虔 (also written as Mujian 牧犍) sent ambassadors to the Song court to present nineteen books, 154 fascicles in total, and asked for tens of other kinds as return. *Song shu* 2416.

¹⁸ *Guang hongming ji* 廣弘明集 compiled by Daoxuan in 664, T 2103.52.319a. "敬禮沮渠國大乘十二部法藏".

¹⁹ T 2059.50.339a.

all burnt and destroyed.

Although Huijiao does not explicitly refer to the library of the Northern Liang in the above passage, he mentions the Northern Liang's capital Guzang and the sutras burned and destroyed in the wars in 439. This suggests that the importance of Northern Liang Buddhism and its sutra collections were recognised in southern China.

After seizing Liangzhou in 439, the Northern Wei emperor Tuoba Tao moved both the population and monks to the Northern Wei capital Pingcheng.²⁰ Following this forced migration, Buddhist activities at Hexi experienced a certain decline, particularly after Tuoba Tao issued a decree in 444 repressing Buddhism.²¹ From the Northern Liang's collapse in 439 to the revival of Buddhism in 452, Hexi probably did not have sufficient religious, social and financial resources to support Buddhist activities. After 452, the Northern Wei capital Pingcheng became the new centre of image-making activities in northern China.

The Western Qin regime (385-431), located in the eastern part of Gansu on the Longtu Plateau, was also active in its promotion of Buddhism, but textual records regarding its Buddhist activities are not as abundant as those for the Northern Liang. The *Gaoseng zhuan* mentions several monks practising meditation within this territory, including Tan Wupi 曇無毘, Shi Tanhong 釋曇弘 and Xuan Gao 玄高 (402-44). The *Gaoseng zhuan* records that Tan Wupi, a monk specialised in meditation practice, came to this region during the reign of King Qifu Chipan 乞伏熾磐 (r. 412-428) and was highly respected by all monks. After Tan Wupi departed, King Chipan invited Shi Tanhong to preach in the country. Some time later, Xuan Gao was also invited, and the king himself led the court and people to await and welcome this eminent monk on the way. He was appointed as the

²⁰ *Wei shu* 3032.

²¹ *Wei shu* 97.

preceptor of the kingdom.²² In 431, the Western Qin regime was terminated by another local power, the Xia 夏, but Buddhism had already taken root in this region.²³

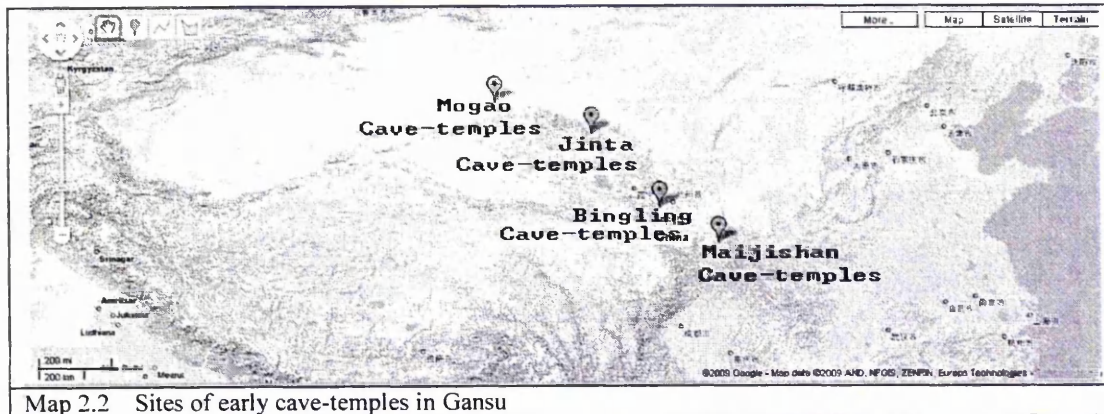
Buddhism in Gansu underwent significant development during the fourth and fifth centuries, both spiritually and as a physical material presence. Under these favourable circumstances, the growing number of adherents seeking to earn religious merit led to an increasing demand for places to worship and practise meditation, and for public spaces to serve as lecture halls. The earliest inscription in Chinese cave-temples, which belongs to an Amitabha triad bearing the reign title of the first year of the Jianhong 建弘 reign of the Western Qin (420) has been discovered in the Bingling Cave-temples 炳靈寺 in Gansu. In addition, an inscription dated 425 has been discovered at the Tiantishan 天梯山 Cave-temples in Wuwei, and another bearing a Northern Liang reign title has been found in the Wenshushan 文殊山 Cave-temples in Jiuchuan.²⁴ These inscriptions discovered in today's Gansu province support the literary evidence that Buddhist activities flourished from the beginning of the fifth century if not earlier.

The earliest pensive bodhisattva images in Gansu date to the period of this fifth-century Buddhist flourishing. From the northwest to the southeast, they are found at Mogao 莫高, Jinta 金塔, Bingling and Maijishan 麥積山 Cave-temples (Map 2.2). The following sections briefly outline the history and dating of each of these sites, and describe the caves in which the pensive images are found.

²² T 2059.50.397a-b.

²³ *Song shu* 2415.

²⁴ Michael Sullivan, *The Cave Temples of Maichishan* (London: Faber, 1969), 2.



2.1 Mogao Cave-temples

2.1.1 History of Mogao Cave-temples

The Mogao Cave-temples are located near today's Dunhuang city in western Gansu province. The early history of building caves for Buddhist use at Mogao is uncertain, although historical records provide some clues regarding the beginning of Mogao's Buddhist history. According to the inscription of the *Lijun Mogaoku foka bei* 李君莫高窟佛龕碑 (dated 698), the carving of niches at Mogao began in 366. The *Mogaoku ji* 莫高窟記 (dated 865), refers it to the Jianyuan 建元 reign of the [Former] Qin, 365-84. The *Shazhou tujing* 沙洲土鏡 (dated 949), states that such activities began in 352. However, these documents post-date the earliest Buddhist activities at Mogao by several hundred years, and there is no way of knowing to what extent their claims were supported by earlier records.²⁵

Su Bai has proposed that another record may shed light to the dating problem. The *Record of Waterways in the Western Regions* (*Xiyu shuidao ji* 西域水道記, compiled in

²⁵ Su Bai 宿白, "Mogaokuji ba 「莫高窟記」跋" and "Dunhuang Mogaoku zaoqi dongku zakao 敦煌莫高窟早期洞窟雜考," *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* 中國石窟寺研究 (Beijing: Wensu, 1996) 200-05 and 214-15.

1821) describes a broken stele discovered in 1783. This stele bore the date of the second year of the Jianyuan reign of the Former Qin (366) and the commissioner's name, Yue Zun 樂樽. Yue Zun was the monk to whom the *Lijun Mogaoku fokan bei* and the *Mogaoku ji* attributed the construction of the first niches at Mogao. However, this stele was subsequently lost in sand drifts and is not accessible for examination. Su Bai, although regarding this record as likely to be reliable, notes the discrepancy that in 366 Dunhuang belonged to the Former Liang, not to the Former Qin. It is unlikely that a stele carved in the Former Liang's territory would adopt the Former Qin's reign, but Su Bai offers two plausible explanations of how this dating inconsistency could have occurred: first, the commissioner Yue Zun was from the Former Qin, and therefore used the Qin's reign; second, after the Former Qin conquered the Former Liang in 376, the commissioner erected a stele that retrospectively applied a Former Qin reign title.²⁶

Despite these arguments, it is worth noting that the carving of steles to commemorate Buddhist image-making activities was a custom that became popular only after the late fifth century.²⁷ As it is unlikely that in the mid-fourth century Buddhists would erect a stele to celebrate the deed, the passage documented in the *Record of Waterways in the Western Region* probably came from a garbled source, since the stele was broken when it was found. Accordingly, the dating of this stele to 366 is unlikely to be correct.

Since literary records do not provide sufficient evidence to establish a firm date for the beginning of Mogao's Buddhist history, art historians and archaeologists have attempted to date the earliest remaining caves by stylistic analysis and through a comparison of the Mogao floor plans, spatial schemata and the subject-matter of the murals with those found

²⁶ Su Bai, "Dunhuang Mogaoku zaoqi dongku zakao" 215.

²⁷ Dorothy Wong, "The origins of Buddhist Steles under the Northern Wei," *Chinese Steles: Pre-Buddhist and Buddhist Use of a Symbolic Form* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 2004) 43-60.

at other dated sites. Although these scholars use similar methods and materials, the dates that they have proposed range from the second half of the fourth century to the late fifth century; however, all scholars who have examined the issue agree that Mogao Caves 268, 272 and 275 are the earliest remaining sites. Alexander Soper dates Caves 272 and 275 to the Western Liang (400-21),²⁸ Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩, Ma Shichang 馬世長 and Guan Youhui 關友惠 date all three caves to the Northern Liang (401-39; Dunhuang fell into the Northern Liang in 421),²⁹ and Su Bai dates them to the Northern Wei between 484 and 494.³⁰

Dating the earliest cave-temples at Mogao is crucial to understanding the transformation of the contemplative bodhisattva's iconography, since at this earliest stage the contemplative bodhisattva images had already appeared at Mogao. In this thesis, I accept the dates proposed by Alexander Soper and Ma Shichang, which date the earliest Caves of Mogao to approximately the first quarter of the fifth century. As Soper has proposed, the earliest dated manuscript from Mogao in the Stein Collection is dated to 406, suggesting that there were a fair number of Buddhists in Dunhuang and a certain scale of sutra-copying activities during the Western Liang.³¹ These Buddhists would have needed a place for their regular assemblies for rituals, daily worship and preaching. It is possible that the cave-temples at Mogao were created in response to the need during this time, the Western Liang, but these caves might have been renovated after 421 when the Northern Liang seized Dunhuang, as has been suggested by Ma De 馬德.³² In any case, it is safe to conclude that the earliest caves at Mogao were not cut after the Northern Liang, as it was

²⁸ Alexander Soper, "Northern Liang and Northern Wei in Kansu," *Artibus Asiae* 21.2 (1958): 160.

²⁹ Fan Jinshi 樊錦詩, Ma Shichang 馬世長, and Guan Yuohui 關友惠, "Dunhuang Mogaoku beichao dongku de fengqi 敦煌莫高窟北朝洞窟的分期," ed. Dunhuang wenwu yanjiusuo 敦煌文物研究所, *Zhongguo shiku: Dunhuang Mogaoku* 中國石窟·敦煌莫高窟 (Beijing, 1982) 177-89.

³⁰ Su Bai, "Mogaoku xiancun zaoqi dongku de niandai wenti 莫高窟現存早期洞窟的年代問題," *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* (Beijing: Wensu, 1996) 277.

³¹ Soper, "Northern Liang and Northern Wei in Kansu" 160.

³² Ma De, *Dunhuang Mogaoku shi yanjiu 敦煌莫高窟史研究* (Lanzhou: Gansu jiaoyu, 1996) 50-61.

during the Northern Liang that Buddhism became extremely popular in Gansu—scriptures were translated with the imperial support and stored in the imperial library, images and cave-temples were constructed by rulers, and important monks were active in this region. This Buddhist community was likely to have attracted a large number of adherents, generating a need for appropriate settings for lectures, ritual practices or ceremony gathering, and the area's cave temples were probably created in response to these needs.

2.1.2 Typology

Six pensive bodhisattva images dated to the Northern Dynasties survive at Mogao, in Caves 275, 259, 260, 257 and 437. Except for Cave 275, the remainder are dated to the second half of the fifth century, in the Northern Wei.³³ These caves can be categorised into two groups based on the spatial design: one group includes Caves 275 and 259, while the other includes Caves 260, 257 and 437. The former group has a rectangular floor plan, and the primary icon is set at the end of the cave in the main wall (also the west wall) facing the entrance (the east), with several niches aligned in side walls (the northern and southern walls). The latter group also has a rectangular floor plan, but the caves have a central pillar—niches are cut in each side of the pillar, and the walls are covered with paintings. The pensive bodhisattva image is placed in a similar position in each group. In the first group, it is placed in the niches in side walls closest to the entrance. In the second group, it is placed in the niche in the upper tier in the central pillar facing the south (floor plans in Figs. 2.5, 2.7 and 2.9). The following description of these caves pays particular attention to the precise spatial arrangement in each cave, since understanding this arrangement is essential to reveal the close iconographical relationship at Mogao between the pensive

³³ Fan Jinshi, Ma Shichang, and Guan Yuohui 177-89.

bodhisattva image and the cross-legged bodhisattva image.

2.1.2.1 Pensive bodhisattva pair

Cave 275, which is believed to be one of the earliest caves at Mogao, contains an imposing cross-legged bodhisattva statue, approximately 3.5 m in height, attached to the main wall. Both side walls are divided into two sections horizontally; the upper section has three niches aligned in each side, while the lower section is covered with paintings of *jātaka* stories. The pensive statues are placed in the two niches closest to the entrance (Fig. 2.1), and the other four niches house the cross-legged bodhisattva statues. The niches which house the cross-legged bodhisattva statues are fashioned as a palace (*que* 闕) whereas the niches which house the pensive bodhisattva statues are formed with two trees, one at each side of the deity (Fig. 2.2).³⁴

Many interpretations have been made to explain the arrangement of this cave. Scholars such as Lee Yu-min believe that the primary statue represents Maitreya bodhisattva and the cave as a whole is the representation of the Tusita Heaven, where the Maitreya bodhisattva dwells and awaits the appropriate time to descend to the mundane world as Sakyamuni's successor.³⁵ Accordingly, the bodhisattvas (including pensive ones) in this cave are closely related to Maitreya and can be identified as Maitreya.³⁶

³⁴ In Chinese-language scholarship, the shape of the niche is described as *que* 闕. The term *que* 闕 can refer to the paired watch towers at both sides of the entrance of a palace or a city wall, or can alternatively refer to the palace or emperors' abode. Since the character is used to describe the shape of a niche that houses a bodhisattva, the meaning of "palace" is probably more suitable in this context. Luo Zhufeng 羅竹風, *Hanyu dacidian* 漢語大詞典 vol. 12 (Shanghai: Hanyu dacidian chubanshe, 1993) 147.

³⁵ Lee Yu-min, "The Maitreya Cult" 280.

³⁶ Lee Yu-min, "Banjia swie xiang" 46.

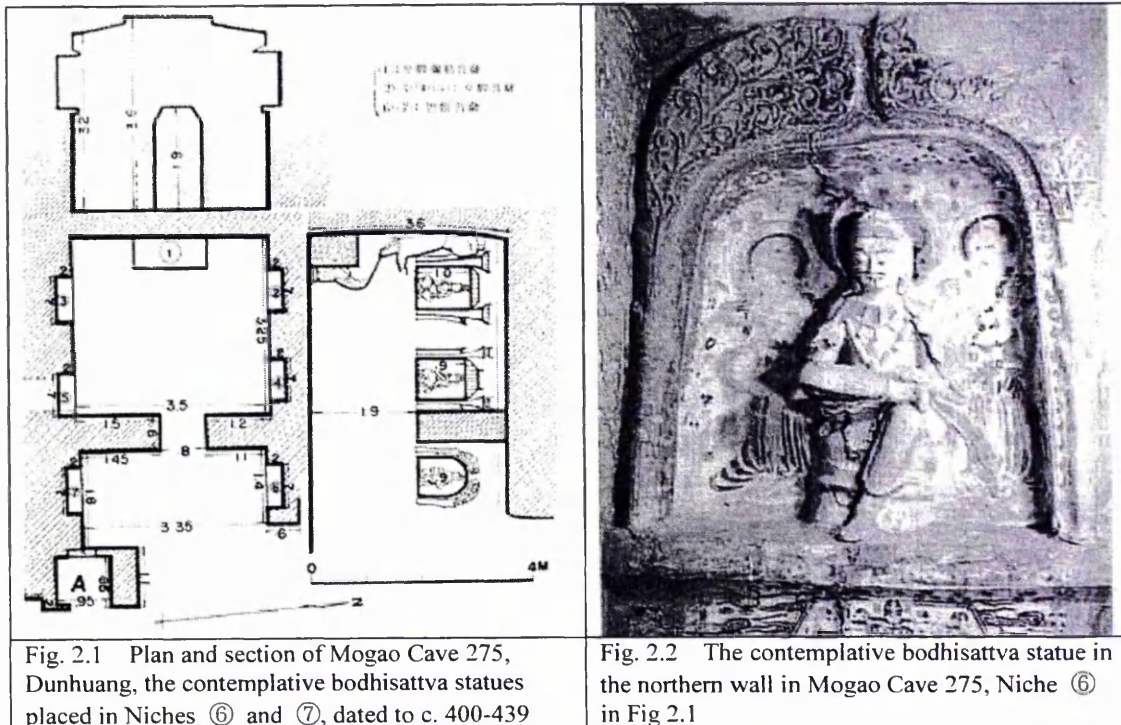


Fig. 2.1 Plan and section of Mogao Cave 275, Dunhuang, the contemplative bodhisattva statues placed in Niches ⑥ and ⑦, dated to c. 400-439

Fig. 2.2 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in the northern wall in Mogao Cave 275, Niche ⑥ in Fig 2.1

Cave 259, dated to the second half of the fifth century (Northern Wei), similar to Cave 275, also has a rectangular plan and a primary icon (in this case a double seated Buddha statue in the main wall) but has a more complex design of the side walls. The side walls are horizontally divided into three sections; four niches are carved into the top section, three niches in the middle, and the lower section is covered with portraits of *yaksa* (Fig. 2.3). The pensive bodhisattva statue is placed in the niche in the top section in the northern wall (Fig. 2.4 and Niche B in Fig. 2.3). The other two niches on its right house cross-legged bodhisattva statues (Niches C and D in Fig. 2.3). The niche closest to the entrance is so badly damaged that only part of the frame of the niche survives, and the statue no longer exists (Niche A in Fig. 2.3). Four niches in the top section are all fashioned in the shape of a palace, in a similar form to those housing cross-legged bodhisattva in Cave 275, except that the roofs in Cave 259 are damaged but the holes once holding the wooden roof structure can still be seen (Fig. 2.4).

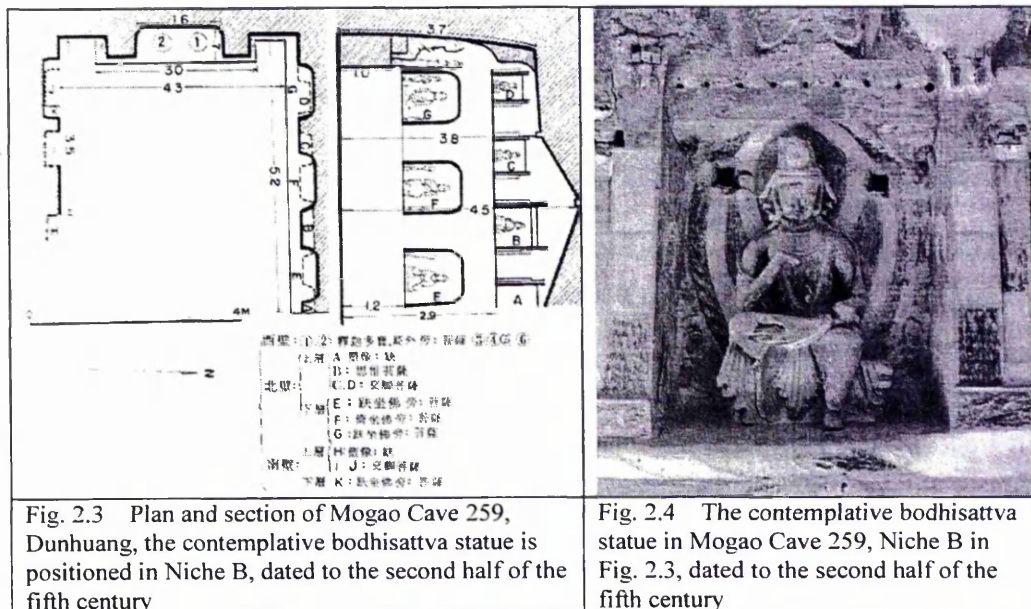


Fig. 2.3 Plan and section of Mogao Cave 259, Dunhuang, the contemplative bodhisattva statue is positioned in Niche B, dated to the second half of the fifth century

Fig. 2.4 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in Mogao Cave 259, Niche B in Fig. 2.3, dated to the second half of the fifth century

On the opposite side, the southern wall is more damaged than the northern wall; only three niches and two statues closest to the main (western) wall survive in the top section. The three surviving niches are fashioned in the shape of a palace and the two statues are rendered as cross-legged bodhisattva facing the other two in the opposite wall. Since this cave is constructed symmetrically, it is probable that the statue facing the pensive bodhisattva statue in the northern wall was originally a pensive bodhisattva image (Niche H in Fig. 2.3). In the middle section, only the statue closest to the main wall survives: this is a seated Buddha, similar to the seated Buddha in the mirror position in the opposite side of the cave.

2.1.2.2 Pensive bodhisattva with cross-legged bodhisattva

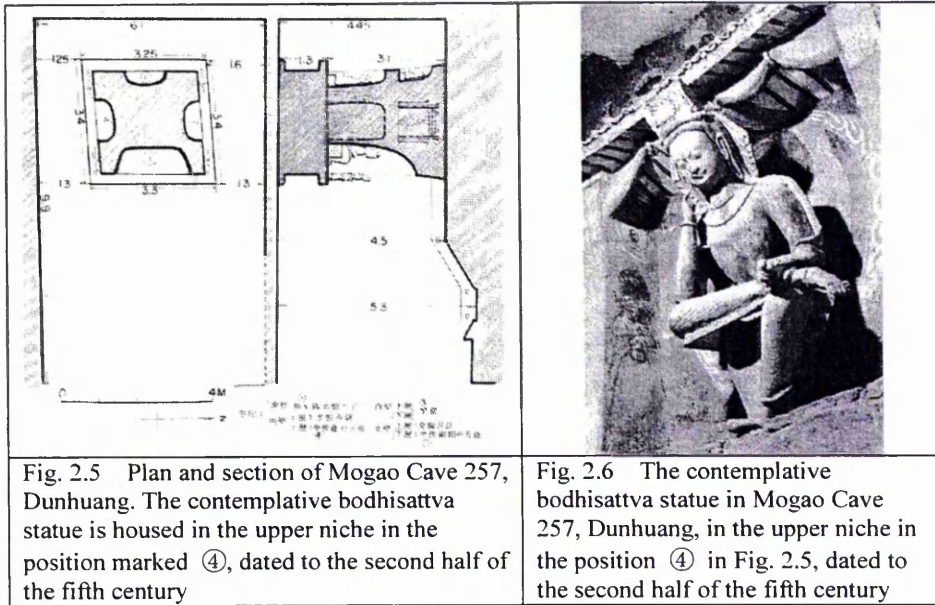
Caves 257, 260 and 437 have a different spatial design from the two caves just discussed: the key distinguishing feature of these three caves is the presence of a central

pillar. Scholars generally agree that the central pillar in cave-temples represents a stupa around which Buddhists circumambulated clockwise and practiced the *raota* 繞塔 ritual.³⁷ It is uncertain precisely what procedures were involved in this ritual, but the term *raota zuoli* 繞塔作禮, “circumambulating the stupa and paying homage”, was used in the earliest translation of the *Lotus Sutra* (*Zheng fahua jing* 正法華經) by Dharmarakṣa in 286.³⁸ The central pillar inside the caves is carved from the living rock as a rectangular solid having four faces, cut with several niches.

In Cave 257, the eastern surface of the central pillar is carved with a niche housing a pendant-legged Buddha facing the entrance, which is the primary icon in this cave (in the position marked ④ in Fig. 2.5). The three other faces of the central pillar are all cut with two niches, one on top of the other. The pensive bodhisattva statue (Fig. 2.6) is positioned in the upper niche facing the south (the upper niche in position ④ in Fig. 2.5). In its mirrored position, the upper shrine facing the north in the central pillar houses a cross-legged bodhisattva image. The remaining four niches, i.e. the lower ones facing the south and the north and the two facing the west, have a seated Buddha image inside. It is worth noting that the two niches housing the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva statues are rendered in the shape of a palace (Fig. 2.6), while the other five niches are not.

³⁷ Stanley Abe has proposed that at least in the case of Mogao Cave 254, the central pillar may represent “the central shaft of the pagoda rather than the pagoda itself”. Stanley Abe, “Art and Practice in a Fifth-Century Chinese Buddhist Cave Temple,” *Ars Orientalis* 20 (1990): 1-31.

³⁸ *Zheng fahua jing* T 263.9.105c.



The central pillar in Cave 260 has the same iconographical design as Cave 257. The primary niche in the eastern surface of the central pillar, facing the entrance, houses a pendant-legged Buddha. The pensive bodhisattva statue is positioned in the upper niche in the central pillar facing the south (position ④ in Fig. 2.7), and the upper niche in its mirrored position facing north in the central pillar houses a cross-legged bodhisattva image (position ② in Fig. 2.7). The remaining four niches each contain a seated Buddha. The two niches for the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva images are fashioned in the shape of a palace (Fig. 2.8).

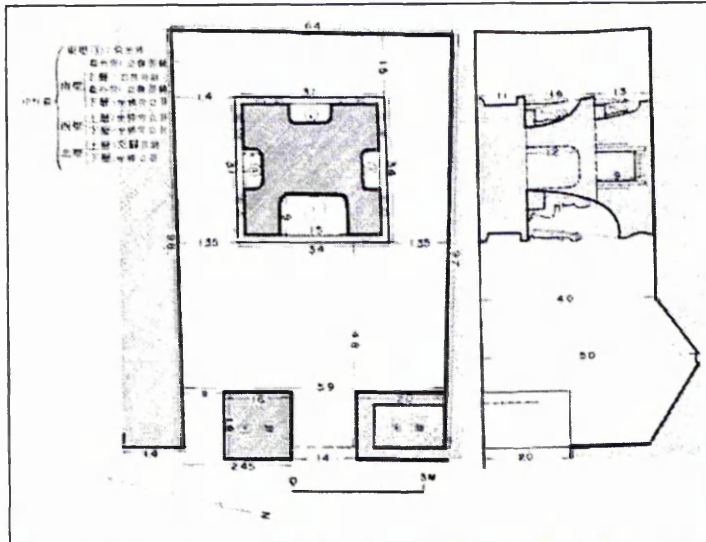


Fig. 2.7 Plan and section of Mogao Cave 260, Dunhuang. The contemplative bodhisattva statue is housed in the upper niche of the position marked ④, dated to the second half of the fifth century

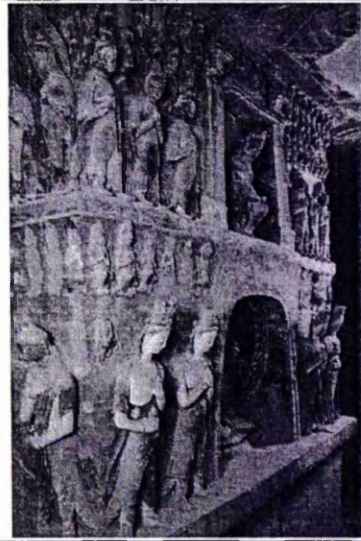


Fig. 2.8 Northern surface of the central pillar in Mogao Cave 260, Dunhuang, dated to the second half of the fifth century

The central pillar in Cave 437 has a similar design to that of Caves 257 and 260, except that there are eight niches rather than seven. The eastern surface facing the entrance has two niches, one on top of the other, rather than a single primary niche. The upper niche houses a seated Buddha while the lower one houses a pendant-legged Buddha, as found in the single niche in Caves 257 and 260. The niches for the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva statues are also modelled in the shape of a palace (Figs. 2.9 and 2.10).

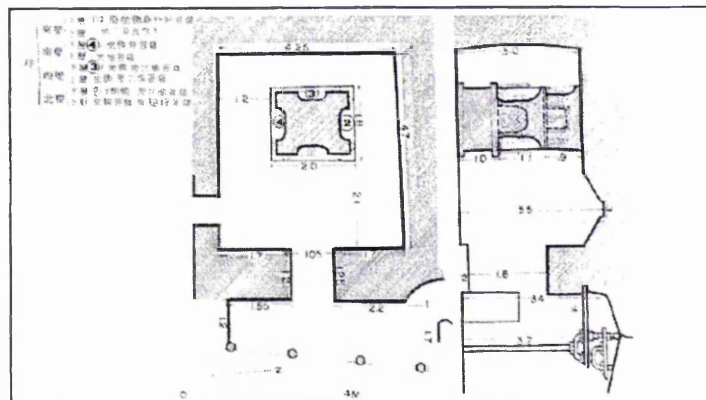


Fig. 2.9 Plan and section of Mogao Cave 437, Dunhuang. The contemplative bodhisattva statue is housed in the upper niche of position ④, dated to the second half of the fifth century



Fig. 2.10 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in Mogao Cave 437, Dunhuang, in the position of ④ in Fig. 2.9, dated to the second half of the fifth century

2.2 Jinta Cave-temples

2.2.1 History of Jinta Cave-temples

The Jinta Cave-temples, located near today's Zhangye 張掖 city, have two caves extant today. These caves, both of which contain central pillars, are carved high up in a cliff face, approximately 60 meters above ground level. As they are constructed facing south, they are named as West and East Caves in accordance with their positions.³⁹ The entrances of the caves would have been set on the south side, but when the cliff collapsed, the foreparts of both caves fell in. Only the central pillars and the rear parts of the caves survive today.

There is no surviving textual evidence relating directly to the Jinta Cave-temples. Scholars have attempted to date these two caves by comparing both artistic style and cave

³⁹ Gansusheng wenwu kaogu yanjiusuo 甘肅省文物考古研究所, *Hexi shiku* 河西石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1987) 3-4.

layout with those seen in other sites, including Yungang and Mogao. Their conclusions have ranged widely, from the late fourth to the early sixth century.⁴⁰ In this thesis, I accept the dating by Lee Yu-min, as she carefully compares the iconography, stylistic rendering of the statues, decorative patterns and artistic expression of the murals with those at other sites. Lee has argued that the West Cave should be dated to the 470s, during the Northern Wei, and is thus approximately contemporaneous to the central pillared caves at Mogao.

2.2.2 Typology: Pensive bodhisattva with Maitreya Buddhas

There is one pensive bodhisattva image remaining in the West Cave (L. 7.90 m, D. 4.05 m, W. 4.30 m).⁴¹ It is positioned in the second (middle) tier of the central pillar, facing west (in Position A in Fig. 2.11; Fig. 2.12). The original image next to it, facing south, is lost, but a statue of a Buddhist patriarch has been installed in this position since the Yuan Dynasty (1260-1367). The other two images set on this tier facing north and east respectively are the cross-legged Buddha and the pendant-legged Buddha. Images in this tier are not positioned in deep niches but only attached to the pillar as high reliefs. The tier below (the third tier) has a niche carved in each side. Each niche houses a Buddha statue. With two attendants standing beside the niche, the image in each side represents a Buddha

⁴⁰ Marilyn Rhie dates the East Cave to c. 400 or before: *Early Buddhist Art of China and Central Asia* vol. 1 (Leiden; Boston; Köln: Brill, 1999) 388. Lee Yu-min 李玉珉 dates the West Cave to the 470s: "Jintasi shiku kao 金塔寺石窟考 (The Grottoes of Chin-t'a-ssu)," *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 22.2 (2004): 45. Zhang Xuerong 張學榮 dates them to the Northern Wei: "涼州石窟及有關問題," *Dunhuang Yanjiu* 4 (1993): 47-60. Du Doucheng 杜斗城 dates them to the Northern Liang: "Bei Liang shiku 北涼石窟," *Bei Liang fojiao yanjiu 北涼佛教研究* (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1998) 173-81. Dong Yuxiang 董玉祥 dates them between 401-411: "Hexi zoulang Matisi, Wenshushan, Changma zhu shikuqun 河西走廊馬蹄寺、文殊山、昌馬諸石窟群," *Hexi shiku* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1987) 15-16. Zhang Baoxi 張寶璽 dates them to the Taihe reign (477-500): "Hexi Beichao zhongxin zhu ku zhaiyao 河西北朝中心柱窟(摘要)," *Dunhuang Yanjiu* 2 (1982): 17-19. Ji Yuanzhi 暨遠志 dates them between 486-510: "Zhangye diqu zaoqi shiku fenqi shilun 張掖地區早期石窟分期試論," *Dunhuang Yanjiu* 4 (1996): 26.

⁴¹ Yao Guilan 姚桂蘭 and Gesan Meizhuo 格桑美卓, "張掖馬蹄寺石窟群內容總錄 Zhangye Matisi shikuqun neirong zonglu," *Dunhuangxue jikan* 28 (1995): 79.

triad. The four faces of the top tier are covered with images of the Buddhas of ten directions and bodhisattvas.⁴²

The walls are covered with three layers of paintings. The bottom layer is contemporaneous with the construction of the cave. Dong Yuxiang 董玉祥 has argued that the middle and top layers were painted in the Western Xia (1032-1227). The subject-matter of the bottom layer is the Buddha's preaching with the thousand Buddhas as it background.⁴³

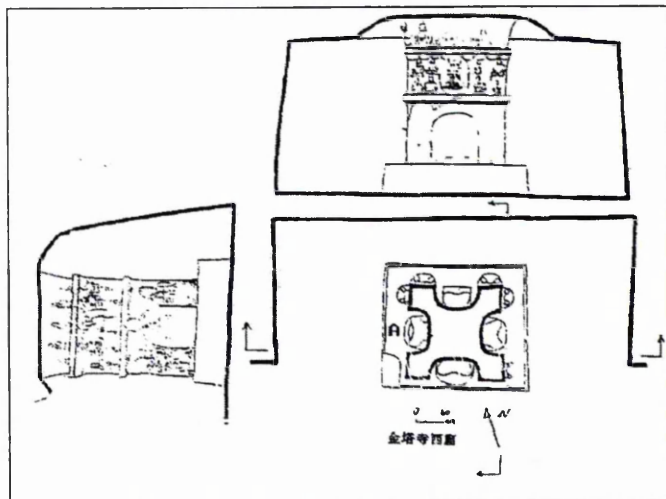


Fig. 2.11 Plan and section of the West Cave of the Jinta Cave-temples, Zhangye. The contemplative bodhisattva statue is found in the niche in the second tier in position marked A.



Fig. 2.12 The contemplative bodhisattva image in the West Cave at Jinta Cave-temples, Zhangye, in the niche in the second tier marked position of A in Fig. 2.11

The spatial design of the caves and the arrangement of the pensive images at Mogao and Jinta have both similarities and differences. The West Cave at Jinta, like Mogao Caves 257, 260 and 437, has a rectangular plan and a central pillar. Each section of the central pillar is wider at the top and narrower at the bottom. Moreover, the niches are set only in the central pillar, while the walls are covered with paintings. The positions of the pensive image in the

⁴² Lee Yu-min, "Jintasi" 46-47.

⁴³ Dong Yuxiang, "Hexi zoulang Matisi, Wenshushan, Changma zhu shikuqun" 6.

caves are also similar: they are placed in front of the central pillar, on the viewer's upper left upon entering the cave. When practicing the *raota* ritual and circumambulating the pillar clockwise, one would start from the position below the pensive bodhisattva.

Lee Yu-min has identified the pensive image in the West Cave as the Maitreya bodhisattva in the Tusita Heaven, the cross-legged Buddha in the same tier facing north as a Maitreya Buddha, and the pendant-legged Buddha facing east as another Maitreya Buddha. When performing the circumambulating ritual, one would first see the Maitreya bodhisattva in the Tusita Heaven, thus rendering concrete the belief that if one practices the teaching relating to the Maitreya school (“*Mile famen* 彌勒法門”), one would ascend to the Tusita Heaven and enter into the presence of Maitreya. The second image, the cross-legged Maitreya Buddha, represents the practitioner's descent to the mundane world together with Maitreya, while the third image, the pendant-legged Maitreya Buddha, represents the believer's ability to listen to Maitreya's preaching and attain enlightenment.⁴⁴

However, there are differences in the iconographical layout between the caves at Mogao and Jintasi. In Mogao Caves 257, 260 and 437, the pensive statues are placed in palace-shaped niches (Fig. 2.6, 2.8 and 2.10), but the contemplating image found in the West Cave at Jintasi is simply attached to the pillar, rather than being sited in a niche. The cross-legged bodhisattva, which in the Mogao Caves is always set in the mirrored position to the pensive image in the central pillar, is not found at Jintasi. Instead, the statue in the mirrored position to the pensive statue in the pillar in the West Cave is a pendant-legged Buddha. Although the West Cave and Mogao Caves 257, 260 and 437 have a similar layout, including a rectangular plan and a central pillar, the iconographic scheme is different. Nevertheless, these are the only two sites where pensive images appear in the central pillars.

⁴⁴ Lee Yu-min, “Jintasi” 49.

2.3 Bingling Cave-temples

2.3.1 History of Bingling Cave-temples

The Bingling Cave-temples were originally named Tangshuku 唐述窟 before the Northern Wei period (386-534), but were referred to as Lingyansi 靈岩寺 in the Tang dynasty (618-907). The present name Binglingsi 炳靈寺 is a transliteration from the Tibetan language, meaning “Maitreya’s lands of the ten directions”, “*shifang Mile fo zhou* 十方彌勒佛洲”, and came into use since the Song dynasty.⁴⁵ In the Ming dynasty, it was also known as Binglingsi 冰靈寺, Lingyanshansi 靈岩山寺 or Binglingsi 丙靈寺. From the Qing dynasty (1644-911), when Tibetan Buddhism prevailed in this area, the Tibetan transliteration Binglingsi 炳靈寺 from the Song (960-1279) has been used till today.⁴⁶

It is not certain when construction of caves for Buddhist use at this site began, but an inscription with the reign title of Yongkang places the earliest date of construction during the second decade of the fifth century:

永康四年歲次乙卯三日[月].....二十五日己丑弟子.....河南王.....枹罕積石.....敬造彌勒一區，上爲國家四方.....其原。⁴⁷

On the twenty-fifth day (*jichou*) of the third month of the fourth year of the Yongkang reign (the year being *yimao*), disciple.....King of Henan.....Baohan Jishi.....respectively had a Maitreya made for the kingdom and four directions.....

⁴⁵ Dong Yuxiang, “Binglingsi shiku zongshu 炳靈寺石窟縱述,” *Zhongguo shiku: Binglingsi shiku* 中國石窟·炳靈寺石窟 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1989) 169.

⁴⁶ Gansusheng bowuguan 甘肅省博物館 and Binglingsi shiku wenwu baoguansuo 炳靈寺石窟文物保管所, *Binglingsi shiku* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1982) 1.

⁴⁷ Feng Guorui 馮國瑞, “Binglingsi shiku kancha ji 炳靈寺石窟勘查記,” *Binglingsi shiku yanjiu lunwenji* 炳靈寺石窟研究論文集 (Yongjing: Binglingsi wenwu Baoguansuo, 1998) 11. This article was first published in 1951 on the *Guangming ribao* 光明日報 in Beijing and *Gansu ribao* 甘肅日報.

The reign title Yongkang was used by five emperors in Chinese history: Emperor Huan of the Eastern Han 東漢桓帝 during 167-68, Emperor Hui of the Western Jin 西晉惠帝 during 300-01, Taizu of the Former Liang 前涼太祖 in 301, Liezong of the Later Yan 後燕烈宗 during 396-98 and Taizu of the Western Qin 西秦太祖 during 412-20. Amongst them, Taizu of the Western Qin was the only one who held the Yongkang reign for more than three years. The cyclic characters *yimao* thus give the precise date of 415. The term “Baohan 枹罕” in the inscription refers to the capital city of the Western Qin after 412, while “Jishi 積石” is the name of the area, still in use today.

According to Feng Guorui 馮國瑞, who in 1951 discovered and recorded the above inscription, it was located in the upper middle part of the cliff between two rows of caves, and many caves are situated above this inscription. The position of this inscription in the cliff suggests that the inscription was added after the caves were cut, which indicates that the year 415 was not the earliest date that the caves were constructed at this site. This inscription was probably damaged at a later time, as it has never been re-discovered in later investigations. The earliest known inscription with a reign title at the Bingling Cave-temples extant today belongs to an Amitabha triad in Cave 169:

建弘元年歲在玄枵三月廿四日造⁴⁸

[This image is] made on the twenty-fourth day of the third month of the first year of the Jianhong reign, the year being *xuanxiao* [420].

This inscription, located at the lower part of the side (northern) wall, places the construction of Cave 169 before the year 420. Cave 169 is a naturally formed grotto (W. 26.75 m, D. 19 m, H. 15 m; Fig. 2.13).⁴⁹ Niches were installed or carved into the surface of the cave from

⁴⁸ Gansusheng bowuguan and Binglingsi shiku wenwu baoguansuo 5.

⁴⁹ Yan Wenru 閻文儒, “Binglingsi shiku zongshu 炳靈寺石窟綜述,” *Zhongguo shiku: Yongjing Binglingsi*

top down over time. Traces of earlier statues can be seen in the upper part of the walls.

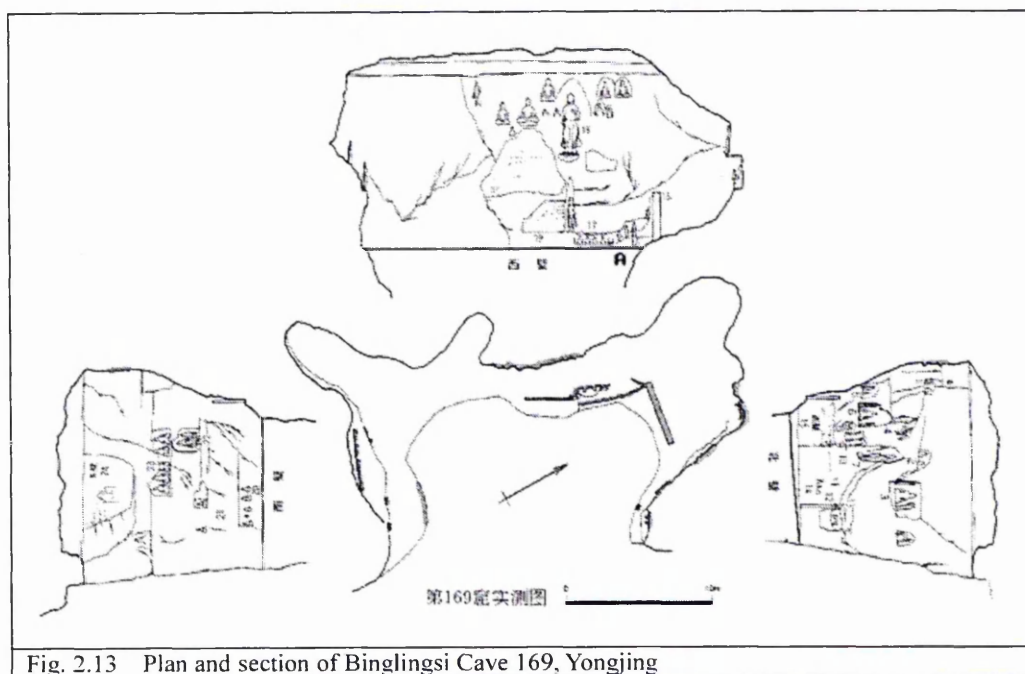


Fig. 2.13 Plan and section of Binglingsi Cave 169, Yongjing

The earliest textual record referring to this site is seen in the *Commentary on the Book of Waterways*, *Shuijing zhu* 水經注:

懸巖之中，多石室焉。室中若有積卷矣，而世士罕有津逮者，因謂之積書巖。巖堂之內，每時見神人往還矣，蓋鴻衣羽裳之士，練精餌食之夫耳，俗人不悟其仙者，乃謂之神鬼。彼羌目鬼曰唐述，復因名之為唐述山，指其堂密之居，謂之唐述窟。其懷道宗玄之士，皮冠淨髮之徒，亦往棲託焉。故《秦州記》曰：河峽崖傍有二窟，一曰唐述窟，高四十丈；西二里有時亮窟，高百丈，廣二十丈、深三十丈，藏古書五卷。⁵⁰

Among the towering cliffs, there are many stone caverns. In the grottoes it seems that there are scrolls piled up, and since the people of the world seldom go there, they call it “The Cliff of the Piled-up Books”. Inside these halls, one can often see spirits coming and going. These are the gentlemen clad in the feathers of wild

中國石窟·永靖炳靈寺 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1989) 170.

⁵⁰ Li Daoyuan 酈道元 with commentary by Yang Shoujing 楊守敬 and Xiong Huizhen 熊會貞, *Shuijing zhu* 水經注, vol. 1 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji, 1989) 138-39.

swans, who refine their essences, feeding on medicinal herbs. The unenlightened do not realize that they are immortals, and instead call them “spirit demons”. The Qiang call demons “tangshu”, and so they call the mountain “Tangshu Mountain”, and they call the dwellings where the halls are clustered the “Tangshu Grotto”. Those [Daoists] who Embrace the Way and Revere the Mystery take refuge here, as do the Shaven-headed Monks. Thus the *Record of Qinzhou* says: “There are two grottoes beside the banks of the river gorge. One is called the Tangshu Grotto, which is 40 zhang high; two li to the west of this there is the Shiliang Grotto, which is 100 zhang high, 20 zhang wide, and 30 zhang deep, and contains five ancient scrolls.”

According to this account by Li Daoyuan 酈道元 (?-527), the earliest name of the site, Tangshuku, was also a transliteration of a non-Chinese term. By the early sixth century, when Li compiled the *Shuijingzhu*, there were both Buddhist and Daoist practitioners living or practising in a number of the caves, but it is not clear to what extent the same may have been true during the Northern Wei.

Another piece of literary evidence is found in the *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 compiled by Daoshi 道世 in 668, under the entry *Baohan linhe Tangshugu xian si* 枹罕臨河唐述谷仙寺:

晉初河州唐述谷寺者，在今河州西北五十里……鑿山構室接梁通水，繞寺華果蔬菜充滿，今有僧住。南有石門濱於河上，鑄石文曰，晉太始年之所立也，寺東谷中有一天寺，窮討處所略無定指，常聞鍾聲，又有異僧，故號此谷名為唐述，羌云鬼也，所以古今諸人入積石者，每逢仙聖，行往恍忽現寺現僧。
51

The early Jin-period Tangshu Valley Temple in Hezhou is located fifty li northwest of today’s Hezhou [...] [They] carved out the mountain, constructed rooms, fitted together rafters and irrigated it with water. Around the temple fruit and vegetables grow in abundance, and there are monks living there. To the south, there is a stone gate on the bank of the river, and the carved inscription says that this was erected during the Taishi reign [265-274] of the Jin dynasty. In a valley

⁵¹ *Fayuan zhulin* 法苑珠林 compiled by Daoshi 道世 in 668, T 2122.53.595a.

to the east of the temple there is a Heavenly Temple. No matter how hard one tries to find its location, it seems to have no fixed place; however, one can often hear the sound of its bells. In addition, there are miraculous monks there, and the people call this valley "Tangshu", since the Qiang call demons "tangshu". Thus from ancient times to the present, people who enter [the region of] Jishi often encounter immortal sages travelling around mysteriously, and temples and monks that appear and disappear.

Daoshi's descriptions includes the claim that an inscription found alongside the river dated the establishment of the site to the Taishi 太[泰]始 reign of the Jin (266-75), but he does not mention the date when the inscription was carved. There is no surviving material evidence to support Daoshi's account.

2.3.2 Typology

There are four contemplative bodhisattva images at the Bingling Cave-temples, one in Cave 169, one in Cave 126, another in Cave 128 and the other in Niche 116 immediately above Cave 126. The one in the earliest Cave 169 has been dated to the Western Qin (385-431) on stylistic grounds, while the other three are dated to the Northern Wei in the early sixth century by an inscription and adjacent location.

2.3.2.1 Pensive bodhisattva appearing alone

The pensive image dated to the Western Qin is located near the bottom of the main wall in Cave 169 (Fig. 2.14; above Position A in Fig. 2.13).⁵² As the original setting has

⁵² Chang Qing 常青 dates it to 495-515: "Binglingsi 169 ku suxiangyubihua de niandai 炳靈寺 169 窟塑像與壁畫的年代," *Binglingsi shiku yanjiu lunwenji* 炳靈寺石窟研究論文集 (Yongjing: Binglingsi wenwu baoguan suo, 1998) 263-86, but compared with the one in Cave 126, which has an inscription dated to 513, the styles are too distinct to be placed in the same time frame. Wei Wenbin 魏文斌 dates it to the Western Qin:

been damaged over time, the contemplative image is now iconographically isolated from its original surroundings, but there are still two characteristics worth noting. First, this bodhisattva is seated in a mirrored position to those pensive bodhisattva statues found at the Mogao and Jinta Cave-temples. At Mogao and Jinta, the contemplative bodhisattvas all have their right legs resting on their left legs, but the bodhisattva in Binglingsi Cave 169 has its left leg rested on the right leg.

Second, the deity is portrayed with a halo and leaning against a throne in the shape of an inverted triangle which represents the draped backrest of the throne.⁵³ This is similar to the cross-legged bodhisattvas found in Mogao Cave 275 and that in the northern wall of Mogao Cave 259, except that the one in Bingling Cave 169 has a larger throne than those at Mogao. This similarity in iconography suggests that the pensive bodhisattva at the Bingling Cave-temples also had a close relation to the cross-legged bodhisattva, as the pensive bodhisattva sits on the same type of throne exclusive to the cross-legged bodhisattva at Mogao.



Fig. 2.14 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in Cave 169, Bingling Cave-temples, Yongjing, dated c. 420s



Fig. 2.15 The surroundings of the contemplative bodhisattva statue in Cave 169, Bingling Cave-temples, Yongjing

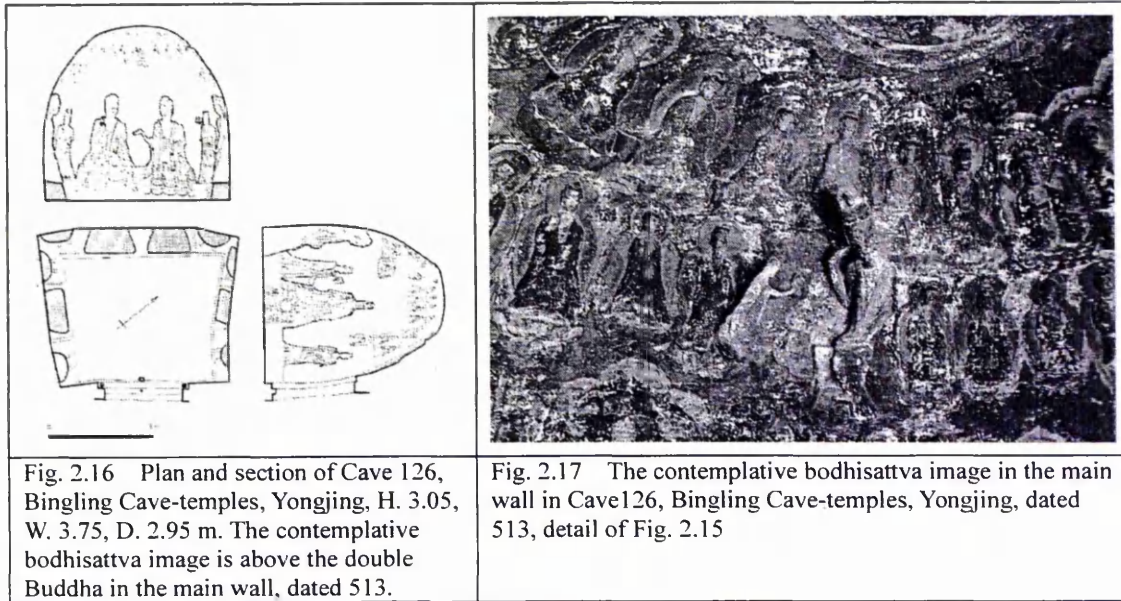
“Binglingsi 169 ku neirong zonglu 炳靈寺 169 窟內容總錄,” *Binglingsi shiku yanjiu lunwenji* (Yongjing: Binglingsi wenwu baoguansuo, 1998) 332.

⁵³ Soper, “Northern Liang and Northern Wei in Kansu” 152-53; Fig. 20.

2.3.2.2 Pensive bodhisattva with worshipper

The other three pensive bodhisattva images dated to the early sixth century appear in Caves 126 and 128 and Niche 116. They are located in the same section of the cliff where the Northern Wei constructions are centralised. A dedicating inscription informs us that Cave 126 dates to the year 513 (Yanchang 延昌 2). This cave was refurbished in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644). The commissioner in the Ming period simply had the cave repainted, preserving the original carvings of the Northern Wei. This cave has a rectangular plan and a vaulted ceiling (Fig. 2.16). A double seated Buddha and its two attendant standing bodhisattvas are set in the main wall facing the entrance. The side walls feature triads of a cross-legged bodhisattva and a seated Buddha. The ceiling is covered with a thousand-Buddha motif (Buddha images arranged in an array, some standing, some seated), while the pensive bodhisattva image appears amongst the thousand Buddhas above the primary icon of a double Buddha in the main wall (Fig. 2.17).

A monk-like figure, with a shaved head and wearing a monastic robe, kneels in front of this pensive deity. The size of the pensive deity is larger than any of the thousand Buddhas, which suggests that the thousand-Buddha image serves as the background for the pensive deity, and the pensive deity functions as the primary subject of the ceiling. Since the pensive deity is depicted in the main wall, anyone entering the cave would immediately notice its presence.



Cave 128 (H. 3.5m, W. 3.9m, D. 3.5 m), located next to Cave 126, has a similar spatial design to Cave 126, with a rectangular plan, a vaulted ceiling (with a coffer in the middle) and a double seated Buddha as the primary icon. The two side walls are respectively carved with a seated Buddha triad. The pensive bodhisattva image is positioned above the entrance on the viewer's right-hand side, at the end of an array in which seven standing Buddhas and a monk worshipper are depicted (Figs. 2.18 and 2.19). Above this register is another array of six seated Buddhas. It is possible that the ceiling of this cave was originally designed with a thousand-Buddha motif as that in Cave 126 but subsequently damaged, and these two arrays are the only remains of the original design.

As with Cave 126, Cave 128 was also reconstructed in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).⁵⁴ It is probable that before the regeneration the ceiling was so badly damaged that small carvings had been chipped off. The designer or artisans of the Ming removed the damaged area, applied new plaster and repainted the surface. It can be observed that the surface re-painted during the Ming dynasty is lower than the surface remaining from the

⁵⁴ Binglingsi wenwu baoguan suo 炳靈寺文物保管所, "Binglingsi shiku neirongzonglu 炳靈寺石窟內容總錄," *Zhongguo shiku: Yongjing Binglingsi* (Beijing, 1989) 249.

Northern Wei period, which supports the hypothesis that a layer of the original rock was removed in the Ming dynasty. The ceiling and walls are now depicted with thousand Buddhas, bodhisattvas, Dharma guardians and a portrait of Tsong-kha-pa 宗喀巴 (Zongkeba, 1417-78), a Tibetan Buddhist patriarch. The designers or artisans of the Ming might have inherited the original subject-matter of the ceiling, the thousand-Buddha motif, and added the fashionable topics of their time.

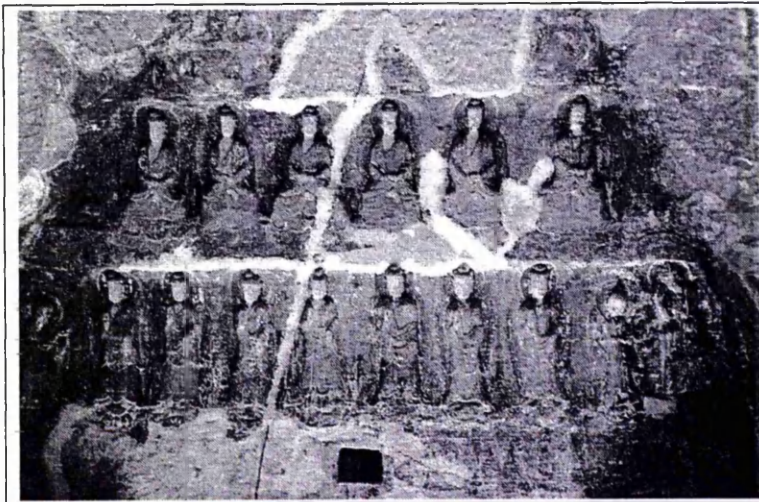


Fig. 2.18 The Buddhas and the contemplative bodhisattva image above the entrance in Cave 128, Bingling Cave-temples, Yongjing, dated to 510s, the image of the contemplative bodhisattva with a worshiper on the lower right of the picture



Fig. 2.19 The contemplative bodhisattva and a worshiper in Cave 128, Bingling Cave-temples, Yongjing, dated to 510s, detail of Fig. 2.18

Niche 116 (H. 62cm, W. 57cm, D. 10 cm) is cut in the cliff above the entrance of Cave 126 (Fig. 2.20). The surface of this area is carved with a number of small niches, which might have been commissioned by different donors, as the niches considered together do not constitute any complete or larger iconographical setting (Fig. 2.21). Since the niches are cut surrounding the entrances of Cave 126 and 128 but at approximately 30 centimetres distance, they probably would have been created later than the caves and thus be dated at least slightly after 513. In Niche 116, a monk-like figure with a shaved head and

wearing a monastic robe stands in front of the pensive bodhisattva and holds an incense burner offering to the deity. This suggests that the pensive deity in the 510s had been treated as an independent deity in Gansu — it did not need to belong to a larger picture or a narrative sequence.



Fig. 2.20 Niche 116, Bingling Cave-temples, Yongjing, dated to c. 513-20, detail from Fig. 2.21

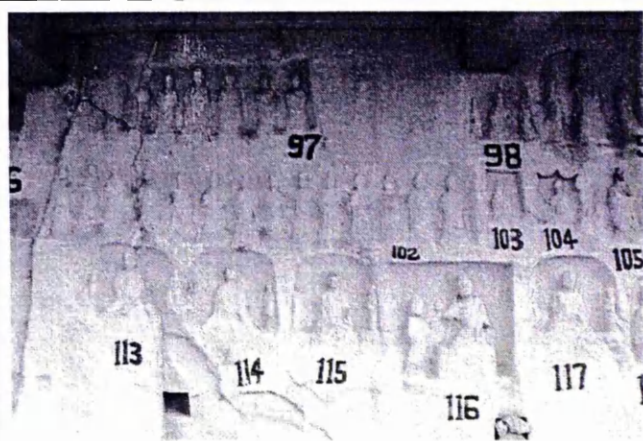


Fig. 2.21 The cliff surface above the entrance of Cave 126, Bingling Cave-temples, Yongjing, dated to c. 513-20

2.4 Maijishan Cave-temples

2.4.1 History of Maijishan Cave-temples

The Maijishan Cave-temples, located in today's southern Gansu province (Map 2.2), are believed to have been first constructed during the Western Qin dynasty (384-417). According to the record in the *Gaoseng zhuan*, Monk Xuangao 玄高 (402-44) came to Maijishan in the 420s, but before his arrival more than a hundred practitioners had stayed here. The text does not specify whether these practitioners were exclusively Buddhist or included some Daoists, but explains that they admired Xuangao's way of meditation and

studied meditation practice under him.⁵⁵ This same passage also mentions another monk Tanhong 曇弘 from Chang'an, who had arrived at Maijishan earlier than Xuangao and developed a solid friendship with him.⁵⁶ Although this record does not describe what kind of settlement was established by Xuangao and Tanhong at Maijishan, the mentioning of meditation practice provides an important clue for determining the possible date of construction of cave-temples and image-making activities. As meditation practice usually requires visual aid to help practitioners to concentrate their thoughts to enter a realm of certain Buddhas or bodhisattvas, it is usually accompanied with the construction of cave-temples and the creation of sacred images. Practitioners typically sit inside a cave in which Buddha and bodhisattva images have been applied on the surfaces of the walls and the ceiling, and visualise themselves as being in a space surrounded by Buddhas and bodhisattvas.⁵⁷

Judging from the stylistic rendering, no cave cut during the Western Qin (384-417) survives today, but traces of the tradition of meditation practice at Maijishan can be seen in later caves of the Northern Wei, such as Caves 76, 86, 89, 114, 115 and 156. These caves are small in size, averaging approximately 135 cm high, 130 cm wide and 110 cm deep, and most would allow only one person seated inside, presumably for the use of meditation practice.⁵⁸ There may have been some small meditation caves carved during the time of Xuangao's arrival in the 420s, or even before, but later destroyed during Emperor Taiwu's 太武帝 repression of Buddhism in the Northern Wei. However, no text describes the scale of the impact of repression on Maijishan. It is also possible that these caves were destroyed

⁵⁵ T 2059.50.397a. “高乃杖策西秦，隱居麥積山，山學百餘人，崇其義訓，稟其禪道。”

⁵⁶ T 2059.50.397a. “時有長安沙門釋曇弘，秦地高僧，隱在此山，與高相會，以同業友善。”

⁵⁷ Su Bai, “Yungang shiku fenqi shilun 雲岡石窟分期試論,” *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* (Beijing, 1996) 76-78.

⁵⁸ Cave 76: H. 130 cm, W. 110 cm, D. 90 cm; Cave 86: H. 141 cm, W. 148 cm, D. 84 cm; Cave 89: H. 150 cm, W. 150 cm, D. 162 cm; Cave 114: H. 167 cm, W. 152 cm, D. 155 cm; Cave 115: H. 107 cm, W. 110 cm, D. 100 cm; Cave 156: H. 116 cm, W. 116 cm, D. 70 cm. Data from Wei Wenbin's PhD dissertation in progress at the University of Lanzhou.

in natural disasters. Maijishan, located in ancient Qinzhou 秦州, experienced a number of earthquakes that were severe enough to be recorded in the official history, *Weishu*: in the years 477, 481, 482 (three times), 483, 486 (twice), 500, 503 (twice), 506, 508, 512, 517 and 521.⁵⁹ These major earthquakes could have caused damage or destroyed the caves before they were a century old.

Michael Sullivan has speculated that before the spread of Buddhism to Maijishan, local nature cults had made use of caves in the mountain. Although this hypothesis is grounded rather more in poetic sensibility than in concrete evidence, it is not entirely implausible. Many sites of Buddhist temples were chosen because of their auspicious association in the Daoist tradition, including the famous Mount Lu 廬山 where the monk Huiyuan 慧遠 (334-416) built his retreat.⁶⁰ Maijishan is surrounded by a beautiful landscape near the Mount Qin 秦嶺. The “Mist and Rain of Maiji”, *Maiji yanyu* 麥積煙雨, is mentioned as one of the eight most beautiful sceneries of Qinzhou (*Qinzhou bajing* 秦州八景) in the gazetteer *Gongchangfu zhi* 鞏昌府志.⁶¹ Even today, the scenic beauty of *Maiji yanyu* continues to be promoted by the local government.⁶² It is plausible that the mist and rain at Maijishan had been noted in the fifth and sixth centuries by local people, who might thus have regarded Maijishan as having “numinous *qi*” (*lingqi* 靈氣). Carving caves for Buddhist use at Maijishan was perhaps not only following a Buddhist tradition but also a local religious convention.

The contemplative bodhisattva images appear in the earliest caves remaining at Maijishan, but the lack of inscriptional evidence makes dating difficult. Scholars have

⁵⁹ *Wei shu* 2894-98.

⁶⁰ Sullivan 1.

⁶¹ Ji Yuan 紀元, *Gongchangfu zhi* 鞏昌府志 (1687; Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng, 1968) 234. *Gongchangfu zhi* was first compiled around 1550 and the latest version was finished in 1687

⁶² The Tianshui Municipal Government 天水市政府, “Qinzhou bajing zhi Maiji yanyu 秦州八景之麥積煙雨,” <http://tianshui.gov.cn/html/lstq/200606261430562618.html> March 10, 2009.

different opinions, ranging from late fourth century to the late fifth century,⁶³ but all agree that Caves 74 and 78 are the earliest surviving caves. It is probably safe to date these earliest caves to the mid-fifth century, as both the subject-matter and style of the early Maijishan caves, which represent the idea of Past, Present and Future Buddhas in a way comparable to the first-stage Yungang Caves 17, 18, 19 and 20, all constructed in the 460s.⁶⁴ The contemplative bodhisattva images appeared at this earliest stage and continued to be produced until approximately 510.⁶⁵ The iconographic context of the pensive image at Maijishan is straightforward: it is always set as a counterpart of the cross-legged Maitreya, and placed in the main walls of the caves.

2.4.2 Typology: Pensive bodhisattva with cross-legged bodhisattva

There are twelve surviving pensive images at Maijishan, in Caves 74, 78, 93, 93-3, 100, 114, 128, 148, 155, 159, 170 and 218.⁶⁶ Except for Cave 218, which is too severely damaged to judge the original design, and Cave 93-3, these caves have a similar iconographical scheme in that a main Buddha statue is placed at the centre of the main wall (facing the entrance) and several small niches are arrayed in rows at each side of the Buddha. The pensive bodhisattva image is placed in one of these small niches and as a counterpart of the cross-legged Maitreya. The following will introduce Caves 74, 78, 100, 148, 114, 159 and 93-3, as in these caves the pensive image and cross-legged Maitreya both remain.

⁶³ Michael Sullivan dates the earliest caves to the mid-fifth century; Sullivan 13. Yan Wenru dates the earliest caves to the Western Qin (). Dong Yuxiang dates them to the Northern Wei, approximately 452-86; Yan Wenru ed, *Maijishan shiku* 麥積山石窟 (Lanzhou: Gansu renming, 1984) 26-27; 61-62. Wei Wenbin dates Caves 74 and 78 to the 460s in his PhD dissertation in progress at the University of Lanzhou.

⁶⁴ Wei Wenbin's PhD dissertation in progress.

⁶⁵ Wei Wenbin's PhD dissertation in progress.

⁶⁶ According to my fieldwork in September 2007.

In the main wall in Caves 74 and 78, a seated Buddha is placed at the centre of the main wall with a bodhisattva at each side of him as attendants and a niche above each bodhisattva (Fig. 2.22). Another seated Buddha is placed in each side wall. In these two small niches, the pensive bodhisattva and the cross-legged Maitreya are placed respectively to the left and to the right of the Buddha (Figs. 2.23 and 2.24) as counterparts. They both have their attendants in a smaller size flanking them in the niches.

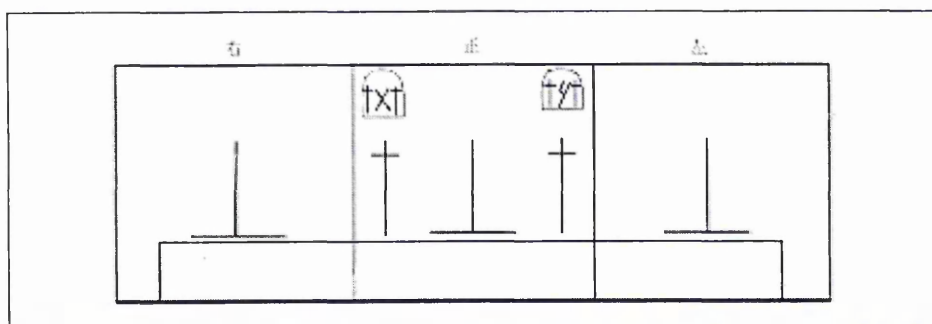


Fig. 2.22 Schematic diagram of Maijishan Cave 74, Tianshui, H. 4.57, D. 2.66, W. 4.57 m. ⊥ seated Buddha, × cross-legged Maitreya, † standing bodhisattva, 卩 pensive bodhisattva



Fig. 2.23 The cross-legged bodhisattva statue in the niche to the Buddha's right in Cave 74 at Maijishan



Fig. 2.24 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in the niche to the Buddha's left in Cave 74 at Maijishan

Caves 100 and 148 have the same iconographical arrangement in the main wall (Fig. 2.25). A seated Buddha is placed at the centre, and three niches are aligned vertically at each side of the Buddha. The pensive bodhisattva statue and its two attendants are placed in the top niche on the viewer's right, and the cross-legged Maitreya and its two attendants are

set in the niche in a mirrored position (Figs. 2.26 and 2.27). In this iconographical scheme, the pensive deity and the cross-legged Maitreya have equal status in the iconographical setting, just as in Caves 74 and 78.

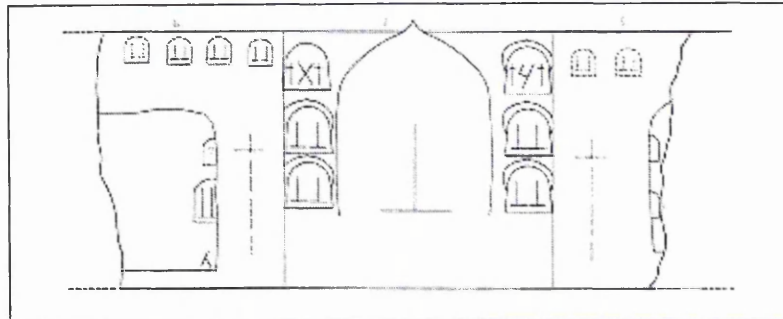


Fig. 2.25 Schematic diagram of Maijishan Cave 148, Tianshui, H. 1.99 m, W. 2.61 m, D. 0.89 m. ⊥ seated Buddha, X cross-legged Maitreya, + standing bodhisattva, ∩ pensive bodhisattva



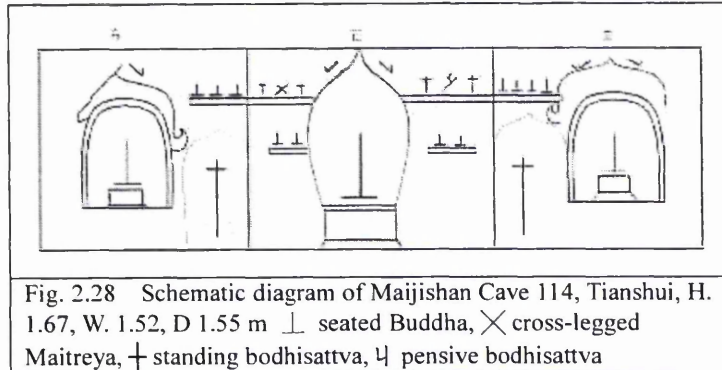
Fig. 2.26 Detail of Cave 148 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in the top niche to the Buddha's left, dated to the second half of the fifth century.



Fig. 2.27 Detail of Cave 148. The cross-legged bodhisattva statue in the top niche to the Buddha's right, dated to the second half of the fifth century.

In Cave 114, the iconographical design is similar to that of the caves examined above: a Buddha statue at the centre of the main wall with small minor figures surrounding him. However, the bodhisattvas in this cave are not placed in the niches but aligned in tiers (Fig. 2.28). Both the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva are placed between two standing bodhisattvas, but the six bodhisattvas are all moulded in similar size and with

similar technique. There is no suggestion of any superior-inferior relationship other than the positioning the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattvas between two standing bodhisattvas.



In Cave 159, the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva are depicted in corresponding positions on either side of the central Buddha statue, but here they are placed on the second tier instead of the top tier as in the cases examined above (Fig. 2.29). A Buddha triad, i.e. a Buddha with two standing bodhisattvas, replaces the pensive and cross-legged bodhisattva on the top tier (the Buddha image in the triad on the viewer's right no longer is in situ. Just as in Caves 74, 79, 100 and 148, the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattvas are arranged as triads (Figs. 2.30 and 2.31). These six bodhisattvas are moulded in similar size, but the halos of the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva are moulded, while those of the standing attendants are painted. This different choice of technique to render the halo of the bodhisattvas suggests their greater relative importance. On the third and lowest tier are images of devotees. Beside each figure, there is an inscription identifying each individual and their relationship with the commissioner:

亡媳阿奴供養佛

[my] late daughter-in-law Anu making offerings to the Buddha.

亡姪孟虎供養佛

[my] late nephew Menghu making offerings to the Buddha.

亡兄阿□供養佛

[my] late brother A... making offerings to the Buddha.

亡父李道生供養佛

[my] late father Li Daosheng making offerings to the Buddha.

亡母龍歡姬供養佛

[my] late mother Long Huanji making offerings to the Buddha.

亡嫂王雙供養佛

[my] late sister-in-law Wang Shuan making offerings to the Buddha.

Judging from these inscriptions, this cave is likely to have been commissioned by the Li family, and the primary commissioner was the son of Li Daosheng and Long Huanji. He had the artisans portray his deceased family members in the section beneath the pensive and cross-legged bodhisattva triads set in the main wall facing the entrance, a prominent position which would be seen by anyone entering this cave.

The original paint of the Northern Wei is well preserved in this cave, providing ideal conditions to investigate how the creators of this cave utilised and coordinated sculpture and painting techniques. The artisans first finished the main statues and moulded the minor images on the wall. After the clay had dried, they applied a coat of white paint on the wall including on the moulded reliefs. They then used pigments to delineate the figures and decorations, such as garments, headdresses, streamers, jewels and halos. In the two upper sections, lotus flowers and foliage are painted on the surfaces between moulded reliefs of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Overall, it gives a visual impression that the Buddhas and the bodhisattvas appear upon a lotus pond or in a lotus world, reminiscent of textual descriptions of the Pure Land.⁶⁷ In the third section where the devotee images appear, no

⁶⁷ *Foshuo Amituo jing* 佛說阿彌陀經 T 366.12.346c. *Foshuo Wuliangshou jing* 佛說無量壽經 T 360.12.272a.

lotus flower or foliage is depicted, possibly implying that these devotees are inferior to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas or in a different space from the divinities. In the fourth and also the lowest section, lotuses are also present, but only lotuses—no figure is portrayed in this section. This arrangement not only serves a decorative purpose—depicting lotuses in the lowest section consequently places every subject above it in a pure and peaceful realm, namely a Buddha world (Fig. 2.32).

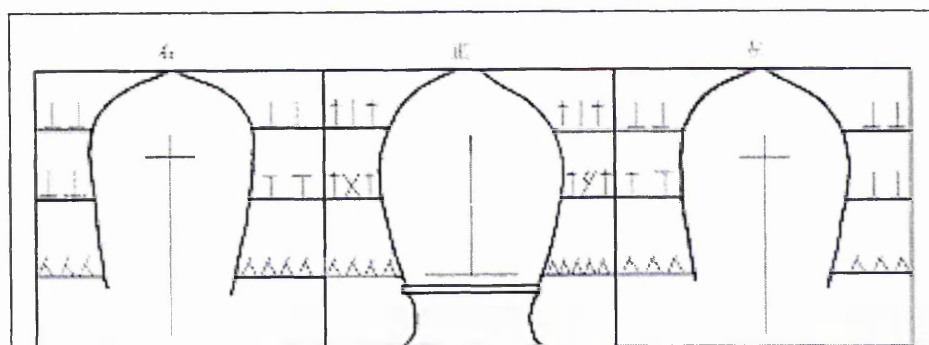


Fig. 2.29 Schematic diagram of Maijishan Cave 159, Tianshui, exact size unknown.
 ⊥ seated Buddha, X cross-legged Maitreya, ⊥ standing bodhisattva, ⊥ pensive bodhisattva, 人 patrons.



Fig. 2.30 The cross-legged bodhisattva triad in the main wall in Maijishan Cave 159, dated c. 500



Fig. 2.31 The contemplative bodhisattva triad in the main wall in Maijishan Cave 159, dated c. 500



Fig. 2.32 The main wall of Maijishan Cave 159, Tianshui

Niche 93-3 outside Cave 93 presents an extremely unusual example of the pensive bodhisattva image in China. In this niche, the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva are joined as a unit with a standing bodhisattva as the attendant on each side of them (Fig. 2.33). This small niche, only 44 cm in height, 40 cm in width and 23 cm in depth, would most likely have belonged to a larger iconographical setting, probably a cave, which has since been destroyed. As with the examples discussed above, the pensive deity and the cross-legged Maitreya are set as counterparts, in this case equally sharing the space in a niche. The symbolic meaning represented by this niche is not clear. Michael Sullivan provides three possible ways to read this image, as an unorthodox representation of Sakyamuni and Prabhūtaratna, as a cross-legged Maitreya and Prince Siddhartha, or as a pair of two Maitreyas.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Sullivan 12.



Fig. 2.33 Maijishan Niche 93-3, Tianshui, H. 0.44, W, 0.40, D. 0.23 m, the pensive and the cross-legged bodhisattva jointed as a unit placed in a niche

The examples introduced above are the caves in which both pensive and the cross-legged Maitreya are extant. The obvious characteristic that these two deities are set as counterparts helps to identify several other caves in which the same arrangement appear: in Caves 93, 128, 155, 170, 218, only the pensive bodhisattva image exists today; in Caves 19, 51, 86, 144, 156, only the cross-legged Maitreya image survives, but from the traceable remains, there is little doubt that they were treated as a pair in these caves.

2.5 Discussion

At Mogao, the contemplative bodhisattva image appeared in the earliest cave-temples. They appear in two types of caves, those of a rectangular plan with niches

aligned in side walls and those having rectangular central-pillars. The positioning of the contemplating image in these two types of caves is consistent for each type of cave-temple: in the cave-temples without a central pillar (Caves 275 and 259), the contemplating image is housed in the niches in the upper section of the side walls facing each other, while in the group having central pillars (Caves 257, 260 and 437) the contemplating image is placed in the upper niche in the central pillar facing the southern side wall. Among them, Cave 275 is the earliest, dated to 400-39, and the rest are dated to the second half of the fifth century. In all these caves, the cross-legged bodhisattva image is present. It is placed beside the contemplative bodhisattva statue in side walls in the first cases, and placed in the mirrored position in the central pillar in the second cases.

In the West Cave of the Jinta Cave-temples, the contemplative image is housed in the same position as the second type of Mogao Caves (Caves 257, 260 and 259), but in contrast to Mogao, the Jinta contemplative image has a pendant-legged Buddha in its mirrored position. In other words, Jinta and Mogao shared similar iconographical sources, but each developed their own local characteristics.

At the Bingling Cave-temples, the earliest contemplative image in Cave 169 has lost its original iconographical context, but the remains of the statue show that the throne against which the deity leans is rendered in a manner similar to those used by the cross-legged bodhisattvas in Mogao Cave 275. This suggests that the pensive bodhisattva in Binglingsi Cave 169 had an iconographical relationship with the cross-legged bodhisattva. Moreover, it also implies that although the Hexi Corridor at this time was occupied by more than one political power, the Buddhist art of this area drew on a shared culture of visual representations.

The later examples in Binglingsi Caves 126 and 128 show significant innovations. In these examples, dated to approximately 510-520, a worshipper is depicted in front of the

contemplative deity, which is carved against a background of a thousand Buddhas. This innovation emerged after the transfer of the Northern Wei's capital to Luoyang, and will be further discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Niche 116 is carved individually in the cliff without being included in a bigger iconographical scheme, suggesting that the pensive image of this period had sufficient iconographical significance to be used independently. Moreover, similar to the images in Cave 126 and 128, there is a worshipper appearing with the pensive bodhisattva. The appearance of worshippers in front of the thinking divinity effectively elevated the figure's status. The above two features together suggest that by the early sixth century, an independent identity for this image was beginning to emerge.

Compared with other sites in Gansu, the contemplative bodhisattva image was treated more simply at Maijishan. Similar to Mogao Caves 257, 260 and 437, in which the contemplative and the cross-legged bodhisattvas are set in the mirrored positions as equals in the central pillars, at Maijishan the contemplative and the cross-legged bodhisattvas are placed on each side of the primary statue in the main walls as equals. Architects and artisans may have inherited the iconography from Mogao and transformed it into a new one.

2.6 Conclusion

As mentioned in Chapter One, the contemplative bodhisattva image had been represented in China on a bronze mirror before the fourth century, but it was not until the beginning of the fifth century that it started to receive more attention and became one of the images depicted in cave-temples in China. This spread of the pensive image to China may have been facilitated by more frequent pilgrimages to India and missionaries from the late

fourth and early fifth century, as recorded in the *Gaoseng zhuan*.⁶⁹ Some of the travelling monks may have brought with them images depicting the contemplative bodhisattva, as suggested by the story of Wu Cangying in the *Collected Records of the Miraculous Responses of the Three Treasures in the Sacred Region* (see Chapter One). In Gandhāra, the likely source of the models on which the Chinese artisans were to build, the contemplative image at this time had been employed to represent several different deities, including Prince Siddhartha, Maitreya, Avalokitésvara and Padmapāni. In other words, when the contemplative bodhisattva images were enthusiastically introduced to China in the late fourth and early fifth century, they were already imbued with a multiplicity of possible meanings.

Based on the material evidence discussed in this chapter, I argue that Buddhists in Gansu started to install the contemplative image in their cave-temples, and that this image began the process of transformation that would eventually earn it an independent seat as a deity in the Chinese Buddhist Pantheon. The similarities between the images in Gansu show that although this region was occupied by different regimes, this did not prevent them from sharing a common iconographic visual culture. The differences among them reveal that although they might have shared similar pictorial sources, Buddhists at different sites altered existing models and created new images in accordance with their own imaginations, desires and understanding of Buddhism. This twofold process continued in other places in China with the spread of the pensive images.

Mogao Cave 275 is particularly important for understanding the early development of the contemplative bodhisattva image. In this cave, the contemplative images were in some instances positioned as equals to the cross-legged bodhisattvas beside them; in others, they are shown as subordinates to a cross-legged bodhisattva statue in the main wall. Later

⁶⁹ For example, Fa Xian 法顯, T 2059.50.337b-338b

Buddhists and artisans adopted these two ideas and employed them in the iconographic design of later caves. In Mogao Caves 260, 257 and 437, artisans borrowed the idea of setting the pensive image and the cross-legged images as equals and placed them in the central pillar. This same idea was also employed at Maijishan, but in a different way: both pensive and cross-legged bodhisattvas are placed in the main wall. In the later Buddhist centre Yungang, architects treated the contemplative bodhisattvas as subordinates to the cross-legged bodhisattva and to flank the cross-legged bodhisattva in a triad; a different type of contemplative image from that in Gansu appeared and became popular - that representing Prince Siddhartha, the young Sakyamuni, as a contemplating bodhisattva.

Chapter 3: Yungang (c. 460-524)

3.1 History of Yungang Cave-temples

The Yungang cave temples are situated in Shanxi province, near the modern city of Datong 大同. Datong was the site of the first Northern Wei capital of Pingcheng 平城, from 398 until the court's move to Luoyang in 494. The historical context of the Yungang cave temples is easier to determine than that of the cave-temples in Gansu, since the *Wei shu* includes important information relating to the Yungang Cave temples, which it refers to as the Wuzhoushan Shiku Si 武州山石窟寺. According to the *Treatise on Buddhism and Daoism* in the *Wei shu*, during the revival of Buddhism under the reign of Emperor Wencheng 文成帝 (452-65), the Chief Monk (*sengren tong* 僧人統) Tanyao 曇曜 proposed to build five cave-temples at Wuzhousai 武州塞 (Wuzhou Garrison) and a Buddha image in each cave.¹ These five caves are believed to be the beginning of the Yungang construction and the famous Five Caves of Tanyao, *Tanyao wuku* 曇曜五窟, Yungang Caves 16-20, in the 460s. But some works in these five caves were finished during the second stage of construction, including Caves 19A, 19B, the main statue of Cave 16 and some niches in the walls of Caves 16 and 17.²

After the 460s, the building of new cave-temples continued under the sponsorship of the imperial family, aristocrats and high-ranking officials until Emperor Xiaowen 孝文帝 moved the capital to Luoyang in 494. In this second stage of construction, c. 470-94, new caves, including Caves 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, were carved in the cliff to the east of the Five Caves of Tanyao.³

In the third stage of construction, from 494 (when the capital was moved from

¹ *Wei shu* 3037.

² Su Bai, "Yungang shiku fenqi shilun" 77.

³ Su Bai, "Yungang shiku fenqi shilun" 78-85.

Pingcheng to Luoyang) until 526 (when Luoyang fell to rebels),⁴ most caves were cut to the west of the Tanyao caves, and the sponsorship shifted to people of lesser means and lower-ranking officials.⁵ Caves cut in this period are smaller than those from the previous two periods. When renovating the surfaces of existing caves, the new benefactor had the original images removed and replaced with new ones. Consequently, in many earlier caves, images from different periods are juxtaposed or overlapping each other; however, with careful archaeological and stylistic analysis it is possible to distinguish images of different dates.

The following discussion categorises the contemplative images at Yungang into three groups according to the iconographical elements present. The first category comprises those images in which the pensive bodhisattva occurs as an attendant to the cross-legged Maitreya. This type appeared in the 470s in the second phase of Yungang construction. Images in the second category are very similar to those in the first in terms of the iconographical structure in which the pensive bodhisattvas are still attendants to the cross-legged bodhisattva, but in this second group both bodhisattvas are portrayed under a tree. This type appeared from the late 480s and continued to be employed into the third stage of cave temple construction. In the third category, the pensive bodhisattvas are depicted with a horse, an iconographic convention that appeared in the late 480s to the early 490s and continued to be produced in the third stage of construction. Mapping these three iconographical categories over the construction chronology, after the late 480s three types of images were simultaneously carved at Yungang.

3.2 Typology

⁴ According to the inscription of the *Dajin Xijing Wuzhoushan xiongxiu dashikusi bei* 大金西京武州山重修大石窟寺碑 (1115-1234), the latest inscription was dated to 524. Su Bai, "Yungang shiku fenqi shilun" 85.

⁵ Su Bai, "Yungang shiku fenqi shilun" 86-87.

3.2.1 Pensive bodhisattva with cross-legged Maitreya

The first category of pensive bodhisattvas found at Yungang are the paired contemplative figures attending on either side of a cross-legged Maitreya figure and forming a Maitreya triad. Triads of this type were carved at Yungang during the period from the second to the third phase of the construction, c. 470-94. This section will introduce them chronologically, starting from the Five Caves of Tanyao, Caves 16-20. Although the building of these five caves began in the early 460s, some works were completed in the second stage of construction. In these caves six images dated to the 470s have been discovered, two in Cave 19A, two in Cave 18 and two in Cave 16. These images most likely form part of the original design of the caves, as they are all placed in the frontal wall and in mirrored position as an integrated design of the caves.

In Cave 19A, at the eastern side of the frontal wall (Fig. 3.1), the cross-legged bodhisattva has an over-large head, possibly to adjust the visual effect so that when viewed from the ground level, the head would appear as normal size. He has a square face and a muscular body, and wears a skirt with incised curved lines indicating pleats. In addition, he wears a disk-shaped crown, ear pendants, a luxurious necklace, pectorals and armbands to exhibit his noble status. His hands perform the gesture of turning the dharma wheel (*dharmacakra mudra*). A lion is carved at each side of his throne, which recalls the setting of the primary statue in Mogao Cave 275.

The contemplative figures display similar physical and facial characteristics to the central deity, but are not wearing a crown. The size of the contemplative deities is of much smaller scale than that of the central figure. They are seated on a waisted stool, sharing the space in the trapezoidal niche with the cross-legged Maitreya.⁶ Another two deities are standing, one at each side of the niche. An array of donors is portrayed below

⁶ The shape of the niche is described as “trabeated” by Stanley Abe and “trapezoidal” by Lee Junghee. Abe, *Ordinary Images* 206. Lee Junghee, “The Origins and Development” 339.

the niche, following a convention of the fifth and sixth centuries, with male donors on the viewer's right and females on the left.



Fig. 3.1 A niche of a cross-legged Maitreya with two contemplative bodhisattvas at the eastern side of the frontal wall in Yungang Cave 19A, dated to the 470s



Fig. 3.2 A niche of a cross-legged Maitreya with two contemplative bodhisattvas at the western side of the frontal wall in Yungang Cave 18, dated to the 470s

In Cave 18, the two niches in the frontal wall are set at the lower part of the window above the entrance, showing similar physical and facial features to those in Cave 19A (Fig. 3.2). The cross-legged Maitreya also performs the hand gesture of turning the Dharma wheel. The niche is also in the shape of a trapezoidal arch, and the space is shared by three deities. But in contrast to those in Cave 19A, the contemplative deities in this cave are wearing crowns, and they are of larger scale. In addition, there is no donor's portrait below the niches; instead, they are surrounded by small Thousand-Buddha niches.

The figures in Cave 16 show similar stylistic rendering to those in Caves 19A and 18, but a new iconographical element is added to the shape of the niches (Fig. 3.3). The niches are set in the frame between the window and the entrance in the frontal wall, and at each side of a Buddha triad in symmetry. The Maitreya bodhisattvas wear a taller crown than those in Caves 18 and 19A. The scarf hung across his body is characteristic of the later period in the 470s, and therefore suggests a date later than those in Caves 18

and 19A. Another difference is the cross-legged bodhisattvas in this cave show their right hands in the fearlessness gesture (*abhaya mudra*) and one has his left hand in wish-granting gesture (*varada mudra*), and the other holding a flask. These gestures are the typical *mudras* for Maitreya Bodhisattvas in the second stage of the Yungang construction.

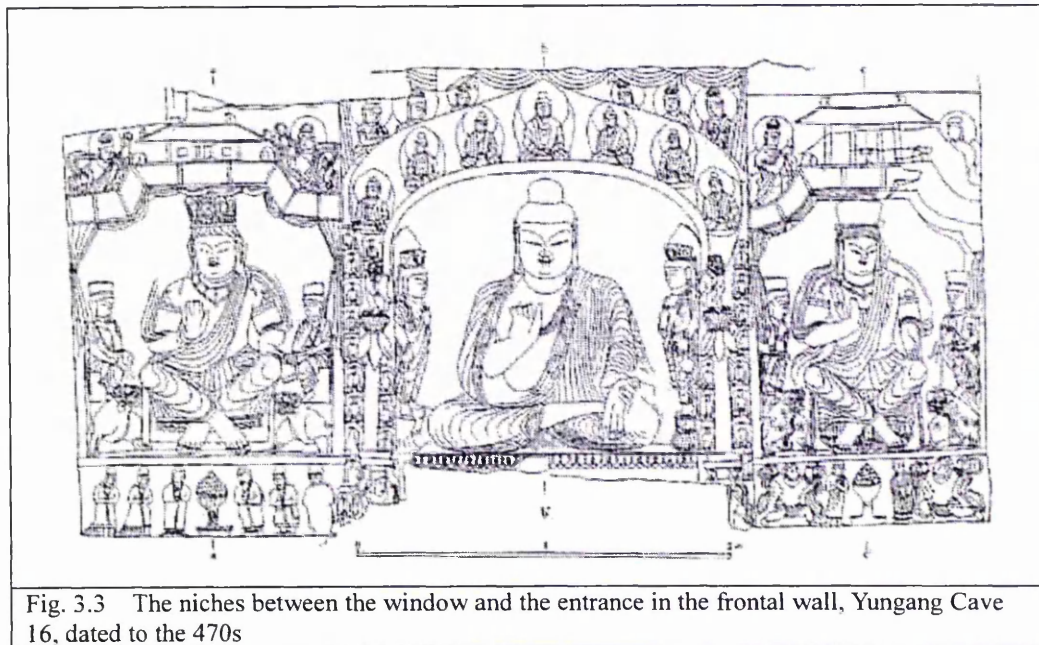


Fig. 3.3 The niches between the window and the entrance in the frontal wall, Yungang Cave 16, dated to the 470s

The relative size of the contemplative bodhisattvas in Cave 16 is closer to that in Cave 18, and the pensive deities are also wearing crowns in this case. Two sashes hang over their upper body and form a cross at the front. The contemplative bodhisattvas are not seated on a waisted stool here but placed on the top tier of the throne, and in the same space inside the niche with the cross-legged bodhisattva. Below both niches, donors and incense burners (and in the niche at viewer's right, heavenly beings) are portrayed.

The distinctive iconographic feature of these two niches is their unusual shape, together with the depiction above the niche of a Chinese-style pavilion, illustrating the gradual sinicisation of Buddhist art at the capital established by the Tuoba 拓跋 tribe. More importantly this innovation of combining the traditional trapezoidal arch for the

cross-legged Maitreya niche at Yungang and the palace-shaped niche for cross-legged Maitreya found at Mogao (Fig. 2.1) shows that Buddhists and artisans at Yungang had knowledge of the iconographic traditions of Liangzhou and that they inherited the legacy of Liangzhou Buddhism and Buddhist art.

This coexistence of the trapezoidal arch and a Chinese pavilion in the same niche is not seen in any other caves at Yungang nor elsewhere in China. This combination displays the artisans' experimentation with different iconographies and forms from different sources in this age of extensive Chinese-foreign interaction. In the caves of the later time of the Northern Wei, both the trapezoidal arch and the Chinese pavilion are used in niches housing the cross-legged Maitreya.

In the second phase of Yungang's construction, from c. 470-94, a new iconographical combination associated with the pensive deity appeared. In Caves 7 and 8, the earliest caves of this stage from the beginning of Emperor Xiaowen's 孝文帝 reign (471-99), the pentad includes the icons of a cross-legged bodhisattva, a pendent-legged Buddha and a contemplative bodhisattva. In Cave 7, in the upper part of the main (northern) wall, the cross-legged Maitreya is set in the middle, with a pendent-legged Buddha at each side (Fig. 3.4). A contemplative deity is carved at each side of the set of three, forming a pentad. The arrangement of the main niche in Yungang Cave 8 is similar to that in Cave 7, only that the primary statue is the pendent-legged Buddha with a cross-legged bodhisattva at each side (Fig. 3.5). The contemplative bodhisattvas are set in the same position as the minor deities in the pentad. In both caves, they are placed in a trapezoidal arch.



Fig. 3.4 The pentad in the niche in the upper part of the main wall, Yungang Cave 7, dated to 470s

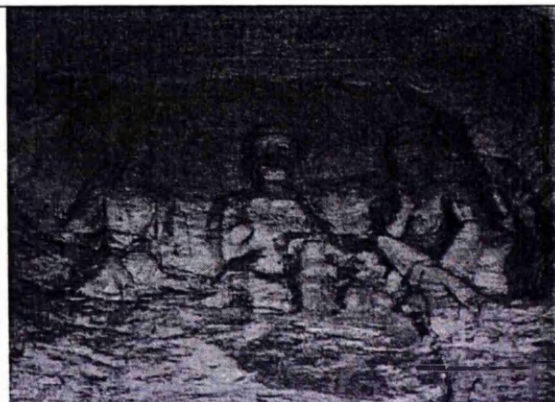


Fig. 3.5 The pentad in the niche at the upper part of the main wall, Yungang Cave 8, dated 470s

In Yungang Cave 1, dated to 480s, the triad of the cross-legged bodhisattva with two contemplative deities is carved in a large scale and placed in the main (northern) wall (Fig. 3.6). This prominent position denotes the increasing importance of this set. The whole main wall is cut in the form of a trapezoid arch-shaped niche and divided into three units so that every one of the three deities occupies a unit. The central figure, a cross-legged bodhisattva, wears a necklace and a crown. The scarf hanging over his body forms a cross in front of his lower belly. The lower part of his *dhoti* is fashioned with sharp ends like a fishtail, as was the characteristic model from the 480s. The attendant on viewer's left is seated on a waisted stool with his right leg pendant and the left one folded horizontally on the knee of the right leg, the typical posture of the contemplating image; however, his hands are shown holding each other and resting on the left leg, not with one arm supporting the head as those in the pensive images, and the garment he wears is a monk's robe, not a bodhisattva's dress. But a closer examination reveals that the folds of the garment and the volume of the body were added at a later time with clay. The shape of the stone inside the clay suggests that it was originally a contemplative bodhisattva of the Northern Wei.

The status of the contemplative bodhisattva in the Yungang iconographies became elevated over time, as evidenced by the increasingly prominent positioning within the cave. During the later first stage of Yungang's construction (the late 460s to

the early 470s) the setting was positioned in the front wall of Caves 18, 19A and 16, positions not immediately to be seen upon entering the cave, whereas in Cave 1 from the second phase of the Yungang's construction, the setting is positioned in the main wall facing the entrance, as the triad of Maitreya with two Siwei attendants. Furthermore, heavenly worshippers are kneeling beside the contemplative deities. This is the first example in Yungang in which the contemplative deity has his own attendants or worshippers.

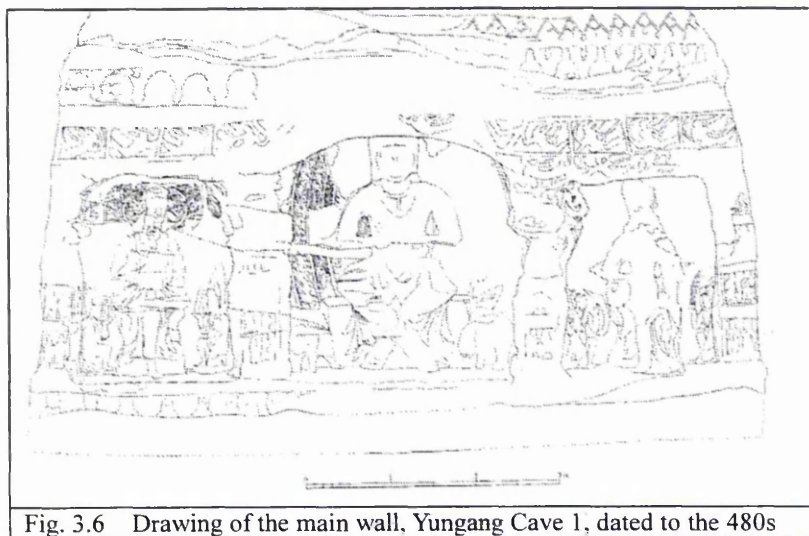


Fig. 3.6 Drawing of the main wall, Yungang Cave 1, dated to the 480s

In Cave 12, dated to the 480s, the set of the cross-legged Maitreya and the contemplative bodhisattvas is cut in the eastern wall of the antechamber. A standing worshipper is depicted at each side of the niche, but not in the space that is cut into the wall. The niche is shaped as a Chinese pavilion which consists of a tiled roof, beams, brackets and four columns. The columns divide the space into five units, but the three at the centre occupy most of the space and are cut into the stone. Each of the three units enjoys the similar size of space. In contrast to the examples discussed above, in which all the pensive figures are considerably smaller than the central figure and placed in the same space with the central deity, the pensive deities here are positioned in their own space and delineated in the same scale as the main statue. The unusual iconographical

element is the form of the backrests of the thrones against which the pensive deities are leaning. These thrones differ from the more commonly seen waisted stools, but are similar to the inverted-triangle type seen in the pensive bodhisattva statue of Binglingsi Cave 169, and in the cross-legged Maitreya statues of Mogao Cave 275. Its appearance at Yungang again strongly suggests that people in the Northern Wei capital had knowledge of Buddhist images in Liangzhou and were inspired by the iconographic legacy of Liangzhou Buddhist art.

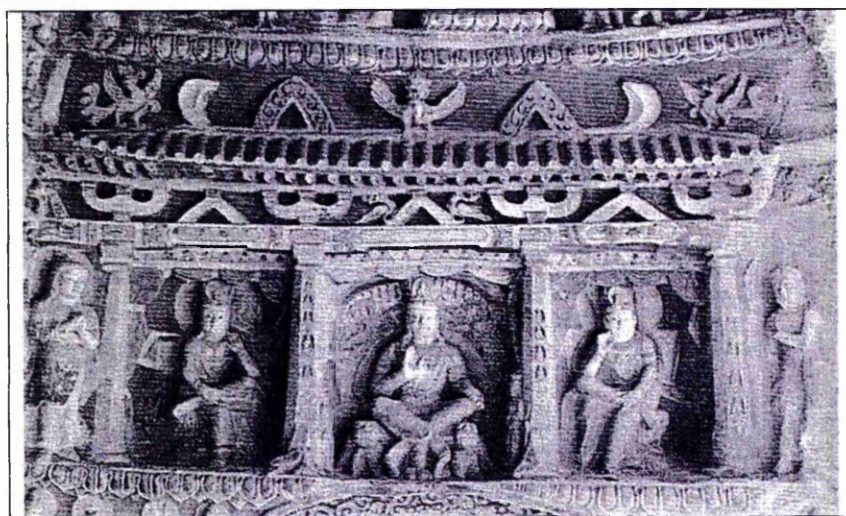


Fig.3.7 The niches of a cross-legged Maitreya with two contemplative bodhisattvas in the eastern wall of the antechamber of Yungang Cave 12, dated to 480s

After the 480s, niches in the shape of a trapezoidal arch and those in the shape of a Chinese pavilion coexisted at Yungang. But the trapezoidal arch-shaped niches had undergone some transformation, which might have been influenced by the form of the Chinese pavilion niche, particularly the spatial arrangement. Fig. 3.8 shows a carving dated to 489 in the window frame of Cave 17. This carving is damaged but it can be seen that the niche was cut in the shape of a trapezoidal arch, and the space in the niche is divided into three units. In earlier works from the 470s, introduced above in Cave 19A (Fig. 3.1), 18 (Fig. 3.2) and 16 (Fig. 3), the three deities are placed in the same space in the niche – there are no columns in the niche to separate the primary statue

from its attendants. Another example in Fig. 3.9 shows more advanced development in that the niches are hollowed out and more space created. Two standing figures are added behind the columns and make the set a pentad.



Fig. 3.8 The carving in the window frame of Yungang Cave 17, dated 489



Fig. 3.9 A niche of the cross-legged Maitreya and two contemplative bodhisattvas in the western wall of Yungang Cave 11, dated to 480s-90s

In the third stage of the Yungang construction, after the capital moved to Luoyang in 494, the scale of the new caves became smaller, most likely because after the imperial family, aristocrats and high-ranking officials emigrated to the south, the sponsorship at Yungang shifted to low-ranking officials and residents of lesser means. During this period, Buddhists and artisans adopted existing iconographies in situ and reproduced them in the new caves. The conventional triad of the cross-legged Maitreya with two contemplative deities can be found all over the caves in the western region of the cliff at Yungang, for example in Caves 21, 26, 27-2, 31, 33-6, 35, 36 and 39. A variation can be seen in Cave 27, in which the upper part of the main (northern) wall is cut with three cross-legged Maitreyas in similar size and a contemplative deity is set at both sides of the central one (only the one to viewer's left remains) (Fig. 3.10).



Fig. 3.10 Three niches of the cross-legged Maitreyas placed in the upper part of the main wall in Yungang Cave 27, dated to 500-520

Another variation is found in Cave 29 (Fig. 3.11), in which the upper part of the main wall is created with three primary niches, the pendent-legged Buddha in the middle and two cross-legged Maitreyas at sides. The contemplative bodhisattvas play the role of attendants to the pendent-legged Buddha. This icon was possibly a transformation from the main icon in Cave 8, in which the pendent-legged Buddha was primary, the cross-legged bodhisattvas at both his sides, and the pensive deities at two ends in side walls (Fig. 3.5). In Cave 8, viewers standing at the entrance are less likely to notice the existence of the pensive deities, as they are placed in the niche in side walls facing each other. But in Cave 29, a work from a later date, artisans changed the position of the pensive deities to a more prominent position so that anyone standing at the entrance would notice their existence. This is further evidence supporting the raising status of the contemplative bodhisattva.



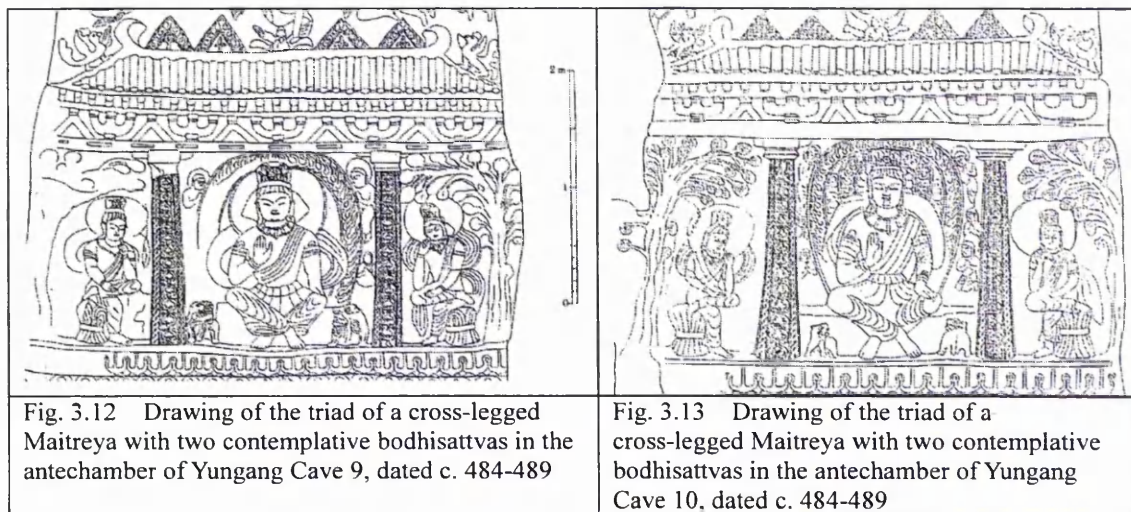
Fig. 3.11 Two contemplative bodhisattvas as the pendent-legged Buddha's attendants with two cross-legged Maitreyas, in the upper part of the main wall in Yungang Cave 29, dated to 510s

3.2.2 Pensive bodhisattva with tree

This category introduces the images having a new visual element—a tree—added next to the two contemplative bodhisattvas in the conventional triad of the cross-legged Maitreya. These images first appeared in Caves 9 and 10 at Yungang, dated to c. 484-489. These two caves were designed as a set of double caves, and therefore the floor plans are identical in that both consist of an antechamber and a central-pillared main chamber. The two antechambers share the dividing wall and are connected by a gateway. The triads are placed in the upper sections of the antechambers, in the eastern wall of Cave 9 (Fig. 3.12) and in the western wall of Cave 10 (Fig. 3.13), in mirrored positions. These two carvings have almost identical designs in that both are placed in niches in the shape of a Chinese pavilion. Two columns divide the niche into three spatial units, the cross-legged Maitreya is set in the middle, with a pensive deity set in the space on both sides.

A tree is depicted beside each pensive deity. The branches and foliage of the trees are slightly bent inward toward the centre above the deity, as if sheltering the thinking divinities. Here the pensive deities are of smaller scale than the central bodhisattva, in contrast to those found in Cave 12 (Fig. 3.7) discussed above, in which

three deities are cut in the same size. The smaller scale of the contemplative deity in this set suggests his subordinate status to the central deity, the cross-legged Maitreya.



Images of a pensive bodhisattva with a tree are rare at Yungang. The only other example is found in the western wall in Cave 33-3, dated to c. 510s (Fig. 3.14 and 3.15).⁷ The cave is damaged but the remaining stone shows a pensive deity sitting under a tree as the cross-legged Maitreya's attendant. To create a symmetrical composition as other triads, there most likely had been another pensive deity under a tree on the other side of Maitreya. It is worth noting that a kneeling figure is depicted beside the deity. As this cave is located high up in the cliff, I was not able to closely examine the worshipper. But judging from the photo published in the 1950s and comparing it to the heavenly figures in Cave 1 (Fig. 3.6), this kneeling figure probably is a secular character because he does not have the streamer or a halo as depicted with the figures beside the pensive figures in Cave 1.

⁷ This cave is numbered as 32E by Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Taishio, *Unkō sekkutsu: seireki goseiki ni okeru Chūgoku hokubu bukkyō kutsuin no kōkogakuteki chōsa hōkoku*, vol. 15 (Kyoto, 1951-56) Fig. 31.

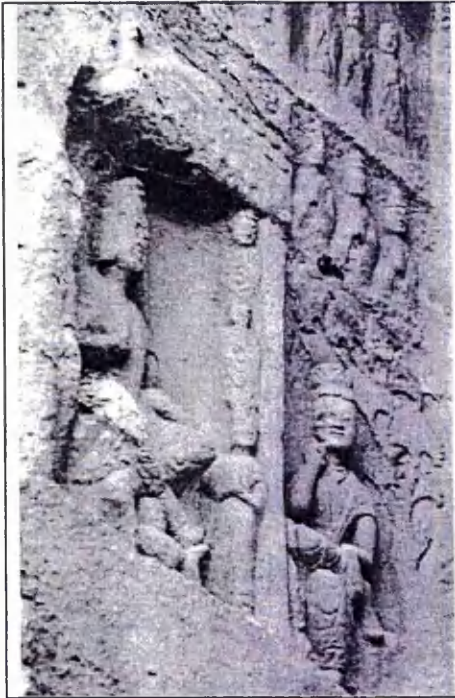


Fig. 3.14 The lower part of the western wall of Yungang Cave 33-3, dated to c. 520



Fig. 3.15 The contemplative bodhisattva statue in Yungang Cave 33-3

3.2.3 Pensive bodhisattva with horse

During my fieldwork in September 2007 at Yungang, I noted four instances of the pensive figure depicted together with a horse: two in Cave 6, one in Cave 28 and one in Cave 30. A further possible example exists in Cave 41, but the image is weathered too badly to be certain. This image has precedents in Gandhara, but in the Gandhara examples the horse is always depicted standing upright. The depiction of the horse Kanthaka in a kneeling position was an innovation of Chinese artisans, perhaps motivated by a desire to follow more closely the textual descriptions in Śākyamuni's biographies.

The image of a horse appearing in Cave 6 in the 480s is not known to have appeared previously in the repertoire of Liangzhou Buddhist art. In the window frame of Cave 6, two pensive figures are carved with a horse (the one in the eastern wall is

damaged) as mirrored images facing each other (Figs. 3.16 and 3.17).⁸ The pensive statues do not play the role as attendants to any deity in this case, but each sits in their own niche. Both niches are cut in the form of a trapezoid arch. As the horse is a unique character in the narrative in Śākyamuni's biography, I agree with earlier scholars' identification of these two pensive figures as Prince Siddhārtha (Chapter One).



Fig. 3.16 Drawing of the contemplative bodhisattva with a horse in the niche in the eastern side of the window frame in Yungang Cave 6, dated to 480s



Fig. 3.17 The contemplative bodhisattva with a horse in the niche in the western side of the window frame in Yungang Cave 6, dated to 480s

In addition to the horse, there are three other distinctive iconographical characteristics in these two images in Cave 6. The first of these characteristics is the draped backrests of the thrones. The backrests are depicted as the same type as those in the paired pensive attendants to cross-legged Maitreya in Yungang Cave 12 (Fig. 3.7), in the single pensive bodhisattva statue in Binglingsi Cave 169 (Fig. 2.14), and in the statue of the cross-legged Maitreya in Mogao Cave 275. These examples reveal that

⁸ My in situ examination of Cave 6 in August 2007 noted that there is a hole, roughly square, approximately ten centimetres in depth, in the floor of each niche on the opposite side of the horse. There might have been an object, possibly a statue, installed in this hole, but since installing objects in stone niches was not a custom in the fifth and sixth centuries, if there once had been, it was probably added in a later period.

from Liangzhou to Pingcheng, from the beginning to the end of the fifth century, the iconography of the cross-legged Maitreya, the contemplative deity and Prince Siddhārtha shared similar visual elements, including the sitting posture, hand gesture and the throne type. These shared visual elements reflect the fact that when the image of the contemplative bodhisattva entered China, it was already a hybrid denoting several meanings (cf. Chapter One).

The second characteristic is that there are a number of heavenly figures with halos delineated in the niche around the bodhisattva, as if celebrating a memorable moment. All the figures join their palms in front of their chests in obeisance paying homage to the bodhisattva. No such image has been found in other caves at Yungang or Gansu.⁹ The third feature is the landscape appearing in the lower part of the niche and below the niche, which creates a visual illusion that the prince is surrounded by mountains. These two niches in Cave 6 are the only ones at Yungang having the contemplative bodhisattva in a natural setting; a composition and an element which might have been copied when images were later created at Nannieshui and in Hebei.

The image of the contemplative bodhisattva with a horse in Cave 6 is duplicated in Cave 28 but with new development. This image is carved in the right upper corner in the western wall (Fig. 3.18). The juxtaposition of the two images in the right and left upper corners suggests that both images represent stories from Śākyamuni's life. In the upper left corner is the image of the Great Departure—Prince Siddhārtha on the horse back and the horse carried by four heavenly figures escaping from the palace in which he once lived. The pensive deity in the upper right corner appears with a horse and another standing figure representing his farewell to his mount Kanthaka. The figure standing beside them is the portrait of his groom Chandaka. In its antecedents in Cave 6, Chandaka is not depicted. The image in Cave 28 might have another pictorial source

⁹ The niches house the pensive bodhisattvas in Mogao Cave 275 were refurbished in the Song dynasty, and the original design is unknown. Dunhuang yanjiuyuan 敦煌研究院, *Dunhuang shiku neirong zonglu* 敦煌石窟內容總錄 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1996) 111.

other than those in Cave 6, or it might have been the creation of the designers or artisans of this cave.

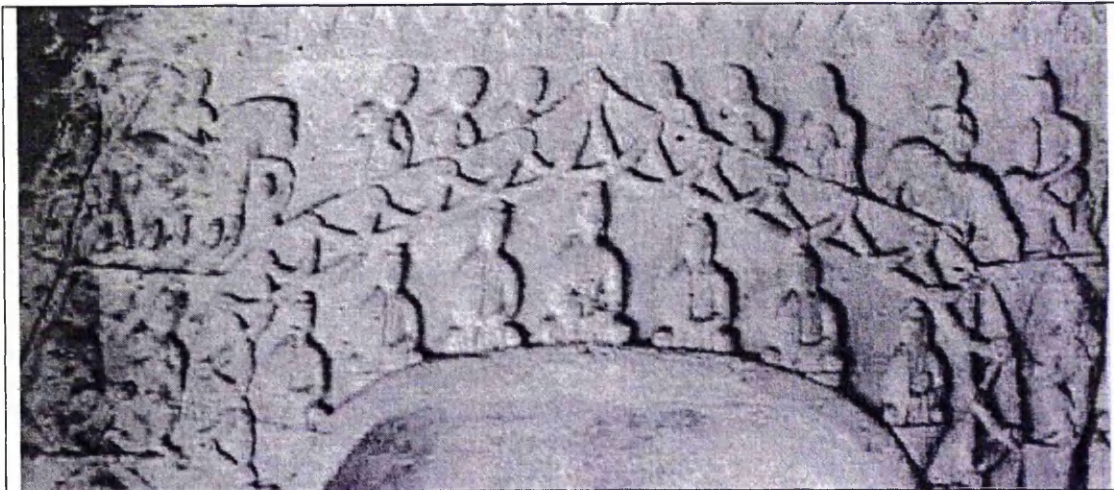


Fig. 3.18 The upper part of the western wall in Yungang Cave 28, dated to c. 520

The farewell scene in Cave 30 is different from ones discussed above (Fig. 3.19): Prince Siddhārtha occupies most of the space in the niche in the centre, and is depicted wearing a monastic robe as a Buddha instead of being portrayed as a prince or adorned as a bodhisattva; moreover, Chandaka is carved in a small scale kneeling beside Siddhārtha and grasping his robe, expressing great affection toward Siddhārtha. This scene highlights the scenario in the farewell plot of Chandaka begging Siddhārtha to return to the palace. Several celestial figures carved in a larger size than those in the niches in Cave 6 stand around the main characters, as if witnessing the event.



Fig. 3.19 The niche in the frontal wall in Yungang Cave 30, dated to 510s



Fig. 3.20 The Guo Yuanqing Stele from Gansu, dated 492, Ōsaka Municipal Museum

A stele from Gansu might shed some light as to the source of such composition. The Guo Yuanqing Stele 郭元慶造像碑, dated 492, has a similar arrangement (Fig. 3.20), in which Chandaka and Kanthaka kneel at each side of Siddhārtha, and two figures stand behind the scene.¹⁰ It is not clear if the two figures behind Siddhārtha in the Guo Yuanqing Stele are heavenly or secular figures. From the remaining stone, the one on the viewer's right seems to be a monk because he wears a monastic robe and has a shaved head, and the one on the viewer's left might be a bodhisattva or a mundane figure as he or she seems to have a topknot. They might represent a Buddhist disciple and a bodhisattva, or a monk and a worshipper, possibly the commissioners. In this stele, Siddhārtha is also portrayed as a Buddha with the *usnisa* (a swelling of flesh) depicted, and is wearing a monk's robe as is the one in Yungang Cave 30. But while the thinking Buddha in Cave 30 wears the robe in Han style, the one in the Guo Yuanqing Stele is in Indian style.

The above examples are all meant to illustrate the farewell scene, but they are delineated in distinct ways from one another. The same textual origin with different

¹⁰ Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* 中国仏教彫刻史論 (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobunkan, 1995) vol. 1, PL 99; vol. 4, 255.

depictions suggests that texts and images can to a certain extent cross-reference each other, but images do not always faithfully portray the texts. Buddhists and artisans created images with their imaginations, wishes and conceptions of Buddhist stories, or myths. Ordinary Buddhists probably did not concern themselves greatly over the extent and precision to which the images reflected the description in texts, provided the images were sufficiently indicative in suggesting certain legends, dogmas and myths, so that they would have been effective in ritual contexts or valid for earning religious merits. These explain why from the 480s several versions of farewell scene in which Prince Siddhārtha is portrayed as a contemplative bodhisattva or Buddha were circulated in northern China.

Prince Siddhārtha's farewell scene represents Siddhārtha's last attachment to the secular life and also his detachment of it—after the farewell he went into the forest and became an ascetic. The subtle difference between these images emphasises different moment and significance of the scenario. The carvings in Cave 6 (Figs. 3.16 and 3.17) probably serve as a prophesy of Siddhārtha's future enlightenment—the farewell to the horse suggests Siddhārtha's departing from secular life, and the heavenly figures surrounding him paying homage implies his future enlightenment. The image in Fig. 3.18 in Yungang Cave 28 stresses Siddhārtha's determination of pursuing full awakening and his detachment to ordinary affection—he consoles Chandaka who is persuading him to return to the palace and sends Chandaka to return alone. The images in Fig. 3.19 in Cave 30 and in the Guo Yuanqing Stele (Fig. 3.20), having Chandaka kneeling and begging Siddhārtha to return to the palace, express Chandaka's grieving over Siddhārtha's departure, and in turn emphasise Siddhārtha's great compassion for all beings that he renounces his princely life to discover the way of salvation.

3.2.4 Pensive bodhisattva with women in palace

Another carving containing Siddhārtha in contemplation appears in Cave 6. This image is based on the descriptions in literature and captures the night of Siddhārtha's escape from the palace. According to the *Scripture on Past and Present Causes and Effects*, one night when Siddhārtha observes the palace women and his wife Yaśodharā (Yeshutuoluo 耶輸陀羅) sleeping, he finds them no different from wooden puppets; the scripture then enumerates the repulsive details of these women's physicality, including their bodies' component parts and secretions. He contemplates and realises the imperfect and impermanent nature of life and flesh, and the folly of devoting one's limited hours of wakefulness to the pursuit of lustful ends, and thus decides to leave the palace in order to practice the way of the ancient Buddhas.¹¹



Fig. 3.21 Great Renunciation, Prince Siddhārtha contemplating beside his wife Yaśodharā and palace women, Yungang Cave 6, dated to the 480s

In the carving in Cave 6, the image is divided into three sections (Fig. 3.21). The protagonist, Prince Siddhārtha, is seated under a curtained roof in trapezoidal shape, and

¹¹ T 189.03.632c.

his hand touches his right cheek as if absorbed in contemplation. Beside him, his wife Yaśodharā lies on the bed asleep. Two divine figures in the upper section floating in the air, the figure on the right with his streamer flying upwards in the middle section and the bird in the lower section represent the divine beings who witness the scene and assist him to leave the palace, as described in the text.¹² In the lower section, a number of palace women fall asleep with their musical instruments in their arms.

Both the theme and the composition of this Yungang carving came from Gandharā where this image can be found in a fairly large number of precedents. The British Museum alone holds at least three similar pieces, for example the carving shown in Fig. 3.22.¹³ In the Gandharan carving, the image is divided into two sections, Siddhārtha and his wife Yaśodharā in the upper part and the palace women in the lower one (Fig. 3.22). This carving was originally an architectural component, judging from the remaining shape of the tenon on the top of the stone. Since the other parts of the image have been lost, it is not known if this stone had another section at the top as the Chinese image does. The torches behind the prince suggest that this plot happens during the night.

¹² T 189.03.632c.

¹³ The British Museum Collection Database, 20 July 2009

<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=225376&partid=1&searchText=Siddhārtha&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx¤tPage=3>



Fig. 3.22 Great Renunciation, Prince Siddhārtha contemplating beside his wife Yaśodharā and palace women, schist, from a monastery site at Takht-i-Bahi, Gandhāra, the second to third century

Artisans at Yungang transformed the Gandarān image into a Chinese one by depicting the figures wearing Chinese clothes and having a Chinese hair style. Moreover, they also adopted the curtained trapezoidal arch, a popular motif, at Yungang in the fifth and the sixth centuries.

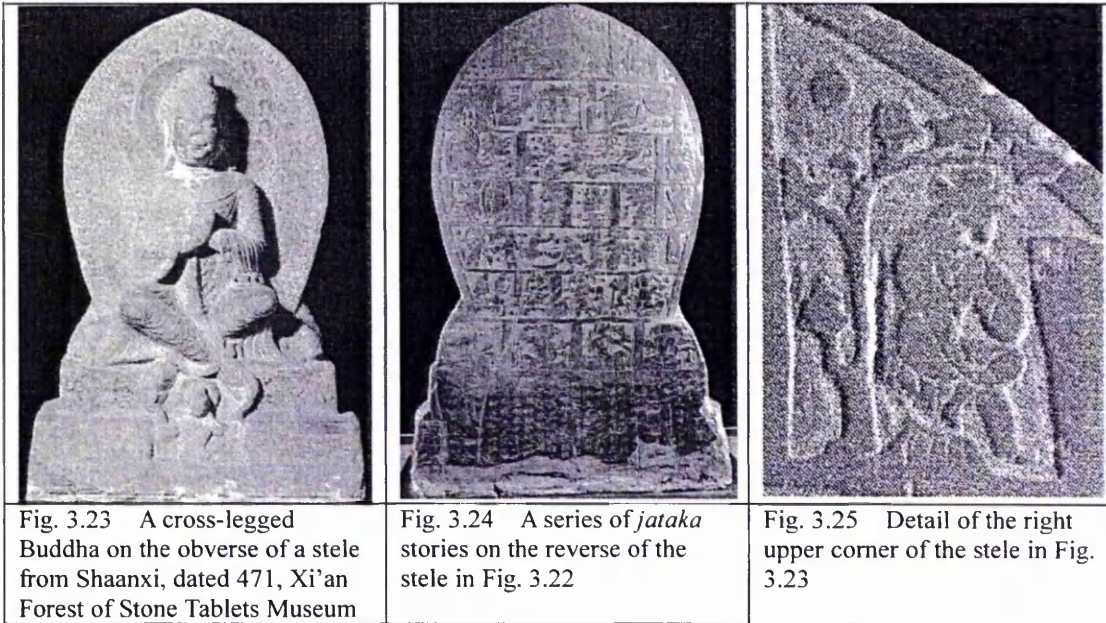
3.3 Discussion

The representations of the contemplative bodhisattva at Pingcheng show a number of new visual elements and new compositional arrangements not previously seen in the region of today's Gansu province: for example, the triad of a cross-legged Maitreya with a contemplative bodhisattva at each side in a niche. Although this type had not appeared earlier in Gansu, its appearance at Yungang might have been inspired by certain iconographical traditions that can be seen in the Gansu caves, particularly Mogao Cave 275 (Fig. 2.1). In the spatial design of the Mogao Cave 275, the contemplative bodhisattvas in the side walls play a subordinate role to the primary icon, the cross-legged Maitreya, in the main wall. It is possible that in order to transform a three-dimensional layout to an image on a plane, designers and artisans at Yungang

choose the primary icon and another distinguishing image, namely the contemplative bodhisattva statue, in Cave 275 to represent, and maintained the structure in which the pensive deities are attendants to Maitreya.

Nonetheless, the visual element of the tree in Mogao Cave 275 (c. 400 - 440), forming the niches housing the contemplative bodhisattvas, did not appear in the earliest contemplative images at Yungang. At Yungang the triad discussed above appeared in the 470s, but the tree next to the pensive bodhisattva in the triad appeared only after c. 484 (Section 3.2.2). The absence of the tree in the early cases suggests that the later artists who included the tree may have derived their inspiration from sources other than Mogao, possibly steles from Shaanxi and Hebei.

In Hebei, the image of a contemplative figure under a tree had circulated since the 470s, and it seemed to have appealed to the people of that region. Several bronzes from Hebei have been discovered bearing such an image. The earliest remaining example is dated to 471 commissioned by Qiu Jinu 仇寄奴 (Fig. 6.17), and the latest extant example is dated to 498 commissioned by Wu Daoxing 吳道興 (Fig. 6.7). During the sixth century, the image of a pensive figure under a tree continued to be produced in Hebei but carved in stone (to be discussed in Chapter Six). In other words, this icon had been circulating in Hebei in the 470s before it appeared in Yungang after c. 484.



A stone stele, dated 471, produced in Shaanxi, also has an image of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree. On the obverse of the stele is a cross-legged Buddha identified as the Future Buddha Maitreya (Fig. 3.23);¹⁴ on the reverse is a series of *jātaka* and Śākyamuni's life stories (Fig. 3.24).¹⁵ The image of the contemplative bodhisattva under a tree is depicted in the right upper corner (Fig. 3.25). This image shows that the portrait of the contemplative bodhisattva under a tree was circulated in Shaanxi before it reached Yungang. (The significance of this image will be discussed in Section 8.4.)

These examples show that the images at Yungang have more similarity with those from Hebei and Shanxi than with those from Mogao. At Yungang, the tree and the pensive figure are both placed within the niche; in Hebei, the tree and the figure are placed at the centre of the reverse surface of the bronzes, which shows that they are an integrated unit; in Shaanxi, the tree and figure equally occupy the entire space within the frame. But in Mogao Cave 275, the trees serve as the arch, i.e. the frame, of the niches (Fig. 2.2). Judging from the similarity in structure in Yungang, Hebei and

¹⁴ Lee Yu-min, *Maitreya Cult* 288.

¹⁵ Audrey Spiro, "Hybrid Vigor: Memory, Mimesis, and the Matching of Meanings in Fifth-Century Buddhist Art," *Culture and Power: In the Reconstitution of the Chinese Realm, 200-600* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001) 127-48.

Shaanxi works, the source of Yungang's contemplative figure under a tree was more likely to be from Shaanxi or Hebei Buddhist art. This also suggests that the image of the contemplative bodhisattva under a tree had been circulating in northern China by 471. However, at Yungang in contrast to the arrangement without a tree, of which I documented about seventy pairs, the later combination with a tree appeared only three times. The above suggests that the image of a tree in the triad at Yungang might have been borrowed from elsewhere, and did not take root at the capital city.

On the other hand, the contemplative images at Yungang belonged to two different contexts, one related to the Maitreya cult and the other associated with Śākyamuni. These two categories had never been combined together although they shared certain visual elements, such as the inverted triangle-shaped backrest in Cave 12 (in a Maitreya triad; Fig. 3.7) and Cave 6 (in Prince Siddhārtha statue; Figs. 3.16 and 3.17). Patrons and artisans at Yungang seem to have had a high level of awareness of these two different pictorial contexts, but they still had some freedom to create varied versions under these two categories. As I have demonstrated in Section 3.2.3, there were a number of different pictorial sources of Prince Siddhārtha's farewell at Yungang, each stressing different scenarios of the plot. The triad of the cross-legged Maitreya with pensive attendants also had varieties, including different shapes of niches, and with or without trees.

The design of Cave 33-3, dated to c. 510-524, supports the above hypothesis (Fig. 3.26). The main (northern) wall of this cave is carved with a double seated Buddha, a theme derived from the Lotus Sutra, which is usually believed to be the symbol of the Buddha of the past. The eastern wall is so badly damaged that only the inner half remains. The upper part of it is cut with Queen Maya's conception, i.e. a noble figure, Śākyamuni, riding an elephant with an attendant holding a canopy behind him; the lower part of the wall is carved with Queen Maya's giving birth to the Buddha under a tree. The two surviving images in the eastern wall illustrate stories from Śākyamuni's

life. It is likely that the damaged half was also carved with Śākyamuni's life stories. Opposite these images, the upper part of the western wall depicts a popular theme of that time, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī's debate; the lower part of the western wall depicts a triad with a central cross-legged Maitreya. The creators of this cave chose to carve the image of the contemplative bodhisattvas in a Maitreya triad under the independent theme of Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, on the opposite side of Śākyamuni's life story. This decision suggests that the contemplative bodhisattva in the Maitreya triad was not closely identified with Śākyamuni.

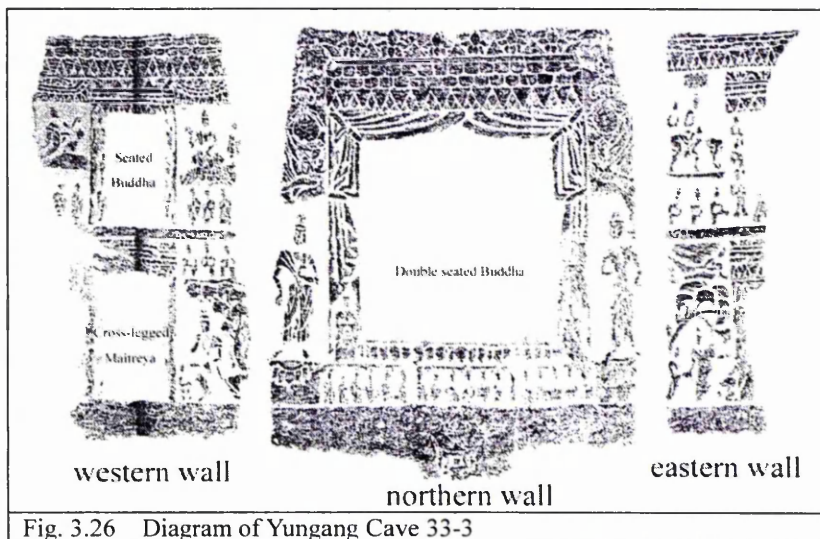


Fig. 3.26 Diagram of Yungang Cave 33-3

This image of a pensive figure under a tree later became a fixed motif and was widely reproduced across northern China. In some later images, the pensive figure under a tree is shown together with a horse: several examples of this combined iconography survive from Nannieshui (Section 5.2.1) and from Henan (Section 4.2.8).

3.4 Conclusion

From Liangzhou to Yungang, the development of the belief in the contemplative image entered into a second stage. The pensive images became more complex in that more visual elements started to be attached to the figure, including the tree, horse,

landscape and worshippers, and the compositions also became more sophisticated than those in Liangzhou. Patrons and artisans inherited the iconographic legacy of Liangzhou and re-created them as new icons to accommodate their own needs and wishes.

Although complex, these images can be categorised into two groups according to their religious signification: those associated with Maitreya and those related to Śākyamuni (Prince Siddhārtha). The visual elements of tree and horse were never shown in combination at Yungang—the tree was exclusively attached to the Maitreya category and the horse was exclusively associated with Siddhārtha. In the later development at Nannieshui and the new Northern Wei capital, the Luoyang metropolis, the tree and horse motifs were often combined in depictions of single scenes.

The images of the pensive figure thus began to take on new meanings, and came to represent a growing variety of religious concepts. Moreover, the pictorial traditions developed at Yungang continued to form a part of the later repertoire of visual culture. The next chapter will introduce the images from the Luoyang metropolis, mainly from Longmen, where the pensive images were further developed and its status in iconographical settings was elevated still further.

Chapter 4 Luoyang Metropolis

4.1 History of Buddhism in Luoyang

In 494, Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei moved the capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang. Large-scale construction at Yungang gradually subsided, and carving new caves and niches began at Longmen near the new capital. The earliest inscription at Longmen, dated 495, is found in the Guyang Cave 古陽洞,¹ but extensive construction at Longmen did not begin until a somewhat later date. Although several niches were created from the end of the fifth century, it was only after the construction of the imperially sponsored Binyang Caves 賓陽洞 beginning in 500 that Longmen became a popular site for building new cave-temples.²

The initiation and cessation of cave-temple construction at this site were both consequences of political events. The transfer of the capital to Luoyang in 494 brought the court and a sizeable population including patrons and started Longmen's Buddhist history. In 528 the Heyin 河陰 massacre, in which the rebel general Erzhu Rong 爾朱榮 slaughtered more than two thousand aristocrats and high-ranking officials, and image-making activities at Longmen lost their major sponsors.³ Erzhu Rong's army destroyed the city of Luoyang, and the effort to suppress the rebellion exhausted the resources of the Northern Wei. Soon after the rebellion in 534, the court split into two: one faction moved to the city of Ye (in modern Hebei), while another faction moved to Chang'an (in modern Shaanxi). Production of Buddhist images in Luoyang continued during the Northern Qi (550-77), but on a much smaller scale than during the late Northern Wei.

¹ Tsukamoto Zenryū 塚本善隆, *Longmen shiku Beichao fojiao yanjiu* 龍門石窟—北朝佛教研究, trans. Lin Baoyao 林保堯 and Yan Juanying 嚴娟英 (Xinzhū: Juefeng, 2005) 19.

² *Wei shu* 3043.

³ *Wei shu* 266.

This chapter will also introduce contemplative images in steles from Luoyang and from sites nearby. From the peak period of image making in late Northern Wei Longmen (500-27),⁴ there survive twenty-three contemplative images in six caves: Guyang Cave 古陽洞, Lotus Cave, Huoshao Cave 火燒洞, and Weizi Cave, Putai Cave 普泰洞 and Huangfugong Cave 皇甫公窟.⁵ On the basis of stylistic and inscriptional evidence, scholars have dated most of these caves to the period c.510-527 (Appendix 4.1), and the contemplative images in these caves display the variety of ways in which this iconographic motif was used in the early the sixth century.

The discussion in this chapter categorises these images according to their iconographical context. In cases where the iconographic setting includes elements from a number of these categories, I have placed such instances in the category that emphasises the innovative nature of the Luoyang iconographies.

4.2 Typology

4.2.1 Pensive bodhisattva pair with cross-legged Maitreya

This category includes a type of image that had occurred extensively in Yungang—the cross-legged Maitreya bodhisattva with two contemplative figures attending at his sides. Such images appear only in the earliest cave at Longmen, the Guyang Cave, with the majority of instances cut at the upper and middle rows of the side walls near the main statue. Mizuno Seichi and Nagahiro Saburō have described the process by which the Guyang Cave was constructed: the construction began from the

⁴ Tsukamoto 13.

⁵ Sasaguchi Rei and Denise Leidy have discussed the contemplative images from Weizi and Lotus Caves: Sasaguchi 47-49; Denise Leidy, “Northern Ch’i Buddhist Sculpture” 67. Lee Junghee has identified all the contemplative images from Guyang, Weizi, Lotus, Putai Caves as Prince Siddhartha: Lee Junghee “The Origins and Development” 339. I examined all these images during my fieldwork in August 2009.

ceiling and from the top row of the cave downwards.⁶ There are three rows of niches in the side walls (the northern and southern walls), numbered from lowest to highest as Row I to Row III.⁷ The images of a crossed-legged bodhisattva flanked by two pensive figures are carved at the rear of the cave near the main statue at approximately the same level as Row III. Since the earliest inscriptions in Row III and Row II are respectively dated to 498 and 505, and Su Bai has proposed that the main statue should be dated to 505, statues included in these niches are likely to have been carved at some point between these two dates.⁸

The only niche of this kind that bears an inscription is located above Row III in the southern wall, dedicated by Zheng Yinxing and others 鄭胤興等 in 500.⁹ This conventional image can be considered as continuation of the pictorial tradition of the northern capital. Moreover, it followed the most conventional depiction, in which no tree is depicted beside the contemplative bodhisattva. Furthermore, this triad is placed in a niche shaped with a trapezoidal arch similar to numerous examples at Yungang. However, these contemplative bodhisattva iconographies closely modelled on Yungang precursors appear only in the earliest cave, the Guyang Cave, and were soon abandoned in favour of the innovative depictions described below.

Soon after the construction of the Guyang Cave began, an innovative design, probably inspired by the traditional triad, appeared in Niches 185 and 258, dated to the 510s. Both niches have a trapezoidal arch, house a cross-legged Maitreya bodhisattva and have a pair of contemplative bodhisattva figures flanking the primary icon in similar positions. In Niche 185, a monk disciple and a bodhisattva are cut in high relief on either side of the Maitreya, forming a pentad (Fig. 4.2). A small-sized contemplative

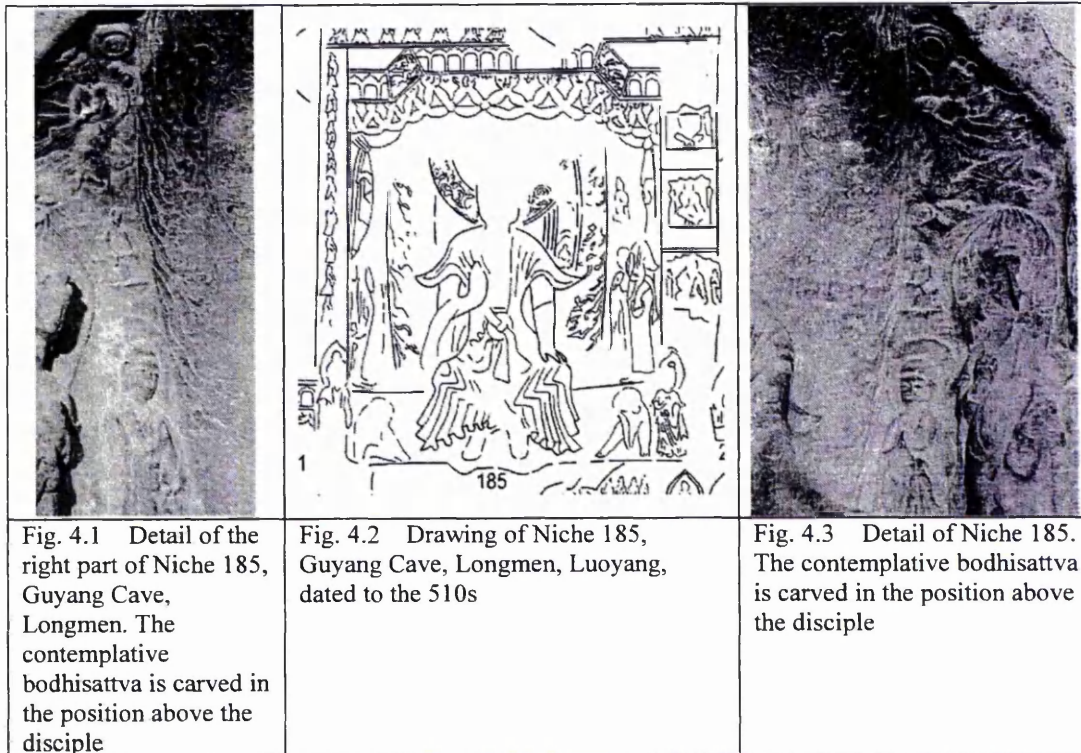
⁶ Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio 長広敏雄, *Kanan Rakuyō Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* 河南洛陽龍門石窟の研究 (Tokyo: Zayūho kankōkai, 1941) 105-08.

⁷ The numbering of the rows follows Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 92-108.

⁸ Su Bai, "Luoyang diqu beichao shiku de chubu kaocha 洛陽地區北朝石窟的初步考察" *Zhongguo shikusi yanjiu* (Beijing, 1996) 155.

⁹ Stanley K. Abe, *Ordinary Images* (Chicago, 2002) 208.

figure is cut in the space above the disciples on both sides of Maitreya (Figs. 4.1 and 4.3). Their original purpose, as main attendants to Maitreya, is replaced by the standing disciples and bodhisattvas, and the contemplative images are in this case cut in low relief and repositioned as minor background figures.



Niche 258, like Niche 185, originally contained a pentad, but the high-relief carvings of the two disciples have been removed, leaving only traces in the stone; only the primary icon and the two standing bodhisattva attendants remain. The composition of the background of the niche is more sophisticated than that in Niche 158. The contemplative bodhisattva is depicted in the same positions as in Niche 185, above the attendants, but in this instance it is associated with the Debate Between Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti, a popular theme in sixth century Buddhist art (Figs. 4.4 and 4.5). This theme can be seen in a large number of niches in cave-temples and independent steles such as the niches at Longmen in Figs 4.6 and 4.8., mostly above the two ends of a trapezoidal arch. But in this probably earlier case Niche 258, the Debate is carved in the

background of the niche with the pensive deities; moreover, the deities merge into the depiction of Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti's debate, as if they are also the audience of the debate.



Fig. 4.4 Rubbing of the carving of the contemplative bodhisattva and Vimalakīrti in Niche 258, Guyang Cave, Longmen, Luoyang, dated to the 510s.



Fig. 4.5 Rubbing of the carving of the contemplative bodhisattva and Mañjuśrī in Niche 258, Guyang Cave, Longmen, Luoyang, dated to the 510s.

In addition to the Debate, another characteristic difference between Niche 185 and 258 is that in Niche 258 the pensive deities are portrayed contemplating under a tree, and some elegant plants are depicted next to them. As discussed in Section 3.3, by the year 471, the image of the contemplative figure under a tree had become a commonly employed motif in northern China. At Yungang, a pair of pensive bodhisattvas under trees as Maitreya's attendants is carved in Caves 9 and 10, dated to c. 484-89 (Figs. 3.12 and 3.13). The images in Niche 258 in the Guyang Cave follow this tradition.

The juxtaposition of the Debate between Mañjuśrī and Vimalakīrti and a pair of pensive bodhisattvas appears repeatedly in later carvings at Longmen, including those in the Guyang, Lotus, Putai and Weizi Caves. Although the designs are slightly different from one another, the principle remains the same.

4.2.2 Pensive bodhisattva with worshippers

This section discusses images in which a pensive bodhisattva is depicted together with his worshippers, a motif that appeared in approximately the 510s. This motif can be analysed from two points of view. First, the contemplating deity in these images is receiving worship from his believers, which consequently elevates its religious status compared with most of the earlier images depicted without worshippers (at Yungang and in the Guyang Cave). Second, the contemplative deity is placed at the two ends of a trapezoidal arch or on both sides of a primary icon. This arrangement adopts the structure of the iconographic tradition found at Yungang, in which the pensive deities are attendants at both sides of the primary icon. However, in the works at Longmen there is also a novel feature — namely, the changed position of the pensive deities' position within the niche.

At Yungang, images of worshippers of the contemplative bodhisattva had first appeared at the second stage of Yungang's construction, in Caves 1 and 6. In Cave 1, heavenly worshippers were carved inside the niches with the contemplative deities (Fig. 3.6); in Cave 6, several celestial worshippers were depicted inside the niches with the pensive deities, Prince Siddhārtha (Figs. 3.16 and 3.17). In the third stage of Yungang's construction in Cave 33-3, dated to the 510s, contemporaneous with Longmen, the worshipper became an earthly Buddhist (Figs. 3.14 and 3.15). This change of the third stage of Yungang's construction coincided with the development at Longmen where the worshippers are depicted as profane figures. These images appeared in the Guyang, Lotus, Putai and Weizi and Huoshao Caves, with slight variation from one another.

In the Guyang Cave, one of the examples appears in a trapezoidal arch in Niche 155, located in the lowest row in the southern wall (Fig. 4.6).¹⁰ This niche is so badly

¹⁰ Numbered by the Longmen Grottoes Research Institute 龍門石窟研究院. Liu Jinglong 劉景龍, *Guyang Dong: Cave 1443 of Longmen Grottoes* 古陽洞: 龍門第 1443 窟 (Beijing: Kexue, 2001) 45 and

damaged that the main statue does not survive. The remaining inscription reads:

三月廿八日¹¹

on the twenty-eighth day of the third month

As the reign title in this inscription is damaged, this niche cannot be precisely dated.

However, Mizuno and Nagahiro have suggested that the current ground was constructed in c. 518,¹² and this niche is likely to have been cut not long after 518.

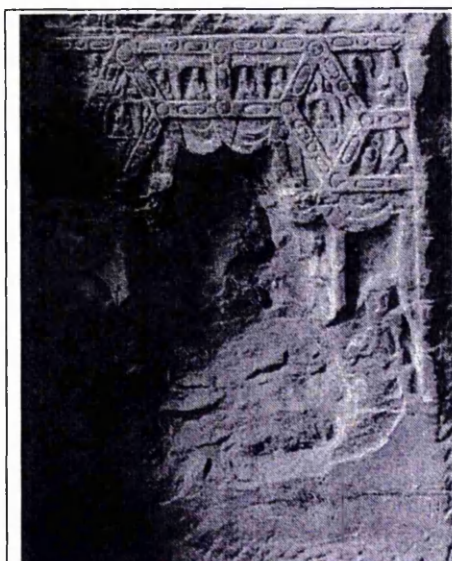


Fig. 4.6 Niche 155 in Guyang Cave, Longmen, H. 30 cm, W. 23 cm, D. 3 cm, dated to c. 518

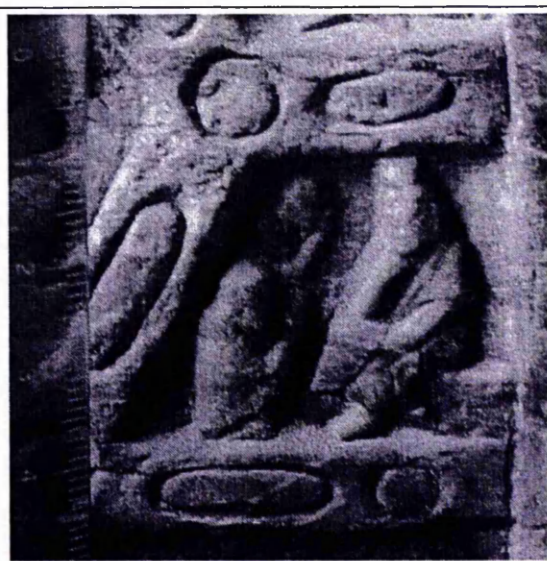


Fig. 4.7 Detail in Fig. 4.5, two worshippers, one standing, one kneeling, of the contemplative bodhisattva, H. 2.5 cm

In this niche, two identical images are cut in mirrored positions on either side of the arch. In both cases, kneeling and standing worshippers are shown paying homage to the pensive figure (Fig. 4.7). Compared with similar examples in which worshippers are shown, the composition and visual elements of the pensive images in this niche may be the simplest. In each image only two worshippers are depicted paying homage to the deity, whereas in other examples there are usually a row of attendants behind the primary worshippers, exhibiting the primary worshippers' high social or financial status.

83.

¹¹ Liu Jinglong, *Guyang Dong* 45 and 83.

¹² Abe, *Ordinary Images* 186.

The simplicity in these two images was perhaps determined by the small size of the niche.

Above the contemplative images outside the arch is a depiction of the Debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī (cf. above, Section 4.2.1). In the earlier example (Figs. 4.4 and 4.5), the pensive deities and the Debate are merged as integrated images, but in Niche 155 they are separated and carved in different frames. The spaces in two upper corners of a niche are almost reserved exclusively to this theme in the sixth century at Longmen, Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī occupying each, regardless of the theme of the images in the arch directly beneath them. Since the images of the pensive bodhisattva are often cut at the two ends of the arch, they are usually juxtaposed with the Debate. However, this juxtaposition is unlikely to represent any connection in religious contents between them, being simply a result of compositional conventions.

In Niche 174 in Row I in the southern wall, the contemplating image is depicted in a similar position to the previous work (Fig. 4.6), but in a different pictorial context (Figs. 4.8 and 4.9). The primary icon of this niche is a cross-legged Maitreya. The dedicating inscription informs that this niche was commissioned by Zhao Ahuan 趙阿歡 and thirty-four others in 520.¹³ The contemplating figure is depicted in a series of narrative scenes (Fig. 4.9). Although the body of the figure is badly damaged, from the remaining stone it is still clear that his shoulders and head are slightly tilted and his hand is supporting his head as if he is contemplating. He is placed within a series of depictions of Śākyamuni's life stories. The direction of reading the images in temporal order of the scenarios is interesting, from the centre of the niche outwards, starting from the set on the viewers' right. The first one on the left, namely the one closest to the central statue, is Queen Maya giving birth to the Buddha; the one in the middle depicts the first seven steps of the Buddha; the one on the right is the nine dragons giving infant Śākyamuni the first shower. In the other set on the viewers' left, the unit on the right is

¹³ Liu Jinglong, *Guyang Dong* 46 and 81.

Śākyamuni's parents bringing him to a fortune teller.



Fig. 4.8 Niche 174 (Zhao Ahan Niche). The contemplative image is placed on the left side of the arch of the niche in Guyang Cave, Longmen, dated to 520. H. 93 cm, W. 113 cm, D. 18 cm.



Fig. 4.9 Detail of the left part of the trapezoidal arch in Fig. 4.8.

Putting the last image, the contemplating figure receiving worship, in the context of Śākyamuni's life stories, it is highly probable that the pensive figure was intended to represent Prince Siddhārtha. However, it is not known which story of Siddhārtha's life this image was intended to portray. In this image, besides the worshipper who kneels in

front of the deity, two figures stand behind and respectively hold a canopy and a fan, illustrating the worshipper's high social or financial status. It is possible that this image represents Śākyamuni's first meditation, as Lee Junghee has suggested (Chapter One). If so, the kneeling figure would be the portrait of Śākyamuni's father, Suddhodana, i.e. King Jingfan 淨飯王. Nonetheless, the jumbo tree, an important character in the plot of Siddhārtha's first meditation, is missing in this picture. Can this be a variation on the theme of Siddhārtha's farewell to his horse and groom? Or was this image meant to represent another story of Siddhārtha's life? Several interesting comparisons can be made with parallels in the Lotus, Huoshao, Putai and Weizi Caves, which will be discussed below in turn.

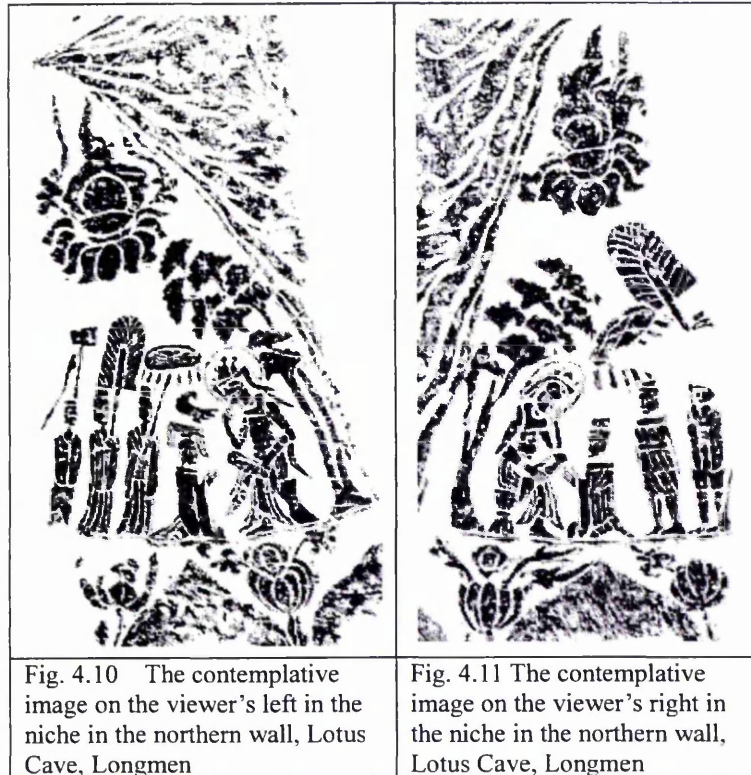
In the Lotus Cave, the earliest inscription is dated to 521. Scholars believe that the main shape of the Lotus Cave was finished around 518-22.¹⁴ In this cave, two pairs of the contemplating figures receiving worship are cut in low-relief, one in a niche in the top row in the northern wall, and the other in a niche in the bottom row in the southern wall. Based on the theory of the cave construction process put forward by Mizuno and Seiichi, that each cave was carved top down from the ceiling to the floor, the contemplative image in the top row in the northern wall was probably cut earlier than the one in the bottom row in the southern wall. Although there was a gap of time, these two images show close similarity in both iconographical elements and structure.

The image carved on the viewer's left in the niche of the northern wall (Fig. 4.10) shows the deity contemplating under, or in front of, a tree. Judging from the bodhisattva's slim body, headdress and flying ribbons, this image was probably carved in the 510s. The figure kneeling in front of the deity wears an unusual headdress, suggesting that it was intended to represent an emperor.¹⁵ Three attendants stand behind him, holding a canopy, a fan and a pole topped with an unknown object, possibly a *yue*

¹⁴ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 54-55.

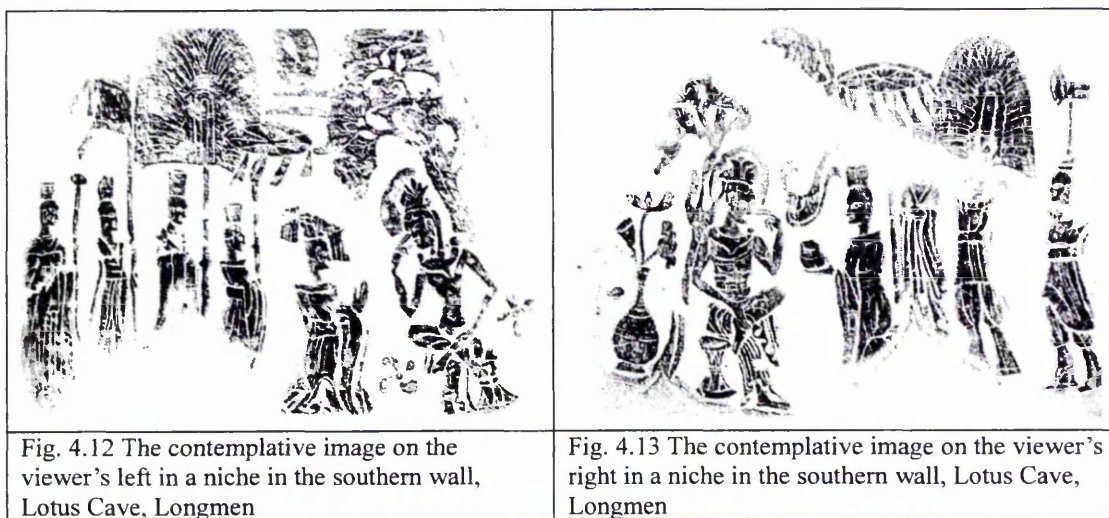
¹⁵ The same type of headdress is seen in the image of the procession of the emperor in the imperial Binyang Middle Cave 賓陽中洞. Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 23 (Fig. 19).

鉞, with a piece of streamer, presumably a symbol of imperial status. A huge *mani*-jewel is depicted above the scene. In the image on the other side of the main statue, the deity and worshippers are arranged with the same composition, but the leading figure does not wear an emperor's headdress (Fig. 4.11). The difference of attire shown in these two images may denote distinct identities of the leading figures.



The images cut in the southern wall also have similar compositions. The one cut on the viewer's left in the niche shows a figure of a high social status kneeling in front of the pensive deity (Fig. 4.10). He wears the same type of headdress as the worshipper in Fig. 4.9, which likely denotes his position as an emperor. Four attendants hold a canopy, a fan, a flag and an unknown object. At each side of the deity, a flower is depicted as decoration and to imply his celestial status. In the image on the viewer's right, the kneeling worshipper wears the same type of cloth as the one in Fig. 4.11. He is not only worshipping the deity but also presenting the offering in his left hand. Three

attendants hold a canopy, a fan and a *yue* but without a streamer. The difference between the *yue* in Figs. 4.10 and 4.13, the former with and the later without a streamer, might signify the figures' distinct classes: the one with a streamer belonging to an emperor, and the one without a streamer belonging to a high-ranking officials or aristocrats. This image also contains a new visual element, a large vase of lotus flowers. The image of lotus flowers growing out of a vase beside the contemplative image is also seen in the Huangfugong Cave in the northern wall (Fig. 4.24). Its exact meaning is unknown, but it could possibly be an auspicious sign serving the same function as the flowers beside the deity in Fig. 4.12.



Lee Junghee identifies the image in Fig.4.12 as Prince Siddhārtha receiving worship from his father King Jingfan, based on textual description in Śākyamuni's biographies (Chapter One).¹⁶ According to these, during Siddhārtha's first meditation, the tree under which he is seated bends its branches to shade the prince. When King Jingfan sees this miracle and realises his son's supreme status, he worships his son. Lee Junghee has argued that the tree, worshippers and pensive figure in this image are iconographic attributes of Siddhārtha and identified the scene as Siddhārtha's first

¹⁶ Lee, Junghee, "The Contemplating Bodhisattva Images of Asia" 50.

meditation. However, there are questions unanswered. First, Lee does not consider the other three contemplative images in her analysis and even fails to mention their existence (Figs. 4.10, 4.11 and 4.13). The clothing of the kneeling worshippers in Figs. 4.11 and 4.13 denotes that they are not in the positions of an emperor (or in Indian context, a king), thus making it unlikely that these images represent Prince Siddhārtha receiving worship from his kingly father.

In the Huoshao Cave, three contemplative images remain. The earliest inscription in this cave is dated to 521,¹⁷ which provides a clue of roughly when this cave was carved. A pair of contemplating figures is found at both sides of the main statue, in the space above the attendants in a niche in the southern wall (Figs. 4.14 and 4.15). But this niche is so severely damaged that in both images, only the contemplating figures remain. Both figures have bare upper bodies and are seated on a waisted stool. An image of a tree remains behind the figure on the viewer's right. Traces of a tree image can also be observed behind the deity on the other side. As their position in the niche and the existence of the trees are parallel to those in the Lotus Cave, it is highly likely that there were worshippers in front of the deities as those in the Lotus Cave.

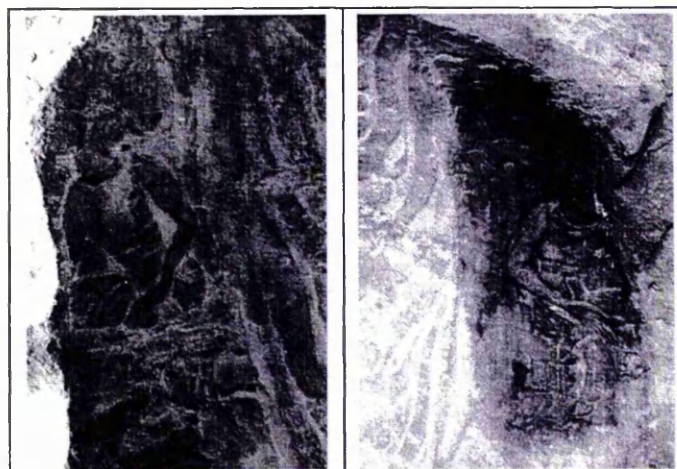


Fig. 4.14 The contemplative image on the viewer's left in a niche in the southern wall, Huoshao Cave, Longmen.

Fig.4.15 The contemplative image on the viewer's right in a niche in the southern wall, Huoshao Cave, Longmen

¹⁷ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 317, inscription no. 755.

Another contemplative image is found in possibly a trapezoidal arch of a niche in the western wall (Fig. 4.16). As this niche is badly damaged, the shape of the arch cannot be certain. However, based on the designs in the Guyang and Lotus Caves in which the contemplative images are cut in the space on two ends of the trapezoidal arch, and above the contemplative images are the depictions of the theme, the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, which coincide with the arrangement in this case, it is likely that there had been two in this niche in the Huoshao Cave. The dedicating inscription carved below the niche reads:

……年七月十……信女佛弟……王妃胡智……造……像一區，願國……
疆，四海安寧……常樂

元善見侍佛、元敬遜侍佛、元仲華侍佛¹⁸

On the ... day of the seventh month of the ...year, [pure] woman believer Princess Hu Zhi.....had a statue made. May the state be ... borders, and all be at peace within the four seas ... ever blissful.

Yuan Shanjian at the Buddha's service; Yuan Jingsun at the Buddha's service; [Yuan] Zhonghua at the Buddha's service.

As the stone carved with the reign title is damaged, the date of this work cannot be determined with certainty. But in this inscription, the name Yuan Shanjian offers a clue of the date. Yuan Shanjian was the name of the Emperor Xiaojing of the Eastern Wei 東魏孝靜帝 who based on the *Wei shu* ascended to the throne at the age of eleven in the year of 534. The same paragraph in the *Wei shu* states that his mother's surname was Hu 胡,¹⁹ which is correspondent with the princess (*wangfei* 王妃; the title for wife of a prince) name in this inscription. Accordingly, the Yuan Shanjian in this inscription refers to Emperor Xiaojing, but since it does not observe any taboo on Yuan Shanjian's name, it is possible to conclude that the niche was cut between 523-34, after he was born and

¹⁸ Inscription noted during my fieldwork in September 2007. Also in Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 319, inscription no. 785.

¹⁹ *Wei shu* 297.

before he became an emperor and moved to Ye 鄴. In other words, this niche was created in the last decade before Luoyang was abandoned.

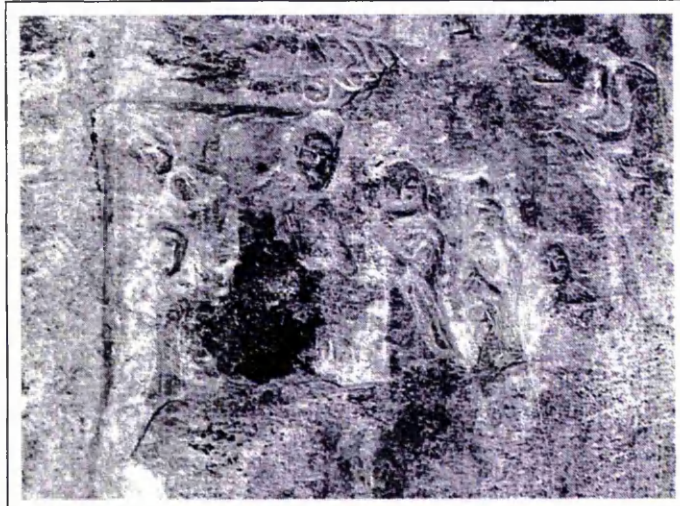


Fig. 4.16 The contemplative image in a niche in the western wall, Huoshao Cave, Longmen, dated to 523-34.

This image has both similarities to and differences from the examples mentioned above. The contemplating deity is shown receiving worship from several figures, but the worshippers are not arrayed in front of him as seen elsewhere in this cave and in the Lotus Cave. Instead, the pensive image is surrounded by the worshippers, not placed at the edge of the picture as in other examples. Furthermore, the leading figure standing in front of the pensive deity is a monk, judging from his monastic robe and shaved head. The worshipper behind the monk could be a lay Buddhist wearing a headdress. The identity of the one kneeling on the far right is impossible to determine because of the rough quality of the carving. The two characters behind the deity with their palms held together in front of their chests and paying homage to the deity are also monks – their identity is revealed by their hairless heads.

The Weizi Cave preserves three contemplative images, all of which are depicted in trapezoidal arches. In the spaces above the contemplative images is the theme of the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī, the same as the examples in Guyang and

Huoshao Caves. The earliest inscription in the cave is dated to 523, which gives an approximate date for the beginning of carving in this cave. A pair of contemplative images appears in the space at two ends of a trapezoidal arch of a niche in the northern wall (Figs. 4.17 and 4.18).



Fig. 4.17 The contemplative image on the viewer's left in an arch of a niche in the northern wall, Weizi Cave, Longmen, dated to the 520s



Fig. 4.18 The contemplative image on the viewer's right in an arch of a niche in the northern wall, Weizi Cave, Longmen, dated to the 520s

The carving on the viewer's left shows a contemplating figure sitting under a tree and a row of six worshippers, two kneeling at the front and four standing behind (Fig. 4.17). A lotus blossom is delineated above the standing attendants; below it, another lotus with leaves grows from the ground; a *mani*-jewel floats in the space. They together suggest that these characters are in an unusual and miraculous space or event. This technique is also used in the images in the Lotus Cave (Figs. 4.10, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13). The kneeling figures' prominent social status is indicated by the fan and canopy. Without an inscription, the identities of the leading worshippers cannot be certain. They possibly represent two commissioners—the smaller one in the inner illusional space could be the wife, and the larger one closer to viewers could be the husband. The image on the other side of the arch shows a similar composition, the pensive deity place on one side of the picture and a row of worshippers on the other (Fig. 4.18).

On the other side in the southern wall, the niche is damaged so badly that only the right side of the image in the trapezoidal arch survives (Fig. 4.19). In space above the contemplative image is the depiction of the debate between Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī. The composition of the remaining contemplative image is rather simple and almost identical to the example in the opposite side of the wall in the cave.



Fig. 4.19 The contemplative image in the arch of a niche in the southern wall, Weizi Cave, Longmen. Dated to the 520s.

The Putai Cave (earliest inscription dated 531) preserves a pair of contemplative images in the trapezoidal arch of a niche in the northern wall. Both of them have a similar composition to the previous ones. The primary worshipper in the unit on the viewer's left is not only kneeling and worshipping the deity but also presenting an offering of an object held in his right hand (Fig. 4.20). The leading worshipper in the unit on the viewer's right is depicted standing, rather than kneeling as in other images (Fig. 4.21). This is the only example of a standing worshipper depicted in this type of images.



Fig. 4.20 The contemplative image on the viewer's left in the arch of a niche in the northern wall, Putai Cave, Longmen. Dated to 525-31.



Fig. 4.21 The contemplative image on the viewer's right in the arch of a niche in the northern wall, Putai Cave, Longmen. Dated to 525-31.

4.2.3 Pensive bodhisattva pair with seated Buddha

There is only one image at Longmen in this category, which is in the Huangfugong Cave, dated to 527 by a dedicating inscription on the outer wall of the cave (Figs. 4.22, 4.23 and 4.24).²⁰ This example marks a new development of the contemplative image, not only because the statues are carved in large size and as a part of the primary icon of the cave, but also because they are attendants to a seated Buddha instead of to the cross-legged Maitreya, as frequently seen. In this iconographical setting, the seated Buddha is flanked, from inside out, by a standing disciple, a standing bodhisattva and then the pensive bodhisattva at each side, forming a heptad. The contemplative statues are set on the platform on which the central Buddha is seated. These two deities would have been visible immediately to any viewer who entered the cave.

In addition, a tree is carved beside each contemplative bodhisattva, which is reminiscent of the compositional structure in the antechambers of Yungang Cave 9 and

²⁰ Huangfugong Cave is named as Shiku Cave 石窟洞 in Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* 110-11.

10 (Figs. 3.12 and 3.13). The iconographical structure of the instances in Yungang Caves 9 and 10 is similar to that in the Huangfugong Cave. In each of these cases, the contemplative bodhisattva figures play a role as the primary attendants of a central deity. The architects of the Huangfugong Cave probably have borrowed the scheme from Yungang. However, the visual element of a tree seems to have been more popular at Longmen than at Yungang.



Fig. 4.22 The heptad in main wall of Huangfugong Cave, Longmen. Dated 527. The contemplative bodhisattva statues are set on both sides of the seated Buddha.



Fig. 4.23 Detail in Fig. 4.2. The contemplative statue in the southern side of the main wall of Huangfugong Cave, Longmen.



Fig. 4.24 Detail in Fig. 4.2. The contemplative statue in the northern side of the main wall of Huangfugong Cave, Longmen.

4.2.4 Pensive bodhisattva with Buddhas

This section introduces a new type of image at Longmen, in which the pensive bodhisattva is placed at the same level with Buddhas as an integrated design (Fig. 4.26). The juxtaposition illustrates that the religious status of the pensive deity had been elevated so high to be equal to a Buddha. This type of image at Longmen appears in the Guyang Cave in the arch of Niche 228, i.e. Yang Dayan Niche 楊大眼造像 (Fig. 4.25). This niche bears an inscription but without a reign title.²¹ Nonetheless, since it states that the niche is dedicated to emperor “Xiaowendi 孝文帝”, using the posthumous title, it is thus known that this niche was carved after the emperor’s death in 499. Tsukamoto Zenryū has dated this niche to 500-03.²² The contemplative image was likely to have been carved after the niche was finished, as the arch now shows an asymmetrical composition, rare for a design of an arch in early sixth century. Artisans probably took advantage of the available space and carved this unit in a later time. This image therefore could probably be dated to c. 510.

In this image, the contemplative bodhisattva sits in the space in the far-left with a beast on his right; the second image from the left is the Buddhist King Aśoka in his childhood, offering earth in his toy barn as rice to Śākyamuni; the third one from the left is a seated Buddha, identity unknown; the fourth one from the left is the *jataka* story that Śākyamuni, in one of his previous lives, lays out his hair on the muddy ground for Dipankara Buddha to step on, keeping Dipankara’s feet clean; the one on the far-right is the pendant-legged Buddha who is usually identified as the Future Buddha Maitreya.

²¹ Liu Jinglong, *Guyang Dong* 7, 30 and 66. .

²² Tsukamoto 76.

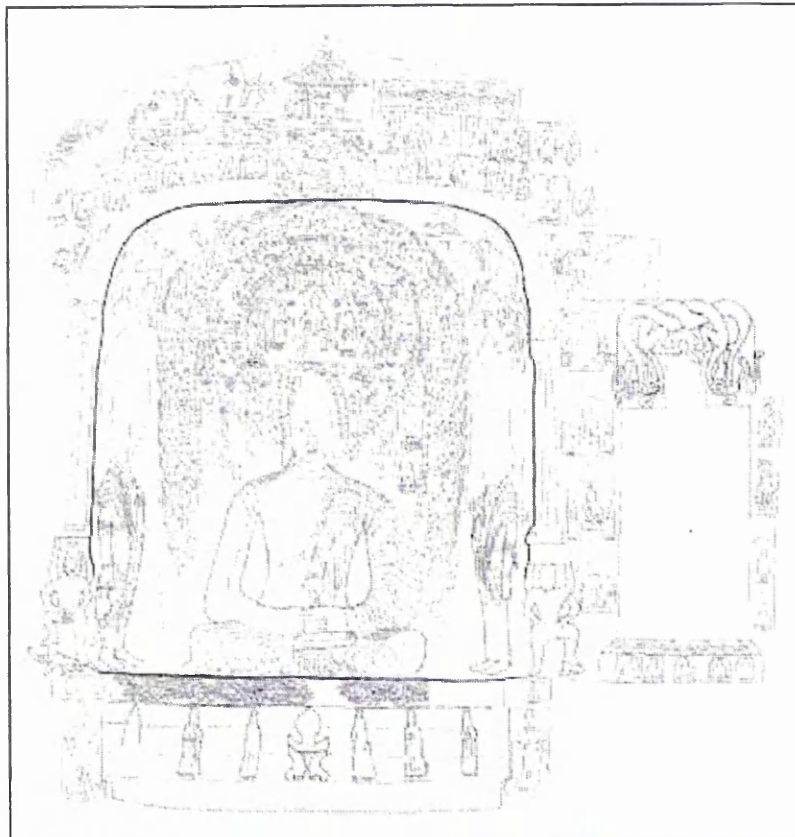


Fig. 4.25 Drawing of Niche 228 (Yang Dayan Niche), Guyang Cave, Longmen, dated to the 510s. The image of the contemplative bodhisattva with Buddhas is carved in the arch to the viewer's right, next to the central pavilion.



Fig. 4.26 Detail of Niche 228, Guyang Cave, Longmen, Luoyang. The contemplative bodhisattva is placed at the same level with Buddhas.

A similar design appears in the upper section on the reverse of a stele, dated 525, excavated from Yingyang 滎陽 in Henan, approximately 80 kilometers from Longmen (Fig. 4.27). This stele has a huge cross-legged Maitreya as the primary image on the

obverse. On the reverse, the lower section is carved with an inscription and portraits of donors; the upper section consists of five units of images. The unit on the far-left is King Aśoka offering to Śākyamuni; the second one from the left is the contemplative bodhisattva on a platform with a beast below him; the middle unit is the double Buddha, i.e. Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna; the second one to the right is a standing Buddha on a platform with a beast below him, identity unknown; the unit on the far-right is the nine dragons bathing the newborn Śākyamuni. In this stele, every unit seems to represent a Śākyamuni-related story. The contemplative bodhisattva likely represents Śākyamuni, and portrays him in the status of a bodhisattva, probably to emphasize his pursuit of enlightenment, or the practice or the path he chose.

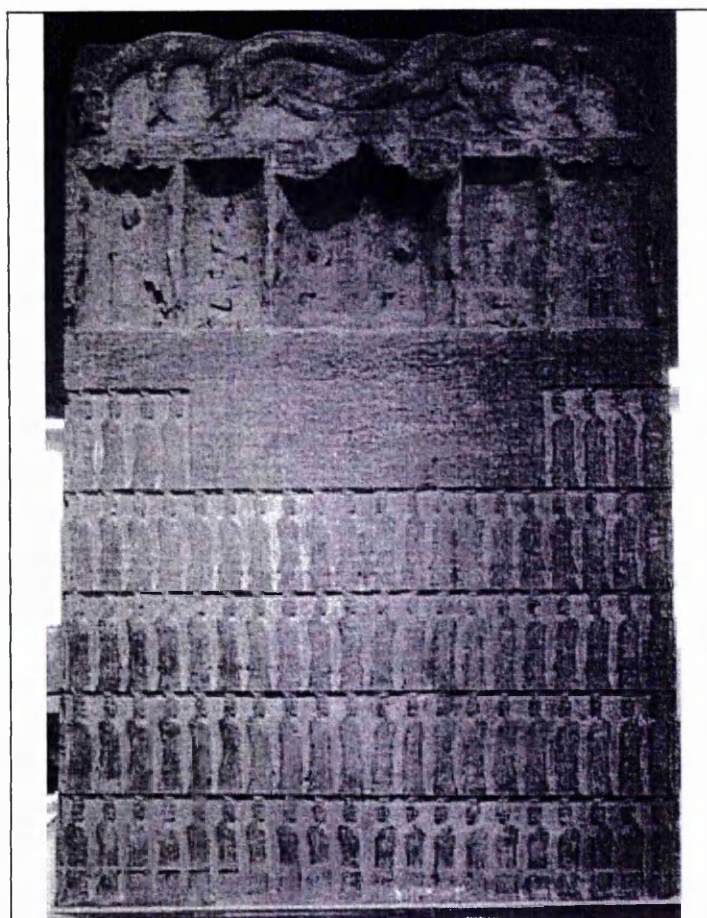


Fig. 4.27 The reverse of a stele from Yingyang, Henan, dated 525, Henan Provincial Museum, Zhengzhou

4.2.5 Pensive Buddha

In addition to the conventional contemplative bodhisattva images, artisans at Longmen also created hybrid forms at the beginning of the sixth century, including a contemplative Buddha in the Guyang Cave (Fig. 4.28).²³ The Buddha wears a monastic robe and places his right leg horizontally on the knee of left his leg. His right hand and a finger are pointing to his cheek, making the gesture of contemplation. A contemporaneous textual record suggests that the image of a contemplative Buddha was circulated at the end of the fifth century. In the *Monograph on Auspicious Omens in the History of the Qi* 南齊書祥瑞志, a passage reads:

[永明]七年，越州獻白珠，自然作思惟佛像，長三寸·上起禪靈寺，置刹下。²⁴

In the seventh year [of the Yongming reign], Yuezhou presented a white pearl, which naturally transformed into an image of a Contemplative Buddha, three inches in length. His Majesty had Chanling Temple erected and placed [the image] beneath the canopy of the stupa [of this temple].²⁵

According to this record, by the year 489 the contemplative images seem to have been widely recognised and had a certain importance including in the Southern Dynasties that an event about this image is documented in the official history. In this record, reading “*siwei foxiang* 思惟佛像” as “a contemplative Buddha image” or “a contemplative Buddhist image” are both possible interpretations. Without the surviving material evidence, it is not certain whether this image was a contemplative Buddha or

²³ It is now reserved by the Longmen Grottoes Institute and believed to have been removed from the Guyang Cave. Nicole De Bisscop et al, *The Buddha in the Dragon Gate: Buddhist Sculpture of the 5th-9th Century from Longmen, China*, ed. Jan Van Alphen (Antwerp, 2001) 101.

²⁴ *Nan Qi shu* 366.

²⁵ The character “*cha* 刹” signifies several meanings: first, the transliteration of the Sanskrit word, *kṣetra*, meaning land, realm or world; second, the transliteration of the Sanskrit word, *lakṣata*, referring to the canopy of a stupa; third, Buddhist temple; fourth, the transliteration of the Sanskrit word, *kṣana*, meaning a very short moment. Luo Zhufeng vol.2, 671. In this passage, it refers to the canopy of the stupa of the Chanling Temple.

bodhisattva, but this passage may refer to a contemplative Buddha image.



Fig. 4.28 A contemplative Buddha, originally in the Guyang Cave, dated to the 510s.



Fig. 4.29 A contemplative cross-legged bodhisattva, originally in the Guyang Cave, Longmen, dated to the 510s.

4.2.6 Pensive cross-legged bodhisattva

Another hybrid form, a contemplative cross-legged bodhisattva, also appeared in the Guyang Cave (Fig. 4.29).²⁶ In this image, the iconographical characteristics of the cross-legged and the contemplating bodhisattva are combined. He is seated with his legs crossed at the ankles, and his right hand touches his right cheek as if he is absorbed in contemplation. From the beginning of the fifth century, these two icons had had a close relationship in that they were often placed together such as those in Mogao Cave 275, Maijishan Cave 74, and Yungang Cave 19A. After a century's development, these two images were merged at Longmen. However, as this image has been excised from the cliff, the original iconographical setting is not known. No such images exist in the caves

²⁶ This piece is reserved by the Longmen Grottoes Institute and believed to have been removed from the Guyang Cave. Nicole De Bisscop et al. *The Buddha in the Dragon Gate: Buddhist Sculpture of the 5th-9th Century from Longmen, China*. Ed. Jan Van Alphen (Antwerp, 2001) Pl. 4.

at Longmen today.

4.2.7 Pensive bodhisattva appearing alone

In addition to those examples where the contemplative bodhisattva is depicted in an iconographical setting, there is a contemplative bodhisattva appearing alone in the northern wall of the Guyang Cave (Figs. 4.30 and 4.31). Although it may once have been a part of a bigger composition, its surroundings have been damaged and the original context is not possible to determine. The bodhisattva is seated on a waisted stool on a lotus pedestal with a frame at the edge of the image. The surface of this image is higher than that of the adjacent niches, and this image's border is rather well-preserved except for the upper part which probably has naturally weathered. It may have been made earlier than the niches around it. The niche on its right bears an inscription with the reign title of Yanchang 延昌 (512-15).²⁷ This image thus can be dated prior to this date. Based on its stylistic qualities, this image is likely to have been carved c. 510.



Fig. 4.30 An individual contemplative image and its iconographical surroundings in the northern wall, Guyang Cave, Longmen, dated to the 510s.

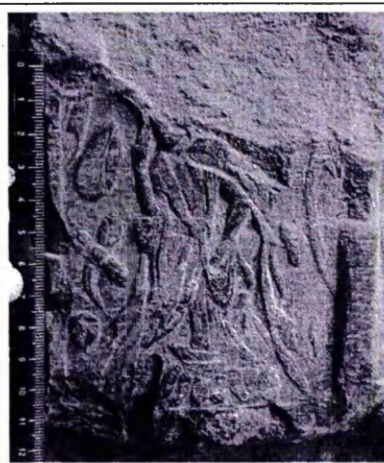


Fig. 4.31 Detail of the individual contemplative image in Fig. 4.24. H. 11 cm, dated to c. 510.

²⁷ The Yanchang inscription was noted during my fieldwork on August XX 2007.

4.2.8 The pensive bodhisattva with horse and tree

In Luoyang a new type of image of Siddhārtha's farewell emerged in the first quarter of the sixth century. This image (Fig. 4.32), Siddhārtha contemplating under a tree and his horse Kanthaka kneeling beside, is carved on the reverse of a stone stele commissioned by Zhao Anxiang 趙安香 and several others. It was unearthed with another three pieces from the same pit from present-day Zhengzhou 鄭州. Amongst them, two pieces bear inscriptions with dates, 521 and 527.²⁸ The obverse of the Zhao Anxiang Stele shows a standing Buddha with two standing monk disciples and two smaller standing figures on lotuses. The Buddha is carved with a muscular body, and the cloth of his robe has a certain thickness. Judging from the qualities of the artistic expression, this stele was likely to have been carved during the 520s, approximately the same period as those dated pieces buried together.²⁹

The reverse of this stele shows complex composition with a number of visual elements (Fig. 4.32): a bodhisattva contemplates under a tree; a bird is depicted in this tree; a horse kneels beside the deity; two figures stand in front of the thinking deity with inscriptions next to them, "Zhao Anxiang at the Buddha's service 趙安香侍佛時" and "yizi Cheng Shixing 邑子程世興". In the background, an elephant with a figure holding a halberd are depicted on the left; above them are an *aspara* and a large *mani*-jewel. On the right of the picture, a beast, several figures and inscriptions of three names are carved.

²⁸ Zhengzhou Municipal Museum 鄭州市博物館, "Zhengzhoushi faxian liangpi Beichao shike zaoliang 鄭州市發現兩批北朝石刻造像," *Zhongyuan wenwu* 2 (1981): 16.

²⁹ Roderick Whitfield dates this stele to the Northern Zhou (557-81), but he notes that "it continues the Northern Wei style". Sabrina Rastelli (with the collaboration of Roderick Whitfield) ed, *China: At the Court of the Emperors: Unknown Masterpieces from Han Tradition to Tang Elegance (25-907)*, trans. Felicity Lutz et al. (Milan: Skira, 2008) 271.



Fig. 4.32 Reverse of Zhao Anxiang Stele, Zhengzhou, Henan, dated to the 520s.

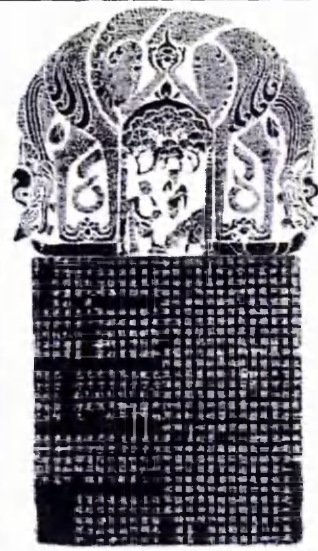


Fig. 4.33 Reverse of a stele from Henan, H. 150 cm, L. 65 cm, W. 38 cm, dated 561.



Fig. 4.34 Detail in Fig. 4.33. Prince Siddhārtha with Chandaka and Kanthaka.

This image shows important developments. First, as mentioned above, the horse and the tree appear in the same image. At Yungang, these two visual elements were not found combined together nor in the example of 492 from Gansu (Fig. 3.20). This combination was probably an innovation by artisans in Luoyang. Second, the fact that donors' names are inscribed in the picture suggests that donors wished to associate themselves with the deity by placing their own names and portraits in the picture's visual context. Artisans altered the "original version" of Siddhārtha's farewell to his horse and groom, in which the figure might have been his groom Chandaka, and carved donors' portraits and names in the image instead. Third, additional characters depicted in this image, such as elephant, elephant tamer and lion-like beast, are not found in the texts of Śākyamuni's biographies.

A later image, dated 561,³⁰ shows Prince Siddhārtha under a tree, a figure standing to his side wiping tears, and a horse kneeling and kissing Siddhārtha's foot. This image is carved in the top section of a stone stele (Figs. 4.33 and 4.34). The identities of the characters are indicated by two rows of inscription on the frame of this

³⁰ Zheng Anfen 鄭安芬, *Selected Buddhist Relics 佛教文物精粹* (Taipei: Zhendan wenjiao jijinhui, 2003) 250.

image:

太子思惟像主[示匕]惠岳

The donor of the image of the contemplative crown prince, Bi Huiyue.

車匿共乾直□太子還國時³¹

The moment of Cheni (Chandaka) and Qianzhi (Kanthaka) [asking] the crown prince to return to the kingdom.

As described in the inscription, the figure wiping tears in this image is Siddhārtha's groom Chandaka. The inscription below this image mentions several names of places informing us that this stele was erected in present-day Henan, approximately 100 kilometres from Luoyang.³² The coexistence of the horse and the tree in the same image suggests that from the first quarter of the sixth century the tree had become a conventional element in depictions of Siddhārtha's farewell scene.

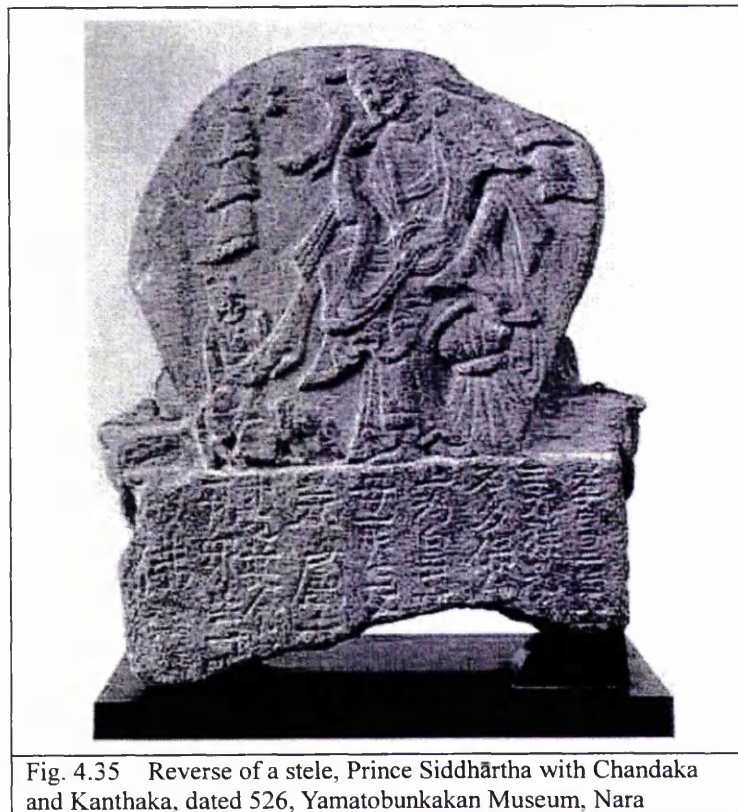


Fig. 4.35 Reverse of a stele, Prince Siddhārtha with Chandaka and Kanthaka, dated 526, Yamatobunkakan Museum, Nara

³¹ I transcribed the inscriptions.

³² This stele was located between Yingchuan 潁川 (modern Xuchan 許昌), Songgao 嵩高 (Mount Song near modern Zhengzhou), Liangfan 梁幡 (unidentified) and the river Huangshui 潢水.

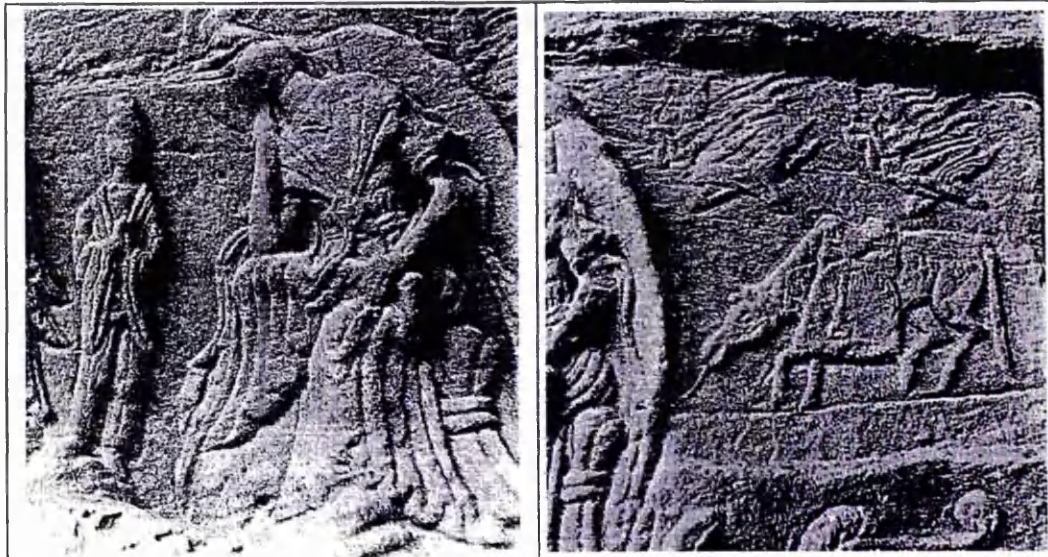


Fig. 4.36 Prince Siddhārtha with Chandaka and Kanthaka, Loudicun Cave 1, Qingyang, Gansu

However, it should be noted that the appearance of the new combination did not necessarily replace the old ones. Some images of Prince Siddhārtha's farewell still follow the older tradition without a tree: for example, the stele dated to 526 in the collection of the Museum of Yamato Bunkakan 大和文華館 (Nara, Japan; Fig. 4.35),³³ and the carving in Loudicun Cave 1 樓底村一窟 (Qingyang 慶陽, eastern Gansu; Fig. 4.36), dated to the 510s.³⁴ In the stele dated 526, Chandaka is carved in a small scale, kneeling and wiping tears, expressing his grief over his master's departure, following the iconographical tradition of Yungang Cave 30 (Fig. 3.18), dated to the 510s, and the Guo Yuanqing Stele from Gansu, dated 492 (Fig. 3.20); however, the depiction of Chandaka as wiping away his tears is an innovation not found in the earlier exemplars (not in Fig. 4.36). In the carving in Luodicun Cave 1, Chandaka is shown standing next to Siddhartha, which is similar to the image in Yungang Cave 28 (Fig. 3.18).

In the later carving from Henan dated 561 (Fig. 4.34), Chandaka is depicted standing and wiping his tears. This carving adopted the visual elements from previous

³³ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 1, PL 191b; vol. 4, 268.

³⁴ Gansu sheng wenwu gongzuodui 甘肅省文物工作隊 and Qingyang bei shiku si wenguansuo 慶陽北石窟寺文管所, *Qingyang bei shikushi* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1985) PL. XXIV.

images that included a horse, Chandaka wiping tears and a tree. These examples exhibit the coexistence of several iconographical traditions regarding Prince Siddhārtha as the contemplative bodhisattva. They also display that several iconographical sources regarding Prince Siddhārtha's farewell scene were distributed in northern China in the sixth century. Artisans learned to integrate the visual elements appealing to them in their own works, and inevitably re-interpreted the meaning of the image.

4.3 Discussion

The variety of the contemplative images from the Luoyang metropolis shows that Buddhists and artisans at Luoyang not only inherited the legacy of the earlier image-making centre Yungang but also themselves developed innovative iconographies. The most popular type at Yungang, the cross-legged bodhisattva with contemplative bodhisattvas at both of his sides, was reproduced at least seventy times at Yungang, but appears only five times at Longmen, all in the early-stage Guyang Cave. Although they were inspired by existing models at Yungang, artisans in Luoyang seemed to be more interested in creating novel images to satisfy their patrons' wishes.

My analysis of the most popular iconographic type at Longmen, the contemplative bodhisattva depicted with worshippers within the compositional scheme of a niche, reveals that this type was indebted to the Yungang tradition both in its iconographical elements and the spatial arrangement of figures within the niche. At Yungang, the contemplative bodhisattvas are usually placed under the two sides of a trapezoidal arch flanking the central deity. At Longmen in the compositional structure of the niches this type of image is always symmetrically placed in the spaces at two ends of a trapezoidal arch, regardless what the main statues are. This symmetrical structure was settled at Yungang, if not Mogao, as early as the early 470s. Second, regarding the iconographical elements, the contemplative bodhisattvas are usually placed under a bent

tree. This arrangement is the same as those in Yungang Caves 9 and 10 and 33-3.

Although the image of a pensive deity under a tree had been present in Hebei from the early 470s, it was not until the capital was moved to Luoyang that this image started to become popular.

Images showing the contemplative deity together with worshippers are highly diverse in their details, with no two images following an identical scheme in their depiction of the worshippers. The most prominent point of difference is in the identity of the leading worshippers. Most of these worshippers are people of high social standing followed by an array of attendants holding fans and canopies (Figs. 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19, 4.20 and 4.21); some are emperors in their unique attire (Figs. 4.9 and 4.11); and one shows monks (Fig. 4.15). Some are paying homage; some are presenting offerings. These differences suggest that the depiction of worshippers in these images was intended to reflect the identity of the patrons. This assertion can be further supported by the image on the reverse of the Zhao Anxiang Stele, which even has the patrons' names carved beside their portraits to identify each of them.

Based upon the above discussion I therefore argue that the image of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree at Longmen represents an independent bodhisattva receiving worship from his adherents, the patrons; moreover, its position in niches was inspired by the arrangement of the cross-legged Maitreya triad at Yungang; furthermore, the tree under which the bodhisattva sits also came from the precedents in Yungang Caves 9 and 10. At Longmen, Buddhists were enthusiastic in placing themselves in the same spatial and temporal frame with the contemplative bodhisattva. They even cut themselves in a similar scale to the deity and created the illusion that the encounter was an actual event.

At this stage, the contemplative bodhisattva earned more adherents than it had at the old capital. The residents of Luoyang appear to have been fonder of this image than

those of Pingcheng. In some images, such as in Fig. 4.26, the bodhisattva's status in the iconographical setting had been elevated even to be placed at the same level with Buddhas, and this iconographical structure was shared amongst Buddhists in adjacent cities, e.g. Yinyang (Fig. 4.27). The individual contemplative bodhisattva, without being placed with other deities, also appeared. Its appearance suggests that the contemplative bodhisattva now validly stood for itself – it did not need any iconographical reference to relate it to any pictorial or textual context to be recognised or understood. Some hybrid forms were also created, for example the pensive cross-legged bodhisattva and contemplative Buddha.

Finally, the image of Prince Siddhārtha under a tree with a horse was probably created in Luoyang and later became popular in other places in China. At Yungang the visual elements of tree and horse were not mixed together in an image. They respectively belonged to images related to Maitreya and Prince Siddhārtha. But several examples of the coexistence of tree and horse have been discovered in Luoyang and neighbouring cities. This combination denotes that the iconographical boundary between these two iconographical conventions was blurred in Luoyang, and this merging later was also reflected in the later development in the religious associations of the image in the Hebei region.

4.4 Conclusion

In both Pingcheng and Luoyang, Buddhists, architects and artisans developed an innovative visual culture on the basis of existing religious and iconographical traditions. In the new capital, Buddhists took liberty in altering conventional images they brought from Yungang. Their experiments resulted in the appearance of various contemplative images. The dynamic creativity was supported by the economical prosperity that Luoyang provided; it was also probably stimulated by the pictorial exchange with other

regions, including the region around Nannieshui introduced in the next chapter. Some of these innovations continued to be an important branch in the pensive image's development, for example, the pensive bodhisattva under a tree with a horse.³⁵ However, other distinctive elements from the Luoyang iconographic repertoire failed to be adopted elsewhere after Luoyang was abandoned by the court: for example, the cross-legged contemplative bodhisattva is not seen elsewhere in China.

³⁵ Such image is discovered on the reverse of a stone stele from Hebei, dated to the Northern Qi period. Hebei Lingzhangxian wenwu baoguan suo 河北臨漳縣文物保管所, "Hebei Yenancheng fujin chutu Beichao shizao xiang 河北鄴南城附近出土北朝石造像," *Wenwu* 9 (1980): 67.

Appendix 4.1 Dating of caves at Longmen

Cave		Date	Scholar
Guyang Cave	古陽洞	500-15	Mizuno and Nagahiro ³⁶
		495 – c. 518	Stanley Abe ³⁷
		505, the construction of the main wall finished	Su Bai ³⁸
		493-503	Zhang Baoxi ³⁹
Lotus Cave	蓮花洞	518-22	Mizuno and Nagahiro ⁴⁰
		505 – c. 521	Su Bai ⁴¹
		finished before 521	Zhang Baoxi
Huoshao Cave	火燒洞	520-25	Mizuno and Nagahiro ⁴²
		516-20	Gao Musen ⁴³
		522	Zhang Baoxi ⁴⁴
Weizi Cave	魏字洞	523-27	Mizuno and Nagahiro ⁴⁵
		construction started before 523	Su Bai ⁴⁶
		523	Zhang Baoxi ⁴⁷
Putai Cave	普泰洞	525-31	Mizuno and Nagahiro ⁴⁸
		520	Su Bai ⁴⁹
Huangfugong Cave	皇甫公窟	527	Mizuno and Nagahiro ⁵⁰
			Zhang Baoxi

³⁶ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* Table II.

³⁷ Abe, *Ordinary Images* 185-86.

³⁸ Su Bai, “Luoyang diqu beichao shiku de chubu kaocha” 155.

³⁹ Zhang Baoxi, “Bei Wei Longmen shiku erdizi zaoxiang de dingxinghua 龍門北魏石窟二弟子造像的定型化” *Longmen shiku yiqian wubai zhounian guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* 龍門石窟一千五百週年國際學術討論會論文集 (Beijing: Wenwu, 1996) 24.

⁴⁰ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* Table II.

⁴¹ Su Bai, “Luoyang diqu beichao shiku de chubu kaocha” 155.

⁴² Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* Table II.

⁴³ Gao Musen 高木森, “Longmen Bei Wei huoque zaoxiang fengge zhi xingti luekao 龍門北魏後期造像風格之興替略考” *Longmen shiku yiqian wubai zhounian guoji xueshu taolunhui lunwenji* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1996) 36-43.

⁴⁴ Zhang Baoxi, “Bei Wei Longmen shiku erdizi zaoxiang de dingxinghua” 24.

⁴⁵ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* Table II.

⁴⁶ Su Bai, “Luoyang diqu beichao shiku de chubu kaocha” 156 and footnote 9.

⁴⁷ Zhang Baoxi, “Bei Wei Longmen shiku erdizi zaoxiang de dingxinghua” 25.

⁴⁸ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* Table II.

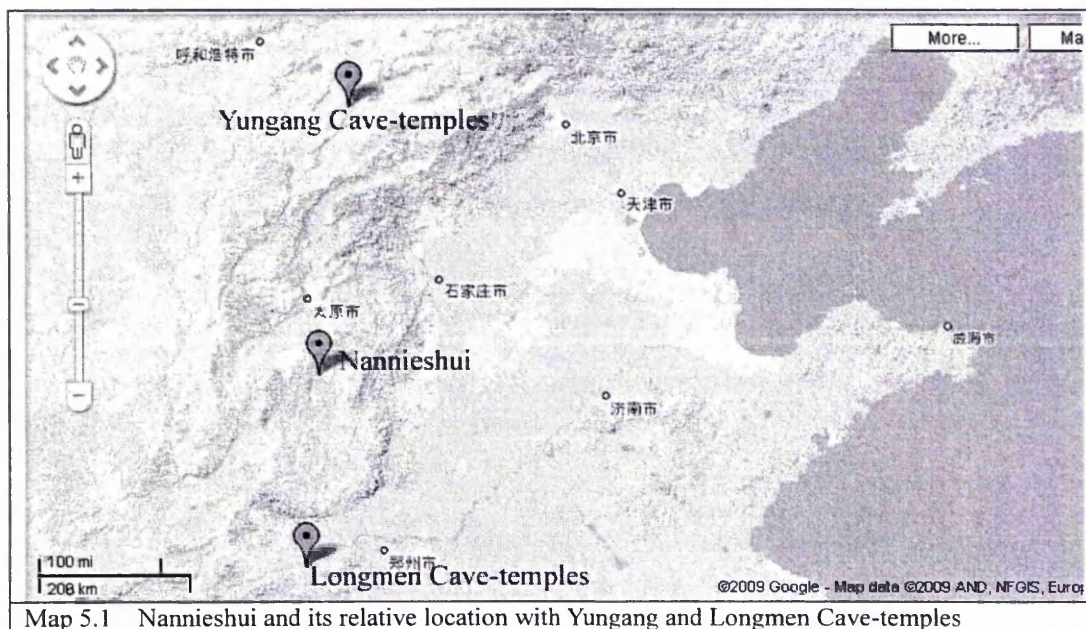
⁴⁹ Su Bai, “Luoyang diqu beichao shiku de chubu kaocha” 156.

⁵⁰ Mizuno and Nagahiro, *Ryūmon sekkutsu* Table II.

Chapter 5 Nannieshui

5.1 History of Buddhism in Nannieshui

In 1957 approximately 2,100 pieces of Buddhist sculptures were excavated from the vicinity of the remote village Nannieshui 南涅水 in Qinxian 沁縣, Shanxi province (Map 5.1). These sculptures are dated to a period spanning over 500 years, from the Northern Wei to the Northern Song. The majority of the inscriptions are dated to the sixth century, from the late Northern Wei to the Northern Qi.¹ The earliest inscription from 509 suggests that the development of the Nannieshui Buddhist sculptures was almost contemporaneous with those at Longmen, where the earliest dated inscription is from 495. Both Buddhist sites apparently began to flourish after the Northern Wei capital was transferred from Pingcheng to Luoyang in 494.



Map 5.1 Nannieshui and its relative location with Yungang and Longmen Cave-temples

¹ Zhang Mingyuan 張明遠, "Shanxi Qinxian Nannieshui shike yishu 山西沁縣南涅水石刻藝術," *Meishu Guan* 2 (2001): 64.

The distinguishing features of these sculptures of the sixth century are that the majority of them are cut in stone blocks: a niche in four of the six faces of the blocks and usually a main figure carved in each niche. The approximately cubic blocks range in size from roughly 25 cm to 70 cm. When the blocks were discovered, they were buried randomly, and the original arrangement of the blocks is unknown. Because each block is slightly tapered, it is likely that the blocks were originally stacked as tapering pillars, with smaller



Fig. 5.1 One of the exhibition room in the Nannieshui Stone Sculptures Gallery

blocks upon larger ones forming the shape of a Chinese pagoda (as they are now displayed: Fig. 5.1), rather than in an alternative possible arrangement into different-sized columns formed from blocks of uniform size. The way they are now arranged in the museum is only for exhibit and each block has no particular correlation with its neighbours, and the only pictorial context we can extract is the connection between the images on four faces of a block.

The findings at Nannieshui were made public in 1959, but these images have rarely been mentioned in previous academic works.² Until recently, the excavations have only been cited in several introductory articles in which the authors have focused on aesthetic appreciation rather than iconology or cultural and social meaning.³ This chapter briefly introduces the Buddhist history of this region and the characteristics of

² Guo Yong 郭勇, "Shanxi Qinxian faxian le yipi shike zaixiang 山西沁縣發現了一批石刻造像," *Wenwu* 3 (1959): 91-92.

³ Zhang Mingyuan 張明遠, "Shanxi Qinxian Nannieshui shike yishu 山西沁縣南涅水石刻藝術" *Meishu Guan* 2 (2001): 64-67. Zhang Mingyuan, "Qinxian Nannieshui shike yishu 沁縣南涅水石刻藝術," *Shanxi shike zaixiang jicui 山西石刻造像藝術集粹 (A Collection of Shanxi Stone Statues)* (Taiyuan: Shanxi kexue jishu, 2005) 51-76. Guo Hailin 郭海林 and Li Chunlan 李春蘭, "Nannieshui shike 南涅水石刻," *Wenwu shijie* 6 (2001): 61-63. Li Huaiping 李懷平 and Li Chunlan, "Qianxi Nannieshui shike de zaixiang yishu tese 淺析南涅水石刻的造像藝術特色" *Wenwu shijie* 5 (2007): 34-37. Zhang Shaokun 張少鯤, "Shanxi bowuguan cang shike zaixiang jiezhen Shanxi 山西博物館藏石刻造像攝珍賞析," *Wenwu shijie* 4 (2001): 50-54. Wong 65.

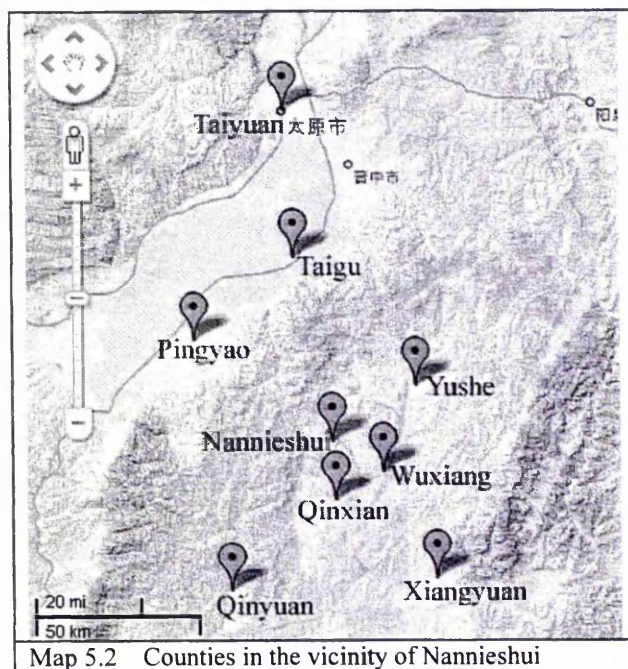
the Nannieshui excavations. I analyse the contemplative images found at this site by categorising them into one of four iconographic groupings in which the pensive bodhisattva is shown: those with horse and tree (Section 5.2.1), those with worshippers (Section 5.2.2), those with meditators (Section 5.2.3), and those in which the contemplative bodhisattva figure appears alone (Section 5.2.4). I discuss how the Nannieshui images in the four categories relate to one another and to pensive images found in other regions, particularly those of Yungang and Longmen, and argue that the pensive figure at Nannieshui is associated with Pure Land beliefs. Finally, I argue that the religious beliefs associated with the pensive figure at Nannieshui during this period evolved to the point where by the second half of the sixth century, the pensive bodhisattva had become recognised as an independent deity.

Qinxian's history is not well-documented in official historical records, as Qinxian was never a significant political, commercial or military city. A comparison of the *Dixingzhi* 地形志 (*The Chapter on Geography*) in *Wei shu* and the *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集 (*The Historical Atlas of China*) reveals that today's Qinxian belonged to Xiangjun 鄉郡 in Bingzhou 并州 in the Northern Wei.⁴ Apart from this entry, there is little surviving information about Xianjun during this period.

Nevertheless, the 2,100 pieces excavated from the site prove that Buddhism flourished in this region and there were a considerable number of adherents living here in the sixth century. In order to reconstruct the sixth-century Buddhist history of this region, I have consulted gazetteers of the counties in the vicinity. Since Qinxian, the county to which Nannieshui has been subsumed, does not have its own gazetteer, I have examined gazetteers of the cities around Qinxian, including *Qinyuan xian zhi* 沁源縣志, *Xiangyuan xian zhi* 襄垣縣志, *Wuxiang xian zhi* 武鄉縣志, *Yushe xian zhi* 榆社縣志, *Pingyao xian zhi* 平遙縣志, *Taigu xian zhi* 太谷縣志 and *Taiyuan xian zhi* 太原縣志

⁴ Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集, vol. 4 (Beijing, 1982) 52. *Wei shu* 246-67.

(Map 5.2).



Map 5.2 Counties in the vicinity of Nannieshui

Relief Map 5.2 shows that Pingyao, Taigu and Taiyuan are located in the same valley whilst Yushe, Wuxiang, Qinyuan and Xiangyuan belong to another. The discussion below will first describe the former group and then the latter group, to which Nannieshui belongs and where records delineate Buddhist activities of the central Shanxi province in the sixth century.

In *Pingyao xian zhi* several Buddhist temples mentioned were built in the sixth century: Sanjie Temple 三界寺 in 570, located between Pingyao, Qinxian and Qinyuan counties; Xifang Temple 西方寺 in the Northern Qi (550-77);⁵ and Shanglin Temple 雙林寺 refurbished in 571.⁶ There are also remains of sixth-century cliff carvings, Xigou moyai zaoxiang 西溝摩崖造像, with dated inscriptions: sixth year of the Wuding 武定 reign (548), third year of the Tianbao 天保 reign (552), and third year of the Wuping 武平 reign (572).⁷

⁵ Pingyaoxian difangzhi biancuan weiyuanhui 平遙縣地方志編纂委員會, *Pingyao xian zhi* (Beijing, 1999) 748.

⁶ Pingyaoxian difangzhi biancuan weiyuanhui 764.

⁷ Pingyaoxian difangzhi biancuan weiyuanhui 750.

The *Taigu xian zhi* (Taigu, named as Yangyi 陽邑 before 579) contains only two records related to early Buddhism. The first of these records that in 522 a monk at Jinglin Temple 靜林寺 discovered a number of jade discs and seals when he was picking medical herbs in a valley in the west of the county, and presented them to the court,⁸ while the second records that a Puci Temple 普慈寺 (ancient name Wubian Temple 無邊寺) was built in 272.⁹ In the *Taiyuan xian zhi* several records are briefly documented: Chongfu 崇福,¹⁰ Xianyan 仙巖¹¹ and Fahua Temples 法華寺 in 551,¹² Xuanwong Cave-temples 懸甕寺 in 552,¹³ Tongzi Temple 童子寺 in 556,¹⁴ Tianlong Temple 天龍寺 in 560,¹⁵ and Shangsheng Temple 上生寺 in 566.¹⁶

Judging from these gazetteer records, the erection of Buddhist temples in these counties seems to have boomed only after 550, especially in Jinyang 晉陽 (modern Taiyuan), although the construction of the nearby site Yungang had started from the 460s. This sudden explosion from the 550s corresponded to the period in which Gao Huan 高歡 (the prime minister of the Eastern Wei, 534-50) and the Northern Qi emperors enthusiastically built Jinyang as the Gao family's base from circa 534. None of the records show temple construction predating this year.

In the valley on the other (east) side of the mountains, most of the records regarding Buddhist activities in Wuxiang, Yushe, Qinyuan and Xiangyuan are also dated from the second half of the sixth century, but a few of them are earlier.

The *Wuxiang xian zhi* and the *Yushe xian zhi* both include stories of the Later Zhao emperor Shi Le 石勒 (274-333), who grew up in this area and later became a ruler of a regional regime and the patron of the famous monk Fotu Cheng 佛圖澄

⁸ Wang Xiaozun 王效尊, *Taigu xian zhi* (1886; reprinted Taipei, 1968) 2: 3b.

⁹ *Taigu xian zhi* 2: 14a.

¹⁰ Gao Ruxing 高汝行, *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi* 嘉靖太原縣志 (1551; reprinted Shanghai, 1963) 1: 14a-b.

¹¹ *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi*, 1: 16b.

¹² *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi*, 1: 15b.

¹³ *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi*, 1: 14b.

¹⁴ *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi*, 1: 16a.

¹⁵ *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi*, 1: 16a.

¹⁶ *Jiajing Taiyuan xian zhi*, 1: 14b-15a.

(?-348). The *Wuxiang xian zhi* even includes a biography of Fotu Cheng informed by the *Gaoseng zhuan*.¹⁷ The 1986 version of the *Wuxiang xian zhi* mentions a Northern Qi stone sculpture discovered in Beilianghou Village 北良侯村, located 70 *li*, approximately 45 km, north of the Wuxiang county seat.¹⁸

In the *Yushe xian zhi*, a description of a stone pillar is intriguing: the peak of the Guojiashan 郭家山, located to the west of the Yushe county seat, is naturally shaped as a stone pillar, one *zhang* 丈 in height and one *wei* 圍 in circumference,¹⁹ and is carved in the form of a seven-storey pagoda in which each of the four faces and each storey is cut with Buddha images. According to the gazetteer, it bears an inscription with a date of the thirtieth year of the Tiantong 天統 reign of the Great Qi.²⁰ However, this date must be mistaken, as the reign Tiantong of the Northern Qi lasted for only five years (565-570). Since this inscription clearly states the reign title and name of the dynasty, which accord with other historical records, it is likely that the mistake is only in the year recorded. According to this description, the four-faced, seven-story stone pillar on top of the Guojiashan had a similar appearance to those found at Nannieshui.

In the *Qinyuan xian zhi*, there are several further records concerning Buddhist activities. The Shifo Temple 石佛寺, located in Jiagu Village 賈郭村, 130 *li* 里 (85 km) north of the Qinyuan county seat, was first established in 570.²¹ The *Jiaguocun chongxiu shifosi bei ji* 賈郭村重修石佛寺碑記, written in 1735, notes that there were tens of stone Buddha statues housed in the temple and therefore named this temple as Shifo Temple,²² literally Stone Buddha Temple. Another temple, Longhua Temple 龍

¹⁷ T 2059.50.383b-387a.

¹⁸ Wuxiangxian xianzhi biancuan weiyuanhui 武鄉縣志編纂委員會, *Wuxian xian zhi* 武鄉縣志 (Taiyuan, 1986) 407.

¹⁹ *Wei* 圍 refers to the circumference that can be embraced by a normal-sized person, approximately 1.7 meters; *zhang* 丈 is approximately 3 metres.

²⁰ Wang Jiafang 王家坊 and Ge Shida 葛士達, *Yushe xian zhi* 榆社縣志 (1881; reprinted Taipei, 1976) 1: 22b. “石上鐫大齊天統三十年云云”

²¹ Kong Zhaoxiong 孔兆雄, Guo Lantian 郭藍田, Yin Guoyuan 陰國垣, *Qinyuan xian zhi* (1933; reprinted Taipei, 1976) 6: 41a; 7: 35b.

²² *Qinyuan xian zhi* 7:35b. “創始於武平七年，有石佛數十尊，故名石佛寺”

華寺, located in Wangtou Village 王頭村, 120 *li* (77 km) north of the Qinyuan county seat, was built in 585. The earliest record of temple construction in this region is the Longxing Temple 隆興寺, located in Qinyu Village 琴峪村 north of the Qinyuan county seat, built in 477 by monk Yuangui 圓珪.²³ It is worth noting that all three temples are located to the north of the Qinyuan county seat, fairly close (within 130 *li*, 85km) to Nannieshui, suggesting that the region surrounding Nannieshui was characterised in the sixth century by a high concentration of Buddhist temples.

The *Xiangyuan xian zhi* records that a Buddha image carrying an inscription with the Heqing 河清 reign title (564) was discovered from an ancient sandalwood tree and that a temple was later built to house this image. This record does not specify when these events occurred but notes that the temple was refurbished in 1462.²⁴ Another chapter of the same source mentions that the Tianlong Temple 天龍寺 was built during the Wuping reign of the Great Qi (570-77).²⁵

None of the above explains the sudden appearance of a large number of sculptures in Nannieshui in the sixth century, but reinforces the impression that temple construction and associated image-making activities were flourishing in this region at this time. However another record, although not directly referring to Buddhism, might give insights into the sudden boom in Buddhist activities. The *Xiangyuan xian zhi*, quoting the *Record of the Emperor Xiaowen Shrine* (*Wei Xiaowendi miao ji* 魏孝文帝廟記), notes that there are two shrines dedicated to Emperor Xiaowen of the Northern Wei in the county, and that after Emperor Xiaowen moved the capital from Pingcheng to Luoyang in 494, royal inspection tours between the old and new capitals followed a route passing through Xiangyuan. With such close contact with the emperor and his court, inhabitants of this region built shrines to commemorate him.²⁶

²³ *Qinyuan xian zhi* 6:41b.

²⁴ Yan Yongchen 嚴用琛, Lu Zongfan 魯宗藩 and Wang Weixing 王維新, *Xiangyuan xian zhi* (1928; reprinted Taipei, 1976) 7: 4b.

²⁵ *Xiangyuan xian zhi* 7: 27a.

²⁶ *Xiangyuan xian zhi* 7: 2a. “帝自代遷都洛陽，往來駐蹕此山，故後人祠之，廟祀不絕”

Map 5.1 shows that the Nannieshui region is located midway between the two capitals of Pingcheng and Luoyang, and that travelling via this region was probably the fastest route between these two capitals. The emperor with his possessions, tens of thousands of official and military personnel with their families, and voluntary or forced migrants travelling this route must have impacted this region. These processions probably brought economic benefits and cultural fashions from the former and new capitals that encouraged the production of Buddhist images.

However, it should be noted that artisans in Nannieshui did not simply replicate the forms, artistic expressions and iconographies from the models at Yungang or Pingcheng. Although there are traces of similarities in iconography to Yungang works, Nannieshui artisans developed their own unique visual elements. The new visual elements which appear in the pensive bodhisattva images will be introduced in Section 5.2.

With respect to the most noticeable feature of the Nannieshui works of the sixth century – that they were carved in stone blocks and presented in the form of pillars – there survive contemporaneous parallels from the region and from the regions to the west, including Shaanxi and Gansu. In 1982, several similar blocks dating to the sixth century were unearthed at the nearby site of Wuxiang.²⁷ In Shaanxi, a four-faced stone stele, in the shape of a block, (H. 60cm, W. 60cm, L. 60 cm) bearing an inscription of 501, was discovered in Xi'an and is now held by the Xi'an Beilin Museum 西安碑林博物館.²⁸ Another similar example bearing an inscription of 526 is held by the Ōhara Museum of Art 大原美術館 in Japan.²⁹ It is unknown if these blocks were discovered alone or with other similar pieces, but they have a similar design to the stone blocks from which the Nannieshui pillars are constructed, i.e. a main deity carved in a niche in

²⁷ Zhang Shaokun 張少鯤, "Shanxi bowuguan cang shike zaixiang jiezhen shanxi 山西博物館藏石刻造像擷珍賞析," *Wenwu shijie* 文物世界 4 (2001): 50-54.

²⁸ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1 Pl. 103 a, b, 104 a, b; vol. 4, 256.

²⁹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1 Pl. 189; vol. 4, 268.

each face of the block. Another work, dated to c. 500-20, discovered in Huaxian 華縣 in Shaanxi (Fig. 5.2), shows interesting similarities to the Nannieshui pillars.³⁰ This four-faced stele has several niches carved and aligned vertically. Although in the form of a stele with clearly distinguished frontal and lateral faces, the tapered form of the stele recalls the shape of the Nannieshui pillars. Another four-faced pillar excavated from Zhuanglang xian 莊浪縣 in Gansu is dated to the first half of the sixth century, and is composed of five stone blocks (which might have been more in its original setting). In Fig. 5.3 these blocks are shown arranged with smaller stones set on larger stones, in a manner similar to the proposed arrangement of the blocks found in Nannieshui.³¹

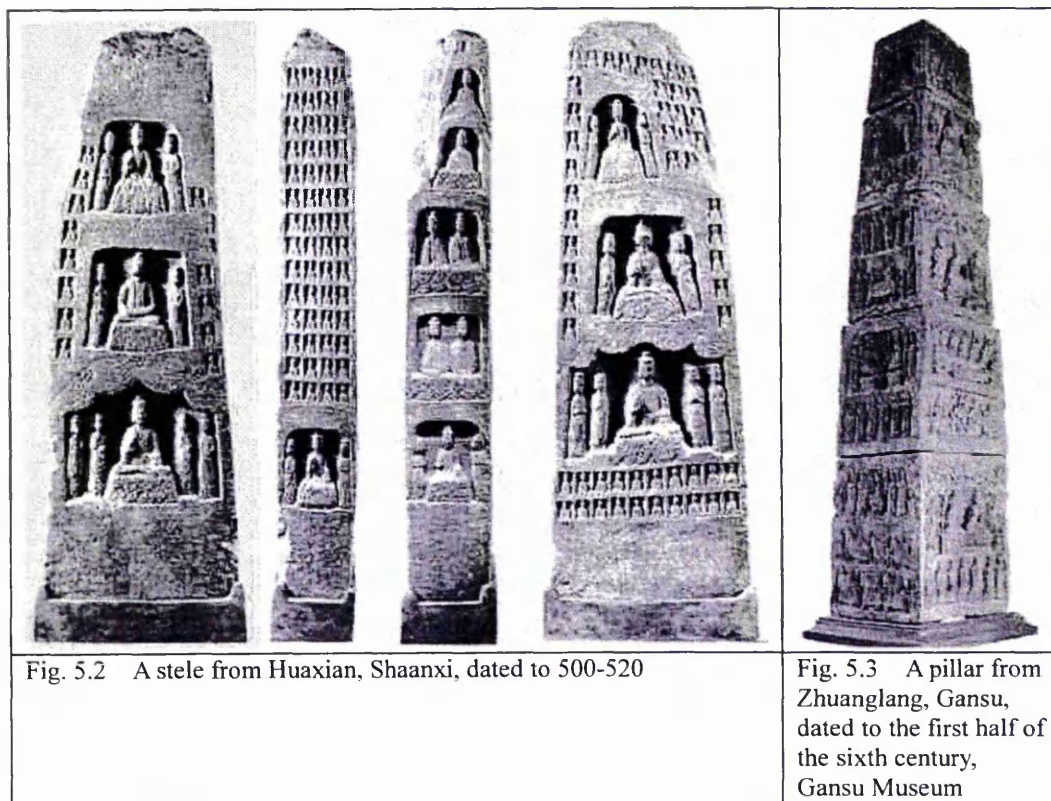


Fig. 5.2 A stele from Huaxian, Shaanxi, dated to 500-520

Fig. 5.3 A pillar from Zhuanglang, Gansu, dated to the first half of the sixth century, Gansu Museum

These examples show that the Nannieshui pillars bear a close relationship to similar sculptural forms from Shaanxi and Gansu. No such pillars have ever been

³⁰ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1 Pl. 151; vol. 4, 263.

³¹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1 Pl. 152; vol. 4, 263.

discovered in the eastern regions of Hebei or Shandong. Matsubara Saburo notes that the construction of four-faced steles was a characteristic of Buddhist sculptures during the Northern Zhou, the regime that occupied northwest China between 557-81.³² However, the examples from Xi'an and Zhuanglang show that similar four-sided pillars were already being fashioned from the beginning of the sixth century. It is therefore difficult to determine the direction of influence, from Shanxi to Shaanxi and Gansu, or vice versa. These four-sided blocks appeared almost simultaneously in several places in China, which leaves open the possibility of an ongoing iterative influence between the regions.

There are several possible visual sources that might have inspired artisans or patrons to build such a pillar structure. The first one would be the central pillars in cave-temples, which already existed from the beginning of the fifth century in Gansu, and more importantly were meant to represent pagodas, as probably so did the pillars from Nannieshui and Zhuanglang. The central pillars of the fifth century at the Mogao (Figs. 2.5, 2.7 and 2.9) and Jinta Cave-temples (Fig. 2.11) are divided into several tiers, and a niche or a primary deity is set in each face of the tier in the central pillar. This is the same arrangement as those found at Nannieshui. Nonetheless, there are also differences. The central pillars in cave-temples in Gansu are wider at the top and narrower at the bottom in each tier, whereas at Nannieshui the stone blocks are usually narrower at the top and wider at the bottom, and smaller blocks were probably stacked on top of bigger ones, most likely to represent Han-styled pagodas.

Another possible source could be the independent sculptures carved in the form of a several-storied Chinese-styled pagoda. The earliest dated example is the one commissioned by Cao Tiandu 曹天度 in 466, when the capital was still located at

³² Matsubara Saburo, "Hokushū shimenzō no ichi keishiki 北周四面像の一形式" *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* 151-55.

Pingcheng (Fig. 5.4).³³ It is a nine-storied pagoda with Han-styled roofs and brackets for each story. In addition to this example, at the Yungang Cave-temples in Pingcheng metropolis, there are abundant representations of pagodas of similar kind, rendered in sculptures in the round or low reliefs. For example, the central pillars in Yungang Caves 1 and 39 are also shaped in the form of a pagoda with Han-styled roofs and brackets. In Cave 6, a nine-storied pagoda is cut at each corner in the top tier of the central pillar as supports of the roof (Fig. 5.5).

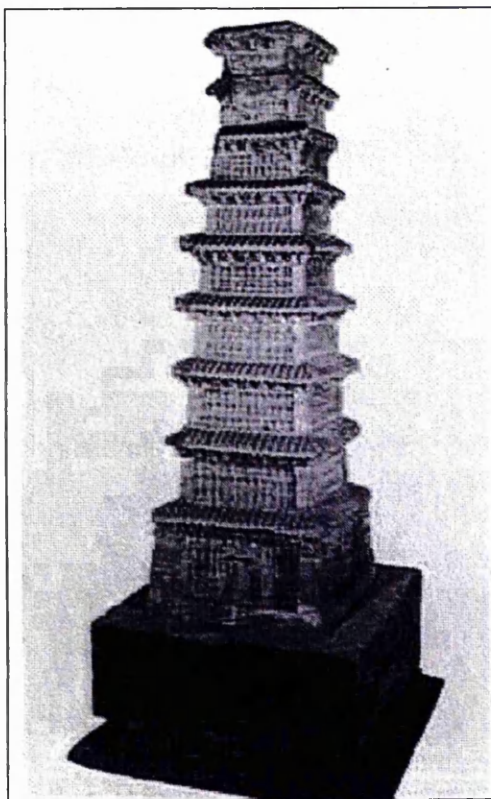


Fig. 5.4 Cao Tiandu Stupa from Datong, dated 466, History Museum Taipei

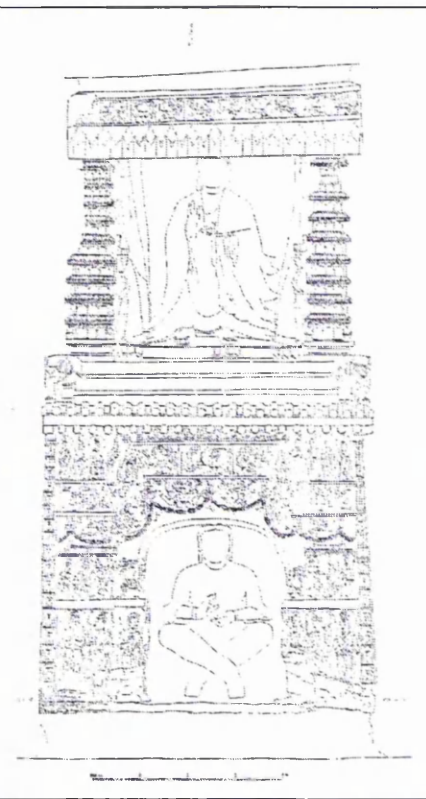


Fig. 5.5 Drawing of the central pillar of Yungang Cave 6, dated to the late 480s to the early 490s

The form of the central pillar of Cave 6 is of particular interest, as each tier of the central pillar is narrower at the top and wider at the bottom, and the top tier is smaller than the lower one (Fig. 5.5), the same design as the Nannieshui examples. More intriguingly, although there are structures carved to represent wooden beams in

³³ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1 Pl. 30b, 31 a, b, c, d; vol. 4, 246.

the ceiling, which indicate that the central pillar is meant to represent a Chinese pagoda, the Han-style roof was abbreviated and thus not depicted. Yungang Cave 6 is believed to have been finished not long before the capital was moved to Luoyang in 494.³⁴ The central pillar was probably finished in the late 480s or the early 490s. Artisans might have adopted this new fashion, innovated with a new form and produced in large numbers at Nannieshui and other places in China. It was also possible that this form had started to be produced in Pingcheng shortly before the capital had been moved.

Although the region between the two capitals of Pingcheng and Luoyang was not prominent in the political history of the period, the excavations reveal that Buddhism was highly popular in this region. A large number of adherents enthusiastically constructed tens of stone pillars to celebrate their belief, which transformed this region into a major image-making centre in the sixth century, no less important than the better-known sites of Mogao, Yungang, Luoyang, Dingzhou and Qingzhou.

The inspiration of the shape of the pillar structure representing a Chinese pagoda probably came from the former capital Pingcheng, and most likely so did some aspects of the Nannieshui iconography, but local artisans and Buddhists also left traces of their creativity. This creativity incorporated novel visual elements alongside conventional themes. In the following section, I introduce the traditional and innovative visual elements created by the artisans and Buddhists at Nannieshui, and discuss the role they played in the formation of the cult of the pensive bodhisattva.

5.2 Typology

During my fieldwork in September 2007, I documented 37 blocks incorporating the contemplative image in the collections of the Shanxi Museum 山西博物院 in

³⁴ Su Bai, "Yungang shiku fenqi shilun 雲岡石窟分期試論" 80.

Taiyuan and the Nannieshui Gallery of Stone Sculptures 南涅水石刻藝術館 in Qinxian. The pensive images at Nannieshui show greater complexity in both iconography and composition than those from Gansu, Yungang or Luoyang. Although the Nannieshui images show a number of features inherited from earlier artistic traditions, they also include novel elements, such as thatched cottages, meditating figures and huge birds, that had seldom been combined with the pensive figure in previously discussed cases. This novel arrangement of visual elements illustrates the creativity of the local Nannieshui artisans.

In the analysis below, I categorise the pensive images at Nannieshui into four groups based on iconographical aspects: first, those with a horse representing Prince Siddhārtha, for which precedents can be found at Yungang in Shanxi and at Pingliang in Gansu; second, those with worshippers, possibly showing influence from Luoyang; third, those appearing with meditators, possibly inspired by similar images from Yungang; and finally, those pensive figures appearing alone, showing similarity to the visual traditions of the Hebei region. This categorisation helps to illustrate the visual traditions from earlier sites and innovations by local artisans, as well as displaying the diversity of the Nannieshui contemplative images.

5.2.1 Pensive bodhisattva with horse and tree

In most of the images at Nannieshui, the pensive figure is depicted under a tree, following the visual traditions of Gansu and Yungang discussed above and of Hebei, discussed in the next chapter. The most noticeable visual element that appears at Nannieshui but not in the Yungang Siddhārtha images is the depiction of a tree with its branches bent above the pensive deity.

Five of the thirty-seven contemplative bodhisattva images are depicted with a horse kneeling in front of the deity. In these cases, it seems reasonable to follow Oswald

Siren's identification of similar images at Yungang as representing Prince Siddhārtha, because the horse is a unique element in the episode of the prince's farewell to his horse and groom in Śākyamuni's biographies. However, the images at Nannieshui are more complex than those in Yungang Cave 6.

The appearance and traits of the bodhisattva carving shown in Fig. 5.6 are typical of images from the period from the late Northern Wei to the early Eastern Wei (c. 520 to 540). A shallow niche is carved in the middle of the picture; a contemplating figure is seated inside the niche; two ribbons from his headdress are flying outwards; a disc-like ornament tying the two pieces of streamers together is placed in front of his belly; the skirt is depicted in pleats; his body is lean and face is squarish. The cloak over the deity's shoulders is also frequently seen in portraits of donors of this time. In the corner on the viewer's lower left, a horse is kneeling and kissing the deity's foot. Another figure stands in the space above the horse. In the top left corner, a monk wearing a cape to cover his head is meditating in his thatched cottage which can find its antecedent in Yungang Cave 9. On the viewer's right, a tree is depicted and bending its branches to cover the cave-like niche.



Fig. 5.6 Drawing of a carving of Prince Siddhārtha under a tree with Chandaka and Kanthaka, Nannieshui, dated to c. 520-40

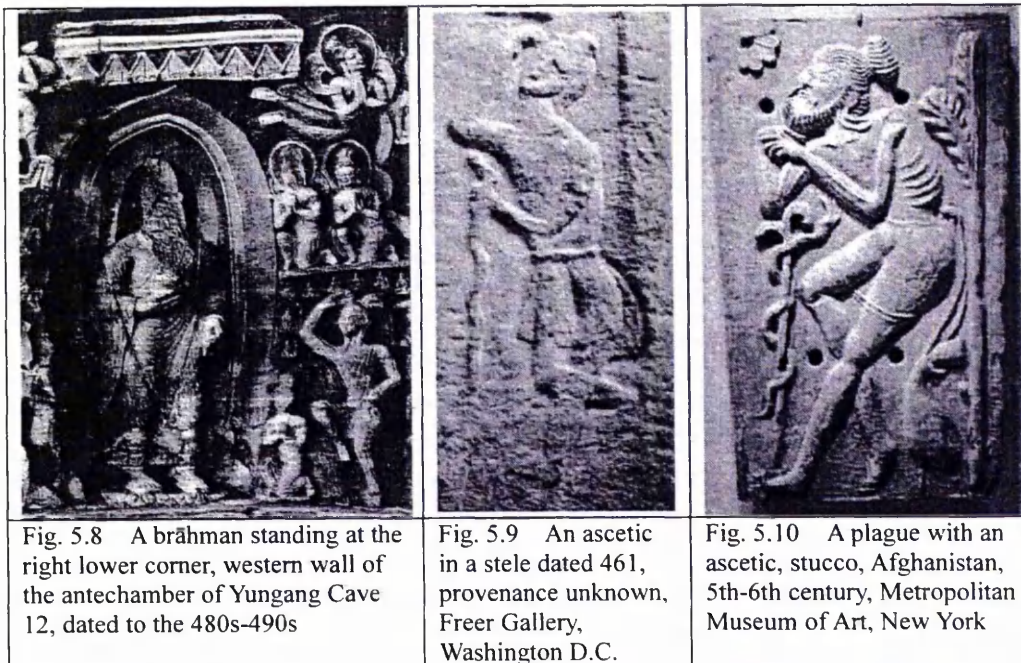


Fig. 5.7 Drawing of a carving of Prince Siddhārtha under a tree with Kanthaka, two ascetics and a bird, Nannieshui, dated to c. 520-40

The contemplative figure in Fig. 5.7 is positioned in a niche cut so deeply into the stone that it gives an impression that the figure is seated in a cave absorbed in contemplation. Outside the cave on the viewer's left, a tree bends its branches above the cave. On the other side, a figure wearing a short skirt stretches out his right hand on which a very large bird is perched while his left hand holds a zigzag-shaped stick. In the lower portion of the sculpture, mountains are depicted on the left with a thatched cottage amongst them, and in the right corner a kneeling horse extends its tongue to lick the deity's foot. Another figure standing between the landscape and the horse reaches his left hand out towards the horse, and his right hand holds a stick in the same shape as the one in the hand of the other figure.

In this image, several visual elements make their debut appearance together with a contemplating figure. First, the figures wearing short skirts are not known to have been depicted with the pensive figure at Mogao or Yungang. Similar figures can be seen in Yungang Cave 12, in the stele inscribed with a date of 461 held by Freer Gallery (Fig. 5.9) and in a plaque from Afghanistan displayed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Fig. 5.10).³⁵ They are usually identified as ascetic practitioners, heavenly figures (*xianren* 仙人), brahmacārins (*fanzhi* 梵志) or brāhman (*poluomen* 婆羅門), non-Buddhist sages or practitioners, who have isolated themselves, living in the forest. In these representations, including the Nannieshui image, the ascetics usually have their hair tied in a knot on the top of their head and hold a zigzag-shaped stick (a snake-like creature around the stick in the Afghanistan image).

³⁵ The image of the 461 stele is in Eva Ingersoll Gatling, "A Dated Buddhist Stele of 461 A.D. and Its Connections with Yün Kang and Kansu Province," *Artibus Asiae* 20.4 (1957): 241-50. According to Dorothy Wong, this stele is in the collection of the Arthur M Sackler Gallery in Washington D.C.. Wong 74; Fig. 5.3.



The thatched cottage in the mountains in the left lower corner of Fig. 5.7 is not seen in pensive images elsewhere, but a few of the same type are delineated in the representations of Sāmaka *jātaka* on the western wall of the antechamber of Yungang Cave 9 (Fig. 5.11), finished around late 480s. The cottage in this Nannieshui image serves as the lodging place for the practitioner(s). There are precedents for the landscape image among the images of pensive Siddhārtha in Yungang Cave 6 (Figs. 3.15 and 3.16) – mountains are carved in the lower part in the niche and bottom rim outside the niche; however, there is no tree included in the Yungang image. The mountains with the thatched cottage, practitioners and the tree together in this Nannieshui image imply that Prince Siddhārtha’s farewell to his horse and groom occurred in a forest, away from the palace from which he had escaped.

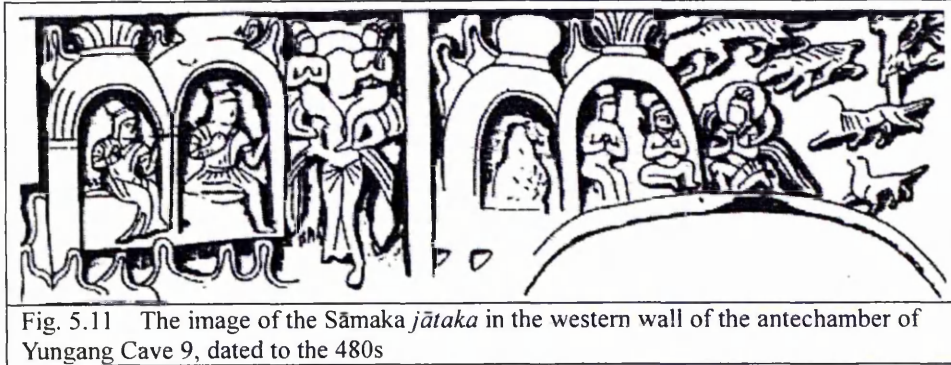


Fig. 5.11 The image of the Sāmaka *jātaka* in the western wall of the antechamber of Yungang Cave 9, dated to the 480s

Another new visual element in this image (Fig. 5.7) is the bird at the right upper corner, which occupies such a large space that it could not escape the attention of any viewer. This is not the only bird delineated in the contemplating images at Nannieshui, but it is unclear what the bird represented. It may have signified an important meaning at this site in the sixth century; the possible meanings of the bird image will be discussed below (Section 5.3).

The image shown in Fig. 5.12 has a relatively simpler composition than the two others from Nannieshui discussed above. The niche is also deeply cut into the stone, a contemplating deity sits in the middle in the niche, and a horse kneels in front of him kissing or licking his left foot. Outside the niche to the viewer's left, a standing figure, wearing trousers and a coat with a v-shaped collar, holds a pole with both hands and faces toward the contemplating figure. Apart from the iconography, this piece is hardly a finely treated work. Every element in this image is roughly cut, and the size of the surface is rather small, less than 20 cm square. Some of the lines do not have any clear indication of their purpose or function, as if this piece had not been finished. For example, the two vertical lines to the viewer's right of the niche seem to be either meaningless or an extremely crude representation of a tree; moreover, the significance of the pole held in the standing figure's hands is difficult to identify.



Fig. 5.12 Drawing of a carving of Prince Siddhārtha with Kanthaka and a figure holding a pole-like object, Nannieshui, dated to c. 520-40



Fig. 5.13 Drawing of a carving of Prince Siddhārtha under a double tree with Kanthaka, Nannieshui, dated to c. second half of the sixth century

The remaining two contemplative images in this group are identical in their composition and iconography. In Fig. 5.13, the iconography and composition seem to be simpler than the cases discussed above. The niche is also cut deeply into the stone at the centre of the picture. The body of the contemplating figure seated in the niche is well-muscled, and the drapery is delineated with a simple pattern without complex pleats as those in Figs. 5.6 and 5.7. Both traits put this work in the Northern Qi period (550-77). Aside the figure, a horse is depicted kneeling on its forelegs, and on both sides of the niche a tree is set with the branches bending towards each other above the niche. At the bottom of the composition, several mountains are arranged, which in combination with the trees create a landscape setting for the cave-like niche, similar to the example shown in Fig. 5.7.

It is also noticeable that although the iconographical elements are not diverse, the spatial arrangement in this image is rather sophisticated in that the visual elements are layered to imply space between them: the mountains below the niche are set as a foreground shading the bottom part of the tree on the right; the kneeling horse is placed in front of the tree on the left covering the bottom of trunk; the two trees are understood to be set in front of the niche, as the branches cover the arch of the niche and protrude

over the edge of the arch, which reinforces the artisan's intention of creating the spatial relationship between the trees and the niche. As a result, the trees and the horse are positioned to appear in the middle distance, whilst the niche then appears further distant, as if the deity is contemplating deeply in a cave in the mountains. One can imagine that in the sixth century when the block was placed outdoors it would, with the effect of sunlight and shadow, enhance the visual illusion that this deity is deeply contemplating inside a cave in the mountains.

5.2.2 Pensive bodhisattva with worshipper

This second category will introduce those images having a worshipper with the contemplative deity. The depiction of the contemplative figure together with one or several worshippers was a new development beginning towards the end of the fifth century. The earliest known example is the Guo Yuanqing Stele 郭元慶造像碑 from Gansu, dated 492 (Fig. 3.19). Other instances can be seen in Yungang Cave 30 (Fig. 3.18) and Cave 33-3 (Fig. 3.14), and in the Lianhua, Putai, Huoshao and Weizi Caves at Longmen (Figs. 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4.13, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19, 4.20 and 4.21). But the cases from Gansu, Yungang, Longmen and Nannieshui differ from each other. The pensive bodhisattva in the Guo Yuanqing Stele is carved with a horse and a figure kneeling in front of him, and a figure stands behind the scene at each side of the deity as worshippers. The composition of the Guo Yuanqing Stele is similar to the example in Yungang Cave 30. In these two images the pensive deities wear monastic robes, being represented as a Buddha, instead of the more frequently seen representation as a bodhisattva. The images at Longmen usually have an array of worshippers, grandees with attendants holding canopies and fans, kneeling or standing in front of the deity who is contemplating under a tree. However, at Nannieshui the bodhisattvas are depicted under a tree, and a worshipper stands or kneels beside, but every image varies from one

another.

A niche in the block shown in Fig. 5.14 occupies the central position with a contemplating figure seated inside with his head slightly tilted to the viewer's left. A tree is portrayed on the viewer's right with branches bending leftwards above the niche as if shading the deity. Meanwhile, the branches and leaves protrude the arch, suggesting that the cave-like niche is set behind the tree. On the viewer's left a worshipper is set on a lotus pedestal holding a lotus stem topped with a blooming flower; and, most intriguingly, a huge bird is shown standing on the lotus flower. In contrast to the image shown in Fig. 5.7, in which the crane-like bird stands on the ascetic's hand, in this image the bird stands on the lotus whose stem is held by a worshipper standing on another lotus.



Fig. 5.14 Drawing of a carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree with a lay worshipper, Nannieshui, dated to the first half of the sixth century



Fig. 5.15 A carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree with a lay worshipper, Nannieshui, dated to the first half of the sixth century

In the work shown in Fig. 5.15, the iconographical elements and the composition are similar to the preceding image, though slightly more complex. These elements comprise a niche in the middle of the picture, a tree on the viewer's right and a worshipper kneeling on the left holding a lotus stem with a flower on top, a bird standing on the flower, and several mountains cut in the lower right and lower-left

corners. The branches and leaves of the tree are depicted in layers so that one unit covers another, giving the visual illusion of depth of space and making the tree appear more flourishing. Moreover, the branches protrude over the edge of the niche as those shown in Figs. 5.13 and 5.14, implying that the niche is set behind the tree. The shape of the mountains covers the bottom part of the trunk indicating that that the tree stands behind the mountains. Such attention to detail and layering shows that the artisans in the region not only cared about the iconography but also devoted considerable attention to spatial arrangement. This may have been because they wanted to convey the idea that the pensive bodhisattva contemplates in a tranquil rural setting instead of in a town or a temple, or that contemplation should be practised in the tranquillity of nature away from the noise and distractions of the urban areas.

Another image (Fig. 5.16), now exhibited in the Shanxi Museum, shows similar visual elements and composition as the two discussed above. The contemplative bodhisattva is seated inside the central niche, a tree is set beside the niche on the viewer's right, some mountains are depicted in the lower right corner covering the bottom of the tree, a worshipper holding a stem topped with a lotus flower stands on a lotus pedestal facing the deity, and in the upper left corner a bird stands on the lotus and spreads its wings. Additionally, there is a horizontal belt at the top of the image as a decoration. In this belt, three lotus flowers are depicted, one in the middle and one on each side of the stripe. Between the flowers, two birds are portrayed facing towards each other.



Fig. 5.16 Drawing of a carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree with a lay worshipper, Nannieshui, dated to the first half of the sixth century

corner a bird stands on the lotus and spreads its wings. Additionally, there is a horizontal belt at the top of the image as a decoration. In this belt, three lotus flowers are depicted, one in the middle and one on each side of the stripe. Between the flowers, two birds are portrayed facing towards each other.

The work shown in Fig. 5.17 is a finely treated work. It has similar composition to the others, but two additional iconographical elements are found: the thousand-Buddha motif (the niches in the background organised neatly in arrays), and the lotus pedestal under the tree. The Thousand Buddha motif is carved as the background of the setting, which creates a visual illusion that the deity is sitting in a cave cut into a cliff sculpted with thousands of Buddha niches. The branches of the tree protrude over and cover the edge of the cave, indicating by their relative positions in the illusionary space that the cave is situated behind the tree.



Fig. 5.17 A carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree with a lay worshipper holding a lotus, Nannieshui, dated to the first half of the sixth century

The theme of the Thousand Buddhas appeared from the very beginnings of Chinese Buddhist art. The earliest known visual representation is the mural in Binglingsi Cave 169, dated to the Western Qin (409-31), but textual evidence relating to the Thousand Buddhas concept, which derives from the Lotus Sutra, can be traced as far back as the late third century.³⁶ From the beginning of the fifth century, the Thousand Buddhas theme had been repeatedly employed in China, with examples being found in Yungang Caves 5, 11, 13, 15, 16, 19 and 39 and in many individual steles. It very often serves as a background for a larger icon or niche. For example, in Binglingsi Cave 169 the Thousand Buddhas are arranged surrounding two Buddha triads in the middle; in Yungang Cave 5, in the window frame the Thousand Buddhas are arranged around a niche of a double Buddha;³⁷ and so is the Thousand Buddhas image in this Nannieshui case. The Thousand Buddhas are carved as the background for the primary theme, the

³⁶ Alexander Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (Ascona, 1959) 201-02; James Caswell, "The Thousand-Buddha Pattern in Caves XIX and XVI at Yün-Kang," *Ars Orientalis* 10 (1975): 36.

³⁷ Yungang shiku wenwu baoguansuo Fig. 50.

pensive deity niche, a worshipper holding a lotus, a bird and a bent tree. A similar but simpler example is shown in Fig. 5.18.

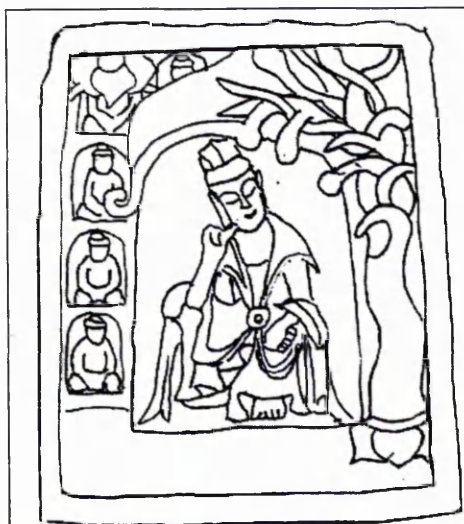


Fig. 5.18 Drawing of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree, Nannieshui, dated to first half of the sixth century



Fig. 5.19 A carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree with a lay worshipper; an elephant supporting a reborn being emerging from a lotus is carved in the lower section, Nannieshui, dated to first half of the sixth century

Although the juxtaposition of the Thousand Buddhas with another icon had become an established convention by the fifth century, the Thousand Buddhas most commonly framed either a Buddha triad or a double Buddha image, and it was unusual to depict the Thousand Buddhas motif with a pensive figure. The only examples other than those at Nannieshui are those in Binglingsi Cave 126 (Fig. 3.17, dated to 513), and Cave 128 (Fig. 3.18, dated to the 510s). Although the known examples of the Thousand Buddhas framing the pensive figure are few, the usage of a framing motif usually afforded to a Buddha triad or double Buddha image provides evidence that the pensive figures thus framed were being represented as significant deities.

The tree in Figs. 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19 is propped up with a lotus pedestal. No such precedent can be found at Yungang or Luoyang from where the iconographical elements of Nannieshui might have been borrowed. Using a lotus pedestal to support

the tree is the innovation of the artisans and Buddhists at Nannieshui. The Lotuses, sacred flowers in Buddhism symbolizing purity, effectively transform the trees in the statues in Figs. 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19 from secular plants in an ordinary landscape into sacred entities, thereby transforming the entire setting into a sacred space.

In Fig. 5.19, two distinctive iconographical elements are found: an elephant below the cave-like niche, and a figure holding a flower emerging from the lotus supported by the elephant's proboscis. The meaning of the elephant in this image is unclear. In texts of the fifth to sixth century, elephants usually appear in the records of official histories when presented by tributary countries to Chinese emperors as national gifts.³⁸ Because of this context, they probably were regarded as precious animals associated with an exotic spectacle. However, elephants were rarely depicted in indigenous Chinese images. In Buddhist visual representations, elephants are usually related to Queen Maya's conception. According to biographical stories, Śākyamuni rode an elephant to enter Maya's womb. However, elephants are not exclusively used in this context. For example, in Yungang Cave 6, an image in the central pillar shows that Queen Maya rides an elephant to return to the palace after giving birth to the Buddha,³⁹ another image in the central pillar in Yungang Cave 6 depicts Prince Siddhārtha riding an elephant to return to the palace after his tour in the city.⁴⁰

In Indian culture elephants had long been considered as noble and auspicious animals and also had been used for transport by grandees such as Queen Maya and Prince Siddhārtha. In the carving shown in Fig. 5.19, a saddle is set on the elephant's back, suggesting that the elephant has been prepared to be ridden; or perhaps this is a close imitation of its pictorial source: the decorative pattern in the saddle is identical to the one on the back of the elephant ridden by Maya in Yungang Cave 6, and the

³⁸ *Bei shi* 48, 53, 70 and 3210; *Nan shi* 236, 512 and 1953.

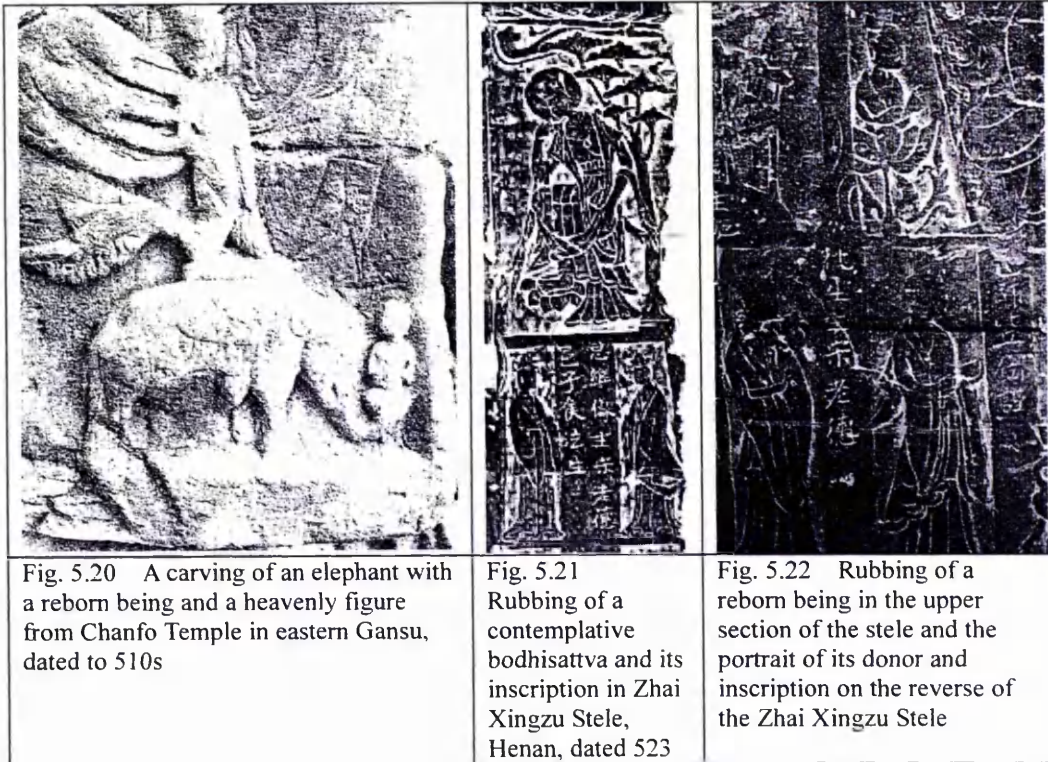
³⁹ Yungang shiku wenwu baoguansuo 雲岡石窟文物保管所, *Zhongguo shiku: Yungang shiku* 中國石窟·雲岡石窟 (Beijing, 1991) Fig. 74.

⁴⁰ Yungang shiku wenwu baoguansuo, *Zhongguo shiku: Yungang shiku* (Beijing, 1991) Fig. 76.

pendants tied to sashes are highly similar to those on the elephant ridden by Siddhārtha in the same cave.

Examples of an elephant appearing with the contemplative bodhisattva are rare. Besides the example from Nannieshui (Fig. 5.19), another is found in the Zhao Anxiang Stele from Henan (Fig. 4.32), in which the significance of the elephant is unclear; a final example derives from Shandong, possibly denoting Śākyamuni's incarnation (Figs. 7.12 and 7.13; cf. Chapter 7). However, in these examples or at Yungang, no figure or lotus is depicted on the elephant's proboscis. The figure emerging from the lotus is usually identified as a reborn being in the Pure Land of the West where Amitabha Buddha dwells, preaches and rules.

One similar image, a reborn being emerging from a lotus bud supported by the elephant's proboscis, dated to the 510s, is found in eastern Gansu at Chanfo Temple 禪佛寺 (Fig. 5.20). There are traces of a saddle carved on the elephant's back. A heavenly figure is depicted above the elephant, but it is not clear whether it is meant to be interpreted as being carried by the elephant, or as floating or flying above the elephant. However, the meaning of this image is unclear, and its relationship to the iconography surrounding the contemplative bodhisattva images is uncertain. One possible interpretation of the Chanfo Temple would be that it represents Prince Siddhartha riding an elephant to enter Queen Maya's womb; however, in other images of Queen Maya's conception, no reborn being is depicted emerging from a lotus supported by the elephant's proboscis. Without further pictorial context it is not possible to determine the meaning of this emergent reborn being.



According to the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life* (*Fo shuo wuliangshou jing* 佛說無量壽經), anyone who truly believes in the Buddha's wisdom, produces religious merit, and devotes the merit to all beings that he or she will be reborn from a lotus flower of seven treasures in the pure land. His or her body will be bright, and he or she will be endowed with wisdom and merit like a bodhisattva. Any practitioner who wishes to see the Amitabha Buddha and respectfully provides offerings to bodhisattvas or Buddhist disciples will be reborn to Amitabha Buddha's land from a lotus of seven treasures.⁴¹ The appearance of the reborn being suggests that the beliefs associated with the contemplative figure at Nannieshui from the second quarter of the sixth century were closely associated with Pure Land beliefs. This association is likely to reflect the flourishing of Pure Land beliefs and their imagery in China during this period.

A contemporaneous stele from Henan province provides evidence that the

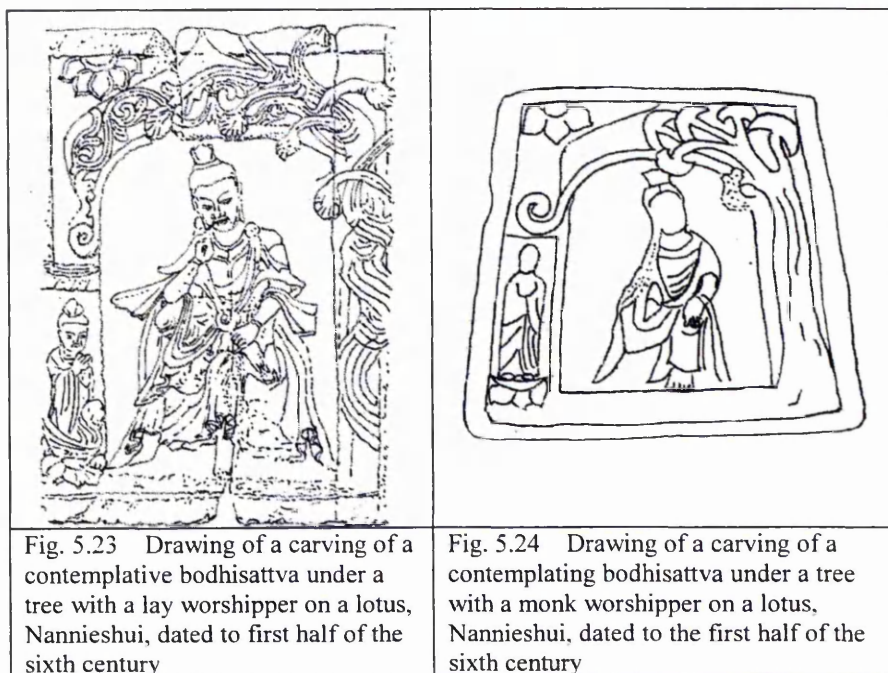
⁴¹ T360.12.278b. “若有眾生。明信佛智乃至勝智。作諸功德信心迴向。此諸眾生於七寶華中自然化生加趺而坐。須臾之頃。身相光明智慧功德。如諸菩薩具足成就。復次慈氏。他方諸大菩薩。發心欲見無量壽佛。恭敬供養及諸菩薩聲聞之眾。彼菩薩等。命終得生無量壽國。於七寶華中自然化生。”

incorporation of contemplative bodhisattva, possibly considered as a deity in its own right, was also incorporated into Pure Land beliefs outside the Nannieshui region. The Zhai Xingzu Stele 翟興祖造像, dated 523, shows two contemplative deities at the upper sections of both sides. The inscription for the image at the right side reads “*siwei xiang zhu* Song Laode 思惟像主宋老德” describing the image as *siwei xiang* and the donor as Song Laode (Fig. 5.21). This same donor commissioned another image on the reverse of this stele: a reborn being emerging from a lotus flower and the inscription reads “*huasheng zhu* Song Laode 化生主宋老德” (Figs. 5.22 and 5.23), describing Song Laode as also being the donor for the image of the reborn being.⁴² It is likely to be no coincidence that the donor who commissioned a *siwei* image simultaneously commissioned the image of a reborn being. Considering this stele together with the work shown in Fig. 5.20, in which a reborn being appears in the context of a contemplative image, it is clear that there was a link between the pensive bodhisattva, adherents’ concerns about their afterlife and the religious practices they employed in order to reach it.

At Nannieshui, the idea of being reborn to the Pure Land was not only embodied by depicting a reborn being in a pensive image, but also by depicting the donors themselves on a lotus. The practice of worshipping the contemplating deity in order to be reborn from a lotus in the Pure Land, or in the presence of a Buddha, is also revealed in Figs. 5.14, 5.16, 5.17, 5.23 and 5.24, in which the worshippers are portrayed on lotus flowers. Another four images also have the worshipper portrayed on a lotus. This was a rare design at this time as worshippers were usually not portrayed on a lotus. The piece exhibited in Fig. 5.23 also shows a worshipper on a lotus as a reborn being kneeling beside and facing the contemplative deity. In this sculpture in the upper left corner, a lotus replaces the bird present in the pieces discussed above. The lotus might be merely

⁴² Li Xianqi 李獻奇, “*Beiwei Zhenguan simian Zhai Xiangzu dengren zaoxiangbei* 北魏正光四年翟興祖等人造像碑,” *Zhongyuan wenwu* 2 (1985): 21-26.

a decoration embellishing the blank space, but it could also denote the Pure Land, where according to the *Amitabha Sutra* (*Amituo jing* 阿彌陀經), which states that in the Seven Treasures Pond, all the lotuses are as large as a carriage wheel and radiate blue, yellow, red and white rays.⁴³



The work in Fig. 5.23 is not the only example having the lotus in the upper left corner. In Fig. 5.24, a big lotus also occupies the upper left corner. It is also noticeable that the attendant is depicted as a monk, not as a layman in the sculptures discussed above. The suggestion that the worshippers in the sculptures represent the commissioners can thus be further supported: different identities of the worshippers in the images signify distinct identities of commissioners.

5.2.3 Pensive bodhisattva with meditator

The same iconographical elements repeatedly appear in this grouping of the

⁴³ T366.12.346c.

pensive images, but with a different arrangement in each image. This suggests that although the visual materials were somewhat experimental, this deity could have presented certain concepts or beliefs held in Nannieshui after the second quarter of the sixth century.



Fig. 5.25 A carving of a contemplating bodhisattva under a tree with a monk worshipper, meditators and a monkey, Nannieshui, dated to the first half of the sixth century



Fig. 5.26 Drawing of a carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree with a meditator and three Buddha niches, Nannieshui, dated to first half of the sixth century

In the carving shown in Fig. 5.25, several distinct visual elements appear not found in contemplative images elsewhere. Inside the central niche, to the deity's left a small figure stands with one leg across the other and leans against a stick. The identity of this small figure is unknown, but its presence in the niche with the deity has the visual and psychological effect of breaking down the boundary between the secular space outside the niche and the sacred space inside, suggesting that the space of the contemplative figure's cave is shared with this secular figure, rather than being a sacred space entirely isolated from the secular world. To the viewer's left, a monk, larger than the figure in the niche, holds a scepter-like object standing beside the cave-like niche. As argued above, this monk may have represented the commissioner of the image, and the scepter-like object probably signals his high status in a monastery. To the viewer's

right outside the niche, a monkey climbing the tree and the mountains at the bottom of the statue imply that this setting is in nature, rather than in a urban environment. Two meditators covering their heads with their monastic robes are seated in the hollows of the tree, as if meditating in caves.

This example is not the earliest contemplative image associated with meditators. The earliest one is the sculpture dated to 442, nearly two years before Emperor Taiwu's repression of Buddhism in the first month in 444 (Fig. 5.27). The inscription on the reverse reads:

太平真君三年五月三日爲亡母王造像一軀⁴⁴

On the third day of the fifth month of the third year of the Taipingzhengjun reign, [I] had a statue made for [my] late mother Wang.

The inscription does not specify the identity of the figure on either side. Sasaguchi Rei has identified the pensive figure as Maitreya and the monk as Śākyamuni's disciple Kāśyapa, based on a comparison of the iconography with sutra texts.⁴⁵ According to sutras on Maitreya, after Śākyamuni enters nirvana, Jiashe will keep the Buddha's robe and alms bowl and await Maitreya to descend to the world. The lions are often seen depicted with cross-legged bodhisattva, who is usually identified as Maitreya.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Jin sheng 金申, *Zhongguo lidai jinian foxiang tudian* 中國歷代紀年佛像圖典 (Beijing, 1994) 436.

⁴⁵ Sasaguchi 29-30. Lee Junghee believes the monk-like figure on the reverse of the stele represents Prince Siddhartha in pursue of enlightenment; Lee Junghee, "The Origins and Deveolopment" 322.

⁴⁶ *Foshuo Mile xiasheng chengfo jing* 佛說彌勒下生成佛經 T 454.14.423c-425c.

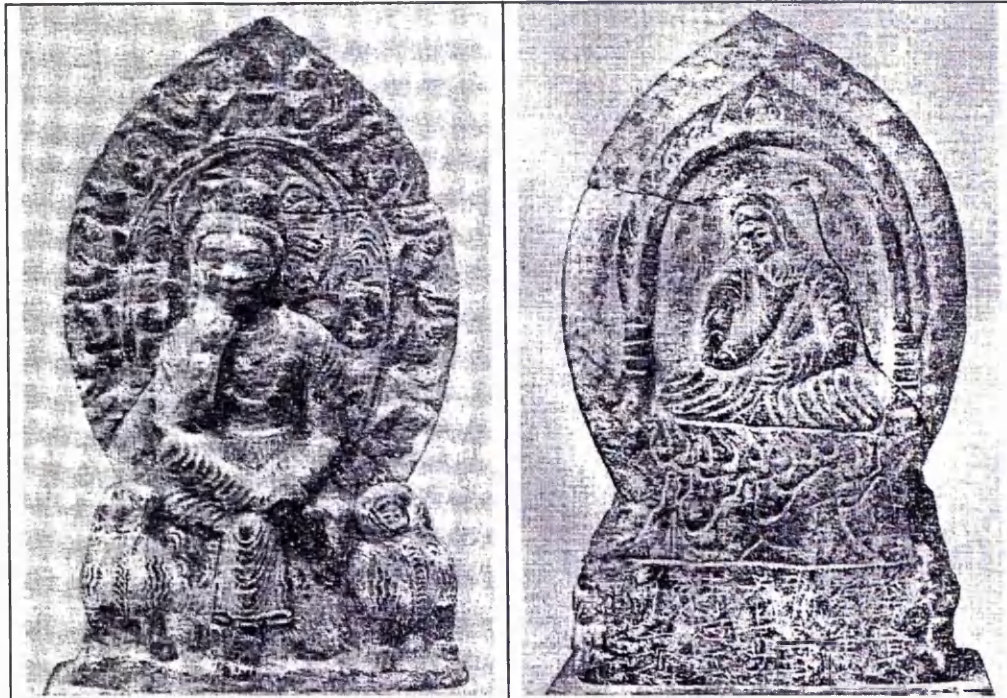


Fig. 5.27 A stele of a contemplative bodhisattva on the obverse and a meditating monk on the reverse, dated 442, provenance unknown

Sasaguchi's proposed identification may well be correct. The flames underneath the niche in which the monk is seated correspond to those described in the *Foshuo Mile dachengfo jing* 佛說彌勒大成佛經. In this sutra, after Jiashe gives a lecture on twelve sutras, flames come out of his body and he enters nirvana. Moreover, the mountains beneath the flames probably symbolise Mount Qishejue 耆闍崛山, where Jiashe dwells and awaits the Future Buddha.⁴⁷ However, the juxtaposition of these two images probably did not become a fixed iconographical convention, as no similar examples from the fifth century have been found, probably because Buddhism was repressed in 444, soon after this image was created in 442.

After the revival of Buddhism in 452, when image-making activities revived, representations of meditating monks appeared in Yungang Cave 7, which was built in the 470s (Fig. 5.28). In the same cave, the cross-legged bodhisattva, probably Maitreya, is set as the primary icon in the main wall and the pensive bodhisattvas are the attendants (Fig. 3.4). Their coexistence in Cave 7 suggests their close iconographical

⁴⁷ T 456.14.433c. “身上出火入般涅槃”

relationship in the earlier time, but the arrangement had changed in the 470s. In this image in Fig. 5.28, more than one monk is delineated.

Four meditators are portrayed under two trees – bags are hung on the trunks, flasks are placed on the floor, and shoes are taken off and put in front of the seat.

This is a depiction of practitioners in the secular world, who would need bags to carry articles, water to drink and shoes to wear. In other words, the image of a meditating monk with the robe covering his head did not exclusively represent Śākyamuni's great disciple Jiashe (Kāśyapa). At the bottom of this image, several mountains are carved, which together with the tree denote that this is a setting in nature.

This scene is highly similar to the one at Nannieshui in Fig. 5.25, only that in the Nannieshui image the meditators are seated in the holes of the tree.

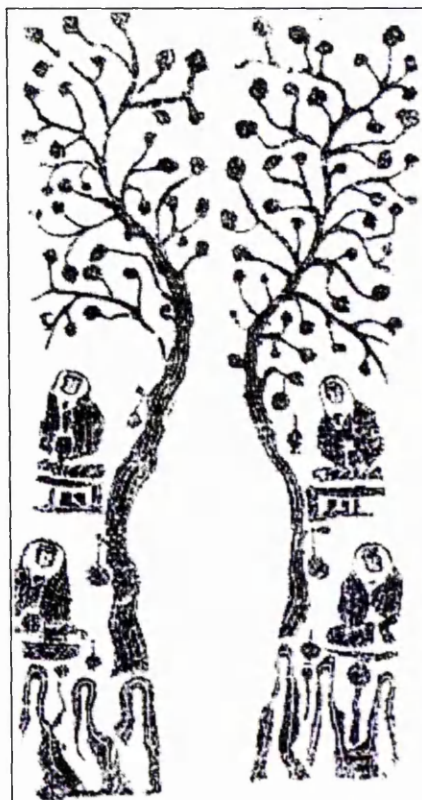


Fig. 5.28 Rubbing of meditating monks carved in the window frame of Yungang Cave 7, dated to the 470s

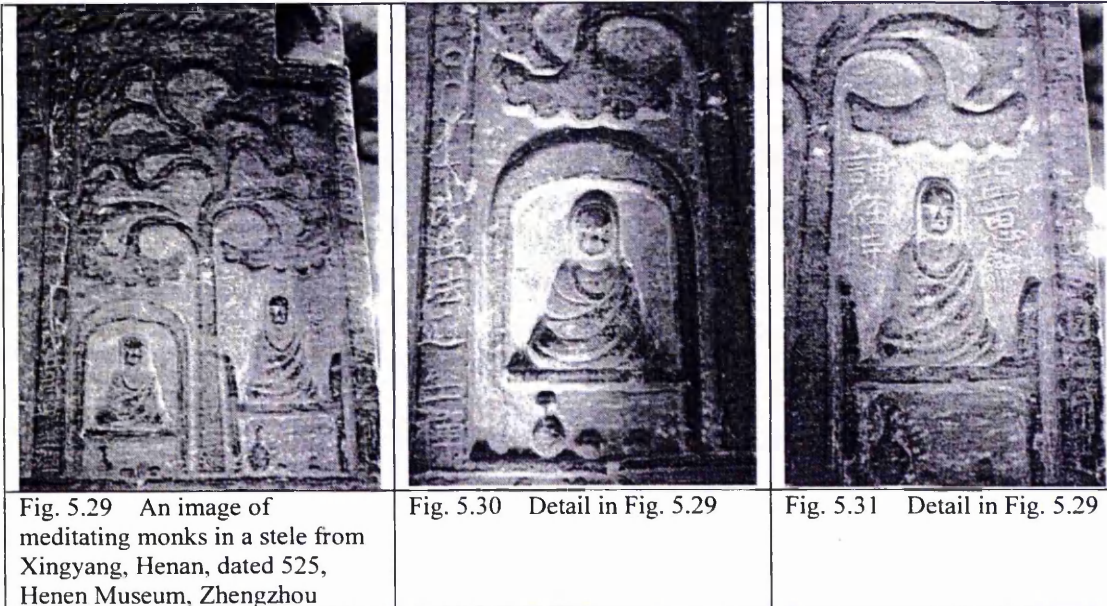
As I have argued, the worshippers on lotuses might have been the images of the commissioners of the carvings. The meditating monks likewise could also have represented monk commissioners who chose the divine thinker as their patron deity and had artisans carve their images beside their patron, the one who pursues enlightenment in nature. An image in a stele, dated to 525, from Xingyang 滎陽, between Luoyang and Zhengzhou, now displayed in the Henan Museum 河南博物院, supports this argument.⁴⁸ The stele bears an image of two monks with their robes covering their heads (Figs. 5.29, 5.30 and 5.31) and an inscription next to their portraits to identify them respectively:

⁴⁸ Henanshen Zhengzhoushi bowuguan 河南省鄭州市博物館, "Henan Xingyang Dahaisi chutu de shike zaoxiang 河南滎陽大海寺出土的石刻造像," *Wenwu* 3 (1980): 56-66.

比丘法延坐禪 Monk Fayan meditating

比丘惠劍誦經時 Monk Huijian reciting sutras

The inscription informs that Fayan, the monk in a cave-like space (Fig. 5.30), is meditating, and Huijian, the monk on a H-shaped platform (Fig. 5.31), is reciting sutras.



As the images and inscriptions cross-reference each other, they show that depictions of meditating monks could refer to actual people. Monks Fayan and Huijian had artisans portray their images in the stele, or perhaps their portraits were added by their disciples and lay followers. This unit also exhibits that monks in the sixth century possibly performed different practices in different spaces – chanting sutras took place in an open space and meditation in a closed space such as a cave or under a tree. The presence of flasks and shoes is reminiscent of the image in Yungang Cave 7 (Fig. 5.28), implying that these meditators are in the secular world. A tree with luxuriant foliage also recalls the Yungang and Nannieshui images, suggesting their practice of meditation and chanting sutras was performed in a natural setting. Artisans and Buddhists at Nannieshui shared similar traditions with those at Yungang and Xingyang, near Luoyang, and

included depictions of meditating figures that may have represented joint commissioners of these steles.

Another meditating monk at Nannieshui is shown in the Prince Siddhārtha image in Fig. 5.6, above the groom Chandaka. It was probably because adherents, particularly monks, valued the practice of meditation and contemplation so highly that they started to depict meditating figures, with whom they themselves would have been able to identify closely, in the same visual space as divine thinkers such as Prince Siddhārtha. At this stage in Śākyamuni's life, he has decided to abandon his princely secular life to seek eternal peace but has not yet attained enlightenment. Bidding farewell to his groom and horse, his last attachment to the secular prince life, is the moment that he shows his determination of discovering the Way to eternal peace. After the farewell, he goes into the forest and starts his life as a monk. Prince Siddhārtha's farewell to the secular world is a parallel, or a metaphor, to a monk's choice of monastic life. Perhaps because of this reason it was favoured and commissioned by the monk who had himself represented in the picture.

5.2.4 Pensive bodhisattva appearing alone

Of the thirty-three images I have documented at Nannieshui, eleven of them fall into this category. Most are dated from the mid to late sixth century. Compared to the deities discussed in the groups above, the pensive deities in this group have rounder faces, thinner and simpler draperies over a more muscular body, and usually appear without other visual elements. Nonetheless, I include in this category two images in which a double tree is carved, as they had transformed from the asymmetrical single-tree setting, which was inherited from earlier visual tradition, and became a symmetrical and iconic composition. The double tree motif was frequently used in the Hebei province during this time and will be further discussed in Chapter Six.



Fig. 5.32 Drawing of a carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a double tree and amongst a landscape setting, Nannieshui, dated to the first half of the sixth century



Fig. 5.33 A carving of a contemplative bodhisattva under a double tree amongst a landscape setting, Nannieshui, dated to the second half of the sixth century

Fig. 5.32 shows a contemplative deity in a cave-like niche set in a landscape. The mountains are arranged as the foreground covering the bottom of the tree trunks; the branches and foliage protrude the edge of the niche so that it is in the innermost space. The carving exhibited in Fig. 5.33 has a more sophisticated pictorial design than the one previously discussed. The artisan devoted much effort to delineate the lush branches and leaves of the trees. Some mountains are depicted in front of the trunks and a beast is squatting at each side in the foreground facing the deity. The visual elements—mountains, beasts and trees—place the deity in a landscape setting. But the beasts might not only present creatures in nature; they resemble the lion-like beings squatting at each side of an incense burner in steles, which subsequently transform this image as an icon as those being worshipped in temples or houses. The monks on both sides of the deity are cut with a standard treatment that gives an impression of this image as a triad and enhances the impression that the pensive figure is equivalent to any Buddhas or popular bodhisattvas, such as Guanyin and Maitreya, who were also being worshipped at this time.



Fig. 5.34 A carving of a contemplative bodhisattva seated in an arched niche, Nannieshui, dated to the mid-sixth century



Fig. 5.35 A carving of a contemplative bodhisattva in an arched niche with several decorative patterns on the surface, Nannieshui, dated to the mid-sixth century

Fig. 5.34 shows a simple design of the pensive image, only the deity is seated in the arched niche, without any iconographical elements or ornament. The design of the piece shown in Fig. 5.35 is also simple but slightly richer in that several floral patterns are carved into the stone surrounding the niche. Another difference between the two works in Fig. 5.34 and 5.35 is that in the latter the head of the deity is not tilted; it is set in a straight frontal position, as a typical iconical image. Moreover, the wicker waisted stool upon which the deity is usually seated is replaced by a tiered platform, a representing of the Sumeru throne (*xumizuo* 須彌座) that was often used to enshrine a Buddha image in the Tang dynasty (Fig 5.35). The different designs in this work, including the upright head, the throne and the absence of additional visual elements such as the horse or tree, all demonstrate that an independent type of contemplative bodhisattva image had emerged, which may reflect the concurrent emergence of new beliefs associated with this image.



Fig. 5.36 Drawing of a carving of a contemplative bodhisattva seated inside a house-like niche, Nannieshui, dated to mid-sixth century



Fig. 5.37 Drawing of a carving of a contemplative Buddha with two bodhisattvas as his attendants, Nannieshui, dated to the second half of the sixth century

The carving in Fig. 5.36 also has a simple structure, but the deity is placed in a trapezoidal shaped niche often seen at Yungang, where it is used to house the cross-legged Maitreya. The deity is seated on a bench-like throne, which is different from those in the contemplative images seen elsewhere. The bodhisattva is also depicted in a frontal view rather than with a tilted head, representing as an iconical image. The iconographic simplicity in these works supports the argument that by this time in the sixth century, the contemplative bodhisattva had become established as an independent and popular deity; additional visual elements in its setting referring to a literary or pictorial tradition were no longer needed to make the setting and the bodhisattva understandable and recognizable. Moreover, at this stage of the contemplative image's development in the mid-to-late sixth century, its status had been elevated to the extent that the contemplative bodhisattva could be flanked by other bodhisattvas as his attendants; in one example, the thinking one is even portrayed as a Buddha (Fig. 5.37).

5.3 Discussion

The above iconographical analysis reveals a close relationship between the images at Yungang and those at Nannieshui. This relationship is especially clear in the case of the first category, in which Prince Siddhārtha with his horse is depicted as a bodhisattva contemplating under a tree. However, although the Yungang images may have served as an iconographic model for the Nannieshui images, the Yungang images never combined these two elements. The pensive figures in Yungang Caves 6, 28 and 30 have a horse but no tree, while those depicted under a tree in Yungang Caves 9, 10 and 12 are without a horse. These images appear in different pictorial contexts and represented different beliefs: the horse is associated with Śākyamuni's biography, while the tree is associated with the Maitreya triad. As shown in earlier chapters, before the pensive figure images were transmitted to Yungang, the contemplative figure had already become endowed with different identities and used in different contexts. Yungang artisans and architects closely copied the images but did not combine the tree and the horse in the same image, whereas the Nannieshui artisans borrowed the elements from the images crafted at the former capital and developed a novel iconographical setting in which the tree and the horse are placed together. These Nannieshui images thus blurred the iconographical boundary between Prince Siddhārtha and Maitreya.

The second category discussed above, the pensive bodhisattva appearing together with worshippers, was a new development dating from the end of the fifth century. Although these images include some visual elements inspired by Yungang, the images found at Nannieshui show a closer iconographical relationship with those found at Longmen, near the new capital of Luoyang, where images show worshippers appearing in front of the contemplative bodhisattva. These images at Nannieshui may have been influenced by the visual tradition represented at Longmen; however, as

discussed in Section 5.2.2, the images from Nannieshui are rendered differently from those found at Longmen. The Longmen images depict worshippers in an array in front of the pensive deity, with grandees leading at the front and attendants bearing canopies and fans, symbols of the social status of their masters, at the rear. At Nannieshui, usually only one worshipper is depicted standing or kneeling beside the deity.

There are several possible explanations for this arrangement. First, artisans were limited by the shape of the frame and the standard format of creating a central niche. At Nannieshui the surface of the blocks is approximately square, and cutting a central niche into the stone surface reduced the horizontal space available for additional visual elements. It would thus have been difficult to delineate a horizontal array of worshippers in the picture. At Longmen, no niche is cut into the stone in the middle of the composition, and the deity and worshippers are arranged on the same surface, providing a larger plane in which more items could be depicted. Moreover, at Longmen the deity is arranged at the side of the composition, rather than the centre as at Nannieshui, leaving more space for other figures.

A second difference between the Nannieshui and Longmen images is that many worshippers at Nannieshui are depicted on a lotus pedestal as reborn beings (Figs. 5.14, 5.16, 5.17, 5.23 and 5.24) No such example is found at Longmen or at other sites. In the adjacent Hebei region, Buddhists shared similar aspirations to be reborn in the Pure Land, as illustrated by the many contemporaneous images found at Hebei in which reborn beings are depicted with the pensive deity. However, at Hebei no images have been found in which worshippers are represented on a lotus, as found at Nannieshui. This comparison suggests that the images from Nannieshui may be some of the earliest to make the connection between the contemplative image and rebirth in the Pure Land, and that donors at Nannieshui represented themselves beside the deity as reborn beings.

The integration at Nannieshui of the belief in Pure Land and in the pensive bodhisattva is further revealed in the new design of another visual element, the tree. In

many carvings, the tree next to the deity is also treated as a transformed being, *huasheng* 化生, as the reborn figures on lotuses. The trees are also depicted emerging from a lotus (Figs. 5.17, 5.18 and 5.19). In the carving shown in Fig. 5.17, both the tree and the worshipper are placed on lotuses, transforming the scene into a divine setting. The bodhisattva is no longer portrayed as contemplating in the mundane world of nature, but instead in the Pure Land. The thousand-Buddha motif behind the setting enhances this suggestion. It is likely that donors believed that by commissioning such an image and portraying himself or a diseased family member in such an environment would secure the donor a place in the Pure Land.

The most obscure image at Nannieshui is the bird standing upon the lotus held by the worshipper as seen in Figs. 5.14, 5.15, 5.16, 5.17 and 5.19. where it occupies the whole space in the upper left corner. In the indigenous Chinese pictorial tradition, birds played multiple roles: it could represent the sun, the messenger of Queen Mother of the West, the heavenly beast symbolising the South, an auspicious being, phoenix, or simply as decorative patterns. Birds frequently appear to serve in these roles in tombs of this period, for example as the auspicious flying beings covering the ceiling of the hallway in Gao Huan's 高歡 (496-547) tomb in Cixian 磁縣, Hebei.⁴⁹ The birds were associated with miraculous powers, probably because their travel is not limited to land, as are humans and most other animals; birds can fly across mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes. Some people thus believed that birds could pass through different spaces, even from this world to another.

In the *Wei shu*, 254 entries about birds are recorded as auspicious signs, including: if a prince is merciful and fulfils his filial piety to the heaven and earth, a three-legged bird will appear;⁵⁰ if the royal ancestral temple is earnestly revered by a

⁴⁹ Zheng Luanming 鄭濤明, "Wanzhang beiqi huanling bihua mu 灣漳北齊皇陵壁畫墓," *Wenwu chunqiu* 2 (2002): 41-48.

⁵⁰ *Wei shu* 2932.

prince, a white crow will come;⁵¹ if an emperor fulfils filial piety and is merciful and people do not kill, a blue crow will come;⁵² if a prince's rank of his nobility is appropriately equivalent to his wealth, a white sparrow will come;⁵³ if a prince takes care of the elderly, obeys rules of morality, and cherishes old things even when he has new ones, a white turtledove will appear.⁵⁴

In Buddhist context, several kinds of birds are mentioned in the *Amitabha Sutra*:

復次舍利弗！彼國常有種種奇妙雜色之鳥
白鵠、孔雀、鸚鵡、舍利、迦陵頻伽、共命之鳥。
是諸眾鳥，晝夜六時出和雅音，
其音演暢五根、五力、七菩提分、八聖道分如是等法。
其土眾生聞是音已，皆悉念佛、念法、念僧。
舍利弗！汝勿謂：『此鳥實是罪報所生。』
所以者何？彼佛國土無三惡趣。舍利弗！
其佛國土尚無三惡道之名，
何況有實？是諸眾鳥皆是阿彌陀佛欲令法音宣流變化所作。⁵⁵

Again, Śāriputra, in that land there are always many kinds of rare and beautiful birds of various colours, such as white geese, peacocks, parrots, *śāris*, *kalavinkas*, and *jīvamjīvakas*. Six times a day birds sing with melodious and delicate sounds that proclaim such teachings as the five roots of goodness, the five powers, the seven practices leading to Enlightenment, and the Eightfold Noble Path. On hearing them, all people of that land are mindful of the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. But, Śāriputra, you should not assume that these birds are born as retribution of their evil karma. The reason is that none of the three evil realms exists in that Buddha-land. Śāriputra, even the names of the three evil realms do not exist there; how much less the realms themselves. These birds are manifested by Amitāyus so that their singing can proclaim and spread the Dharma.⁵⁶

This is not to say that the bird images in the Nannieshui carvings represent those

⁵¹ *Wei shu* 2935.

⁵² *Wei shu* 2937.

⁵³ *Wei shu* 2947.

⁵⁴ *Wei shu* 2953.

⁵⁵ T 366.12.347a

⁵⁶ The English translation is adopted from Inagaki Hisao in collaboration of Harold Stewart, *The Three Pureland Sutras* (Berkeley: Numata Centre for Buddhist Translation and Research, 1995) 122.

mentioned in the *Amitabha Sutra*, but to illustrate that because of the sound of their chirping, birds in Indian culture and Buddhism are believed to be bestowed with special significance affiliated with the heavenly world. The meaning of the birds in these carvings is unclear. However, the pensive deity, the worshipper, the bird and the lotus on which the bird stands had become a fixed iconographical set replicated many times in the sixth century Nannieshui, and therefore most likely delivered explicit denotations that adherents of this time and place would have readily understood.

With respect to the third category, the depiction of meditators together with the contemplative deity reveals another aspect of the contemplative deity's religious associations. These depictions illustrate the intimate relationship between the contemplation represented by the deity and the practice of meditation by the monks. The monk commissioners who portrayed themselves meditating with the deity were probably those who chose meditation as their way to enlightenment. As meditation required a quiet place so the practitioners could concentrate on counting their breath and visualising, a process of meditation, monks in the fifth and sixth centuries often chose caves in mountains, away from the business and noise in cities, to practice this training. This explains why people at Nannieshui usually set the contemplating deity in a natural surrounding.

Finally, the pensive bodhisattva emerged as an independent deity and established icon. At Nannieshui eleven examples of the independent contemplative image have been found, most dating to the mid-to-late sixth century. By this time the pensive bodhisattva no longer needed any other visual elements to provide context or help explain which character he represented. He now stands for himself just as do other widely recognised bodhisattvas such as Mile and Guanyin. In this same period, Buddhists in Hebei were enthusiastically producing the pensive deity as a primary subject in steles, as discussed below in Chapter Six.

5.4 Conclusion

The iconographical analysis reveals that Nannieshui artisans and Buddhists borrowed ideas and visual elements from several sites including Yungang, Luoyang and Hebei. The juxtaposition of these elements shows that at the beginning of the sixth century, the belief in the contemplative bodhisattva had become a mixture of several beliefs. The horse from Śākyamuni's biography and the tree from the Maitreya triad from Yungang; the worshippers from interaction with Luoyang, as a primary icon through contact with Hebei, the reborn beings from the belief in the Pure Land based on the *Amitabha Sutra* and the *Sutra of Immeasurable Life*, and the thousand-Buddha motif from the *Lotus Sutra*. At this site, the contemplative deity had its own distinct character and religious associations.

The appearance of the worshippers beside the deity elevated his status in the Buddhist Pantheon. When Buddhists went to the site where these pillars were erected to pay their reverence, they not only worshipped the deity, but would also see the deity being worshipped in the images they respected. These images may have played a role in educating Buddhists of the miraculousness of this deity and enhanced the belief in him. In the latter half of the sixth century, the image and belief had become sufficiently established that it did not need any additional visual materials to give a hint of its iconographical and textual origins or its religious associations.

Chapter 6: Sites in Hebei

6.1 History of Buddhism in Hebei

The literary evidence of Buddhism's beginnings in Hebei can be traced back to the late Eastern Han dynasty.¹ When the *Fanguang bore boluomi jing* 放光般若波羅蜜經 was translated and brought to Hebei at the end of the third century, the Prince of Zhongshan 中山王 and a number of monks respectfully welcomed the sutra forty *li* 里 south of the city and from there accompanied the sutra with banners and streamers into the city.² In the fourth century, the rulers of the Later Zhao 後趙 (319-51), the kingdom then occupying Hebei, were devout Buddhists and followers of the monk Fotucheng 佛圖澄 (?-348), who was well known for the supernatural power he derived from his incantations. According to the *Gaosengzhuan*, Fotucheng's influence prompted the establishment of 893 temples in Hebei, and 10,000 Buddhists became his disciples.³ In addition to the literary evidence, a Buddha image bearing an inscription with a reign title of the Later Zhao, the fourth year of the Jianwu 建武 reign (338 AD), further supports the existence of Buddhist activities in Hebei in the early fourth century.⁴

Following Fotucheng's death in 348, his disciples such as Daoan 道安 (312 or 314-85) continued to propagate Buddhism in Hebei till the end of the Later Zhao.⁵ Because of their devotion, Buddhism was well developed in Hebei, and monks from Hebei played an important role in the religion's late fourth century development. During the Huangshi 皇始 period of the Northern Wei (396-97), Emperor Daowu 道武帝 appointed the monk Faguo 法果 (exact dates unknown) from Hebei as Chief Monk

¹ Tang Yongtong 湯用彤, *Han Wei Liang Jin Nan Bei chao fo jiao shi* 漢魏兩晉南北朝佛教史 (Xindian: Mile, 1982) 67-70.

² *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 T 2145.55.48a.

³ T 2059.50.387a.

⁴ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1, PL. 6, 7a, 7b; vol. 4, 243.

⁵ T 2059.50.352a.

(*daorentong* 道人統), an official position in charge of all affairs relating to monks and nuns throughout the empire.⁶ In 444, when Emperor Taiwu 太武帝 consulted a Daoist advocate and repressed Buddhism, many monks fled from the capital city of Pingcheng 平城 to Hebei, including the architect of the Yungang Cave-temples, Tanyao 曇曜.⁷ When Emperor Wencheng 文成帝 revived Buddhism in 460, he called Tanyao to return from Hebei to Pingcheng and take up the official post of Chief Monk, now renamed as *shamentong* 沙門統.

Abundant material evidence survives to reflect the extensive growth of Buddhism in Hebei after the end of the repression.⁸ Image-making activities in Hebei had continued even during the repression. Two bronzes bear inscriptions dated in the second and eighth months in 444, after the edict that had been issued in the first month, illustrating the depth of Buddhism's roots.⁹ From the beginning of Emperor Wencheng's reign in 452, throughout the Northern Wei's history, both the imperial family and the court enthusiastically promoted Buddhism. The entire nation indulged in a carnival-like Buddhist atmosphere and in a fervent faith in future salvation. In this context, Buddhism in Hebei continued to flourish.

Modern archaeological findings have delineated the situation and development of Buddhism in sixth century Hebei. In 1953, a peasant in Quyang 曲陽 chanced upon a pit of Buddhist sculptures at the site of the Song dynasty Xiude Temple 修德寺.¹⁰ Archaeologists unearthed approximately 2,000 fragments from this site during 1953 and 1954. Two hundred and forty-seven pieces bear inscriptions, ranging in date from 520

⁶ *Weishu* 3030.

⁷ *Weishu* 3035-37.

⁸ Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, "Hebei zaoqi de fojiao zaoxiang: shiliuguo he beiwei shiqi 河北早期的佛教造像—十六國和北魏時期," *The National Palace Museum Quarterly* 11.4(1994): 1-80.

⁹ Lee Yu-min, "Hebei" 43. The inscriptions dated to the second month in 444 reads: *Taipingzhenjun wunian jiashen eryue bari* 太平真君五年甲申二月八日, on the eighth day of the second month of the fifth year (*jiashen*) of the Taipingzhenjun reign. The one dated to the eighth month reads: *Taipingzhenjun wunian suizai jiashen bayue shierri* 太平真君五年歲在甲申八月十二日, on the twelfth day of the eighth month of the fifth year (*jiashen*) of the Taipingzhenjun reign.

¹⁰ Anon, "Hebei Quyangcheng xinan faxian dapi shizaoxiang 河北曲陽城西南發現大批石造像," *Wenwu cankao ziliao* 1 (1954): 92.

(Zhengguang reign) to 750 (Tianbao 天寶 reign), but mostly dating before the Sui dynasty (581-618).¹¹

Besides the excavation at the site of the Xiude Temple, discoveries of Buddhist sculptures can be found throughout today's Hebei province, including the submission by a peasant in 1969,¹² the collecting by the Zhengding Cultural Relics Reservation Institute after 1953,¹³ the discoveries from Tang County 唐縣 in 1964,¹⁴ from Linzhang County 臨漳縣 in 1970s,¹⁵ from Jing County 景縣 in 1973,¹⁶ from Haocheng County 藁城縣 in 1978,¹⁷ again from Quyang County in 2001,¹⁸ and another piece excavated from Wuyuan 武垣.¹⁹ These pieces together with those held by private collections and museums overseas provide rich material for understanding the Buddhist beliefs of sixth century Hebei.

Several characteristics of these sculptures reveal that the commissioners of these images were not aristocrats, but people of more modest social background. First, the size of the sculptures is humble, averaging thirty to sixty centimeters in height.

¹¹ Luo Fuyi 羅福頤, "Hebei Quyangxian chutu shixiang qingli gongzuo jianbao 河北曲陽縣出土石像清理工作簡報," *Kaogu tongxun* 3 (1955): 34-38. And Li Xijing 李錫經, "Hebei Quyangxian Xiudesi yizhi fajueji 河北曲陽縣修德寺遺址發掘記," *Kaogu tongxun* 5 (1955): 38-44. Yang Boda 楊伯達, "Quyang Xiudesi chutu jinian zaoxiang de yishu fengge yu tezheng 曲陽修德寺出土紀年造像的藝術風格與特徵," *Gugong bowuyuan yuankan* 2 (1960): 43-52. Yang Boda, *Umoretta Chūgoku sekibutsu no kenkyū: Kahokushō Kyokuyū shutsudo no hakogyokuzō to hennen meibun 埋もれた中國石仏の研究: 河北省曲陽出土の白玉像と編年銘文*, trans. Matsubara Saburo (Tokyo: Tokyo bijutsu, 1985).

¹² Zhang Limin 張麗敏 and Sun Yanping 孫彥平, "Dingzhoushi bowuguan shoucang de yipi hanbaiyu fozaoxiang 定州市博物館收藏的一批漢白玉佛造像," *Wenwu chungiu* 65 (2002): 43-50.

¹³ Wang Qiaolian 王巧蓮 and Liu Yuoheng 劉友恆, "Zhengding shoucang de bufen beichao fojiao shizaoxiang 正定收藏的部分北朝佛教石造像," *Wenwu* 5 (1998): 70-74. Chen Yinfeng 陳銀風, Guo Lingti 郭玲娣 and Fan Ruiping 樊瑞平, "Jieshao liangjian guancang wenwu zhenping 介紹兩件館藏文物珍品," *Wenwu chungiu* 6 (2007): 76-78.

¹⁴ Zheng Shaozong 鄭紹宗, "Tangxian Sichengjiancun chutu shike zaoxiang 唐縣寺城澗村出土石刻造像," *Wenwu chungiu* 3 (1990): 21-48.

¹⁵ Linzhang County Reservation Institute of Cultural Relics 臨漳縣文物保管所, "Hebei Ye'nancheng fujin chutu beichao shizaoxiang 河北鄴南城附近出土北朝石造像," *Wenwu* 9 (1980): 65-69.

¹⁶ Shen Mingjie 沈銘傑, "Hebeisheng Jingxian chutu beichao zaoxiang kao 河北省景縣出土北朝造像考," *Wenwu chungiu* 25 (1994): 57-60 and 54.

¹⁷ Cheng Jizhong 程紀中, "Hebei Haochengxian faxian yipi beiqi shizaoxiang 河北藁城縣發現一批北齊石造像," *Kaogu* 168 (1980): 242-45.

¹⁸ Wang Limin 王麗敏 and Lü Xingjuan 呂興娟, "Hebei Quyangxian chutu shizaoxiang 河北曲陽縣出土石造像," *Wenwu chungiu* 6 (2002): 45-48.

¹⁹ Liang Jixiang 梁紀想 and Xing Enze 邢恩澤, "Da Qi Tianbao sannian foxiangzuo qianxi 大齊天保三年佛像座淺析," *Wenwu chungiu* 3 (2008): 77-78.

Compared with stone steles or sculptures excavated from other places in China, which are usually more than one meter in height, the sculptures from Hebei are much smaller. Second, among seventy inscriptions from Hebei I have gathered, there is not a single high-ranking official title attached to the patrons' names. Third, the contents of the inscriptions reveal that the overwhelming majority of these sculptures were carved on behalf of deceased family members. With the religious merits earned from making sacred images, the donors wished that the deceased could ascend to a better heavenly place or to be reborn to a family of standing and wealth. These Buddhists were neither at the base nor the peak of the social pyramid, but were drawn from a wide cross-section of society. They might not have received profound education, and therefore were probably unable to comprehend the intellectual side of Buddhism, but they had sufficient capital to invest in their future happiness or afterlife. They represent the socio-economic stratum that had an established life in the cities and might also have been able to calculate and record simple matters so they could operate their business smoothly. These contemplating sculptures excavated from Hebei were sacred objects belonging to commoners and therefore represent the Buddhist practice and belief of a large part of society, rather than those of cultural elites.

This chapter introduces the Hebei sculptures in two major groups: first, the pensive figures on the reverse of bronzes or stone sculptures as a minor character from 470s; and second, those from the 530s, cut as a sculpture in the round, featuring as a primary deity in iconographical settings. Under each category, I have subdivided the sculptures into groups based on the deity's identity as named in the inscriptions.

Before entering the discussion, it is necessary to first define what I mean by obverse and reverse, or front and back, because in the following argument one of my major points will be built upon this judgment. In Hebei, sculptures are usually carved double-sided, with one side in high relief and the other either in low relief, incised with fine lines, or painted. Inscriptions are often carved on the sides in the low relief. As

Buddhist bronzes or stone sculptures are usually made to serve a ritual purpose, to be worshipped, the sacred images are thus the main subject in such objects. Inscriptions serve a minor purpose as a record commemorating an image-making event, and consequently appear on the “reverse”, and juxtaposed with the less important images rendered in low relief, incised with lines or merely painted. In some cases, donors or artisans carved only the obverse image in high relief, leaving blank the surface on the back. In other cases, the reverse bears only inscriptions or minor images. I therefore define the side in high relief as the obverse, and the side in low relief with inscriptions as the reverse.

In this chapter, I also introduce several double images (Fig. 6.28, 6.29, 6.30, 6.34, 6.35 and 6.36). These consist of two deities cut as mirror images placed at the centre of a stele as a unit and the main subject. The use of this double-image format was not limited to the pensive bodhisattva image: surviving examples include double Guanyins (Fig. 6.10), double Maitreyas (Fig. 6.14) and double Buddhas. Mizuno Seiichi believes that because the contemplative bodhisattvas are seated with a leg pendent and the other crossed, it is suitable to create another in a mirrored position to make a symmetrical composition. Moreover, this custom came from the Yungang Cave-temples, where the pensive bodhisattvas are carved in pairs as the cross-legged bodhisattva’s attendants (Figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12 and 3.13).²⁰ Matsubara Saburō supposes that the double contemplative bodhisattva image was possibly influenced by the images of the Double Buddha, Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna (*Duobao fo* 多寶佛) seated side-by-side.²¹ Sasaguchi suggests that the double contemplative image, especially the type placed under trees, represents Śākyamuni’s spiritual and physical bodies.²² As to the images at both sides of the arches of the niches in Weizi and Lotus Caves at Longmen, they are manifestations of bodhisattva’s

²⁰ Mizuno, “Hanka shiyui zō” 243-44, 247.

²¹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū* 68.

²² Sasaguchi 129-30.

spiritual bodies obtained at the seventh stage of bodhisattva's practice.²³ This theory would also apply to the double Guanyin and double Maitreya images: the mirrored images represent two spiritual bodies of Guanyin and Maitreya.²⁴

However, upon careful examination of the double images and their inscriptions, I have found that Buddhists and artisans seemed to treat the double images no differently from single images: double images were accompanied by similar inscriptions and housed in similar iconographical settings to single images. Moreover, the inscriptions carry no hint of the idea of the spiritual and physical bodies suggested by Sasaguchi. This thesis therefore considers the single and double pensive images as variations on the same theme.

The following discussion begins with pieces in which the contemplative figure is carved on the reverse of the sculptures as a secondary deity, since this type is most common in the earlier time period. I then discuss later instances in which the contemplative figure is carved as a principle figure in iconographical settings.

6.2 Typology

6.2.1 The pensive bodhisattva as a secondary deity

The remaining evidence shows that the contemplating image first appeared in Hebei as a minor deity on the reverse of bronzes, at least as early as 471 (Fig. 6.17). From the beginning of the Eastern Wei (534-550), it began to be carved as a sculpture in the round, but the earlier convention of delineating it on the reverse of a sculpture persisted alongside the new form. In these cases, they were either carved in low relief or painted in colours on the reverse of a sculpture.

²³ Sasaguchi 133.

²⁴ Sasaguchi 133-34.

6.2.1.1 Associated with Guanyin

A bronze of Guanshiyin from Hebei bearing a pensive image on its reverse is dated by its inscription to 484 (Figs. 6.1 and 6.2). On the obverse, a Guanshiyin bodhisattva stands on a lotus pedestal, wears a *dhoti*, an Indian garment worn by men, and holds a lotus stem in his right hand. A ribbon and a triangle-shaped adornment fly upwards from either side of his head dress. A streamer is wrapped around his arms and shoulders.

On the reverse, a contemplating figure with a halo is seated under a bent tree that grows out

of a small bottle. Several straight lines are incised under the pensive figure, which may have intended as the space reserved for an inscription. However, for reasons unknown, this space is abandoned and the inscription is carved in the base of this bronze. It reads:

太和八年七月六日，清信士趙□始，爲亡父母造觀世音像壹軀。²⁵

On the sixth day of the seventh month of the eighth year of the Taihe reign, [I,] pure believer Zhao ..., had a **Guanshiyin** statue made for [my] late parents.

The inscription describes the bodhisattva on the obverse as Guanyin, but it does not mention the figure on the reverse.



Fig. 6.1 A Guanshiyin on the obverse of a bronze from Hebei, dated 484, H. 24.2, private collection in Japan

Fig. 6.2 A contemplative bodhisattva seated under a bent tree on the reverse of the bronze shown in Fig. 6.1

²⁵ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 1, PL. 74, 75; vol. 4, 251.



Fig. 6.3 A Guanshiyin on the obverse of a bronze from Hebei, date 489, H. 22 cm, Hebei Provincial Museum

Fig. 6.4 A contemplative bodhisattva seated under a bent tree on the reverse of the bronze shown in Fig. 6.3

Another bronze, excavated from Pingchuan County in Hebei and dated 489 by its inscription, shows almost identical design (Figs. 6.3 and 6.4) with the previous work. The Guanshiyin bodhisattva holds a lotus stem in his right hand, the outer circle of the aureola is filled with a flame motif. On the back, the tree also grows out of a small bottle as the one in Fig. 6.2. The inscription is incised on the reverse of the base. It reads:

維大代太和十三年歲在己巳七月壬寅朔，東平郡□□□如羅太平息女阿
行，仰惟能仁慈□窮子俯……□□請師造觀世音像□行舍此女形，生思
□□。²⁶

On the first day (*renyin*) of the seventh month of the thirteenth year of the Taihe reign (*jisi*) of the Great Dai, [I, Luo] Aheng, Luo Taiping's daughter....from Dongping Prefecture in reverence for the compassion of

²⁶ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 1, PL. 86a, b; vol. 4, 254.

Capable of and Benevolent One (i.e. the Buddha), ... respectfully requested a master [artisan] had the **Guanshiyin** statue made. May I, [A]heng, discard this female form

The term “Da Dai 大代” was often used as a synonym as “Da Wei 大魏”, the Great Wei. The capital city Pingcheng was also referred to during the Northern Wei dynasty as Daijing 代京.²⁷ The inscription states the bodhisattva on the obverse as Guanshiyin, but includes no mention of the pensive figure on the reverse.

The bronze shown in Fig. 6.5 and 6.6 has a similar iconographical scheme to the two works described above, with a Guanshiyin on the obverse and a pensive figure on the reverse. The contemplative image on the reverse of this bronze has more visual elements than the others, although its artistic expression is awkward and odd (Fig. 6.7). The image on the reverse is delineated only by incised lines. The tree bends the upper part of its trunk and

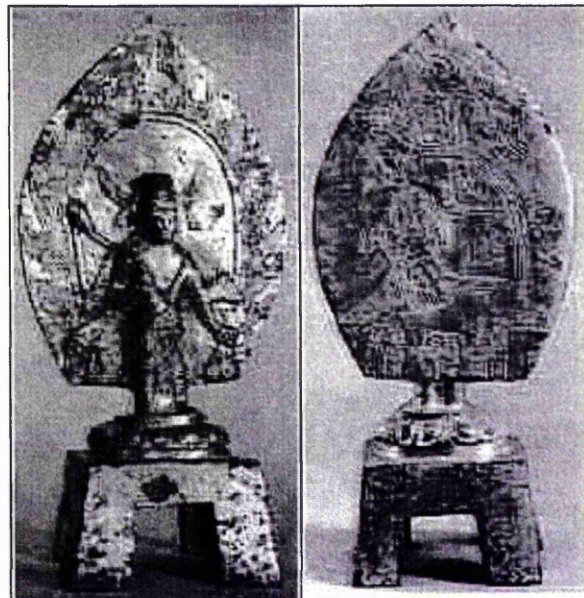


Fig. 6.5 A Guanshiyin on the obverse of a bronze from Hebei, dated 498, H. 25 cm, National Palace Museum Taipei

Fig. 6.6 A contemplative bodhisattva under a bent tree on the reverse of the bronze shown in Fig. 6.5

branches over the contemplative figure. A bird is shown flying over, or perhaps standing on, the bent tree; as I have noted in Chapter 5, bird images are frequently seen in the Nannieshui steles. In this bronze, six figures are aligned at the bottom in three groups of two. Because the lines are too simple, even clumsy, it is not possible to determine with certainty the identities of the figures. The posture and dress of the two figures in the middle—probably seated and wearing headdresses—appears different from the other two pairs, which seem to be standing. A line is drawn around the two figures in the

²⁷ For example, *Wei shu* 173, 21 and 425.

middle, perhaps attempting to delineate a nimbus. If so, these two figures in the middle may represent the Double Buddha (Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna), theme from the *Lotus Sutra*. However, it is unlikely that the donor or the artisan would depict the double Buddha in such a small size; a more likely possibility is that these six figures are the portraits of the donor's family, parents and children, or two eldest brothers and their siblings.



Fig. 6.7 Detail of the reverse of the bronze shown in Fig. 6.6

The inscription is cut in the reverse of the base. It reads:

太和廿二年十一月二日，条縣人吳道興，為亡父母造光世音一區，願居家大小，託生西方妙洛[樂]國土，所求如意，兄弟姊妹六人，常与佛會。
28

On the second day of the eleventh month of the twenty-second year of the Taihe reign, [I,] Wu Daoxing from the Tiao County, had a **Guangshiyin** [statue] made for my late parents. May all my family members, elder and young, be reborn to the wonderful and joy land of the West. May all their wishes be fulfilled. May my six brothers and sisters always attend assemblies for the Buddha's teaching.

²⁸ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1 PL. 88, 89; vol. 4, 254.

The inscriber carved the name of the deity as “Guangshiyin”. This orthography had been used in an early translation of the *Lotus Sutra*, the *Zheng fahua jing* 正法華經 by Dharmarakṣa (Zhu Fahu 竺法護) in 286, in contrast to the more well-known term “Guanshiyin” from Kumārajīva's translation of 406, the *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經. Again, as with the other bronzes, the inscription only mentions the deity on the obverse and omits mention of the deity on the reverse. The identity of the contemplating figures on the back of the bronzes from the late fifth century remains a mystery.

After the 530s, the pensive image was in most cases the main subject on the obverse or cut as a round sculpture, but the convention of carving pensive figures on the reverse of two-sided statues persisted, as in the Wu Yixing Stele 吳益興造像碑, dated 543 (Figs. 6.8 and 6.9). The Wu Yixing Stele is collected by the Baoli Museum 保利博物館 in Beijing, showing a characteristic stone craftsmanship of Hebei of this time, the oval-shaped and pointed *mandorla*. A large number of steles excavated from Quyang bear a *mandorla* of this shape.²⁹ The obverse of the Wu Yixing Stele is cut in high relief and covered in colours. The deity stands on a lotus pedestal with his right hand raised up to his chest holding a lotus bud and the left hand taking a ring-shaped object. This ring-shaped object is often seen held by bodhisattvas of this time, and the lotus bud is a common attribute of Guanyin images as shown in Figs. 6.1, 6.3 and 6.5. The contemplating image on the reverse is painted rather than carved. The pensive figure is seated on a stool supported by a lotus pedestal and steps on another one. The tree beside the deity bends its branches over his head. An elegant plant with flowers is depicted in front of the deity. The tree and the plant together placed the deity in nature.

²⁹ Yang Boda, *Kahokushō Kyōkayū* PL. 1; Figs. 3, 13, 14, 17, 18, 20, 36, 38, 46 and 49.

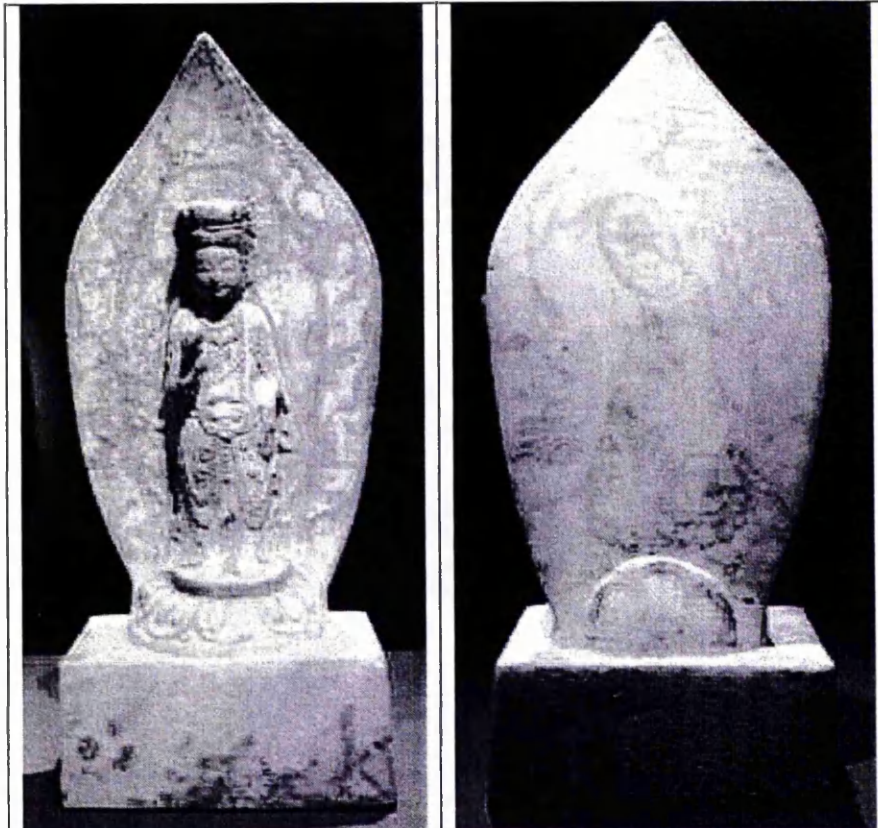


Fig. 6.8 A Guanshiyin on the obverse of a stone stele, dated 543, white marble, attributed to Hebei, precise height unknown, less than 40 cm, Baoli Museum Beijing

Fig. 6.9 The reverse of the stele in Fig. 6.8. A contemplative bodhisattva image is painted on the reverse of the peach-shaped *mandorla*, and an inscription is carved on the reverse of the base.

The inscription is arranged on the back of the base. It reads:

大魏武定元年八月廿三日，佛弟子吳益興，爲亡夫位瑛，造觀世音像一區，願亡夫上生兜率，面覩弥勒，不逢三途，若生人間，得……眷屬調順，逮及无边眾生，行如菩薩，一時成佛。³⁰

On the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the first year of the Wuding reign, [I,] Buddhist disciple Wu Yixing had a **Guanshiyin** statue made for [my] late husband Wei Ying. May my late husband ascend to the Doushuai (i.e. Tusita Heaven), meet Maitreya face to face, and not step on the three paths [of fire, sword, and blood]. If he be reborn to the human world, may he May [our] relatives live in harmony and peace. Also, may all beings of boundless lands behave as a bodhisattva and attain enlightenment at the same time.

³⁰ This inscription was noted during my fieldwork on 21 August 2007 in the Baoli Museum Beijing.

The inscription describes the image on the obverse is Guanshiyin, and the inclusion of a lotus bud in the image follows the standard tradition of Guanshiyin iconography. The inscription on this statue, like those of the earlier bronzes, omits to mention the identity of the figure on the reverse.

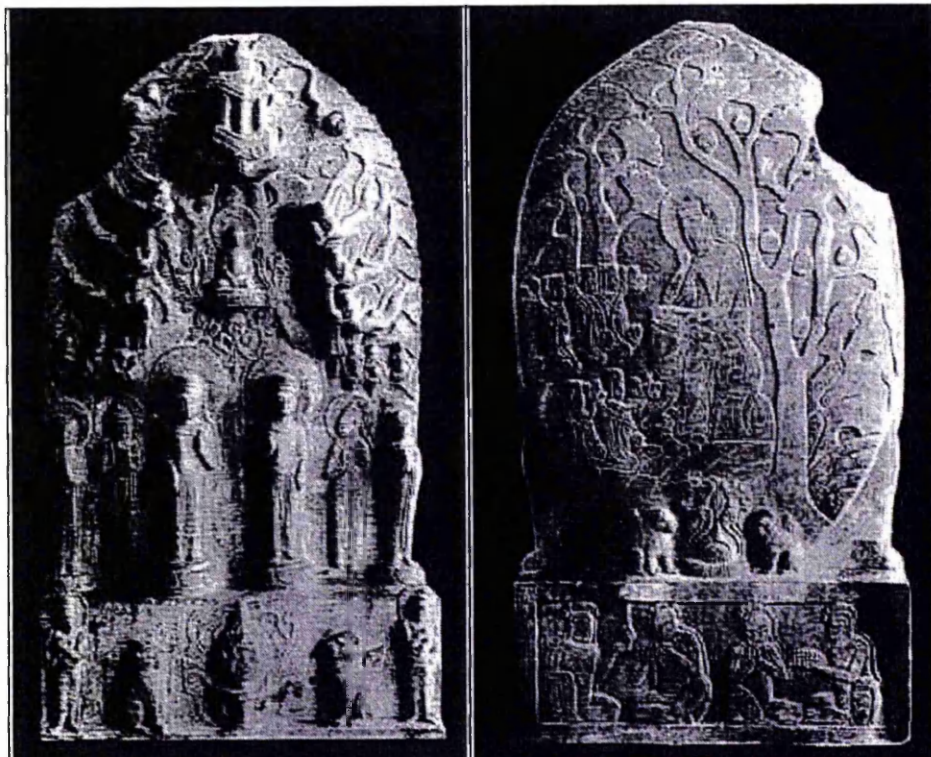


Fig. 6.10 A stele of double Guanyin from Hebei, Northern Qi, white marble, H. 92.25, Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Cologne

Fig. 6.11 The reverse of the stele in Fig. 6.10

Another Guanyin sculpture, cut without inscription but probably from about the same period as the preceding image, also carries a pensive figure on the reverse (Figs. 6.10 and 6.11). Although no inscription identifies the deities on the obverse, the image of a double standing bodhisattva with one hand raised and holding a lotus bud while the other hand is lowered and holds a peach-shaped adornment displays the typical Guanyin iconography of Northern Qi Hebei, e.g. the work shown in Fig. 6.8.³¹ The pensive

³¹ The peach-shaped object in the bodhisattva's right hand is identified as a fan with peacock's feathers fasten to a wicker frame. Diana P. Rowan, "Identifying a Bodhisattva Attribute: Tracing the Long History of a Small Object," *Oriental Art* 47.1 (2001): 31-36.

figure is here provided with a rich iconographical setting, including a large tree in the foreground with *mani*-jewels (*monibaozhu* 摩尼寶珠) between the branches, several lines on the right of the picture representing mountains, one or two trees depicted in a smaller size in the background, and between them, five worshippers kneeling and the deity seated. The scene set in a landscape, away from cities, shows a similar conception to the Nannieshui steles.³²

A group of worshippers kneeling in front of the pensive deity can be seen at Longmen Lotus, Weizi and Putai Caves (Figs. 4.6-17), but the difference between those at Longmen and this image is that the Longmen images usually contain one or two leading characters in the group, while the remainders are attendants or servants holding canopies, fans or banners. In this Hebei image, the five worshippers seem to have similar social status—wearing the same type of caps and clothes and each holding a lotus flower. There is no way to distinguish any difference in their social background from one another. The attire is often seen in mortuary clay figures or Buddhist steles of the sixth century.³³ It probably belonged to officials of average ranking or ordinary people of wealth. Although there is no inscription to identify each of them, these kneeling figures are likely to be the portraits of the donors of this stele as the example of the Zhao Anxiang Stele (Fig. 4.32).

6. 2.1.2 Associated with Maitreya

The sculpture shown in Fig. 6.12, dated 552, is a pentad, a pendant-legged Buddha seated under a double tree and at the centre of the iconographical setting,

³² Denise Patry Leidy believes that this pensive deity “represents the heaven from which the paired bodhisattva and seated Buddha at the front of the alterpiece have descended”. Leidy, “The Ssu-Wei Figure” 26.

³³ Zhongguo shehui ke xue yuan kaogu yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院考古研究所, *Bei Wei Luoyang Yongningsi: 1979-1994 nian kaogu fajue baogao* 北魏洛陽永寧寺：1979-1994年考古發掘報告 (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu, 1996) Fig. 43, PL. 57, 58, 68, 69, 72, 80 and 81.

stepping on lotus flowers, flanked by two monks and two bodhisattvas. The branches of the trees intertwine above the Buddha's embellished halo. An array of *apsaras*, i.e. flying beings (*feitian* 飛天), is carved on each side of the huge nimbus formed by the branches of the double tree. At the top of the nimbus is a stupa. This treatment of the double tree motif as a nimbus is typical of Hebei sculpture. An inscription and four donors—three standing and holding a lotus, and one kneeling and holding an incense burner, are carved on the obverse of the base. The caps worn by the two donors on the viewer's left are the same as the ones worn by worshippers shown in the previous work in Fig. 6.11.



Fig. 6.12 A stele of Maitreya Buddha from Hebei, dated 552, white marble, H 70.9 cm, Ohara Museum of Art, Kurashiki



Fig. 6.13 The reverse of the stele shown in Fig. 6.12

In the same position behind the Buddha's halo on the reverse, a contemplating deity is depicted seated on a waisted wicker stool (Fig. 6.13). The trunk and branches intertwine above the deity forming an arched shape, as if the deity is contemplating in a cave. Below the trunks of the double tree, mountains are carved to represent a landscape.

Similar to the pensive images in the Nannieshui steles and to the image in Fig. 6.11, the contemplating bodhisattva is set in nature, away from cities. The reverse of the base is cut with Spirit Kings (*shenwang* 神王), a common theme in the Northern Qi. The inscription on the obverse reads:

大齊天保三年七月十五日，像主趙元宗、趙蘭興、趙業興，造彌勒像一區，普爲一切有形□同福。³⁴

On the fifteenth day of the seventh month of the third year of the Tianbao reign of the Great Qi, the donors of this statue, Zhao Yuanzong, Zhao Lanxing and Zhao Yexing, had a **Maitreya** statue made. May all beings that have form [receive] the blessings [of making this statue].

This inscription describes the pendant-legged Buddha on the obverse as Maitreya, but omits mention of the identity of the contemplating deity on the reverse.



Fig. 6.14 Two Buddhas seated in half-cross-legged position on the obverse of a sculpture from Hebei, dated 562, white marble, H. 77 cm, Zhengding Cultural Relics Reservation Institute 正定文物保管所



Fig. 6.15 Two contemplating figures seated side-by-side in the central position of the reverse of the sculpture shown in Fig. 6.14

³⁴ Jin Shen, *Zhongguo lidai jinian foxiang tudian* Fig. 190.

Another sculpture of Maitreya bearing a dated inscription from 562 was unearthed in 1978 from Haocheng County.³⁵ This relatively large sculpture, 77 cm in height, is exquisitely executed. On the obverse, two Buddhas in mirror images are seated with one leg placed across the other, an arrangement similar to that of pensive images (Fig. 6.14). The branches and foliage of the double tree form a large aureole adorned with flying beings and small meditating Buddhas. At the top of the aureole, two child-like reborn beings support a stupa. On the reverse of the sculpture, two contemplating deities sit side-by-side in the central position. Two *apsaras* fly above them holding a *mani*-jewel. Beneath the double deity, a Buddha stands in the central niche. Another two niches are cut at each side of the standing Buddha; in each niche, a figure, possibly a Spirit King,³⁶ is seated.

The inscription reads:

河清元年八月廿日，建忠寺比丘尼□□門徒等，上爲國主檀越、邊方一切、七世西[先]亡師僧父母、過去見在緣際路俗有形之背[輩]，敬造白玉弥勒破坐像一軀，通光夫三尺七寸，願使有形之徒，生生世世，值佛聞法，常住快樂。

施地造建忠寺主，賈乾德。³⁷

On the twentieth day of the eighth month of the first year of the Heqing reign, [I,] nun at the Jianzhong Temple, with other [Buddhist] disciples, respectfully had a white jade *Maitreya pozuo* statue, totally three feet and seven inches in height, made for the emperor, Buddhist patrons, all beings of the borderlands, [late] preceptor monks and [our] parents of [previous] seven lives, and relatives and associates of this and past lives. May all beings that have form be able to listen to the Buddha's teachings in every incarnation and be always in joy.

Donor of the land for Jianzhong Temple, Jia Qiande.

Angela Howard has argued that the name "Maitreya" in this inscription denotes the

³⁵ Cheng Jizhong, "Hebei Haochengxian faxian yipi beiqi shizaoxiang" 242-45.

³⁶ Angela F. Howard, *China: Dawn of a Golden Age*, ed. James C.Y. Watt (New York: Metropolitan Museum; New Haven; London: Yale U P, 2004) 266-67.

³⁷ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 4, 301.

contemplating figures on the back, and the identities of the Buddhas on the front are Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna.³⁸ Her identification is based on three assumptions: firstly, in the Northern Wei the double Buddha images were a common representation of Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna; secondly, after 550 the contemplating images were associated with Maitreya worship, especially in Korea and Japan; thirdly, in the Northern Qi the pensive deities were often depicted under trees, and the identification of Maitreya “is further supported by the choice of tree under which the pair sits, a dragon flower tree (Skt: Nagapushpa), the canonical tree of the Buddha of the Future”.³⁹ However, Howard herself has noted that under her interpretation “it is puzzling that two renderings of Maitreya as the central image are portrayed on the back of the altar instead of on the front”.⁴⁰ It is indeed difficult to understand why the primary deity described in the inscription should be depicted not on the front but on the reverse of a sculpture.

However, if we avoid making unwarranted assumptions regarding the identity of these figures and examine the visual and material evidence, we find that “Maitreya” in the inscription in fact refers to the primary subject of this work: the double Buddha on the obverse. As explained in the introduction of this chapter, the purpose of the inscription was to record the image-making event, and because the surface on the back of a base is limited, it would document the most important matters, e.g. date, name of the primary deity, donors’ names, their wishes and dedicatees. The deity’s name in the inscription would refer to the most significant image in a stele, namely the image to be seen and to be worshipped, the one in high relief on the front. Furthermore, as mentioned above, in sixth century Hebei people were fond of double images—the double Guanyin shown in Fig. 6.10 is an example. A sixth-century image of two Buddhas seated side-by-side does not necessarily represent the Śākyamuni and

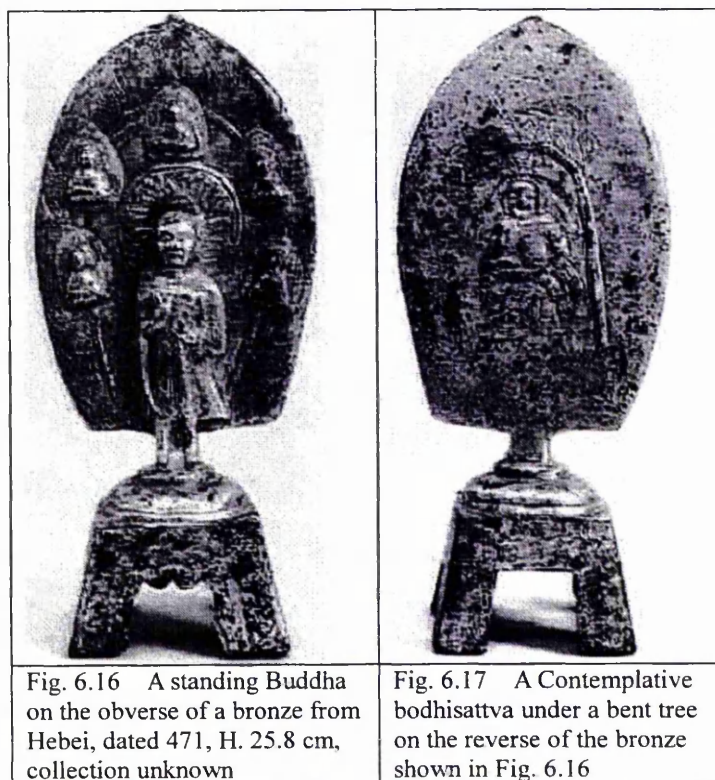
³⁸ Howard 266.

³⁹ Howard 266.

⁴⁰ Howard 266.

Prabhūtaratna pair commonly used in the earlier Northern Wei. Taking note of this, the obvious conclusion is that the term “Maitreya” in the inscription signifies the identity of the double Buddha, while the inscription omits to specify the identity of the contemplating figures.

6.2.1.3 Associated with an unnamed Buddha



The earliest dated pensive image from Hebei is the piece shown in Fig. 6.17 on the reverse of a bronze from 471; on the obverse is a standing Buddha with five small meditating Buddhas in the nimbus (Fig. 6.16). The contemplating figure is seated under a tree which bends its branch over the deity, and shows strong similarity to the images in Figs. 6.2 and 6.4. This bronze bears an inscription in its base:

皇興五年三月廿七日，新城縣民仇寄奴，爲父母造象一軀，願父母上生天上，直遇諸佛，下生人間，侯王長者。清信士仇成佛時；清信士女□□；供主寄奴；佛主伯生；菩薩主阿姬侍佛時；□□僧任侍佛時；韓

雙侍佛時；清信士女韓□□□。 ⁴¹

On the twenty-seventh day of the third month of the fifth year of the Huangxing reign, [I,] Qiu Jinu from the Xincheng County, had a statue made for [my late] parents. May [my] parents ascend to the paradise where Buddha preaches, or be reborn into an aristocratic family.

Pure believer, Qiu [Jinu] attains enlightenment; pure woman believer; Donor, Jinu; Donor of the Buddha [image], Bosheng; Donor of the bodhisattva [image], Aji at the Buddha's service;Sengren at the Buddha's service; Han Shuang at the Buddha's service; pure woman believer, Han

The inscription informs us that the primary commissioner Qiu Jinu came from the Xincheng County, located in the present-day Hebei province, which also suggests the provenance of this piece. Although this twenty-eight centimeter piece is easily portable, and might have been cast in other places and subsequently brought to the location where it was discovered, a comparison with the similar iconographical arrangement in the three Hebei bronzes shown above suggests that it is plausible to identify this bronze as a Hebei work. Except for the provenance, the commissioners, their wishes and the dedicatees, this inscription implies nothing about the identity of the Buddha or the pensive figure. However, Lee Yu-min's research on early Hebei images sheds some light on the identity of the Buddha image: six out of eight bronzes of a single-Buddha image, dated from 443 to 478, are inscribed as Maitreya. Maitreya had been a popular belief in Hebei from the beginning of the Northern Wei.⁴² Besides Lee Yu-min's research, in Matsubara Saburō's catalogue an almost identical image of a bronze dated 498, a standing Buddha on the obverse with five smaller meditating Buddhas in the nimbus, from Hebei is inscribed as Maitreya.⁴³ It is probable that this standing Buddha is also a Maitreya.

Figs. 6.18 and 6.19 show another stele of the Northern Qi period. In this image,

⁴¹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1, PL. 36, 37; vol. 4, 247.

⁴² Lee Yu-min, "Hebei" 1-80.

⁴³ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1, PL. 90; vol. 4, 254.

a pair of pensive deities is flanking a meditating Buddha on the reverse. Although there is no inscription to identify the primary Buddha on the obverse, the unique sitting position of crossed legs suggests that it was intended to represent the Maitreya Buddha.⁴⁴ Pensive bodhisattvas appearing as a pair of attendants closely connected to the primary icon are reminiscent of the images at Yungang Cave-temples. At Yungang, pensive figures usually flank a cross-legged Maitreya bodhisattva (Figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14), although a small number of these instead flank a pendent-legged Buddha (Figs. 3.5 and 3.11). However, in this Hebei piece, they are flanking a meditating Buddha with *mudras* of *abhaya* (fearlessness), and *varada* (wish-granting), suggesting that the use of paired attendant pensive bodhisattvas in iconographical settings came to be more flexible in the sixth century than it had been in the fifth century.



Fig. 6.18 A stele of cross-legged Maitreya Buddha, attributed to Hebei, dated to the second half of the sixth century, H. 86.3 cm, white marble, Cleveland Museum of Art



Fig. 6.19 The reverse of the stele shown in Fig. 6.18

⁴⁴ Ho Wai-kom identifies the cross-legged Buddha on the obverse as Maitreya, the seated Buddha on the reverse as Śākyamuni, and the three seated Buddha images in the foliage on the reverse as “the Buddhas of Three Periods”, namely the Buddhas of the past, present and future. However, Ho does not identify or discuss the pensive bodhisattvas in any detail. Ho Wai-kom, “Notes on Chinese Sculpture from Northern Ch’i to Sui Part I: Two Seated Stone Buddhas in the Cleveland Museum,” *Archives of Asian Art* 22 (1968/1969):34-35.

The work exhibited in Figs. 6.20 and 6.21 is a fine piece of late Northern Qi date. It is made of white marble and is colored with pigments, using the typical stone material and artistic convention of sixth-century Hebei. On the front surface, a standing Buddha is flanked by a monk and a bodhisattva standing on lotus pedestals supported by a dragon on each side. The dragons hold the lotus stems in their mouths, while the lotus flowers appear to be growing out of their mouths. The central figure of the pentad, the Buddha, stands on a roundel pedestal, which could originally have been in a longer stick-like shape, serving as a tenon that could fix the sculpture in a mortise in a base. The base could have born a dedicating inscription stating the identity of the Buddha and the donor's name but now lost. This work carries some qualities reminiscent of Shandong sculpture. The lotus flowers growing out of dragons' mouths and serving as pedestals for the deities, as well as the device of a tenon and a mortise to connect two parts as one were popular designs of Shandong sculptures in the sixth century.

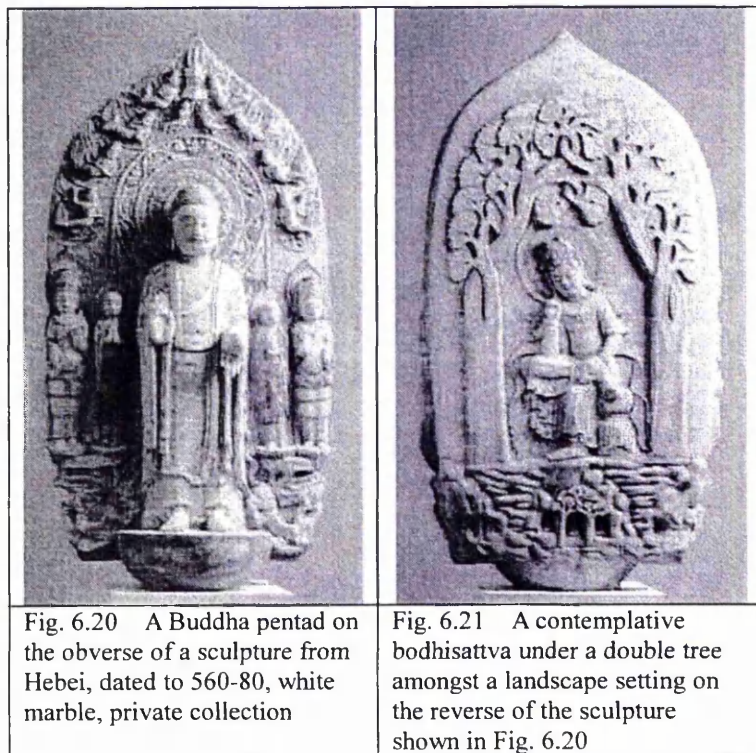


Fig. 6.20 A Buddha pentad on the obverse of a sculpture from Hebei, dated to 560-80, white marble, private collection

Fig. 6.21 A contemplative bodhisattva under a double tree amongst a landscape setting on the reverse of the sculpture shown in Fig. 6.20

On the back, the contemplating deity is seated under two intertwined trees,

usually named by scholars as a double tree.⁴⁵ Beneath the trees and the deity, mountains and rocks are depicted. Again, this deity is surrounded by natural environment as those in Nannieshui and the ones exhibited in Figs. 6.9, 6.13 and 6.11. At the central position in the mountains and rocks, three caves are carved; at the entrance of the central cave, another double tree stands. Inside each cave, a meditating monk is seated.

To summarise, from the first dated bronze of 471 to the end of the sixth century, the visual element of a tree consistently appeared with the pensive deity (Figs. 6.2, 6.4, 6.6, 6.9, 6.11, 6.13, 6.15, 6.17, 6.19 and 6.21). In the early examples respectively dated 471, 484 and 489, the tree was simply delineated and appears singularly and with no branches. In the piece dated 498 (Figs. 6.7 and 6.8), although the artistic skill is awkward, the tree is illustrated with several branches and more visual elements were added such as the worshippers and a bird. After the Eastern Wei, the branches and foliage became increasingly luxuriant; in some later cases, the single tree was replaced by a double tree. In some renderings, artisans made efforts to delineate a landscape and placed the pensive deity within nature, away from artificial constructions, e.g. cities or temples (Figs. 6.9, 6.11, 6.13 and 6.21). This arrangement is reminiscent of the steles from Nannieshui, where a number of pensive deities are also placed within landscapes. This similar design developed in both Shanxi and Hebei discloses an aspect of people's recognition of the religious content of the pensive deity. It might suggest that one of the ways to attain enlightenment is to abandon mundane matters and contemplate upon the Buddha's teaching in nature.

The development of the tree motif, from a single tree to a double tree and to a complex landscape, reveals that the users of Buddhist images did not adhere rigidly to any strict iconographic tradition. The production of images interacted with people's interpretations. From 470s, the pensive image had been associated with Guanyin and

⁴⁵ Yan Chuan-ying 嚴娟英, "The Double Tree Motif in Chinese Buddhist Iconography," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 14.5 (1979): 1-13.

Maitreya but as a minor subject in bronzes and sculptures. This association lasted to the end of the sixth century even after 530s when the pensive deity had been carved as a primary figure in a round sculpture. The following section describes these later examples of the contemplating bodhisattva as a sculpture in the round.

6.2.2 Pensive Bodhisattva as a primary deity

From the beginning of the Eastern Wei (534-550), the contemplative bodhisattva image began to be treated as a main subject in a stele or cut as a sculpture in the round and was extensively produced in Hebei. The iconographical arrangement varied in each work. Placing the inscribed pieces in chronological order, it is possible to see a development from simple beginnings to a greater degree of iconographic complexity. The earliest image has a single pensive figure on a rectangular base; later, a double tree motif was added, and the obverse of the bases were carved with incense burners, beasts and *Vajra-warriors* (*jin'gang lishi* 金剛力士); somewhat later, the pensive figure was depicted with attendants as a triad or pentad; in the final stage, double pensive images can be found. In many cases, the pentads and double pensive images have aureoles (Sk.: *mandorla*) consisting of a double-tree motif embellished with flying beings and reborn beings. Although the iconographical design seemed to evolve, during the last phase of its production in the later half of the sixth century, artisans had a number of options at hand and different combinations of these visual elements coexisted. The level of complexity of the iconography was perhaps commensurate with the amount of the donation. The following discussion categorises the sculptures with the identity stated in their inscriptions: Siwei, Taizi, Longshu and Mile. In each sub-category, the examples will be introduced in chronological order.

6.2.2.1 Inscribed as Siwei

The earliest contemplating figure cut as a primary deity extant today is dated to 539 by its inscription (Fig. 6.22). This is a work of a simple iconographical scheme: a pensive bodhisattva with a huge halo seated alone on a stool supported by a lotus pedestal, two pieces of ribbons flying upward from his headdress, a lotus bud with its stem growing out behind his right shoulder, the deity wearing a shoulder cloak as those in the donor images of this time (an image of the pensive figure wearing similar cloak can be seen in Nannieshui, Fig. 5.2). The inscription on the base of this sculpture reads:



Fig. 6.22 A contemplative bodhisattva as the main and the only subject of the statue from Hebei, dated 539, white marble, H. 46.5 cm, National Palace Museum Beijing

元象二年正月一日，佛弟子比丘尼惠照，造思惟玉像一區，上爲國主、先亡父母、己身眷屬、合家大小、一切有形，同昇妙樂。⁴⁶

On the first day of the first month of the second year of the Yuanxiang reign, [I,] a Buddhist disciple, Nun Huizhao, had a jade **Siwei** statue made. May the emperor, [my] late parents, [all] my family members and relatives and all the beings that have form ascend to [the realm of] wonder and joy.

A statue of an almost identical iconography to the previous work is dated to 540 (Fig. 6.23). The only difference between these two pieces in Fig. 6.22 and 6.23 is the depictions of the lotus flowers on the halos. In Fig. 6.22, the lotus growing out from behind the deity's shoulder is depicted as a bud, whereas that in Fig. 6.23 is a full blossom. The two deities are both placed on simple rectangular pedestals which lack any decorative carvings, although these pedestals originally featured painted images that

⁴⁶ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1, PL. 265; vol. 4, 279.

no longer survive. The inscription of the 540 work reads:

大代興和二年歲在庚申二月己卯朔廿三日辛丑，清信佛弟子邸廣壽，仰爲亡考，敬造玉思惟一區，願亡考上生妙淨國土，合家眷屬，常居富利，七世同沾，有形齊潤，所願如是，像主前鄉令邸僧景。⁴⁷

On the twenty-third day (*xinchou*) of the second month (the first day being *jimao*) of the second year (*genshen*) of the Xinghe reign of the Great Dai, [I,] a pure believer and Buddhist disciple, Di Guangshou respectfully had a jade **Siwei** statue made for [my] late father. May [my] late father ascend to the wonderful and pure land, and all the family members forever live in wealth and at advantage. May [all the associates and relatives of my latest] seven incarnations and all the [beings of] physical forms receive the blessing, as is my wish. Primary donor of the statue, Former Head of the Village, Di Sengjing.



Fig. 6.23 A contemplative bodhisattva as the primary and the only subject of the statue from Hebei, dated 540, white marble, H. 46.5 cm, National Palace Beijing

This inscription describes the statue as a Siwei image. The donor was a lay Buddhist, Di Guangshou, who had this image made for his late father. The name mentioned at the end of this inscription, Di Sengjing, should refer to the devotee, the donor's late father, who once served as the Head of the village. In this inscription, the actual patron Di Guangshou describes his father as the *xiangzhu*, the donor of the image. This shows that the role of *xiangzhu* in the image-making activities could be used not only for the patron who commissioned the image but also for a deceased devotee.

Sasaguchi Rei believes that the two statues of 539 and 540 must have been based on the same model, and they should be “interpreted simply as the representations of the Bodhisattvas pursuing the way to Buddhahood, begun by acquiring *bodhicitta*

⁴⁷ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1, PL. 266; vol. 4, 279-80. Sasaguchi transcribes the character “Di 邸” as “Zou 鄒”; Sasaguchi 153.

(bodhi mind, *puti xin* 菩提心) which is symbolized by the lotuses carved on their haloes".⁴⁸ However, these are the only two examples of the pensive deities holding lotus flowers known today. The majority of the contemplative images do not hold a lotus in their hands.

To trace the possible iconographical sources of the lotus flower in Figs. 6.22 and 6.23, it is worth noting that they are reminiscent of the bronzes dated to 484 (Fig. 6.1), 489 (Fig. 6.3) and 498 (Fig. 6.5). In these three bronzes, the contemplating figure is placed on the back and the deity holding a lotus is placed on the front. The attribute of the lotus flower seems to have a certain connection with the pensive figure since the 480s in Hebei. The contemplative bodhisattvas with a lotus flower in these two stone sculptures probably display an iconographical development from these three bronzes, suggesting that from the 480s to the 540s in Hebei the worship of the pensive deity may have been closely associated with devotion to Guanshiyin.

The iconographical arrangement of the stele shown in Fig. 6.24 is more complex than that of the previous two. It shows a pensive figure cut as the primary deity of a pentad, in a stele that consists of three parts: a double-tree as the aureola, five main figures forming the pentad and the base. The double-tree motif is formed by the trunks, branches and foliage of the trees, a stupa at the top, several flying beings aligned in two arrays (one at each side), and two reborn beings kneeling on lotuses facing the contemplating deity at the bottom of the arrays of the flying beings. A monk and a bodhisattva in a smaller size attend the deity on



Fig. 6.24 A contemplative bodhisattva as the primary deity in a pentad from Hebei, dated 544, white marble, H. 48.3 cm, Metropolitan Museum New York

⁴⁸ Sasaguchi 97-98.

either side, a typical grouping for Siwei pentads from sixth-century Hebei. The base is carved with an incense burner, supported by a figure emerging from a lotus, a lion-like beast crouching at each side of the incense burner and a *jin'gang* standing at each end of the base. These three iconographical elements—a double-tree motif, five, sometimes three, main figures and the base—are common elements of the pensive sculptures in Hebei. The inscription of this piece reads:

大魏武定二年歲次在甲子四月乙亥朔十二日，永□寺尼僧和造石思惟一
軀，上爲國家、師僧、父母、內外眷屬、亡兄、亡姊、法界眾生，一時
成佛，僧藏尼侍佛，道□尼侍佛。⁴⁹

On the twelfth day of the fourth month (the first day being *yihai*) of the second year (*jiazi*) of the Wuding reign of the Great Wei, [we,] monks and nuns of the Yong... Temple together had a stone **Siwei** statue made. May [our] nation, preceptor monks, parents, internal and external relatives, [late] older brothers and older sisters, and all beings of the Dharma world achieve Buddhahood at the same time. Nun Sengzang and Nun Dao... at the Buddha's service.

This inscription discloses that this statue was commissioned by the nuns of a temple. The term “*niseng* 尼僧” is a rarely used in inscriptions to refer to nuns, but in scriptures such as the *Mohe sengqi lü* 摩訶僧祇律, translated by Fa Xian 法顯 (?-422), *biqiuniseng* 比丘尼僧 repeatedly refers to nuns.⁵⁰ Thus the terms “*seng zang ni*” and “*dao....ni*” in the last passage possibly indicate the names of the nuns as Sengzang and Dao.... Moreover, this inscription describes the image as Siwei, and the material as stone (*shi* 石), rather than following the common usage of “white jade” (*baiyu* 白玉), despite the fact that the sculpture is carved from white marble.

⁴⁹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.1, PL. 270a; vol. 4, 280.

⁵⁰ T 1425.22.236a. “如比丘僧、比丘尼僧亦如是”.

The work shown in Fig. 6.25, dated 547 by its inscription, has a similar but simpler iconographical scheme—a single contemplating deity placed under a double tree on the base. The double tree is badly damaged, but from the surviving stone one can still tell that it was originally wound around with dragons; also, a reborn being emerging from a lotus cut in the trunk to the viewer’s left remains. Two dragons wrapping around the trunks is a common design for the double-tree motif in Hebei. The design of the base is also commonly seen in Hebei—an



Fig. 6.25 A contemplative bodhisattva as a main deity of the stele, dated 547, white marble, H. 30 cm, National Palace Museum Beijing

incense burner in the middle, two lion-like beasts and two *jin'gang* figures. The inscription reads:

武定五年，佛弟子邸顯，爲亡父母造思惟像一軀，願先亡歸真，見在獲福。⁵¹

In the fifth year of the Wuding reign, [I,] a Buddhist disciple, Di Xian, had a **Siwei** statue made for [my] late parents. May the deceased return to perfection, and the living receive good fortune.

This inscription describes the image as *siwei xiang*. The donor had this image made on behalf of his late parents and wished that the religious merits gained from making this sacred image could take the deceased to a better place and bring the living secular benefits.

⁵¹ Feng Appendix III no. 49.

The piece shown in Fig. 6.26 is a triad dated to 551. It has a similar iconography to the previous two works—main deities, a double-tree motif and a base. It is noteworthy that at the end of each array of the flying beings, a reborn being is carved emerging from a lotus. The inscription reads:

天保二年四月十八日，佛弟子王□
世，敬造思惟玉像一區，上爲龍天八
部，七世先亡，現在眷屬，願共法界
眾生，下及昆蟻，一時成佛。⁵²

On the eighteen day of the fourth month of the second year of the Tianbao reign, [I,] a Buddhist disciple, Wang ... Shi, respectfully had a jade **Siwei** statue made. May the Eight Divisions of Gods and Dragons, the deceased and the living associates and relatives of [my previous] seven incarnations, and all beings of the Dharma world, including insects and ants, achieve Buddhahood altogether.



Fig. 6.26 A contemplative bodhisattva as the main deity of a stele from Hebei, dated 551, white marble, H. 58 cm, Asian Art Museum San Francisco

The inscription states the contemplating image as *siwei xiang*. The donor of the stele was probably a male lay Buddhist because the term *fodizi* 佛弟子 generally indicates a male. He commissioned this statue not for any particular family members, but for all deceased relatives of his previous seven incarnations and living relatives of this life in general. Dedicating the religious merits of making a Buddhist stele to all relatives in previous and this life was a standard custom in the sixth century Hebei. But unusually in this inscription, instead of noting the emperor and preceptor monks as in other inscriptions, it mentions the *longtian babu* 龍天八部 (usually as *tianlong babu* 天龍八部 in scriptures), the Eight Divisions of Gods and Dragons: *devas* (*tian* 天), *nagas*

⁵² Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 3, PL.392a; vol. 4, 296

(*long* 龍), *yaksas* (*yecha* 夜叉), *gandharvas* (*qiantapo* 乾闥婆), *asuras* (*axiuluo* 阿修羅), *garudas* (*jialouluo* 迦樓羅), *kinnaras* (*jinnaluo* 緊那羅), *mahoragas* (*molouluo* 摩睺羅迦). They are the dharma protectors who have yet been in the pursuit of enlightenment. This group of dharma protectors is mentioned in a number of sutras, including the widely circulated *Lotus Sutra* translated by Kumarajiva in 406,⁵³ and the *Flower Adornment Sutra* (*Dafangguangfo huayan jing* 大方廣佛華嚴經) translated by Buddhabhadra (Fotuobatuo 佛陀跋陀) and others during 418-21.⁵⁴ The appearance of this term in this inscription reveals that ordinary Buddhists also had the knowledge about the contents of sutras, but it is not explained in this inscription that what the donor knew about the Eight Divisions of Gods and Dragons, and why this donor thought it was important to mention them and even replaced the standard use of “emperor, parents and preceptor monks” with this set of Dharma protectors.

Fig. 6.27 shows a triad of the pensive bodhisattva dated to 559. The bodhisattva is positioned at the centre of the iconographical setting. A monk, cut in approximately half-scale of the deity, flanks at each side. A streamer wrapping around and hanging down from his headdress is joined to the monk attendants and reaches the base. A *mani*-jewel accompanied by two dragons facing each other is portrayed at the top of the halo. Two *apsaras* are cut in high relief at each side of the halo. The artisan showed little attempt to express the pleats of the drapery and streamer, and there is no additional adornment on the deity. The simplicity of the rendering of the deity’s body contrasts with the high relief in the halo, giving the halo an imposing impression. The inscription reads:

⁵³ T 262.09.35c.

⁵⁴ T 278.09.703c, 710c, 715b, 718c, 756c and 718b.

天保十年四月八日，佛弟子王俊興敬造思惟像一區，上爲皇帝陛下，又爲七世父母、所生父母，累級[及]諸師，一時成佛。

佛弟子清信女封伏□、佛弟子王迴洛侍佛時，息阿伯仁年四歲，伯年三歲。⁵⁵

On the eighth day of the fourth month of the tenth year of the Tianbao reign, [I,] a Buddhist disciple, Wang Junxing, respectfully had a **Siwei** statue made. May the emperor, Parents of [my previous] seven incarnations, Parents who gave birth to me in this life and all [my] teachers achieve Buddhahood at the same time.

[I,] the Buddhist disciple and pure woman of the faith, Feng Fu, and [I,] the Buddhist disciple, Wang Huiluo, are at the Buddha's service; [our] sons, E Boren is at the age of four and Bonian is at the age of three.



Fig. 6.27 A contemplative bodhisattva triad from Hebei, dated 559, white marble, H. 49.2 cm, unknown collection

The inscription describes the pensive deity as *siwei*. This is possibly a stele commissioned by a family, as the name mentioned at the beginning of the inscription, Wang Junxing, and the male's name inscribed at the end of the inscription, Wang Huiluo, shared the same surname. The female Feng Fu... may be Wang Huiluo's wife, since at the very end two children's names are mentioned.

⁵⁵ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 2, PL. 391b; vol. 4, 296.

The earliest dated double contemplating image inscribed as *siwei xiang* is the piece shown in Fig. 6.28, dated 562. The double bodhisattva is seated under a double tree (one is badly damaged) on a base. The trees are wound with dragons. A reborn being appears on the remaining tree. The inscription reads:

河清元年六月十日，劉愍寺尼曇籍，敬造雙思惟白玉像一區，上為皇帝祚隆，下後為七世先亡現存直佛，有形之類，等同斯願。⁵⁶

On the tenth day of the sixth month of the first year of the Heqing reign, [I], nun Tanji at the Liumin Temple respectfully had a white jade double **Siwei** statue made. May the imperial throne prosper. May the deceased and living [associates and relatives] of [my previous] seven incarnations be at the presence of the Buddha. All beings that have form are united in this wish.

The inscription describes the contemplating deities as a “double Siwei image” (*shuang siwei xiang* 雙思惟像). It was commissioned by a nun, and not dedicated to any particular devotee but for the prosperity of the emperor and the relatives in her previous seven incarnations.

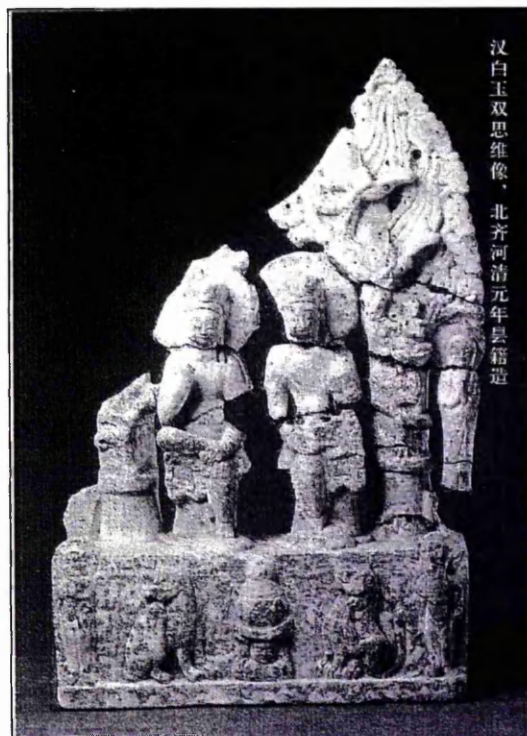


Fig. 6.28 A double contemplative bodhisattva as the primary subject of a stele from Hebei, dated 562, white marble, H. 49.5 cm, National Palace Museum Beijing

⁵⁶ Feng Appendix III no. 109.

Another example of the double contemplating bodhisattva inscribed as *siwei xiang* is dated to 576 (Fig. 6.29). It is badly damaged in that the upper part of the double tree is missing. But from the remaining stone one still can see that two reborn beings emerging from the lotus flowers growing out of the dragons' mouths are carved on the trunks of the double tree. The inscription reads:



Fig. 6.29 A double contemplative bodhisattva from Hebei, dated 576, white marble, H. 30 cm, Hebei Municipal Museum

大齊武平七年四月八日，邸文舉、邸文休、妹靖勝、妹娥容，姊妹兄弟四人，爲亡父敬造思維[惟]像一區。⁵⁷

On the eighth day of the fourth month of the seven year of the Wuping reign, Di Wenju, Di Wenxiu, younger sister [Di] Jingsheng and younger sister [Di] Erong, four sisters and brothers, respectfully had a **Siwei** statue made for [our] late father.

This sculpture was commissioned by four brothers and sisters for their late father. The rendering of the character *wei* 維 in *siwei* with a silk radical stands in contrast to the standard use of the heart radical in other inscriptions.

6.2.2.2 Inscribed as Crown Prince

Of the seventy extant inscriptions of the contemplating statues from Hebei of the sixth century I have collected, four state the identity of the deity as *taizi*, literally the crown prince, referring to the young prince Siddhārtha. The earliest reference is the Guo Yuanqing Stele 郭元慶造像碑 dated to 492 from Gansu, which shows a horse kneeling beside the pensive Buddha figure. As noted in the Chapter One, because the

⁵⁷ Feng Appendix III no. 174.

kneeling horse is a unique character in the narrative in Śākyamuni's biographies, it helps to identify the scene as Prince Siddhārtha's farewell to his groom and ride.

The earliest pensive statue inscribed as *taizi* is dated 545. The picture of this statue has not yet been published, but this work is described as “*siwei xiang*” in Feng Hejun's book.⁵⁸ The inscription reads:

大魏武定三年歲在乙丑三月庚辰朔十八日丙申，上曲陽城內邸金龍，上為皇家，亡過父母，亡兒眷屬，敬造白玉太子思唯[惟]像一區，願國祚永康，過往父母，托生淨妙，亡兒捨穢從真，彌勒三會願在初唱，一切含生像彼澤津，皆同斯善，所願如是。比丘寶琳，比丘寶訥。⁵⁹

On the eighteenth day (*bingshen*) of the third month (the first day being *genchen*) of the third year of the Wuding reign of the Great Wei (the year being *yichou*), Di Jinlong from Upper Quyang respectfully had a white jade statue of the **contemplating Crown Prince** made for the imperial family, [my] late parents, [my deceased] son and relatives. May the empire prosper in eternal peace, my late parents be reborn to the [realm of] purity and wonderland, my deceased son discard the filthy and follow the true, and when the three Maitreya assemblies begin, [we may all join] the first one. May all beings receive the benefits from making this image and are united in this wish. These are my wishes. Monk Baolin; Monk Baoli.

The donor of this statue was a lay Buddhist. He respectfully had a statue of the crown prince made. Besides the crown prince, this inscription also mentions the Three Maitreya Assemblies, which according to the Maitreya sutras when the Future Buddha Maitreya descends to the world, he will convene three assemblies in which he will preach, and people who attend and listen to he preaching will attain enlightenment.⁶⁰ In the mid-fifth century, the belief in the Three Maitreya Assemblies had appeared in Hebei—the earliest inscription is dated to 442.⁶¹ From the end of the fifth century, this belief started to prevail in Hebei.⁶² In many inscriptions, the wish of attending one of

⁵⁸ Feng Appendix III no. 42.

⁵⁹ Feng Appendix III no. 42.

⁶⁰ *Foshuo Mile xiasheng jing* 佛說彌勒下生經 T 453.14.42b-c.

⁶¹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 1, PL.23, 24a, 24b; vol. 4, 245.

⁶² Hou Xudong 侯旭東, *Wu liu shiji beifang mingzhong fojiao xinyang* 五、六世紀北方民眾佛教信仰

the assemblies was stated regardless of the identities of the statues commissioned.

Another contemplating image inscribed as *taizi siwei xiang* is dated to 546. The photograph of this statue has not yet been published. I examined this statue at the Hengshui Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics (Hengshuishi wenwuju 衡水市文物局) on August 15, 2007. It is a single image of a pensive deity similar to those in Figs. 6.22 and 6.23, except that there is no lotus in this piece. Its upper body and right leg are missing, but the base is intact. The inscription reads:

大魏武定四年歲次丙寅，安德令李長君，養[仰]爲皇考皇妣，敬造太子思惟像一區，願福踵考妣，長升妙樂，又願現在眷屬，常與善會，四恩三有，咸同上願。⁶³

In the fourth year of the Wuding reign of the Great Wei (the year being *bingyin*), [I,] the magistrate of Ande District (*jun*), Li Changjun, respectfully had a statue of the **contemplating Crown Prince** made for [my] late parents. May the benefits [from making this image] touch upon [my] late parents that they will eternally ascend to [the realms] of wonder and joy. Also, may [my] living relatives participate in good [Buddhist] assemblies, and four *xi* and three kinds of existence will all fulfil the above wishes.

The inscription relates that the donor was a local official and lay Buddhist who had the statue made and devoted the religious merits to his late parents. At the end of the inscription, the term *siensanyou* 四恩三有 also appears in the inscription of a contemplating statue commissioned by Daoqi 道起, dated 539.⁶⁴ It refers to four kinds of compassion: one's mother, one's father, the Buddha and one's dharma teacher in the *Zhengfa nianchu jing* 正法念處經 translated by Prajñāruci (Boreliuzhi 般若流支, arrived at China in 516), during 538-41 in the Eastern Wei capital Ye 鄴 in Hebei.⁶⁵ *Sanyou* refers to three kinds of existence, the beings or things existing in the realm of

(Beijing, 1998) 182.

⁶³ Shen Mingjie 沈銘杰, "Hebeisheng Jingxian chutu beichao zaoxiangkao 河北省景縣出土北朝造像考" *Wenwu chunqiu* 文物春秋 25 (1994): 57.

⁶⁴ Feng Appendix III no. 22.

⁶⁵ T 721.17.1a-417c

desire (*yujie* 欲界), the realm of form (*sejie* 色界), and the realm of formless (*wusejie* 無色界).⁶⁶

Another contemplating statue stated as *taizi* by its inscription is dated to 561 (Fig. 6.30). It was originally a sculpture of double contemplating deity under a double tree, but now only a deity and a tree remain. The inscription reads:

大齊皇建二年三月八日，清信女
邸洛姬，爲父母造玉太子像一
區，及一切有形，俱時成道。⁶⁷

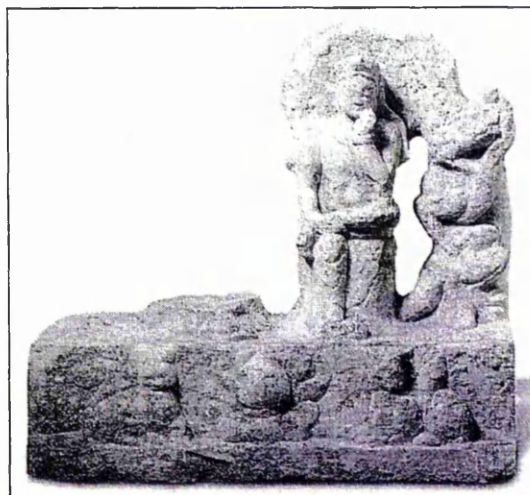


Fig. 6.30 A sculpture of a double contemplative bodhisattva (only one remaining) from Hebei, inscribed as “*taizi*”, dated 561, white marble, H. 18 cm, National Palace Museum Beijing

On the eighth day of the third month of the second year of the Huangjian reign of the Great Qi, [I.] a pure believer woman Di Luoji had a jade statue of the **Crown Prince** made for [my] parents. May [my parents and] all beings attain enlightenment at the same time.

This short inscription records that the donor of this statue was a female lay Buddhist. She had this crown prince statue made for her parents. As mentioned above, people from the second half of the sixth century in Hebei were so fond of double images that this artisan or the donor had a Prince Siddhārtha statue carved in a double image.

The latest work inscribed as *taizi* from Hebei is dated to 596 in the Sui dynasty (581-618). The photo of this image has not yet been published, but it is described as a double pensive image by Feng hejun.⁶⁸ The inscription reads:

開皇十六年四月八日，張天保爲亡父母造太子雖遺[思惟?]象一區。⁶⁹

⁶⁶ William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index* (1937; New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2005) 70.

⁶⁷ Feng Appendix III no. 104.

⁶⁸ Feng Appendix III no. 211.

⁶⁹ Feng Appendix III no. 211.

On the eighth day of the fourth month of the sixteen year of the Kaihuang reign, Zhang Tianbao had a statue of the **contemplating Crown Prince** made for [my] late parents.

The inscriber was probably not familiar with the term or the characters of *siwei*. As the pronunciations of *siwei* and *suiyi* are similar, the artisan carved the characters of *siwei* 思惟 as *suiyi* 雖遺.

6.2.2.3 Inscribed as Longshu siwei

There are four known inscriptions that identify the statues as *Longshu siwei xiang* 龍樹思惟像, respectively dated 547, 552, 555 and 558 (The term Longshu will be discussed in Section 8.6). However, the statue dated 547 is missing; only the inscription is documented in the local gazetteer, *Dingxian zhi* 定縣志.⁷⁰ Since the statue is lost, the iconography of the deity is unknown and thus cannot be discussed here. The one dated 552 is the only sculpture of *Longshu siwei* with a published photo (Fig. 6.31).⁷¹ This sculpture is badly damaged, but the main deity, the contemplating figure, and the base survive. From the remaining stone, one still can tell that there was originally a double tree next to the deity, as the lower parts of the trunks and a small part of the dragon's body on the trunk to the viewer's left remain. The inscription reads:



Fig. 6.31 A contemplative bodhisattva as the primary deity of a stele from Hebei, dated 552, white marble, H. 47 cm, National Palace Museum Beijing

⁷⁰ “Eastern Wei: Fengle Qidi ersi zaoxiangji 東魏·豐樂七帝二寺造像記” *Dingxian zhi* (first edition) *Jinshi pian* 定縣志(一編) 金石篇上, *Zhongguo lidai shike huibian dianziban* 中國歷代石刻彙編電子版 25 September 2008.

⁷¹ Hu Guoqiang 胡國強, “Bei Qi Tianbao sannian zai siwei xiang 北齊天保三年造思惟像,” *Wenwu* 5 (2003): 75-81.

天保三年三月十五日，藁地禪房道人寶副，敬造白玉龍樹思唯像一區，上爲師僧父母，國王帝主，後爲邊地，速登上道，發願如是。⁷²

On the fifteenth day of the third month of the third year of the Tianbao reign, [I,] Monk Baofu at the Gaodi Monastery respectfully had a white jade statue of the **contemplating Longshu** carved. May preceptor monks, [my] parents, the emperor, and [all beings] at the border lands attain the supreme path soon. These are my wishes.

In this inscription, the character *wei* 唯 is used rather than the more commonly used character, *wei* 惟.

The photo of the statue dated to 555 has not yet been published, but I examined this piece on August 14 2007 during my field work at the Hebei Cultural Relics Preservation Institute (Hebei wenwu baoguan suo 河北文物保管所). This is a fragment of a triad of the contemplating deity under a double tree. The inscription reads:

天保六年七月十八日，佛弟子邸龍副息女阿盡，其年四月四日，不幸身喪，命臨受[壽]終，仗憑父母姊妹等，投奔三寶，願造常經一部、白玉像一區，父子天性，依口稱許，其年七月十五日，造白玉龍樹思惟、常經一部，並各造迄，自今以始，惟願亡女，神照淨境，托生佛國，見[現]家眷屬，同沾洪澤。⁷³

On the eighteen day of the seventh month of the sixth year of the Tianbao reign, [I,] a Buddhist disciple, Di Longfu [record and commemorate this]: in this year, on the fourth day of the fourth month, [my] daughter Ajin sadly passed away. At her dying breath, with help from [her] parents and sisters, she turned to the Three Treasures (the Buddha, the dharma and the monks) and vowed to have a sutra and a white jade statue made [on her behalf]. [I] fulfilled [her] vow, for the [loving] nature between parents and their daughter. On the fifteenth day of the seventh month of this same year, a white jade statue of the **contemplating Longshu** and a sutra (*changjing*) were both completed respectively. May from this moment on my late daughter's spirit attain the Pure Land and be reborn to the Buddha's realm. May [my] present relatives also receive the immense blessings [of making the sutra and the

⁷² Feng Appendix III no. 75.

⁷³ Feng Appendix III no. 84.

statue].

This is an unusual inscription for sixth century Hebei, as it explicitly records a story of why the statue was made. This statue was cut on behalf of the commissioner's deceased daughter to fulfill the vow she made on her deathbed. The inscription also notes that the donor commissioned not only a statue but also a sutra, and the inscription was added three days after these two items were completed rather than immediately after the sculpture was finished. This record informs us of an aspect of the custom and procedure of commissioning a Buddhist statue in sixth century Hebei. It probably operated like this: the commissioner placed an order at a workshop, the workshop crafted the sculpture accordingly. When the sculpture was finished, the workshop informed the commissioner, the commissioner composed the inscription he or she wished to inscribe and sent it to the workshop, and the inscriber carved the texts in the base of the sculpture.

In this inscription, the meaning of *changjing* is unclear. Before the sixth century in indigenous Chinese texts, *changjing* refers to “unchangeable law and regulation” (examples can be found in *Guanzi* 管子 and *Zhanguo ce* 戰國策), or “constant principles” (instances can be seen in *Hanshu*).⁷⁴ But these two explanations do not seem to fit into the context in this inscription. Since the term *changjing* is followed by the quantifier phrase *yibu*, the reference is almost certainly to a classical text, which in the Buddhist context would presumably be a sutra. However, what it specifically refers to is unclear. An alternative possibility is that the phrase is a mistake for the title of the sutra *Wuchang jing* 無常經, *Scripture on Impermanence*.⁷⁵ Later Buddhist texts sometimes abbreviate *Wuchang jing* to *Chang jing*,⁷⁶ but there are no parallels from such an early date.

⁷⁴ Luo Zhufeng vol.3, 743..

⁷⁵ *Chu sanzang jiji* T 2145.55.28b.

⁷⁶ Personal communication from Professor Chang A-tsai 鄭阿財. 10 Nov 2008.

6.2.2.4 Inscribed as Mile (Maitreya)

Fig. 6.32 shows a statue inscribed as Mile from Hebei, dated 557 by its inscription. A single Siwei sits on a simple rectangular base without any decoration. A large halo is carved behind the deity's head, and a long streamer winds around his shoulders and arms and finally reaches the base. The inscription is cut on the right and the reverse surface of the base. It reads:

大齊天保八年歲次丁亥五月己丑朔十五日，比丘僧□，敬造弥勒一軀，□皇帝陛下、太皇太后、州郡令長、師僧、父母、僧慶所造像之福，普為法界有形蠢動眾生，餓鬼地獄，皆令解脫，煞盜行慈，虎狼食草，汲迸還鄉，分離慶集，佛世時至，□王迴入真正道，法界有形，莫不蒙此福，離苦亂，弥勒下生，居[俱]時作佛。滄州樂陵郡陽信縣馬子元寺比丘僧慶敬造供養。⁷⁷

On the fifteenth day of the fifth month (the first day being *jichou*) of the eighth year (*dinghai*) of the Tianbao reign of the Great Qi, [I.] Nun Seng..., respectfully had a **Maitreya** [statue] made for the emperor, Empress Dowager, governors of provinces and prefectures, preceptor monks and [my] parents..... May the merits earned from making the image by Sengqing benefit all beings that have form in the Dharma World and liberate the hungry ghosts and those [suffering] in hell. May fierce robbers behave mercifully, tigers and wolves eat grass, all return to their hometown, those being apart [soon] celebrate their reunion, the time of the Buddha come. Mayenter the true noble path and [all beings] that have form in the Dharma World benefit from the merits, be away from misery and turmoil. May Maitreya descend [to the world] and [we all] attain enlightenment at the same time. Monk Sengqing at the Maziyuan Temple in the Yangxin County, Leling Prefecture, Cangzhou, respectfully [had the statue]



Fig. 6.32 A contemplative bodhisattva statue from Hebei, dated 557, white marble, Cangzhou Municipal Museum, Hebei

⁷⁷ This inscription was noted during my fieldwork on August 15 2007.

made and provided offerings.

The iconography of this statue is identical to those inscribed as *siwei* or *taizi*, but in this case the inscription defines the figure as Maitreya.

6.2.2.5 Without a named identity

Of seventy inscriptions of the contemplating statue from Hebei, twenty-six do not state the identity of the deity. They are usually only inscribed as “statue”, “jade statue” or “white jade statue” (*yu xiang*, *baiyu xiang*), the latter two terms referring conventionally to the white marble from which the statues are carved. But this is not unusual in the sixth century. A large number of inscriptions from the fifth and sixth centuries do not explicitly indicate the identity of the primary deity: for example the single Buddha statue commissioned by Monk Daoxian 道顯 in 544, the bodhisattva statue by Hou Shiqian 侯市遷 in 550 and the double Buddha statue by Zhang Jingzun 張敬遵 in 571:

武定二年五月十七日，比丘道顯敬造白玉像一軀，上爲皇帝陛下，師僧父母，邊地含生同獲妙果⁷⁸

On the twenty-seventh day of the fifth month of the second year of the Wuding reign, Monk Daoxian respectfully had a white jade statue made. May the emperor, preceptor monks, [my] parents and sentient beings at the borderland all receive marvelous fruits.

天保一年二月八日，侯市遷爲亡息造像一軀，願賜託生先[西]方妙洛[樂]國土。⁷⁹

On the eighth day of the second month of the first year of the Tianbao reign, Hou Shiqian had a statue made for [my] deceased son. May [he] be granted rebirth in Marvellous Western Realm.

⁷⁸ Feng Appendix III no. 39.

⁷⁹ Feng Appendix III no. 61.

武平二年二月八日，張敬遵仰爲亡父敬造白玉像二區，願亡者生天，見[現]存得福。⁸⁰

On the eighth day of the second month of the second year, Zhang Jingzun respectfully had two white jade statues made. May the deceased ascend to heaven and the living receive blessings.

There are several likely explanations of why some donors did not state the deities' name in the inscriptions. To the donors, the main motivation could have been to earn the religious merits obtained by commissioning any sacred image, with little concern for which specific deity. It is also possible that at the time the deity was commissioned it was very popular and recognised by all Buddhists so that it was unnecessary to specify the deity's name.

The first piece introduced under this sub-category is dated to 559 by its inscription (Fig. 6.33). The deity also has a huge halo similar to the one in Fig. 6.27, but the iconographical arrangement in the halo is different. In this piece, it is a stupa at the top of the halo not a *mani*-jewel as in Fig. 6.27. It is noteworthy that two meditating monks respectively sit in a small cave-like niche on the obverse of the base, which is reminiscent of the meditating monks in pensive images from Nannieshui. The size of this stele is relatively larger than others from Hebei, 75 cm in height. This probably can be explained by its sponsorship: it was commissioned by a *yiyi* 邑義 Buddhist organisation of 18 or so people. The inscription reads:



Fig. 6.33 A contemplative bodhisattva triad from Hebei, dated 559, white marble, H. 75 cm

⁸⁰ Feng Appendix III no. 150.

天保十年十月六日，邑人十八人造玉像一區，上爲帝陛下邑義人等，俱時成佛。佛堂主解□、菩薩主解留安、菩薩主解清雀、金□主解飛鳥、金□主解伏興、光耀主解伏姜、都館主解伏恩、都維那解仲□、維那李但姜、維那宋勝□、邑子楊世朱、邑子宋敬姿、邑子張維光、邑子張練姜、邑子蘇延姬、邑子趙雙姬、邑子□□、邑子李太妃、邑子王道妃、邑子張右、邑子□元姿、邑子張京妃、邑子張妙暈、道場主解□安、比丘尼法延、供養主解黑、邑子解僧季、像主解□昌、像主解道仁

On the sixth day of the tenth month of the tenth year of the Tianbao reign, the 18 members of the *yiyi* [organisation] had a jade statue made. May the emperor above and below him, the *yiyi* members attain enlightenment at the same time. Donor of the Buddha hall, Xie...; Donor of the bodhisattva image, Xie Liuan; Donor of the bodhisattva image, Xie Qingque; Donor of the golden ..., Xie Feinia; Donor of the golden ..., Xie Fuxing; Donor of the light, Xie Fujiang; Chief donor of the pavilion, Xie Fuen; Chief *weina*, Xie Zhong...; *Weina*, Li Danjiang; *Weina*, Song Sheng...; *Yizi*, Yang Shizhu; *Yizi*, Song Jingzi; *Yizi*, Zhang Weiguan; *Yizi*, Zhang Lianjiang; *Yizi*, Su Yanji; *Yizi*, Zhao Shangji; *Yizi*,; *Yizi*, Li Taifei; *Yizi*, Wang Daofei; *Yizi*, Zhang you; *Yizi*, ... yuanzi; *Yizi*, Zhang Jingfei; *Yizi*, Zhang Miaoyun; Donor of the Dharma site, Xie ...an; Nun Fayan; Donor of the offerings, Xiehei; *Yizi*, Xie Sengji; Donor of the statue, Xie ...chang; Donor of the statue, Xie Daoren.

One intriguing aspect of this inscription is that it first states that eighteen members of this *yiyi* organisation that commissioned this statue, but the inscription lists a total of twenty-nine names. A possible explanation is that some commissioners did not belong to the *yiyi* association that led this image-making event: if this speculation is correct, it may provide some insight into how *yiyi* organisations collaborated with individuals who were not *yiyi* members in order to engage in image-making activities.

Another elegant example is dated to 565 (Fig. 6.34). A stupa is depicted at the top of the aureole supported by a *vira* (*lishi* 力士) and accompanied by two dragons. Below the stupa is a double-Buddha motif. These two Buddhas sit side-by-side in a niche supported by two figures stepping on a two-tiered, lotus-like pedestal. A reborn being is depicted at the bottom of each array of the flying beings. The iconographical arrangement of the obverse of the base is a typical Hebei arrangement, except that two meditating monks respectively seated in a niche cut in the space above the beasts. The inscription is carved in the reverse of the base. It reads:



Fig. 6.34 A double contemplative bodhisattva as the primary subject in the stele from Hebei, dated 565, white marble, H. 95.1 cm, Freer Gallery Washington D.C.

□清四年二月八日，曲陽縣□城諸劉村邑人等，敬造白玉像一區，上為師僧、父母、皇帝陛下、七世先亡，後為邊地眾生，俱時成佛。像主劉思顯、像主劉□顯、像主劉悅、劉□生、劉奴、劉桂、劉就。⁸¹

On the eighth day of the second month of the fourth year of the [He]qing reign, the members of the *yi* [organisation] of the Zhuliu Village, ... Town, Quyang County, respectfully had a white jade statue made. May preceptor monks, [our] parents, the emperor, the deceased [associates and relatives] of [our latest] seven incarnations, and all beings of borderlands attain Buddhahood at the same time. Donor of the statue, Liu Sixian; Donor of the statue, Liu ...Xian, Donor of the statue, Liu Yue; Liu ...sheng; Liu Nu; Liu Gui; Liu Jiu.

The inscription notes that this relatively large statue, 95.4 cm in height, was commissioned by a local Buddhist organization, *yi*, and the patrons shared the same surname, Liu 劉. Liu was the major surname of the village, as the name of the village, Zhuliu 諸劉, literally means “the Lius” or “all the Lius”. This statue was not carved for

⁸¹ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol.3, PL. 427; vol. 4, 301.

any particular devotee. The inscription employs a standard custom that dedicates the religious merits gained from commissioning a sacred image to the emperor, preceptor monks and the donors' associates and relatives of the previous seven incarnations.

After approximately 560 the double images became extremely popular. Fig. 6.35 shows an example of a double image of the late Northern Qi, dated to 573. Two pensive deities are cut in mirror images and flanked by two monks. Traces of pigments can be seen but the painted images are not recognisable. In contrast to the double image in Fig. 6.34, in this piece the two halos are cut one connected piece. Their bodies are also cut connected by the streamer between them, which makes the two figures more closely related as a unit. The inscription reads:

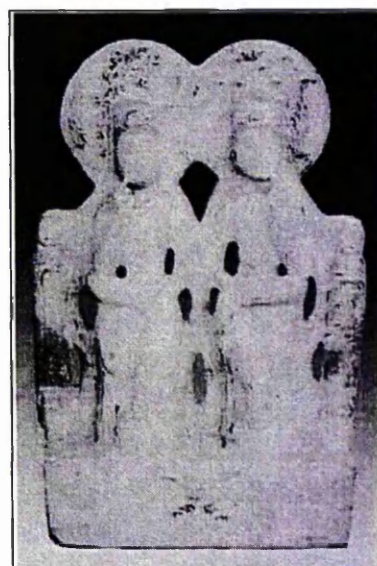


Fig. 6.35 A stele of double contemplative bodhisattva from Hebei, dated 573, white marble, H. 44.6 cm, Zhengding Cultural Relics Reservation Institute, Hebei

武平四年八月廿四日，佛弟子比[丘]尼請譜，爲閤家敬造玉像一區。⁸²

On the twenty-fourth day of the eighth month of the fourth years of the Wuping reign, [I,] a Buddhist disciple and nun, Qingzen, respectfully had a jade statue made for my whole family.

This piece was commissioned by a nun for her family but the inscription does not specify the names of her family members. The conciseness of the inscription's text is determined by the limited surface of the base.

⁸² Wang Qiaolian and Liu Yuoheng 71, Fig 2.



Fig. 6.36 A stele of a double contemplative bodhisattva from Hebei, dated 569, white marble, H. 36 cm, Zhengding Cultural Relics Reservation Institute



Fig. 6.37 Detail of the stele in Fig. 6.36

During the last years of the Northern Qi dynasty (550-77), the contemplative steles with the double-tree motif developed into a sophisticated form. The branches of the double tree became more complex in that they intertwined and formed a hollow inside them, like an opened canopy above the deities. The earliest dated work of this type published is inscribed with the reign year equivalent to 569 (Fig. 6.36). The twin pensive figures are seated inside the space created by two trunks, their branches and surrounding foliage, creating an impression that the deities are housed in a shrine, or seated in a cave. Originally, there were two monks flanking the deities, but now only the one on the viewer's right remains. Although there are four main figures presented on the base, this piece appears to have been designed as a triad: a main subject—double contemplative bodhisattvas—and two monk attendants. Three small figures stand above the arch formed by the branches growing out from two trunks at the sides (Fig. 6.37). These three figures are roughly carved and refined with pigments, but the pigments have

believes that these three figures are representations of Amitābha with his attendants, Avalokiteshvara and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (Dashizhi 大勢至), because the Pure Land belief was prevailing at this time.⁸³ But my on-site examination yielded a different identification. The red robe worn by the figure in the middle indicates that he represents a Buddha or a monk, but the two figures at his sides are probably reborn beings, for the proportion of their bodies is similar to that of a child (an awkwardly big head and upper body), and the posture of holding their two hands together in front of their bellies is unlikely to be that of a bodhisattva. These two figures standing on the lotus leaves are more likely to represent reborn beings.

The inscription of this stele is short and simple, without stating the identity of the deity. It reads:

天統五年七月五日，賈乾德妻楊等，願造玉象一區，願值善緣。⁸⁴

On the fifth day of the seventh month of the fifth year of the Tiantong reign, [I,] Jia Qiande's wife, Yang Deng, vowed to have a jade statue made.⁸⁵ May [we] meet with a fortunate fate.

This short inscription does not specify the identity of the deities. It is interesting to note that the name of the donor Yang's husband, Jia Qiande, also appears in another inscription of a Maitreya stele dated to 562 (Fig. 6.14 and 6.15). It is probable that these two Jia QianDES refer to the same person, as both steles of 562 and 569 were excavated at the same site in Haocheng County,⁸⁶ and the double pensive bodhisattva appears in both steles. This family appears to have had particular interest in this deity as they commissioned two of this bodhisattva, a double image each time. However, in both steles the inscriptions do not specify the identity of the pensive bodhisattva. It was

⁸³ Leidy, "The Ssu-Wei Figure" 27.

⁸⁴ Cheng Jizhong 24.

⁸⁵ The passage indicating the dedicator, *Jia Qiande qi Yang deng* 賈乾德妻楊等, can also be understood to mean "wives of Jia Qiande, Yang and others". However, inscriptions from Hebei usually include dedicators' names explicitly, and it thus seems more probable that "Deng" represents a personal name.

⁸⁶ Cheng Jizhong 242-45.

possibly that they knew this deity so well that they did not feel it was necessary to inscribe his name.

6.3 Discussion

The most obvious characteristic of the Hebei sculptures is the white stone material, identified by earlier scholars as marble,⁸⁷ but this kind of stone was designated as jade by Hebei people in the sixth century. According to the published archaeological reports, most of the excavation sites of the white marble sculptures are located in today's southern Hebei province, centred at the present-day Dingzhou and Quyang. Based on an account in the local records, *Quyang xianzhi* 曲陽縣志, "the Yellow Mountain, Huangshan 黃山, is the quarry of the white stone material. This stone can be carved into steles, thus in the villages around the mountain lived many stone craftsmen".⁸⁸ This stone craft tradition remains till even today.

⁸⁷ For example in Sasaguchi 5. Eileen Hsu translates "yu", literally "jade", as marble; Eileen Hsu 15.

⁸⁸ Zhou Siyi 周斯億, *Chongxiu Quyang xianzhi* 重修曲陽縣志 (1904; Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 2006) 10; 2a. "黃山自古出白石，可爲碑誌諸物，故環山諸村多石工"

During my fieldwork in 2007, I visited a local school for sculptors, the Hebei Quyang Sculpture School 河北曲陽雕刻學校, and interviewed the director, Zhao Shuhong 趙書鴻.⁸⁹ According to her, the marble quarry is only ten kilometers away from Quyang downtown, and the school is still using this local material in teaching. She further explained that the Quyang marble is slightly yellowish, different from the marble from Fangshan 房山 in Beijing, which



Fig. 6.38 Local marble material from Quyang, showing the translucency of the material—light illuminating through the stone, photo taken on August 17 2007

was used for the stone steps and railings of the palace, the Forbidden City. The Fangshan marble has finer grains, appears to be whiter, and is softer. The Quyang marble is harder but more translucent. If one places a torch behind the Quyang marble, one can find the light illuminating through the stone (Fig. 6.38), which is a characteristic similar to jade. It was perhaps this reason that people in Hebei in the sixth century prized this material and described it as “jade”.

Sasaguchi Rei also investigates the source of the marble and states that it came from Shanxi and Henan. She supports her argument with the fact that this type of sculptures recovered from both Hebei and Henan are modest in size, and this is because “the materials of finer quality for carving Buddhist icons were transported to this area from the famous quarries in other provinces”.⁹⁰ However, I would argue that probably it was because the statues made of “white jade” became so famous that the Hebei marble was transported to other regions to fulfil customers’ demands. The white stone sculptures found in Henan were probably made of the marble from Hebei, as in Henan

⁸⁹ August 17 2007.

⁹⁰ Sasaguchi 4-5.

grey limestone. The modest size of these sculptures in Hebei reflects what is stated in the inscriptions: in contrast to steles erected at traffic arteries or public spaces in Henan, these more modest steles in Hebei were carved for deceased family members, and served private and domestic functions.

In the iconographical development after the Eastern Wei, the tree motif still showed a close connection to the pensive deity. Although it was not exclusive to the pensive deity, it was rarely attached to other icons. Almost all the Guanyin statues from Hebei of this time were placed in front of a unique peach-shaped aureole, which are adorned incised, painted or cut in low relief (Figs. 6.8 and 6.10). The tree motif only appears in a few Buddha statues but is rendered differently in each case. The Śākyamuni statue dated to 566 exhibited in Fig. 6.39 is badly damaged, but the remaining stone shows that the design of the trunks is simpler than those in the pensive images: it does not have the dragons wound around nor the lotus flowers from which reborn beings emerge. The Amitabha Buddha statue displayed in Fig. 6.40 has a similar double-tree motif to those with the pensive deity: two dragons wind around the trunks, and two flowers grow out of their mouths. However, because its upper part is damaged it is uncertain it has the same iconographical design as those with the pensive deity although it is likely to. The development of the tree motif from Dunhuang, Yungang, Longmen, Nannieshui to Hebei will be discussed in Chapter 8.



Fig. 6.39 A Śākyamuni stele from Hebei, dated 566, H. 23.5 cm



Fig. 6.40 A stele of Amitabha Buddha from Hebei, dated 568, H. 26.5 cm

Images of meditating monks appear repeatedly in Hebei (Figs. 6.21, 6.33 and 6.34) and Nannieshui (Figs. 5.2, 5.16 and 5.17) suggesting that the belief in the pensive deity might have been related to mediation practice through which some monks pursued their full awakening in the calm of the mountains. In many cases, the pensive deity is placed in a cave-like niche as if contemplating in Nature. The landscape theme was probably also repeatedly depicted in Nannieshui (Figs. 5.3, 5.5, 5.7, 5.8, 5.16, 5.19 and 5.20) and Hebei (Figs. 6.9, 6.11, 6.13 and 6.21) to promote this practice or to respond to this means in pursuing enlightenment. A record in the *Luoyang qielan ji* explains the ideal of mediation practice in Nature, under the entry of the Jinglin Temple in the *Luoyang qielan ji*:

寺西有園，多饒奇果。春鳥秋蟬，鳴聲相續。中有禪房一所，內置祇洹精舍，形置雖小，巧構難比。加以禪閣虛靜，隱室凝邃，嘉樹夾牖，芳杜匝階，雖云朝市，想同巖谷。淨行之僧，繩坐其內，餐風服道。結跏數息。⁹¹

To the west of the monastery was an orchard, which abounded in rare fruits. Birds sang in the spring and cicadas chirped in autumn – the pleasant sound seemed to be continuous. Inside was a meditation hall, within which was a abode of the pure celibate. Small in size, the hall was a matchless design.

⁹¹ *Luoyang qielan ji* 64.

Furthermore, the meditation pavilions were quiet and the secluded rooms were hidden from view—fine trees lined the windows, and aromatic *tu[jo]* (*pollia japonica*) circled the stairways. Even though the monastery was located in a noisy area, it was as quiet as though it were in a valley or on a cliff. Inside, the monks sat erect, observing ascetic rituals. Feeding on the wind, they were absorbed in Buddhist teachings. Sitting cross-legged, they counted the breaths they took, in order to calm their minds and bodies for meditation.⁹²

This passage explains the ideal place for meditating, away from cities in Nature. Those monks who practice Buddhism in cities would like their meditation hall tranquil and peaceful as if in the mountains. This accounts for the appearance of the images of meditating monks and pensive deity set in landscape.

Reborn beings not only appear in Hebei (Figs. 6.24, 6.25, 6.26, 6.28, 6.29, 6.30, 6.34), but also in Nannieshui. In Nannieshui most of them show the donor, also the worshipper, as the reborn one on a lotus (Fig. 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.13 and 5.14). Their appearance reveals people's hope for their future beyond the present life to be reborn from a lotus to the presence of a Buddha, as promised in the *Lotus Sutra*, or in the Pure Land of the West, as noted in the *Sutra of the Meditation on the Buddha of Immeasurable Life*. Through examining the visual elements in the contemplating images, I argue that devotion to the contemplative bodhisattva gradually transformed and infused into contemporaneous Buddhist ideas, including emphasis on meditation practice in a tranquil environment and the teaching in the *Lotus Sutra* and belief in the Pure Land. The religious content the pensive bodhisattva represented was a mixture of several prevailing elements of contemporary Buddhism.

Of the 69 known inscriptions of round sculptures from 539-608 found in Hebei, 33, almost half, state the contemplating as *siwei xiang* whilst 26 do not mention the identity. Four examples are inscribed as *taizi*, the crown prince, respectively dated 545,

⁹² Yang Hsüan-chih, *A Record of Buddhist Monasteries in Lo-yang*, trans. Wang Yi-t'ung (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1984) 58-59.

546, 561 and 596. One piece is declared as Mile, i.e. Maitreya, dated 557. Four works are prescribed as *Longshu siwei*, respectively dated 547, 555, 552 and 558 (the sculpture of 547 lost; the ones dated 555 and 558 not yet published). A further inscriptional analysis regarding the identities of the deities will be discussed in Chapter 8.

6.4 Conclusion

The earliest examples of the pensive image from Hebei appeared on the back of bronzes dated to the last quarter of the fifth century. The dedicating inscriptions only mention the identity of the deity on the obverse but do not mention the name of the deity on the reverse. At this early stage, the pensive bodhisattva played a minor role in the iconographical setting of the bronze works.

After about 539, the pensive bodhisattva began to be carved as a primary subject in steles or as sculptures in the round. Dedicating inscriptions from this period provide a number of different names for the deity, but in the majority of cases the image is identified as a *siwei xiang*. These distinct identities assigned to the figure suggest that people in the sixth century Hebei had a variety of understandings and uses of this image.

Chapter 7 Sites in Shandong

7.1 History of Buddhism in Shandong

Material evidence of early Buddhism in Shandong can be traced to the Later Han. This material evidence includes images of two standing figures with halos found in a tomb in Yinan 沂南,¹ images of six monk-like figures depicted in a tomb in Zoucheng 鄒城,² and an image of a six-tusked elephant from in a tomb in Tengxian 滕縣.³ However, although these images have recognisable Buddhist “iconographical identity”, they do not seem to have born explicit Buddhist meanings; instead, they may have been absorbed into pre-Buddhist funerary culture.⁴ As Erik Zürcher has pointed out, these images must have been transmitted through the circulation of material objects alone. They were not associated with Buddhist texts, priests, or monastic establishments.⁵ Nevertheless, their appearance in Shandong demonstrates Shandong’s early contact with Buddhist images. This early contact may have prepared people in Shandong for accepting Buddhism at an early stage.

Buddhist temples probably appeared in the third century in Shandong. According to Zong Bing’s 宗炳 (375-443) *Mingfo lun* 明佛論: when the Later Zhao Emperor Shi Hu 石虎 (r. 334-48) was regenerating an old stupa in Linzhang 臨漳 and was in need of a *chenglupan* 承露盤 (dew-receiving plate), the building part at the top of a stupa, Monk

¹ Yu Weichao 俞偉超, “Dong Han fojiao tuxiang kao 東漢佛教圖像考,” *Wenwu* 5 (1980): 68-77.

² Zhouchengshi wenwu guanlichu 鄒城市文物管理處, “Shandong Zhoucheng Gaolicun Han huaxiang shimu 山東鄒城高李村漢畫像石墓,” *Wenwu* 6 (1994): 27, 30 and Fig. 6.

³ Fu Xihua 傅惜華, *Handai huaxiang chuanji* 漢代畫像全集·初編 (Paris: Bali Beijing daxue hanxue yanjiusuo, 1950) Fig. 113.

⁴ Erik Zürcher, “Han Buddhism and the Western Region,” ed. W.L. Idema and E. Zürcher, *Thought and Law in Qin and Han China. Studies Dedicated to Anthony Hulsewé on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Leiden: Brill, 1990) 158-82.

⁵ Zürcher, “Han Buddhism” 158-82. Wu Hung, “Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art (2nd and 3rd Centuries A.D.),” *Artibus Asiae* 47.3/4 (1986): 263-303; 305-52. Abe, “Small Beginnings” *Ordinary Images* 11-101.

Fotucheng (c. 232-348) told the emperor that there was one buried twenty *zhang* 丈 deep under a huge tree in a deep forest in Linzi 臨菑, at the site of the ancient Temple of King Asoka (Ayuwangsi 阿余王寺 or 阿育王寺). Shi Hu's emissary discovered the *chenglupan* based on a map drawn by Fotucheng.⁶ If the ancient temple in this account had become a ruin in Shi Hu's reign, it should have been built by the end of the third century.⁷ Nonetheless, this miraculous tale intended to deify the monk Fotucheng is unlikely to be a reliable account, and was perhaps a legend circulating during Zong Bing's time or fabricated by Zong Bing to promote Buddhism. However, it reflects the fact that to Zong Bing the idea of an ancient temple built in the third century in Qingzhou, in today's Shandong province, was an acceptable idea.

Nevertheless, numerous fragments of evidence suggest that the Qingzhou region in which Linzi is located had a long history of Buddhist activity. The *Gaosengzhuan* records the existence of a Qingzhou local, Zhi Tanlan 支曇蘭 (336-419), only a few years later than Fotucheng, who recited 300,000 characters from sutra texts. This record suggests that in the mid-fourth century, abundant Buddhist texts had been widely circulated in Qingzhou. Furthermore, Qingzhou seemed to be one of the fronts of Buddhist contact in the fourth to fifth century: when Faxian 法顯 returned from his pilgrimage to India in 412, his boat drifted to Qingzhou where he went ashore. When the local administrator, Li Yi 李嶷, a devout Buddhist, received the report of Faxian's arrival, he went to welcome Faxian and the sutras and images brought back from India.⁸ Indian monk Buddhahadra (Fotuobatuoluo 佛馱跋陀羅, 359-429) also arrived at Qingzhou via the sea route on his way to Chang'an

⁶ *Mingfo lun* T 2102.52.12b. *Gaosengzhuan* T 2059.50.385b.

⁷ Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, "Shandong zaoqi fojiao zaixiangkao: Liu Song zhi Bei Wei shiqi 山東早期佛教造像考—劉宋至北魏時期 (An Investigation into the Early Buddhist Imagery of the Shandong Region from the Liu-Sung to the Northern Wei)," *The National Palace Museum Research Quarterly* 21.3 (2004): 10.

⁸ T 2059.50.338b.

in 408.⁹ The above records reveal that by the early fifth century, Buddhism was well established in Shandong, and Shandong had direct contact with monks and Buddhist images from outside China.

According to the *Gaosengzhuan*, Monk Senglang 僧朗 (exact dates unknown) was the first monk to preach and establish a monastery in Shandong. He moved to Shandong in 351 and built a monastery near Mount Tai 泰山 (located in today's Ji'nan 濟南). Hundreds of Buddhists came and built their own houses around Senglang's monastery and formed the earliest Buddhist centre of Shandong.¹⁰ This centre had great influence during Senglang's time. Several emperors wrote letters to him and sent gifts to praise Senglang's virtue. Among these records, several of them mention image-making activities: the Eastern Jin Emperor Sima Changming 司馬昌明 (r. 372-96) sent to him a Buddha image made from pearls of five colours; the Former Qin Emperor Fu Jian 苻堅 (r. 357-85) sent several *jin* 斤 of gold to gild Buddhist images; the Later Qin Emperor Yao Xing 姚興 (r. 394-415) sent three golden Buddha images,¹¹ a sutra and a precious platform; the Southern Yan Emperor Murong De 慕容德 (r. 398-410) enfeoffed Senglang as the King of the Eastern Qi 東齊王 with tax income from Fenggao 奉高 and Shanren 山荏 Counties. In Senglang's letter in reply, he politely declined the title but accepted the tax income for the purpose of building temples and making sacred images.¹² According to these accounts, from the mid-fourth century, Buddhists in Shandong had been enthusiastically constructing

⁹ Ciyi 慈怡, "佛陀跋陀羅," *Foguang da cidian* 佛光大辭典, 26 February 2009 <<http://etext.fgs.org.tw/etext6/search-1.htm>>.

¹⁰ T 2059.50.354b.

¹¹ *Guan hongmingji* T 2103.52.322c. The original phrasing "jing futu san ji 金浮圖三級", can be understood in two ways: "a golden three-story stupa" or "three golden Buddha images". *Futu*, or *foto* 佛陀, is used as the transliteration of "Buddha", as explained in the *Chapter on Buddhism and Daoism in Weishu* 魏書釋老志 3026. It can also refer to "stupa" as in the *Luoyang jielan ji* 洛陽伽藍記, finished around 547, under the entry of the Yongningsi 永寧寺, Changqiushi 長秋寺 and Yaoguansi 瑤光寺 (T 2092.51.999c-1003a). But in the *Luoyang jielan ji*, "a three-story stupa" is rendered as "sanceng futu 三層浮圖" (T 2092.51.999c-1002c) that the measure word is placed in front of the noun *futu* not behind it. In the case of "jin futu san ji", it is more appropriate to translate as "three golden Buddha images".

¹² *Guang hongmingji* 廣弘明集 T 2103.52.322a-c.

temples and making images.

Senglang's Buddhist centre continued to be active after his death. During Emperor Xiaowen's reign (471-99) of the Northern Wei, Monk Sengyi 僧意 was housed in the monastery established by Senglang.¹³ Under the entry of Sengyi in the *Xu gaosengzhuàn* 續高僧傳, seven bronze Buddhist images are mentioned:

寺有高驪像、相國像、胡國像、女國像、吳國像、崑崙像、岱京像，如此七像並是金銅，俱陳寺堂，堂門常開……¹⁴

In the monastery, there are images from Gaoli, Xiangguo, Huguo, Nüguo, Wuguo, Kunlun and Daijing. These seven images, all made of bronze, were all placed at the [main] hall of the monastery. The door of the hall was constantly open……

In this passage, Gaoli refers to the country Koguryo on the Korea Peninsula; the country Xiangguo is unidentified; Huguo probably refers to a country in the Western Regions; Nüguo is a small country close to Kashmir;¹⁵ Wuguo is the court of the Southern Dynasties; Kunlun is a general name for Southeast Asia;¹⁶ and Daijing is the Northern Wei capital Pingcheng. This record does not inform us when and how these images arrived, but it reveals that by the mid-fifth century people in Shandong had various sources of Buddhist icons, from both within and outside China.

The earliest known Buddhist image from Shandong surviving today is the bronze Maitreya dated to 451,¹⁷ probably contemporaneous with the images mentioned in the above record, or perhaps a few decades before their arrival at Shandong. This bronze bears

¹³ *Xu Gaosengzhuàn* T 2060.50.647a. *Guang hongmingji* T 2103.52.104b.

¹⁴ *Xu Gaosengzhuàn* T 2060.50.647a.

¹⁵ Nüguo is recorded in the *Wei shu* 2237 and 2262. In Ji Xianling's 季羨林 commentary on the *Da Tang Xiyu ji* 大唐西域記 (The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions), Nüguo's location was close to Kashmir. Ji Xianlin et al., *Da Tang Xiyu ji jiaozhu* 大唐西域記校注 vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2000) 409.

¹⁶ Gaberiel Ferrand, *Kunlun ji Nanhai guguo hangxing kao; Sumendala gudai hangxing kao* 崑崙及南海古代航行考; 蘇門答刺古國航行考, trans. Feng Chengjun 馮承鈞 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2002) 1-32.

¹⁷ Lee Yu-min, "Shandong" 12.

a reign title of the Southern Dynasties, the twenty-eighth year of the Yuanjia 元嘉 reign of the Liu-Song. Lee Yu-min describes this 451 bronze as having graceful facial features and a gentle temperament, which stands in contrast to the roughness of the northern bronzes but resembles the artistic rendering in the south.¹⁸ Before Shandong was occupied by the Northern Wei in 469, it belonged to the Southern Dynasties from 410 (Eastern Jin).

Because of its political history and the geographical position, located at the border land between the northern and the southern political powers and cultures, scholars like Lee believe that it received influences from both sides.¹⁹ On the basis of her study of ninety-six inscriptions and sixty-three images from 410 to 534, Lee concludes that the Shandong images had an intimate relationship with the Southern Dynasties in style but a closer connection with the north in iconography and beliefs.²⁰

Up to now there have been approximately twenty contemplative bodhisattva images excavated from sites in Shandong, including Qingzhou 青州,²¹ Linqu 臨朐,²² Zhucheng 諸城,²³ Boxing 博興,²⁴ Huimin 惠民²⁵ and Wudi 無棣²⁶ (Map 7.1). All the pensive

¹⁸ Lee Yu-min, "Shandong" 13.

¹⁹ Lee Yu-min, "Shandong" 1-79.

²⁰ Lee Yu-min, "Shandong" 41.

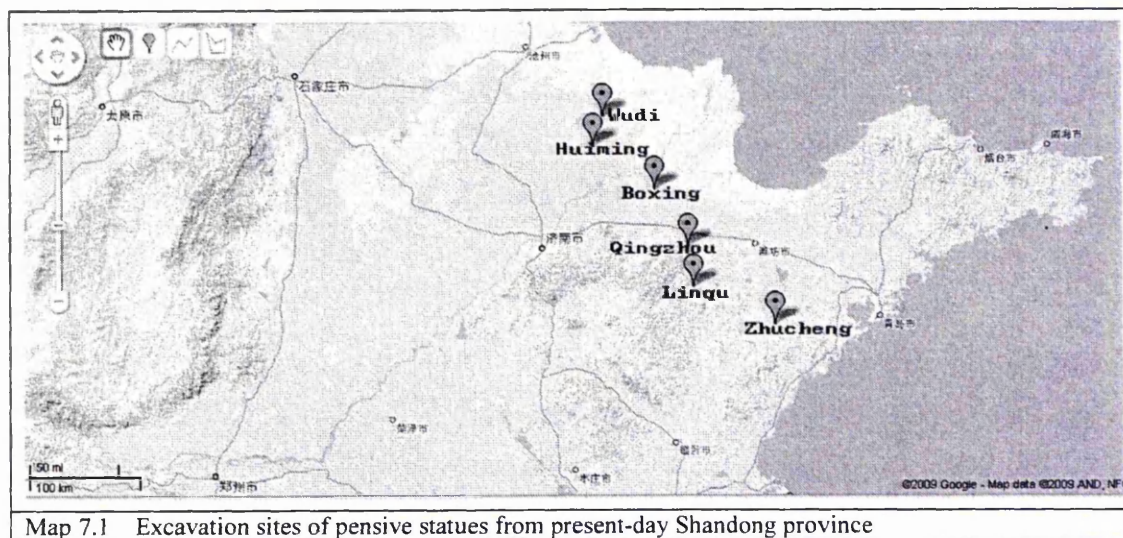
²¹ Lukas Nickel, *Return of the Buddha* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002) 156 and 157.

²² People Daily 人民日報 30 Nov 1984. "More than 150 stone Buddhist sculptures have recently been excavated from Linqu County in Shandong province. Among them, more than twenty bear legible inscriptions. According to the inscriptions, these sculptures were cut more than 1400 years ago, between the Jianming reign of the Northern Wei and the Wuding reign of the Eastern Wei. 山東省臨朐縣，最近發掘出一百五十多尊北朝時代的石造佛像，其中二十多尊背後刻有清晰的銘文。據銘文記載，這批石造佛像雕造於我國南北朝時代北魏建明至東魏武定年間，距今已一千四百餘年。"Linqu County Museum 臨朐縣博物館，"Shandong Linqu Mingdaosi shelita digong fojiao zaoxiang qingli jianbao 山東臨朐明道寺舍利塔地宮佛教造像清理簡報," *Wenwu* 9 (2002): 64-83.

²³ No contemplative statue is mentioned in the archaeological report, Zhuchengshi Bowuguan 諸城市博物館，"Shandong Zhucheng faxian beichao zaoxiang 山東諸城發現北朝造像," *Kaogu* 8 (1990): 717-26; PL II-IV, but there is one on display in the museum.

²⁴ Chang Xuzheng 常敘政 and Li Shaonan 李少南，"Shandongsheng Boxingxian chutu yipi beichao zaoxiang 山東省博興縣出土一批北朝造像" *Wenwu* 7 (1983): 38-44. Li Shaonan 李少南，"Shandongsheng Boxing chutu baiyujian Beiwei zhi Suidai tingzaoxiang 山東博興出土百餘件北魏至隋代銅造像," *Wenwu* 5 (1984): 21-31. Ding Mingyi 丁明夷，"Tan Shandong Boxing chutu de tong fo zaoxiang 談山東博興出土的銅佛造像," *Wenwu* 5 (1984): 32-43. Shandongsheng Boxingxian wenwu guanlisuo 山東省博興縣文物管理所，"Shandong Boxing Longhuasi yizhi diaocha ianbao 山東博興龍華寺遺址調查簡報," *Kaogu* 9 (1986): 813-21.

statues from Shandong are rendered as sculptures in the round. They were probably originally placed with other statues as a set in a hall, housed in a shrine individually, or positioned against a wall on which some pictorial background was painted, but these original settings cannot now be determined.



Map 7.1 Excavation sites of pensive statues from present-day Shandong province

7.2 Sites


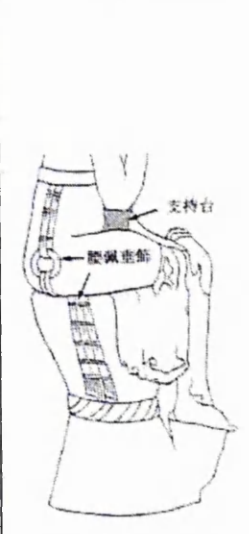

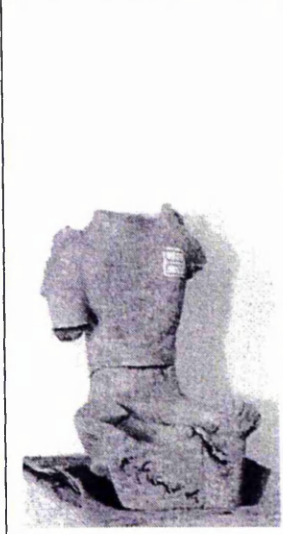
The following sections introduce the statues from central and southern Shandong, Qingzhou, Linqu and Zhucheng, and then the sculptures from northern Shandong, Boxing, Huimin and Wudi. The pensive statues discovered in Shandong all have their right legs resting on their pendent left legs. No “mirrored” images, with left legs resting on pendent right legs, have been discovered. This convention may suggest that in Shandong, the pensive images are used as independent sculptures and primary icons in iconographical settings similar to those of the Nannieshui niches, and not as paired attendants as seen at

²⁵ Huiminxian wenwu shiye guanlichu 惠民縣文物事業管理處, “Shandong Huimin chutu yipi Beichao fo zaoxiang 山東惠民出土一批北朝佛造像” *Wenwu* 6 (1999): 70-81.

²⁶ Huimin diqu wenwu guanli zu 惠民地區文物管理組, “Shandong Wudi chutu Beiqi zaoxiang 山東無棣出土北齊造像,” *Wenwu* 7 (1983): 45-47.

Yungang or Longmen.

7.2.1 Qingzhou 青州

			
<p>Fig. 7.1 A contemplative bodhisattva statue from Qingzhou, Shandong, second half of the sixth century, grey limestone, H. cm, Qingzhou Municipal Museum</p>	<p>Fig. 7.2 Drawing of the side of the statue in Fig. 6.4</p>	<p>Fig. 7.3 A contemplative bodhisattva statue from Qingzhou, Shandong, second half of the sixth century, grey limestone, H. 68 W. 28 cm, Qingzhou Municipal Museum</p>	<p>Fig. 7.4 A contemplative bodhisattva statue from Qingzhou, Shandong, second half of the sixth century, grey limestone, precise height unknown, proximately 50 cm, Qingzhou Municipal Museum</p>

There are three known examples of the pensive bodhisattva unearthed from the site of the Longxing Temple 龍興寺 in Qingzhou in 1996, two of which have been described in earlier publications²⁷ (Figs. 7.1 and 7.3). During my fieldwork in 2005, I documented a third piece found in the Qingzhou Municipal Museum, which has not yet been described in any publication (Fig. 7.4).²⁸ These three pensive sculptures are all dated to the second half of the sixth century.

The statue shown in Fig. 7.1 is the most famous contemplative image from

²⁷ Nickel 156-57.

²⁸ 7 November 2005.

Shandong—it appeared in most of the exhibitions and catalogues on Qingzhou.²⁹ This statue possesses a number of unique characteristics. The bodhisattva is seated on a waisted stool that is divided into two equal sections. In the lower section a dragon is carved holding a lotus flower in its mouth, which supports the deity's foot—this is the only dragon carved in the stool of a pensive image. In contrast to typical Northern Qi works, which usually have a well-built body, this statue has a flat chest and slim limbs. The drapery of the skirt is closely attached to the deity's leg, showing the shape of the leg and the stool. The figure's elbow, instead of resting directly on its leg, is held up by a small support resting on the leg. This is the only example of such support among pensive images that survive today. A ring-shaped ornament is depicted tied to a sash and suspended from the deity's waist. Another piece of sash is shown tied to the ring and placed between the deity's hip and the stool.³⁰

The rendering of the statue in Fig. 7.3 is rather different from the previous work. This sculpture has a wider face and a vigorous body, which are typical Northern Qi features. The skirt is also depicted closely attached to the leg as in the previous work, but it forms a horizontal curve underneath the folded leg. A pattern of several lines is carved in low relief on the folded leg representing the pleats of the skirt, which is also a typical Northern Qi

²⁹ Nickel 156-57. Su-Bai, ed., *Shandong Qingzhou Longxingsi chutu fojiao shike zaixiang jingpin* 山東青州龍興寺出土佛教石刻造像精品, (Beijing: Chinese History Museum, 1999) 135. Wang Huaqing 王華慶, ed., *Shandong Qingzhou Longxingsi chutu fojiao zaixiangzhan* 山東青州龍興寺出土佛教造像展 (Buddhist Sculptures: New Discoveries from Qingzhou, Shandong Province) (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2001) 286-87. Sofukawa Hiroshi 曾布川寬 and Degawa Tetsuro 出川哲朗, ed., *Chūgoku: bi no jūjū ten* 中国：美の十字路展 (China: Crossroads of Culture) (Tokyo: Daiko Advertising Inc., 2005) 188. Miho Museum 美秀博物館, *Buddhist Sculptures from Shandong Province, China* (Special Exhibition Commemorating the Museum's 10th anniversary) (Kyoto: Miho Museum, 2006) 60-62. Tokyo National Museum, ed. *Treasures of Ancient China* 中国国寶展, Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2004, 134.

³⁰ This ring and the arrangement of the sashes were first noticed and described by Ōnishi Shūya 大西修也. Ōnishi Shūya, "Matters Suggested by the Stone Image of Buddhist Figure with One Leg Pendant from Qingzhou, Shandong Province 山東省青州出土石造半跏像の意味するもの," *Ars Buddhica* 248 (2000): 53-67. Ōnishi Shūya, "The Monastery Koryuji's Crowned Maitreya and the Stone Pensive Bodhisattva Excavation at Londxingsi," eds. Washizuka Hiromitsu, Park Youngbok and Kang Woo-Bang, *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan*. (New York; London: Harry N. Abrams, 2003) 55-65.

feature. The piece shown in Fig. 7.4 has a well-built upper body, as found in other Northern Qi sculptures. The rendering of the skirt seems to be more complex, in that the skirt covers and hangs down from the folded leg. This piece was not available for close inspection when I conducted my fieldwork during 2005, and I was unable to obtain more information about it.



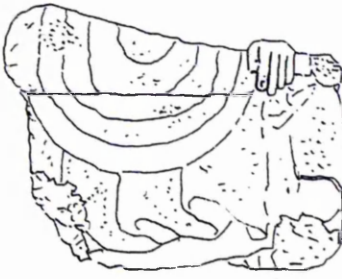
7.2.2 Linqu 臨朐

In Linqu, more than ten pensive bodhisattva statues were excavated from the site of the Mingdao Temple 明道寺, but only one statue has been published by the museum.³¹ I examined all of them during my fieldwork in 2005.³² The statues from Linqu are badly damaged such that no upper body of the statues remains. The surviving lower bodies show diverse renderings, which suggests that there might have been several different iconographical sources or groups of artisans who received distinct training, and possibly came from different regions.

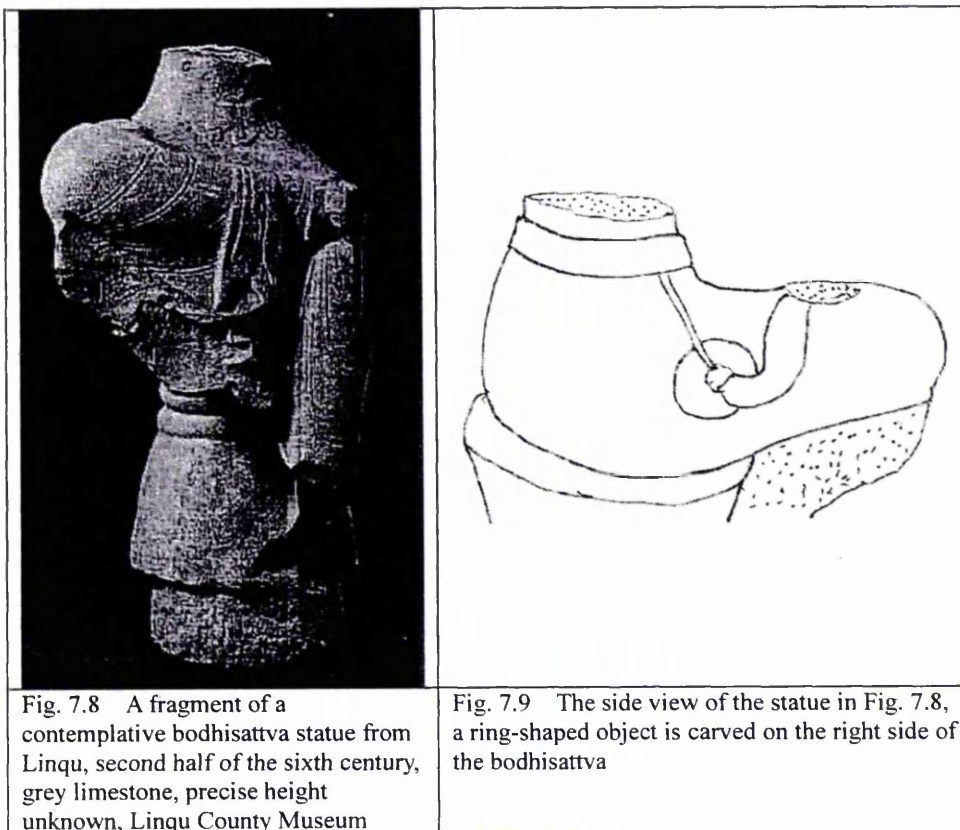
The work in Fig. 7.5 is the earliest piece from Linqu, dated to the 510s to 520s. The streamer is arranged across the front of the bodhisattva's body, with one piece placed under and the other over the folded leg. The arrangement of the streamer crossed in front of the bodhisattva's body is a typical design in late Northern Wei images. The existence of the pensive deity as a sculpture in the round suggests that the production in Shandong of independent pensive images may have begun earlier than in Hebei, where the earliest inscribed round sculpture is dated to 539.

³¹ Linqu County Museum, "Shandong Linqu Mingdaosi shelita digong fojiao zaixiang qingli jianbao," *Wenwu* 9 (2002): 64-83. The total number of pensive bodhisattva statues is highly likely to be more than ten, but some pieces are too badly damaged to identify with certainty.

³² 10 November 2005.

		
<p>Fig. 7.5 Drawing of a fragment of a contemplative bodhisattva statue from Linqu, dated to the 510s to 520s, grey limestone, precise height unknown, Linqu County Museum</p>	<p>Fig. 7.6 Drawing of a fragment of a contemplative bodhisattva statue from Linqu, first half of the sixth century, grey limestone, precise height unknown, Linqu County Museum</p>	<p>Fig. 7.7 Drawing of a fragment of a contemplative bodhisattva statue from Linqu, first half of the sixth century, grey limestone, precise height unknown, Linqu County Museum</p>

The rendering of pattern of the drapery in Fig. 7.6 is similar to the piece in Fig. 7.1 from Qingzhou: the skirts are both closely attached to the folded leg with lines cut to represent the pleats of the skirt. The work shown in Fig. 7.7 exhibits another drapery pattern. The artisan created the curved pattern as the upper layer, and the straight pattern as the lower layer of the cloth. This treatment is often seen in Hebei pensive statues (Figs. 6.21, 6.22, 6.23, 6.24, 6.25, 6.26, 6.27, 6.28, 6.29, 6.31, 6.32, 6.33, 6.34), except that in Hebei the pleats are depicted more naturally and tangibly, whereas in this piece they are depicted in low relief on an almost flat surface.



The work shown in Fig. 7.8 is the only statue whose photograph and description has been published by the museum. Although it is badly damaged, from the remaining stone it is recognisable that the artisan attempted to delineate a horizontal curve below the folded leg to represent the upper layer of the skirt. This deity is seated on a waisted stool divided into two sections. The bottom part of the stool shows traces suggesting it was made to function as a tenon which should have been originally inserted into a base — a typical Shandong design. Fig 7.9 exhibits the right side view of the sculpture in which a jade ring appears. On its left side, another jade ring is carved, together with the right one making the jade rings a pair. The arrangement of the jade ring and sash is different from that in Qingzhou. In this Linqu piece, the second piece of sash is not placed between the deity's hip and the stool but on his lap under his elbow.

This paired ring ornament also appears in another contemplative bodhisattva statue

from Linqu (Fig. 7.10 and 7.11). They are respectively tied to the waist at each side of the deity, but show a different rendering from the previous two examples. The second piece of sash is not placed between the deity's hip and the stool (as the Qingzhou piece, Fig. 7.2) or on his lap under the elbow (as the Linqu piece, Fig. 7.9) but simply hanging down from the ring—the arrangement of the ring ornaments in the three Shandong cases is distinct from one another. Besides the ring ornaments, there are two other unusual characteristics in this Linqu piece. First, the shape of the stool is unique in Shandong—it is carved in a bucket-like shape, whereas other Shandong works show a waisted stool divided into two equal sections (Figs. 7.1, 7.3 and 7.8). Moreover, a piece of cloth is depicted covering the stool. The artisan carefully portrayed the pleats of this cloth, showing how it is bound with the stool by a band. Secondly, the depiction of the drapery is rich and complex. The length of the skirt is longer than other Shandong works. It also shows a horizontal curve in the upper layer of the cloth and the pattern of the free lines in the lower layer (Fig. 7.10).



Fig. 7.10 A fragment of a contemplative bodhisattva statue from Linqu, 534-550, grey limestone, precise height unknown, Linqu County Museum

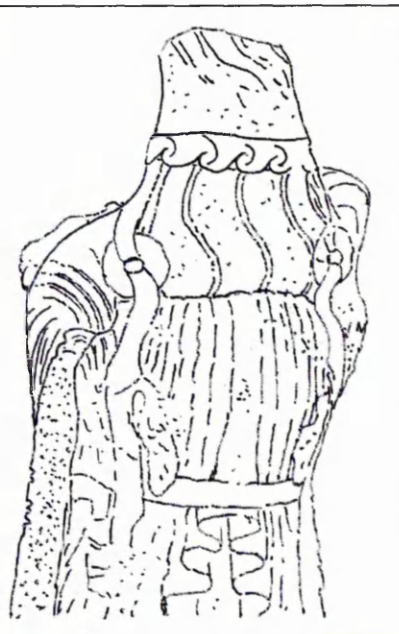
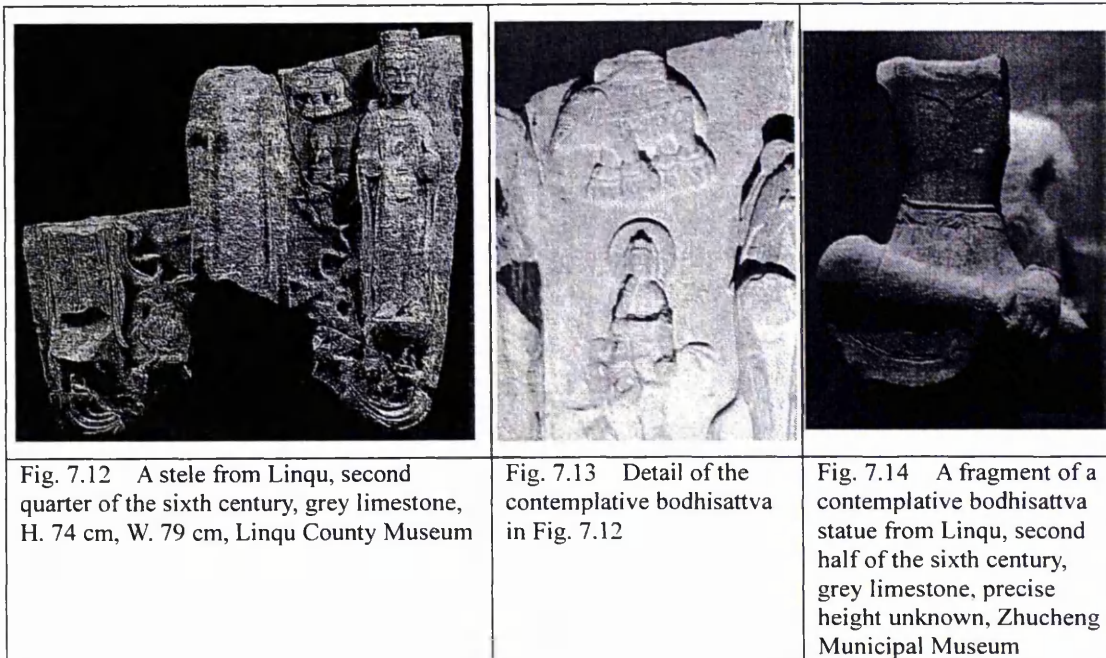


Fig. 7.11 Drawing of the side view of the statue in Fig. 7.10

There is another unique pensive image from Linqu (Fig. 7.12). It appears in a stele depicting a triad of a standing Buddha with a standing bodhisattva at each side. The Linqu County Museum dates this triad to the late Northern Wei or early Eastern Wei, giving the date range 500-542, but a more likely dating is to the Eastern Wei, 534-550, as it shows several typical Eastern Wei designs. These designs include the dragons and the lotus flowers on which the bodhisattvas stand elaborately depicted, the bodhisattva's archaic smile, the disk-shaped ornament on the bodhisattva's right shoulder (originally one of a pair) and the long streamer hanging from his arms. This piece is broken, but the remaining stone has a pensive deity carved in the aureola with an elephant above it. Both of these figures were included as secondary icons to illustrate and interpret the background story of the main subject, the standing Buddha. The elephant stepping on a lotus flower under each of its legs suggests the elephant's divine quality. The remaining stone also shows that there was originally a figure seated on the elephant's back. The juxtaposition of the divine elephant carrying a figure and a celestial figure contemplating suggests that these are depictions of Śākyamuni's life story: the elephant with a figure on its back represents Queen Maya's conception and the pensive image possibly denotes Prince Siddhārtha's first meditation or the moment of him becoming a monk as described in Śākyamuni's biographies. The identity of the Buddha image thus appears to be the historical Buddha Śākyamuni. The pensive figure in this triad is the only one among ten works from Linqu, for which the iconographical context is sufficient to establish its identity.



7.2.3 Zhucheng 諸城

A contemplative statue on display in Zhucheng Municipal Museum has never been described in any archaeological report (Fig. 7.14).³³ I studied this piece during my fieldwork in 2005 and found no ring-shaped ornament carved in this statue.³⁴ The rendering of the skirt is similar to that in Fig. 7.3 from Qingzhou, but in this piece the artisan used incised lines to express the pleats of the skirts rather than low relief.

7.2.4 Boxing 博興

In Boxing, the Gao Ye Statue of the Crown Prince 高業造太子像 dated to 562 presents an unusual example of the pensive bodhisattva image in Shandong, as it exhibits a

³³ According to the former Director of the Zhucheng Municipal Museum, Han Gang 韓崗, there is in addition another broken pensive image collected by the museum. Interview on 8 November 2005.

³⁴ 7 November 2005.

combination of Hebei and Shandong conventions (Fig. 7.15). The statue and the base are carved together as a piece and an inscription is carved on the obverse of the base, both of which were popular techniques in Hebei. But the length of the skirt is shorter than that seen in Hebei works, while the stool consists of two equal sections, as in the Shandong pieces. In addition, the stone material, grey limestone, is common in Shandong. The rendering of the inscription is unique in that it starts with the sentiment of the shortness of life followed by the donor's name, whereas the seventy inscriptions of the other pensive statues I have collected all start immediately with the date. This piece was possibly carved by an artisan, or a group of artisans, from Hebei, who were familiar with the Hebei form and style and integrated them with Shandong craftsmanship. Alternatively, it may have been cut by local artisans who were trained or had knowledge of Hebei craftsmanship.

The deity is seated on a waisted stool. The pleats of the skirt are rendered similarly to the examples from Hebei: a horizontal curve appears as the upper layer of cloth, while lower layer is expressed with free lines. An inscription is carved on the obverse of the base. It reads:

夫百年難保，知身命無常，高業夫妻，大寧二年四月庚子朔，遂捨割家珍，敬造太子一軀，上爲皇帝，下爲居眷，七世父母，故僞斯石，過現常樂。³⁵

To preserve oneself for one hundred years is difficult—I know that life is impermanent. I, Gao Ye, together with my wife, on the first day (*gengzi*) of the fourth month of the second year of the Da[Tai]ning reign, donated the treasures of my household in order to respectfully had a [statue of the] **Crown Prince** made. For the emperor, [my] family, [my] parents of seven previous lives, I [carved?] this stone—may the deceased and the living be eternally joyful.

According to this inscription, this statue was commissioned by Gao Ye husband and wife, and the identity of the figure is the Crown Prince. Based on the literary evidence discussed

³⁵ Chang Xuzheng and Li Shaonan 38-44.

in Chapter 1, the term “Crown Prince” is likely to refer to Prince Siddhartha.



Another similar work in the Shanghai Museum, dated 553, shows almost identical artistic rendering with the Gao Ye Statue, including the grey limestone material, the shape and volume of the body, the adornment on their shoulders, the expression and the length of their skirt, the necklace, and the simple rectangular base, and the position of the inscription—on the obverse of the base. The provenance of this statue is unclear but stylistic similarities suggest that this statue was cut in the same area, or perhaps even the same workshop, as the Gao Ye statue from Boxing. The inscription reads:

大齊天保四季歲次癸酉八月辛卯朔十九日己酉，□宋寺比丘道常，減割衣鉢之資，敬造太子像一軀，普爲一切衆生，國王帝主、師僧、父母，普同斯福。

36

³⁶ Matsubara, *Chūgoku bukkō chōkokushi kenkyū* vol. 4, 295.

The nineteenth day (*jiyou*) of the eighth month (the first day being *xinmo*) of the fourth year (*guiyou*) of the Tianbao reign of the Great Qi. I, Monk Daochang from... Song Temple, using the money collected from saving on clothing and alms respectfully had a statue of the **Crown Prince** made. May all beings, the emperor, preceptor monks and my parents all receive the blessings [from making this image].

As indicated by this inscription, this statue was commissioned by a monk, and the identity of the figure is the Crown Prince. As discussed in Chapter One, most scholars believe the Crown Prince refers to Prince Siddhartha.

The Boxing County Museum holds another unique piece, a gilt bronze contemplating figure (Fig. 7.17), excavated in 1983 from the Chongde Village 崇德村 in Boxing County.³⁷ The double-tier base exhibits a light form of a base cast in bronze which is different from those heavy bases carved from stone. This statue has an elongated upper body, such that his right elbow can not reach his right knee. The deity wears an unusual headdress, quite distinct from those depicted in other known bodhisattva images. These curious renderings suggest that the artisan did not understand that the deity is in a contemplating position, and thus was unfamiliar with the inter-relationship between the deity's body, arm and folded leg. This sculpture may thus represent an early example of the contemplative image carved by Shandong artisans. Judging from the pleats of the lower part of the garment treated in parallels, this piece should be dated to the 520s or earlier, prior to the majority of surviving independent pensive bodhisattva statues carved in stone. This suggests that the pensive bodhisattva was occasionally depicted as an independent deity in Shandong somewhat before the 530s, when stone pensive images began to be produced on a large scale.

This piece also reveals a close relationship between the pensive deity and people's

³⁷ Matsubara, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū* vol. 4, 276.

daily life. Such a small portable bronze, only 13.5 cm in height, implies an intimate connection between this sacred image and its user—a statue in this size was not made for public viewing or worshipping. It was well suited to serve as an icon for personal or family use; alternatively, it might also have functioned as a talisman, carried with its owner in his travels. The user of this statue could easily improvise a simple but reverential shrine at his lodging so he could practice daily worship as he might have done at home. The inscription carved on the base reads:

.....四月八日，仏弟子張嘉喜，爲亡父母亡兄造像一軀。³⁸

..... the eighth day of the fourth month. I, the Buddhist disciple Zhang Jiayi, had a statue made for my late parents and late elder brother.

According to the inscription, this statue was made on behalf of the donor's deceased family members. The physical and visual existence of the inscribed characters of the donor's name and the contents that the devotees are the donor's closest relations in his life reinforce the intimacy between the image and its user through every time of viewing, worshipping and touching this object. The donor believed that by making a pensive bodhisattva image he could earn the same amount of religious merits as those from making a Śākyamuni, Maitreya or Guanshiyin statue—the merits that enough to bring his closest deceased family members to a better place. The appearance of pensive bodhisattva as an independent deity reveals people's fondness and belief in this image. It also suggests the role it might have played in daily life.

³⁸ Matsubara, *Chūgoku Bukkyō chōkoku shiron* vol. 4, 276.

7.2.5 Wudi 無棣

One contemplative statue has been discovered at Wudi, in the northern Shandong (Fig. 7.18).³⁹ It shows a pensive bodhisattva accompanied by two monk-like standing figures with halos. The inscription is carved on the back and both sides of the base. It reads:

大齊天統三年三月廿日，倉州□□郡陽信縣故人姜阿□侍王，敬造玉石像一軀，有居家眷屬，一時成佛。⁴⁰

On the twentieth day of the third month of the third year of the Tiantong reign of the Great Qi, [I,] Jiang A... from Yangxin County in Commandery in Cangzhou, respectfully had a jade-stone statue made. May [my] relatives attain enlightenment at the same time.

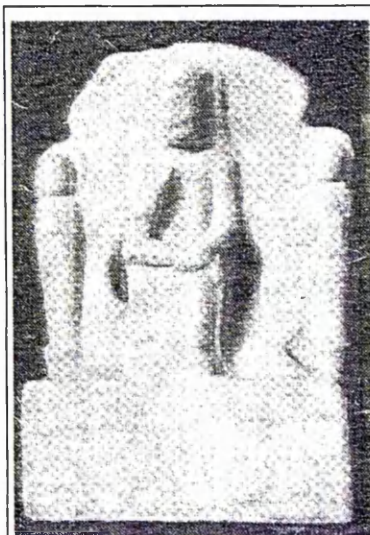


Fig. 7.18 A contemplative bodhisattva statue from Wudi, dated 567, white marble, H. 32 cm W. 21 cm, Wudi County Museum

The short inscription does not mention the identity of the deity but only states that the stone was “jade-stone”.

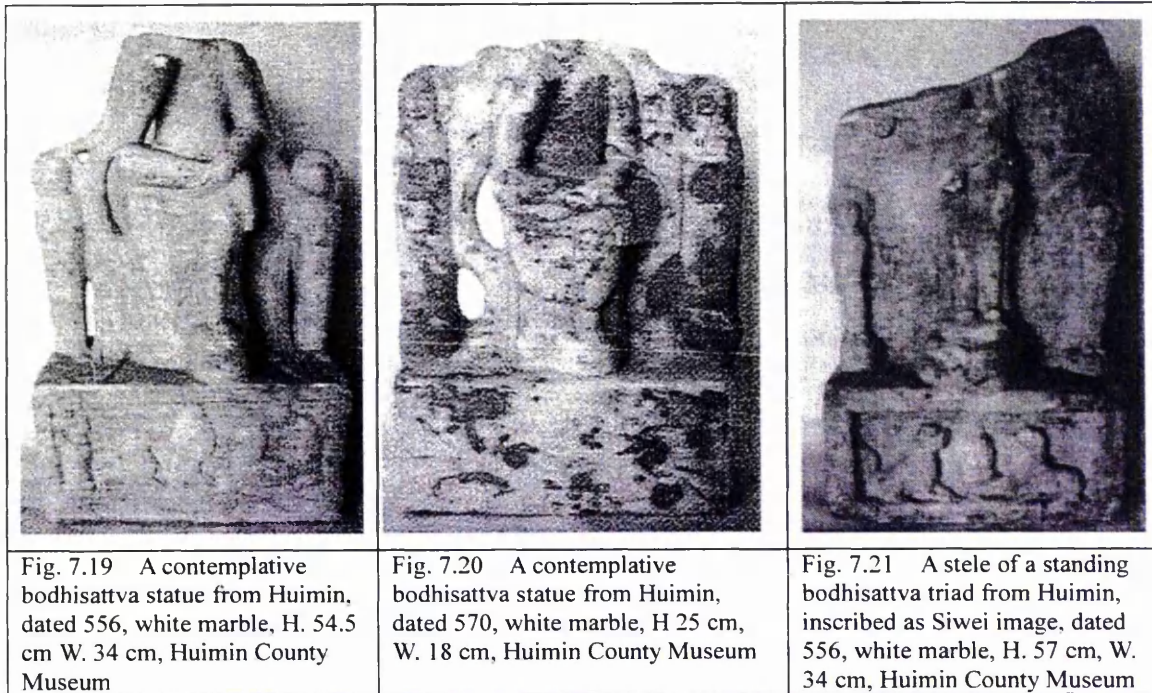
7.2.6 Huimin 惠民

In 1999, two contemplative bodhisattva statues, respectively dated to 556 and 570, were discovered in Huimin (Figs. 7.19 and 7.20). Still more intriguingly, a triad composed of a standing bodhisattva and two disciples, dated 556, is also inscribed as *taizi siwei xiang*

³⁹ Huimin diqu wenwu guanlizu 45-47.

⁴⁰ I transcribe the inscription based on the images of the rubbings published in Huimin diqu wenwu guanlizu 47.

(Fig. 7.21).⁴¹



The contemplative statue dated to 556 is a triad, a pensive deity with two monk-like figures (Fig. 7.19). This piece is not cut in typical Shandong material, grey limestone, but in white marble. It has a rectangular base carved with a incense burner in the middle with two beasts and two jin'gang guardian figures. Both the stone material and the carving reflect the Hebei conventions introduced in Chapter Six. The inscription reads:

天保七年歲次丙子乙亥朔，王比伽爲亡母造白玉石像一區，上爲皇家，有[又]爲七世先亡，見在居家大小，有形之類，咸同斯福。⁴²

In the seventh year of the Tianbao reign (the year being *bingzi*), [I,] Wang Biqie respectfully had a white jade statue made for [my] late mother. May the emperor, [my deceased relatives of] the previous seven life, living relatives [of this life] and beings that have a form all receive this blessing.

⁴¹ Huiminxian wenwu shiye guanlichu 76-81.

⁴² Huiminxian wenwu shiye guanlichu 78.

This inscription does not state the identity of the deity but only designates the stone as white jade, echoing the formulas of Hebei inscriptions. An unusual rendering of the date appears in this inscription: *suici bingzi yihai shuo* 歲次丙子乙亥朔. The character *shuo* 朔, meaning the first day of the month, would normally follow after an expression naming the month and a pair of heavenly stem and earthly branch indicating the day. However, in this case, the composer or inscriber has written two sets of heavenly stems and earthly branches together, followed immediately by the character *shuo*. It seems that the characters that would indicate the month are missing.

The other pensive statue, dated 570, is similar in iconography, style and material (Fig. 7.20). It is also a triad of a pensive deity with two monks, cut in white marble on a rectangular base. However, this base is not carved with any figure but painted with lotuses.

The inscription reads:

武平元年二月十三日，比丘僧馥爲亡父母敬[造]白玉思惟像一區，使亡者托生西方妙樂國土，生生世世值佛聞法，有[又]爲居家眷屬，普同思[斯]願。⁴³

On the thirteenth day of the second month of the first year of the Wuping reign, I, monk Sengfu, respectfully had a white jade **Siwei** statue made for my deceased parents. May the deceased be reborn to the wonderful and joyful land of the West. May [they] come into the presence of the Buddha and listen to the Buddha's teaching in every incarnation. May my relatives also unite in this wish.

This inscription also designates the stone material, marble, as white jade, as in the preceding piece, and describes the statue as a "Siwei image". Moreover, it mentions that the donor wished to be reborn to the paradise in the West. To be reborn to the paradise in the West was a common wish, which can be often seen in dedicating inscriptions from the mid-fifth century.⁴⁴

⁴³ Huiminxian wenwu shiye guanlichu 78.

⁴⁴ Hou Xudong 173-90.

The third case is exceptional. The inscription designates the statue as the Crown Prince contemplating, but the image shows a standing bodhisattva with two monk-like figures with halos (Fig. 7.21). This stele is cut with a huge aureole as those Guanyin sculptures in Hebei (Figs. 6.8 and 6.10). Iconographically, this sculpture resembles Guanyin triads from Hebei. The inscription reads:

□齊天保七年歲次丙子朔八月十三日，樂陵郡陽信縣蓋僧伽，敬造太子□維象一軀，上爲國王帝主，下及七世師僧父母，邊地眾生，含靈之類，有[又]願居家眷屬大小，普同此福，願度惡世。蓋敬爲亡兒造象一軀。⁴⁵

The thirteenth day of the eighth month of the seventh year of the Tianbao reign of the [Great] Qi. Ge Sengqie from the Yangxin County of the Leling Commandery, respectfully had a statue of the Crown Prince contemplating made for the emperor, preceptor monks, my parents of my previous seven lives, all beings at the borderlands and all sentient forms. Also, may my relatives, the old and the young, all receive this blessing, and may we cross over this evil world. Ge respectfully had a statue made for his deceased son.

The inconsistency between the iconography and the inscription mentioned above is not the only confusing point in this work. In the passage of the date, *suici bingzi shuo ba yue shisan ri* 歲次丙子朔八月十三日, is also not fully understandable, as the composer or inscriber placed *shuo* in front of the expression indicating the month. He or she probably did not fully understand the meaning of the character *shuo* but only copied it from inscriptions in other works, and therefore made a mistake.

⁴⁵ Huiminxian wenwu shiye guanlichu 76-77.

7.3 Discussion

In central and southern Shandong, statues and their bases were usually cut separately, the statue as a tenon and the base as a mortise, and to be connected together after these two parts were respectively finished. The number of the bases unearthed is much smaller than that of the sculptures. For example, at the site of the Longxing Temple 龍興寺 in Qingzhou, approximately 300 sculptures, including fragments, were excavated, but no base was unearthed.⁴⁶ It is possible that when people had to abandon these sculptures, out of reverence for the sacred images they buried the Buddha and bodhisattva statues, but decided to re-use the rectangular bases for other purpose, perhaps as building parts. As inscriptions were usually carved on the bases, they disappeared when the stone bases were appropriated for other purposes. The inscriptions discovered from Shandong all come from the north, where the statues and bases are carved as a single piece, following Hebei convention.

The artistic rendering of the pieces from central and southern Shandong is also different from those found in the northern part of the province. In Qingzhou, Linqu and Zhucheng, pensive statues and their bases seem to be carved separately, as was the case for almost all other contemporaneous statues from the same sites, but in Boxing, Huimin and Wudi, the pensive statues and their bases are carved together as a whole piece, reflecting the Hebei convention. Moreover, four pensive statues from Huimin and Wudi are all cut in white marble and three are designated as jade statues in their inscriptions, similarly to the custom in Hebei. It is probably the close geographical distance to Hebei that the masons from Huimin and Wudi were deeply influenced by the Hebei craftsmanship. Boxing,

⁴⁶ Shandongsheng Qingzhoushi bowuguan 山東省青州市博物館, "Qingzhou Longxingsi fojiao zaoxiangjiaocang qingli jianbao 青州龍興寺佛教造像窖藏清理簡報" *Wenwu* 2 (1998): 4-15.

located between the two image-making centres of southern Hebei and central Shandong, reflects stone craftsmanship traditions of both centres—Shandong artistic rendering and material but Hebei custom of carving the statue and base as a piece.

Although the northern Shandong sculptures seem to have adopted elements of Hebei craftsmanship, the double-tree motif serving as an aureole in a stele popular in Hebei is scarcely found in Shandong. The only fragment, dated to late Northern Qi or Sui, was discovered from Anqiu 安丘 in central-Shandong,⁴⁷ roughly between Zhucheng and Linqu.

During the Eastern Wei and the Northern Qi, Buddhists and artisans in both Hebei and Shandong were making the pensive images as independent statues. But compared with Hebei works, Shandong pieces show considerable diversity, whereas Hebei sculptures are more uniform in their expression. In Shandong, there are several different expressions of the volume of deities' bodies, some vigorous (Fig. 7.3), some flat (Fig. 7.1). There are also several different manners for depicting the drapery of the skirt, some showing only one layer of drapery (Figs. 7.1, 7.3 and 7.14), some having two layers (Figs. 7.7, 7.8, 7.10, 7.15 and 7.16). The varied appearances probably can be explained by Shandong's unique position and history, since it had direct contacts with multiple sources of Buddhist images, including Central Asia, the Korean Peninsula, the Southern Dynasties and other places in northern China, as mention in Section 7.1.

The pensive image seems to have been less popular in Shandong than in Hebei. Taking the excavations from the Xiude Temple in Quyang, Hebei, as an example, 247 inscribed pieces were excavated and 46 of them are pensive bodhisattvas, one-fifth of the total number.⁴⁸ However, from the Longxing Temple in Qingzhou, more than 200 torsos and

⁴⁷ Liu Guanjun 劉冠軍, "Anqiushi bowuguan cang beichao fojiao shi zaoxiang 安丘市博物館藏北朝佛教石造像," *Wenwu* 10 (2008): 92-94.

⁴⁸ Yang Boda 楊伯達, "Quyang Xiudesi chutu jinian zaoxiang de yishu fengge yu tezheng 曲陽修德寺出土

250 heads have been discovered,⁴⁹ but only three pensive images were found. From the site of the Mingdao Temple in Linqu, over a hundred pieces were discovered but only ten pensive images were among them;⁵⁰ In Boxing more than a hundred bronzes dated from the Northern Wei to the Sui were discovered but there is only one pensive bodhisattva amongst them. In other words, Buddhism in the sixth century Shandong had its own development, to a certain extent independent from the political centre, southern Hebei, at the time.

Regarding the identity issue, among the seven inscriptions in Shandong, three describe the stone statue as the Crown Prince, i.e. Siddhārtha, three leave the identity unstated and one described the statue as *siwei xiang*. Another small pensive image on the aureole of a triad can also be identified as Prince Siddhārtha judging from its pictorial context. In Hebei, amongst the seventy inscriptions I have collected, only four are described as *taizi*. Shandong had a different use and recognition of the pensive images. They seemed more likely to recognise him as Prince Siddhārtha.

Finally, although the bronze pensive statue from Boxing is without a named identity, it still leaves us significant information. This is perhaps one of the earliest pensive images in Shandong, prior to any stone pensive round sculptures from Hebei. This bronze statue and the contemporaneous stone statue from Linqu (Fig. 7.5) reveal the emergence of a tradition of depicting the pensive image as an independent deity in Shandong at an earlier date than the emergence of a similar convention in Hebei.

紀年造像的藝術風格與特徵,” *Gugong bowuyuankan* 2 (1960): 43-52. Archaeologists claims that they unearthed more than two thousand pieces, including fragments, from this site, but no complete archaeological report has been published to give a clear number of how many have been restored and how many are too fragmental to recognise.

⁴⁹ Xia Mingcai 夏名采, “Qingzhou Longxingsi fojiao zaoxiang yishu de tese 青州龍興寺佛教造像藝術的特色,” *Shandong Qinzhou Longsingsi chutu fojiao zaoxiang zhan*, ed. Wang Huanqing (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Museum of Art, 2001) 48. Stanley Abe, “Book Review on ‘Return of the Buddha: The Qingzhou Discoveries’,” *Artibus Asiae* 62.2 (2002): 293.

⁵⁰ On site observation in November 2005.

7.4 Conclusion

In the final phase of the cult of the pensive deity, Shandong revealed a different course of development from Hebei. The establishment of the pensive bodhisattva as an independent deity happened earlier in Shandong (around 520) than in Hebei (around 539). However, Buddhists in Shandong did not show the same enthusiasm for producing the pensive image as people in Hebei. Amongst approximately five hundred bodhisattva images excavated from Shandong, only about twenty are pensive statues. Moreover, the Buddhists of Shandong appear to have conceived the identity of this deity somewhat differently from those of Hebei: among seven surviving inscriptions, three describe the deity as the Crown Prince; whereas in Hebei, only four out of seventy describe the pensive deity as the Crown Prince. It was probably the unique geographic location of Shandong, situated between the Southern and Northern Dynasties and in convenient contact with cultures outside China via the sea route, that enabled Shandong to develop a distinct tradition regarding the identity of the pensive image.

Chapter 8: Discussion and Analysis

The previous chapters have discussed the pensive images crafted in different regions of Northern China during the fifth and sixth centuries. In this chapter, I summarise the long-term iconographic development of the pensive bodhisattva image and provide a fresh perspective on the question of the figure's identity through a detailed analysis of accompanying inscriptions.

8.1 Pensive bodhisattva's iconographical development

In the previous chapters, I have discussed the contemplating image as it evolved in distinct geographic areas, from northwest to northeast China, from the beginning of the fifth to the end of sixth century. Here, I integrate the conclusions of these regional analyses in order to examine the long-term development of this iconographic tradition and the religious beliefs with which it was associated.

The representation of the contemplative figure as an independent deity can be traced back to the cave-temples in western Gansu in the first quarter of the fifth century and gradually spread eastward, reaching Shanxi, Shaanxi and Hebei by 470. In Shaanxi and Hebei, this contemplating image appeared from time to time, but not as a main deity in the Buddhist iconographic repertoire. However, at the Yungang site in Shanxi a strong iconographical tradition of the contemplative bodhisattva image had been established by continuous reproduction before 495, when the capital was moved to Luoyang. Following the transfer of the capital, a new Buddhist image-making centre developed in Nannieshui, in central Shanxi, on the route between the old and new capitals, probably supported by busy traffic. During this later period of the Northern Wei, Buddhists and artisans in both Nannieshui and Luoyang were exploring and

expanding the religious contents of *siwei*, i.e. contemplation, and experimenting with iconographical possibilities. The variety of the visual elements in the contemplative image reached its historical peak in the first quarter of the sixth century at Luoyang and Nannieshui. After the Northern Wei collapsed and the stronger court faction moved to the new capital of Ye in 534, an independent identity for the pensive bodhisattva was established in Shandong and Hebei.

From the early fifth to the sixth century as the contemplative image transformed, the bodhisattva's status in iconographical settings was elevated from a minor deity in a larger iconographical scheme to a primary deity cut as sculptures in the round. At the beginning of the contemplative image's development, in Gansu, the pensive bodhisattva statues were treated as attendants and set in niches in side walls (Mogao Caves 275 and 259), or in central pillars facing side walls (Mogao Caves 257, 260 and 437, and West Cave of Jinta Cave-temples). Reflecting its minor role at that time, none of the contemplative bodhisattva statues were positioned prominently, such as occupying a central position or facing the entrance. Although the spatial arrangements and iconographical designs are slightly different from one another, in these caves the contemplative statue shows a close relationship with the cross-legged Maitreya. Mogao Cave 275 is particularly important because it is here from where the precedents of two types of contemplative images might have emerged, with subsequent derivations found at other caves at Mogao and other later sites.

In Mogao Cave 275, the contemplative bodhisattva statues play a dual role in the iconographical setting (section and floor plan in Fig. 2.1): they are treated as equals to the cross-legged bodhisattva statues in the side walls, being positioned adjacently; however they are subordinate to the cross-legged bodhisattva statue in the main wall. Both aspects were adopted in later caves. In the former cases, treating the contemplative and cross-legged bodhisattvas as equals, in Mogao Caves 257, 260 and 437, dated to the second half of the fifth century, the contemplative and cross-legged bodhisattva statues

are set in the central pillar in mirrored positions, respectively facing north and south. In the contemporaneously constructed cave, West Cave of Jinta Cave-temples, the contemplative bodhisattva statue is set in the central pillar facing west, and the cross-legged Maitreya Buddha is placed in the niche next to it facing north, also an equal to the pensive statue (section and floor plan in Fig. 2.11). At Maijishan, the pensive and cross-legged images are set in the main wall facing the entrance, one at each side of the Buddha (schematic diagram in Figs. 2.22, 2.25, 2.28 and 2.29). This design can be seen from eastern to western Gansu in the second half of the fifth century.

The later case, treating the contemplative bodhisattva image as a subordinate to the cross-legged bodhisattva image, was popular at Yungang where approximately seventy examples, dated to c. 470 to 524, have been documented. The beginning of using such an image was contemporaneous with the type discussed above. In the examples at Yungang in Shanxi, the pensive bodhisattva statues are mostly placed as attendants to the cross-legged bodhisattva image at his two sides. Artisans probably formed this triad by adopting the model represented in Mogao Cave 275, selecting the most distinctive image from the side-walls to serve as attendants to the primary icon (Section 3.3). Placing the pensive images alongside Maitreya may have been intended to emphasise the contemplative, intellectual side of Buddhist practice, consistent with the doctrine centred on Maitreya (Section 3.3).

In Yungang Caves 9 and 10, dated to the 480s, an image of a tree appears next to the contemplative bodhisattva statue. Its antecedents can be traced to Shaanxi and Hebei where images of a tree next to the contemplative bodhisattva were circulated by 471 (Figs. 3.22, 3.23, 3.24 and 6.17). The combination of these two visual elements probably came from Mogao Cave 275, dated to the first quarter of the fifth century, in which the deity is seated in a double tree niche (Fig. 3.2). The appearance of a tree next to the pensive deity in Caves 9 and 10 is closer to the type found in Hebei and in Shaanxi, and was probably inspired by the carvings there. But the identity of the

contemplating deity was not named in any inscriptions at this stage, most likely as they serve only as a minor deity on the back of the bronze and stele.

In addition to being carved as attendants to Maitreya, from the 480s at Yungang the image of the pensive deity was used in a different iconographical context, representing episodes from Śākyamuni's biography. In Yungang Cave 6, Prince Siddhartha appears as a pensive deity in scenes showing his last night in the palace and the farewell to his horse (Sections 3.2.3 and 3.2.4). This portrayal of Siddhartha's contemplation was probably intended to emphasise the path of intellectual and mental training by which Siddhartha attained enlightenment. In later caves, the image of Great Renunciation is no longer depicted, but the farewell scene continued to be carved till the 520s, the end of the construction of Yungang in the Northern Dynasties. The persisting popularity of the farewell scene is related to its representation of Siddhartha's last attachment to the secular world, and illustrates that Siddhartha chose the ascetic life over the princely life. Immediately after the farewell moment, Siddhartha went into the forest and lived as a monk; this image conveys the forceful determination of pursuing ultimate liberation and full awakening.

At Yungang from the second half of the fifth century to the first quarter of the sixth century, the contemplative bodhisattva image was not exclusively representing any particular deity. It appears in images centred on Maitreya and on Śākyamuni, characteristic of contemplation that was appealing to Buddhist adherents. It should be noted that at Yungang the visual elements in the pensive images belonging to the above two contexts were not portrayed together: the tree in the Maitreya triad was not depicted with Siddhartha and horse, and the horse from the farewell scene was not depicted with the pensive bodhisattva in the Maitreya triads. Artisans at Yungang maintained a clear distinction between these two groups of images.

After the capital was moved from Pingcheng to Luoyang in 495, the contemplative image developed along increasingly diverse lines. The conventional

image from Yungang, a cross-legged Maitreya with two contemplative bodhisattvas in a trapezoidal-arch niche, continued to be portrayed. In the earliest cave at Longmen, the Guyang Cave, this triad was cut from c. 498-505, and new images derived from it also appeared from around 510 onwards. In the innovative images in the Guyang Cave, patrons and artisans continued using the structure developed at Yungang, placing a pensive bodhisattva on both sides of a cross-legged Maitreya; however, they were now not cut in high relief as primary attendants. In Niches 185 and 258 in the Guyang Cave, dated to the 510s, two monks and two standing bodhisattvas are carved in high relief flanking the cross-legged Maitreya.

In contrast to these conventional images, the innovative representation of the contemplative deity together with worshippers elevates the status of the deity in the iconographical settings. In these innovative images, the contemplative images are shown as deities receiving worship from earthly adherents. Emperors depicted in these images as a worshipper suggest the patrons' affiliation with royalty. The manner of depiction of these worshippers also suggests that the contemplative bodhisattvas at this time in Luoyang may have been favoured by Buddhists of aristocratic or royal background. In later examples found in the Weizi and Huoshao Caves, the image of a contemplative bodhisattva with an array of worshippers became a fixed iconographic motif. Its position changed from inside the niche to being placed at the two ends of the trapezoidal arch, but the structure remained the same, i.e. as a pair flanking the central icon. In each unit, attendants holding fans and canopies are depicted serving the primary worshippers, showing their high social or financial status.

At Yungang, images of the contemplative bodhisattva with worshippers first appeared in Cave 1, dated to the 480s, but those worshippers are depicted as heavenly beings with streamers wrapping around their arms (Fig. 3.6). Only after the capital moved to Luoyang in 494 did images of the pensive deity with secular worshippers appear, which were contemporaneous with those crafted at Longmen. Since this image

at Yungang was not as popular as at Longmen, its later appearance at Yungang was probably a consequence of influence from the newer Longmen traditions.

At another site, Nannieshui, where the start of the carving of massive Buddhist images was almost contemporaneous with that at Longmen, Buddhists and artisans were also exploring religious contents and possibilities of iconographies of the contemplative bodhisattva. After the Northern Wei capital was moved to Ye in 534, image-making activities continued at Nannieshui until the third quarter of the sixth century. At Nannieshui, a number of new visual elements were added to the contemplative image, as will be discussed below in Section 8.4, but the iconographical structure remained simple, possibly predetermined by the almost square-shaped surface of the stone blocks and the convention of carving a niche at the centre of the composition. These two crucial apparent limitations probably in practice determined that the pensive deity be seated at the centre, with other visual elements surrounding it to occupy the remaining stone surface.

In the images of Prince Siddhartha's farewell to his horse, a tree is always depicted beside the deity, together with the horse as a fixed iconography (Section 5.2.1). In some examples, a worshipper is portrayed paying homage to the bodhisattva (Section 5.2.2). Both were contemporaneous with the development in Luoyang. The similarities between Nannieshui and Luoyang suggest that these two sites shared common sources, and there may have been interaction between them.

In Shandong, most of the pensive bodhisattva statues are cut as sculptures in the round or cast as individual bronzes. The earliest one is dated to the first quarter of the sixth century, which suggests that by that time the pensive bodhisattva had been treated as an independent deity with its own identity as other deities such as Mile or Guanyin. In Hebei, the earliest independent sculpture is dated to 539 by its dedicating inscription and a large part of them are named as Siwei, a name of an independent deity (see Section 8.2). After a long development from the early fifth century, the pensive image

finally was not only treated as a primary subject in iconographical settings, but also given its own name.

Although an independent identity had emerged and the contemplative image began to be treated as a primary subject, other pictorial traditions continued in parallel. These images coexisted from the second quarter to the end of the sixth century. The pensive figure was first accepted and employed in the Hexi Corridor from the first quarter of the fifth century, developed and established at Yungang from 470s, multiplied and experimented at Luoyang and Nannieshui from c. 495 to 527, and at last established as an independent deity at Shandong and Hebei from the second quarter of the sixth century.

8.2 Inscriptional analysis: the emergence of “Siwei Bodhisattva”

Previous scholars have often noted the frequent occurrence of the term *siwei* in inscriptions accompanying pensive images. However, by retaining their assumption that the figure must possess an identity located in the canonical sutras, they have been blinded to the full implications of these inscriptions' phrasing. Through a close grammatical analysis of these inscriptions, below I argue that the structure of the inscriptions in some instances strongly suggests that the carvers or donors of these statues conceived of the pensive figure itself as an independent deity, despite the fact that no such deity can be found in the sutras.

I begin with inscriptions from sixth-century Hebei, which display a common grammatical pattern. When analysing the inscriptions with subject-matters, a typical example will start with the date, followed the patron's name, the identity of the deity, the devotee, and, in some cases, their wish. The following tables, 8.2.1 to 8.2.4, show four complete inscriptions found at Hebei of different statues with distinct identities.

Table 8.2.1 Inscription of a Maitreya statue dated 521¹

Inscription		
正光二年九月廿日	On the twentieth day of the ninth month of the second year of the Zhengguan reign,	Date
佛弟子張開	[I,] a Buddhist disciple, Zhang Kai,	Patron
爲父母	for [my] parents,	Devotee
造彌勒上生像一軀	had an ascendant Mile statue made.	Identity

Table 8.2.2 Inscription of a Guanyin statue dated 525²

Inscription		
孝昌元年臘月十六日	On the sixteenth day of the twelfth month of the first year of the Xiaochang reign,	Date
仏來芻	[I,] Fo Laiju,	Patron
爲亡妣	for [my] late mother,	Devotee
敬造觀世音石像一軀	respectfully had a stone Guanshiyin statue made.	Identity

Table 8.2.3 Inscription of a Śākyamuni statue dated 555³

Inscription		
天保六年正月廿三日	On the twenty-second day of the first month of the sixth year of the Tianbao reign,	Date
上曲陽縣人李神景兄弟等	[we,] Li Shengjing brothers from upper Quyang County,	Patron
仰爲皇帝陛下亡父母	for the emperor and [my] late parents,	Devotee
敬造白玉無量壽像一區並二菩薩	Respectfully had a statue of Wuliangshou (Amitābha) and two bodhisattvas made,	Identity
願使亡父母捨此身已往生西方極樂世界又願法界眾生居家眷屬遠離苦津速登正覺	May [our] late parents be reborn in the Land of Ultimate Bliss of the West. May all the sentient beings in the dharma world and [my] family members be away from the flood of misery and soon attain enlightenment.	Wish

¹ Yang Boda 楊伯達, *Umoreda chūgoku sekibutsu no kenkyū: Kahokushō Kyokuyū shutsudo no hakugyokuzō to hennen meibun* 埋もれた中國石仏の研究: 河北省曲陽出土の白玉像と編年銘文, trans. Matsubara Saburo 松原三郎 (Tokyo: Tokyo bijutsu, 1985) 165.

² Yang *Kahokushō Kyokuyū* 165.

³ Feng 178.

Table 8.2.4 Inscription of a Śākyamuni statue dated 566⁴

Inscription		
大齊天統二年四月八日	On the eighth day of the fourth month of the second year of the Tiantong reign of the Great Qi,	Date
比丘尼靜藏	[I,] nun Jingzang,	Patron
敬造釋迦白玉像一區	respectfully had a white jade Śākyamuni statue made.	Identity
上爲國王帝主師僧父母己身 眷屬邊地含生俱登正道	May the emperor, preceptor monks, [my] parents, [my] relatives, and the sentient beings of the border land all attain the right path (enlightenment).	Devotee & Wish

As the above four examples demonstrate, inscriptions from Hebei in the sixth century usually consist of the four or five elements: date, patron's name, devotee, identity of the deity, and patron's wish. The two dedicating inscriptions of contemplating statues below in Table 8.2.5 and 8.2.6, also exhibit these same elements.

Table 8.2.5 Inscription of a Siwei statue dated 539⁵

Inscription		
元象二年正月一日	On the first day of the first month of the second year of the Yuanxiang reign,	Date
佛弟子比丘尼惠照	[I,] a Buddhist disciple, nun Huizhao,	Patron
造思惟玉像一區	had a jade Siwei statue made.	Identity
上爲國主先亡父母己身 眷屬合家大小一切有形 同昇妙樂	May the emperor, [my] late parents, [all] my family members and [all sentient beings that have] physical forms ascend to [the realm of] wonder and joy.	Devotee & Wish

Table 8.2.6 Inscription of a Siwei statue dated 547⁶

Inscription		
天保七年二月八日	On the eighth day of the second month of the seventh year of the Tianbao reign,	Date
韓子思	[I,] Han Zisi,	Patron
仰爲亡父母	for [my] late parents,	Devotee
敬造白玉思唯象一區	respectfully had a white jade Siwei statue made.	Identity

⁴ Feng 198.

⁵ Feng 150.

⁶ Yang *Kahokushō Kyokuyū* 170.

The inscription illustrated in Table 8.2.5 dated 539 is the earliest extant *siwei* inscription. Both inscriptions involving the term *siwei* start with the date, followed the patron's name, the devotee, and the identity of the deity and the patron's wish, just as was the case for the previous sixth century inscriptions.

For ease of reference, Table 8.2.7 below compares extracts of the deity's identity from all the inscriptions mentioned above:

Table 8.2.7 The parts of the deity's identity in the inscriptions

Date	Chinese original	English translation
521	造彌勒上生像一區	had an ascendant Mile (Maitreya) image made
525	敬造觀世音石像一區	had a stone Guanshiyin (Avalokitêśvara) statue made
555	敬造白玉無量壽像一區	respectfully had a white jade Wuliangshou (Amitâyus) statue made
566	敬造釋迦白玉像一區	respectfully had a white jade Shijia (Śākyamuni) statue made
539	造思惟玉像一區	had a jade Siwei statue made
547	敬造白玉思唯象一區	had a white jade Siwei statue made

As the entries highlight, the term “Siwei” in the inscriptions dated 539 and 547 serves as a proper noun, identifying the figure, as the other inscriptions had identified the figure respectively as Maitreya, Avalokitêśvara, Amitâyus and Śākyamuni. In other words, the term *siwei* is not limited to being read as an adjective or a verb describing the state of the figure, it can also in some constructions denote the name of the figure. These meanings overlap with each other and embody themselves in the contemplating statues.

A passage in an inscription dated 558 further supports the argument that *siwei* can serve as a proper noun in inscriptions from the sixth century. The provenance of this stele is unclear, but the rubbing is held in the collection of the Academia Sinica in Taipei.⁷ It reads:

.....造釋迦碑像一區，彌勒慈氏，及無量壽佛、藥師、定光、思惟、多

⁷ “Dong Huangtou deng qishiren zao Shijia beixiang bing Mile Wuliangshou Yaoshi Dingguang Siwei Doubao deng xiangji 董黃頭等七十人造釋迦碑像并彌勒無量壽藥師定光思惟多寶等像記,” *Union Catalog of Digital Archives Taiwan* 數位典藏聯合目錄, Dec 26 2008 <<http://catalog.ndap.org.tw/?URN=1811863>>.

寶、阿難、迦葉，并諸菩薩……

……had a stele of Shijia image with Milecishi, Wuliangshoufo, Yaoshi, Dingguang, Siwei, Doubao, Anan, Jiashe and other bodhisattvas made……

In this passage, Milecishi refers to the Future Buddha Maitreya; Wuliangshoufo, Amitâyus, i.e. Buddha of Immeasurable Life; Yaoshi, Bhaisajyaguru, i.e. the Medicine Buddha; Dingguang, Dipamkara; Doubao, Prabhatratna, i.e. Buddha of Abundant Treasures; Anan, Śākyamuni's disciple Ananda; Jiashe, Śākyamuni's disciple Kasyapa. Siwei, listed amongst Buddhas, bodhisattvas and Śākyamuni's disciples, refers to a divine figure as well.

8.3 Naming the deity: *siwei* in texts

The inscriptional analysis discloses the identity of the figure, Siwei Bodhisattva, but it does not illuminate the religious concepts that this figure represented. In order to reconstruct the religious contents of the belief in the Siwei Bodhisattva, this section and the next respectively examine the textual and pictorial evidence relating to the term and the image. This section deals with texts: the use of *siwei* in indigenous Chinese texts and its development in sutras. Together, they reflect people's various understanding of *siwei* and Siwei Bodhisattva.

The following instances explain how a deity's name also denotes the virtue and religious contents he or she represent (Table 8.3.1). Shijia moni 釋迦牟尼, the transliteration of the Sanskrit word Śākyamuni, literally means "the saint of the Śākya clan".⁸ Amituofo 阿彌陀佛, the transliteration of Amitâbha or Amitâyus, meaning "boundless light" or "boundless age", is also translated as Wulianguang fo 無量光佛

⁸ William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index* (1937; New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2005) 482.

or Wuliangshou fo 無量壽佛.⁹ The *Foshuo Amituo jing* 佛說阿彌陀經 explains that this Buddha can shed boundless light and illuminate the ten directions, and also that he and people in his realm have boundless age.¹⁰ Guanshiyin 觀世音 is the translation of Avalokitêśvara, and explained in the *Lotus Sutra* as “Regarder of the world’s sound or cry”.¹¹ Anyone in pain or danger cries out this bodhisattva’s name, and Guanshiyin will hear the cry, then he or she will be saved.¹²

Table 8.3.1 Names of Buddhist deities in Chinese translations and transliterations

Deity’s name	Transliteration	Translation	Meaning
Śākyamuni	釋迦牟尼 Shi jia mo ni		the saint of the Śākya clan
Amitābha Amitāyus	阿彌陀佛 A mi tuo fo	無量光 (Wu liang guang) 無量壽 (Wu liang shou)	boundless light boundless age
Avalokitêśvara		觀世音 (Guan shi yin)	Regarder of the world’s sound or cry

As demonstrated above, the names of Buddhist deities usually denote the virtues they represent. To investigate the name of the Siwei deity, an analysis of the meanings of this term in texts will provide some insight into the ideology that the image embodied.

The term *siwei* was probably first used in the Han Dynasty. It is not found in any pre-Han classics, but appears four times in *Hanshu* 漢書, finished in 82 AD:

陛下親耕藉田以爲農先，夙寤晨興，憂勞萬民，思惟往古，而務以求賢，此亦堯舜之用心也。¹³

If his majesty personally tills the imperial fields, rising at dawn, taking pains for the sake of the people, **directing his thoughts** toward antiquity and his efforts seeking virtue—this is the care that Yao and Shun took [in ruling the empire].

⁹ Soothill and Hodous 287.

¹⁰ *Foshuo Amituo jing* T 366.12.347a.

¹¹ Soothill and Hodous 489. *Miaofa lianhua jing* 妙法蓮華經 T 262.09.56c.

¹² T 262.09.56c.

¹³ *Han shu* 2512.

車騎將軍安世事孝武皇帝三十餘年……宜尊其位，以爲大將軍，毋令領光祿勳事，使專精神，憂念天下，思惟得失。¹⁴

Anshi, the General of Chariots and Cavalry, served Emperor Wu for more than thirty years. [...] We should respect his position and make him Generalissimo, not order him to attend to the affairs of the Chamberlain for Attendants. This would allow him to focus his attention, take concern with all under Heaven, and **consider** gains and losses.

臣得蒙天子厚恩，父子俱爲顯列，臣位至上卿，爵爲列侯，犬馬之齒七十六，爲明詔填溝壑，死骨不朽，亡所顧念，獨思惟兵利害至孰悉也，於臣之計，先誅先零已，則颯、騰之屬不煩兵而服矣。¹⁵

I have received the great kindness of the Son of Heaven: both father and son have attained eminence, and been bestowed with the rank of Marquis. I have reached the age of seventy-six, and am ready to die at the Emperor's command and have only my bones remain, without second thoughts. My one accomplished skill is in **considering** military advantage and disadvantage. According to my reckoning, if we first crush Xianling, then Ying and Teng will surrender without resisting our armies.

昔秦穆公說譏諷之言，任乞乞之勇，身受大辱，社稷幾亡，悔過自責，思惟黃髮，任用百里奚，卒伯西域，德列王道。¹⁶

Once, Duke Mu of Qin delighted in eloquent words and employed courageous heroes, and as a result he himself suffered great humiliation, and almost lost his kingdom. He regretted his mistakes and chastised himself, and **considering** [the benefits to be gained from having an adviser with] grey hair, employed Baili Xi. In the end he became Hegemon of the Western Regions, and his virtue stands beside the Kingly Way.

As the examples show, in *Han shu*, the term *siwei* refers to a serious intellectual activity, including deep reflecting, considering, reckoning and judging. In other words, it is a rational thought process, which requires a certain amount of education or instruction to achieve. When Buddhism entered China in the second century, Buddhist translators

¹⁴ *Han shu* 2648.

¹⁵ *Han shu* 2982

¹⁶ *Han shu* 3179.

chose this Chinese term to explain the intellectual practice and mental training required in the religious path to enlightenment.

As early as the Latter Han period, the first Buddhist translator, An Shigao 安世高 adopted the Chinese term *siwei* in his works dated from 148 to 168. It appears repeatedly in his translations, such as those in the *Foshuo shifa feifa jing* 佛說是法非法經, *Foshuo da anban shouyi jing* 佛說大安般守意經:

佛說比丘我已說賢者法。亦說非賢者法。比丘當自思惟。賢者法亦當思惟。非賢者法已思惟。當行賢者法。捨非賢者法。¹⁷

The Buddha says, “Monks, I have told you the ways of the wise, and I have told you the ways of the unwise. You should yourselves **contemplate** these matters. You should **contemplate** the ways of the wise. Having **contemplated** the ways of the unwise, you should practice the ways of the wise and abandon the ways of the unwise.

時佛坐行安般守意九十日。佛復獨坐九十日者。思惟校計。欲度脫十方人及蝸飛蠕動之類¹⁸

At one time, the Buddha had sat and finished breath-counting meditation for ninety days, and then sat alone for another ninety days. He was **contemplating** and considering the way to liberate human beings, worms, birds and beasts of the ten directions.

In both passages, *siwei* refers to contemplating and considering. After An Shigao’s adoption, many later translators constantly employed *siwei* in their own translations. For example, in Dharmarakṣa’s 竺法護 translation of the *Lotus Sutra* in 286, the earliest version of the *Lotus Sutra* in Chinese language, *siwei* appears a paragraph using drilling into a plateau for water as a metaphor of the pursuit of Dharma:

是法難得遇，信者亦難值。
如人欲求水，穿掘於高原，

¹⁷ T 48.1.838c

¹⁸ T 602.15.163c

數數積功夫，但覩燥乾土。
彼觀自思惟，其水爲甚遠，
所掘深乃爾，續見乾燥土。
然後轉漸覩，濕土稍稍現，
爾乃心決疑，今已得近水。¹⁹

This Dharma is difficult to acquire and believers are also hard to meet.
As one drills into a plateau for water.
One makes great efforts but only sees dry soil.
One sees this and **considers** that water is still far away.
One drills as deep as this and still sees dry soil.
[One drills even deeper] and gradually sees wet soil gradually appearing.
This person then is convinced that he/she is close to water.

In this paragraph, *siwei* means "to consider", "to reckon", "to make a logical and reasonable judgement".

In another translation by Dharmarakṣa, in the *Sheng jing* 生經, a story tells about a diligent servant who prepares food for four practitioners. One day, the servant falls asleep in the mountains and fails to provide a meal for the practitioners. He feels regret about his neglect and sits beside water:

侍者聞之。憂感難言。退在樹下。近水邊坐。偏翹一脚。思惟自責。²⁰

The servant hears this. He feels sad and worried and could not speak. He sits under a tree near water with one leg pendent and the other folded. He **reflects** and reproaches.

In this case, *siwei* refers to the intellectual and mental activity of reflection.

In Dharmakṣa's 曇無讖 translation of the *Beihua jing* 悲華經, *siwei* is combined with *ruding* 入定, referring to meditation:

.....各七歲中心無欲欲，乃至無有香·味·觸想，各於靜處入定思惟，

¹⁹ T 263.9.102a

²⁰ T 154.3.77a

亦得見於十方世界，——方面如萬佛土……²¹

…… In seven years, every one of you will have neither desire in your hearts nor thoughts of fragrance, flavour or touch. You should each enter into concentration and **meditate** in a quiet place, and [also] see the worlds of the ten directions and in each direction ten thousand Buddha lands appear.

In the late third to early fourth century, in the *Faju piyu jing* 法句譬喻經, Fa Ju 法炬 constructed *siwei* with *jiding* 寂定, entering tranquil concentration, to denote the same meaning as meditation:

於是諸女聞佛此偈。願學真道爲比丘尼。頭髮自墮法衣具足。思惟寂定即得羅漢道。²²

Having heard the Buddha's verses, all the female practitioners vow to learn the true path and to be nuns. Their hair has dropped away spontaneously and their Buddhist robes are complete. They **contemplate** and enter tranquil concentration [their thoughts become calmly abiding] and they attain the Luohan (*arhat*) Path.

In the early fifth century, in the *Siwei lueyao fa* 思惟略要法,²³ *A Compendium of the Method of Siwei*, which consists of ten sections, each section is given a title (Table 8.3.1).

Table 8.3.2 Tiles of the ten sections of the *Siwei lueyao fa*

Sec.	Title in Chinese	Title in transliteration	Title in English
1	四無量觀法	<i>si wuliang guan fa</i>	The method of visualising the four immeasurable minds
2	不淨觀法	<i>bujing guan fa</i>	The method of visualising the filthy
3	白骨觀法	<i>baigu guan fa</i>	The method of visualising skeletons

²¹ T 157.3.182c

²² T 211.4.585a

²³ T 617.15.297c-300b

4	觀佛三昧法	<i>guanfo sanmei fa</i>	The samadhi method of visualising the Buddha
5	生身觀法	<i>shengshen guan fa</i>	The method of visualising the physical body of the Buddha
6	法身觀法	<i>fashen guan fa</i>	The method of visualising the dharma body of the Buddha
7	十方諸佛觀法	<i>shifang zhufu guan fa</i>	The method of visualising all Buddhas of the ten directions
8	觀無量壽佛法	<i>guan Wuliangshoufo fa</i>	The method of visualising the Wuliangshou Buddha (Amitābha)
9	諸法實相觀法	<i>zhufa shixiang guan fa</i>	The method of visualising the true marks of all elemental constructs
10	法華三昧觀法	<i>Fahua sanmei guan fa</i>	The method of visualising the samadhi teaching in the Lotus Sutra

Every title of the ten sections has the Chinese character *guan* 觀, which in Buddhist textual context usually refers to visualisation practice. As to the content, all the ten sections are detailed guidance to concentrating thoughts, to imagining the shape and colours of the Buddha's body, and to visualising the demolition of human bodies in order to realise the truth of mortality. This sutra, although entitled *A Compendium of the Method of Siwei*, is actually a compendium of the methods of visualisation. In other words, in the early fifth century the term *siwei* could also be used to refer to visualisation meditation.

As demonstrated, over the course of time translators and composers of canonical texts and the composers of the inscriptions described above contributed their own understanding to the meaning and use of *siwei*. As the texts cross-reference each other, every educated reader should have been able to associate *siwei* in the text being read with instances in other texts. The co-existence of older and newer texts and the dialogues and resonances among them enriched the significance of this term, but this complex situation also inevitably generated a plurality of meanings. By the end of the fifth century, *siwei* in sutras can refer to many kinds of intellectual activities, including contemplating, considering, judging, concentrating, reflecting, reckoning, meditating and visualising. Readers therefore need to take the term *siwei* as a complex of several different ideas, all relating to intellectual and mental training to enlightenment. It is the

training that can take the practitioners from this shore of the mundane world, across the ocean of misery, to the other side of the ocean, nirvana.

This is the meaning the Siwei Bodhisattva represented. The images served as a reminder or an admonition prompting Buddhists to make efforts on mental and intellectual practice, for that is where the true salvation lies, and it is also the path between the mundane world and the Pure Land. The purpose of worshipping the Siwei Bodhisattva is to reach the Buddha's land. In the next section, I examine the resonances between these beliefs, which we see illuminated most clearly in texts, and the serene vision of contemplation that we see displayed in the pensive images themselves.

8.4 Religious significance of the tree motif

In the course of establishing the contemplative bodhisattva as an independent and primary deity, several visual elements appeared with the deity, including trees, horses, reborn beings, worshippers, meditators, etc. Each of these elements contributed a certain meaning to the formation of this belief and enriched the religious contents that the pensive deity represented. These images were created not solely on the basis of textual descriptions but also on people's understanding and hope placed on this bodhisattva. A careful examination of these visual elements, which were used on a daily basis, reveals the concepts attached to this belief. As I have discussed the transformation of iconographical structure of the contemplative image in Section 8.1 and most of the elements in previous chapters, this section focuses on the key element, a tree, which appeared from the beginning to the final stage of the formation of the belief in the contemplative bodhisattva.

In the long development of the contemplative image in China, the tree was the first visual element to be attached to it. The earliest evidence is the two contemplative bodhisattvas in the double-tree niches in Mogao Cave 275, dated to the early fifth

century (Fig. 2.2). By this time in Dunhuang, artisans had abundant visual and textual materials regarding the image of a figure contemplating under a tree. The following discussion starts from the possible visual sources from Gandhara from the second century and then discusses the possible textual sources regarding contemplation from the late third century.

The affiliation of a tree and the pensive figure can be traced to Gandhara from the second century. In a stele in a private collection in Japan, a pensive figure is seated under a tree (Fig. 8.1). On his right, an ox and two peasants, one of them holding a plough, are depicted. Another stele held by the Peshawar Museum shows similar composition, but in this piece, a figure and a horse stand on the pensive figure's left (Fig. 8.2). The contemplative figures under trees in both steles, dated to the second to the third centuries, can with little doubt be identified as Prince Siddhartha, for the ox and the horse are unique characters in the narratives in Śākyamuni's biographies (Section 1.2). The ox is described in Siddhartha's observation on farming, which in turn inspired his first meditation; the horse and the figure in Fig. 8.2 represent Siddhartha's groom and ride, Chandaka and Kanthaka. In both carvings, there is foliage cut over Prince Siddhartha. It seems that In Gandhara, the image of Siddhartha contemplating is often associated with a tree.



Fig. 8.1 Prince Siddhārtha's first meditation, Gandhara, second-third century, Private collection in Japan



Fig. 8.2 Prince Siddhārtha's first meditation, Gandhara, second-third century, Peshwar Museum

However, a tree, as a visual element in Buddhist steles, was not exclusively depicted with Prince Siddhartha in Gandhara. A number of standing or seated figures, including Buddhas and bodhisattvas, are also depicted under a tree in stone carvings (Fig. 8.3). In these images, the foliage of the tree is delineated over the figures as a canopy to express the noble status of the figures. Many images of this type were probably brought into China by missionary monks or by Chinese pilgrims, and served as visual materials for Chinese image-makers.



Fig. 8.3 Statue of a seated bodhisattva under a tree, Gandhara, dated to the second to third century

In addition to the visual materials, Chinese Buddhist texts also contain abundant records regarding practising contemplation under a tree, including a sutra titled *Contemplating the Twelve Limbs of Dependent Origination under the Pattra Tree*, *Beiduo shu xia siwei shier yinyuan jing* 貝多樹下思惟十二因緣經. This sutra title was recorded in the *Comprehensive Catalogue of Scriptures*, i.e. *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集, compiled by Daoan 道安 in 374, but the contents of the sutra are no longer extant.²⁴ In surviving texts, contemplating under a tree, *shuxia siwei* 樹下思惟, appears thousands of times and as early as the late third century. In the *Sheng jing* 生經 (*Jātaka-sūtra*), translated by Dharmarakṣa, a chapter mentions a story about the nuns in the city Jusa 拘薩 practising Buddhism together, who concentrate themselves and contemplate the noble ways of Buddhism under trees.²⁵ The Chapter on Attachment and Desire in the *Faju piyu jing* 法句譬喻經, translated between 290-311, tells a story about the Buddha asking his recently accepted monk disciple to be seated under a tree and contemplating on virtues.²⁶

In the early fifth century, in the Chapter on Ākāśagarbha Bodhisattva (Xukongzang Pusa Ping 虛空藏菩薩品) in the *Great Collection Scripture* (*Dafangdeng daji jing* 大方等大集經), translated in 420, a passage describes an occasion in which a wheel turning sage king (*zhuanlun sheng wang* 轉輪聖王; *cakravartin*) is touring in his wonderful park with attendants, when two ladies in the crowd leave their seats for a place under a tree and contemplate upon the phenomenal and impermanent nature of things in the world.²⁷ A passage in the *Longer Āgama Sutra* (*Chang ahan jing* 長阿含經), translated between 410 and 413, mentions that one day when the Buddha finishes begging for food, he goes into a forest, sits under a tree and contemplates.²⁸ Another passage in the same sutra mentions an ordinary practitioner who wants to leave the

²⁴ *Chu sanzang jiji* 出三藏記集 (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1995) 94.

²⁵ T 154.3.100a. “於時國中諸比丘尼，俱共遊行，樹下精專，思惟正道。”

²⁶ T 211.4.600c. “佛即受之令作沙門，命令樹下坐思惟道德。”

²⁷ T 397.13.108b. “爾時眾中有二大夫人，一名德威，二名德光，離本坐處詣一樹下，思惟諸行無常”

²⁸ T 1.1.34c. “爾時，世尊著衣持鉢，入那伽城乞食已，至大林處坐一樹下，思惟摩竭國人命終生處”

complications of his family life, so he retreats to the mountains for a tranquil place and contemplates under a tree.²⁹ Another passage describes Ānanda, Śākyamuni's monk disciple, following the Buddha's instruction and contemplating under a tree.³⁰ These passages reveal that contemplating under a tree is practiced by Buddhists from many backgrounds, including nuns, lay females, the Buddha himself, an ordinary person and a Buddhist disciple.

With respect to the reasons for practising Buddhism under a tree, the *Da zhidu lun* 大智度論 (*Mahāprajñāpāramitā-sāstra*), attributed to Nāgārjuna (Longshu 龍樹) and translated by Kumārajīva between 403-13, explains: contemplating under a tree is one of the twelve austerities (*shier toutuo* 十二頭陀) regarding clothing, eating and dwelling that a practitioner should observe. Regarding dwelling, this treatise explains that a practitioner should first dwell at a graveyard, as it will help him or her realise the impermanent and filthy nature of flesh; after gaining this realisation, he or she moves under a tree, as the Buddha Śākyamuni was born, attained enlightenment, preached and entered nirvana under a tree. Because of this cause and connection, a practitioner who follows the Buddha's teaching should often reside under a tree:

行者隨諸佛法，常處樹下³¹

A practitioner who follows the Buddhist Dharmas should often reside under a tree.

Residing under a tree is utilised as a method to help practise Buddhism, and it is because several important moments of the Buddha's life involved a tree, practising the intellectual and mental side of Buddhism under a tree makes a parallel to the Buddha's life and would bring practitioners closer to the life of their great teacher Śākyamuni.

The same section in the *Dazhidu lun* continues to explain that when a

²⁹ T 1.1.149b. “爾時，有一眾生作是念言，世間所有家屬萬物皆為刺棘癰瘡，今宜捨離，入山行道，靜處思惟。時，即遠離家刺，入山靜處，樹下思惟。”

³⁰ T 1.1.156b. “阿難承佛意旨，即從座起，禮佛而去，去佛不遠，在一樹下，靜意思惟。”

³¹ T 1509.25.538a.

practitioner becomes accustomed to daily life under a tree and emotions attached to the coolness and joy under the foliage, he or she should move to an open ground to start another stage of meditation practice and contemplate the two drawbacks of being beneath the foliage: the coldness caused by rain, and the filthiness of birds' droppings and bites by poisonous insects.³² According to this section, practising the Buddha's teaching under a tree is a method and process in pursuit of enlightenment.

In the *Middle Length Āgama Sūtras, Zhong ahan jing* 中阿含經 (*Mādhyamāgama*), translated in 397-98, at least nine chapters end with the Buddha's admonition of diligently contemplating under a tree:

我今已作，汝等當復自作。至無事處，至林樹下，空安靜處燕坐思惟，勿得放逸，勤加精進，莫令後悔。此是我之教勅，是我訓誨。³³

I have already done these things, and you likewise should also do these things. Arriving at an undisturbed place, arriving in the forest beneath a tree: in an empty, peaceful and quiet place, sit calmly and contemplate. Do not lapse, but assiduously increase your zealous purity, in order that you may have no regrets. This is my teaching, this is my instruction.

Besides prompting Buddhists to assiduously practise intellectual and mental training, the above passage reveals important qualitative benefits of setting oneself under a tree in the forest—the emptiness, peace and quietness in nature. By instructing his disciples to practise contemplation in nature, the Buddha was also diverting them away from city, or secular, life, one of the causes of vexation. This is one of the purposes of becoming a monk, in Chinese “*chujia* 出家”, literally “leaving home”. The reasons for “leaving home” are provided in the Chapter on Attachment and Desire in the *Faju piyu jing* mentioned above, in which the Buddha explains: wives, women and mansions are like

³² T 1509.25.538a.

³³ T 26.1.543b. Also T 26.1.565c, 574b, 590a, 602b, 603b, 684c, 739c and 740c.

one's prison and hell, and sons and relatives are like one's fetters.³⁴ Therefore, to keep oneself away from prison and fetters one should start by keeping oneself away from secular life, and then to contemplate in nature to advance one's understanding of reality and finally liberate one's mind.

To summarise the textual references, they demonstrate that the idea of contemplating under a tree as a Buddhist practice appeared in China as early as the third century and continued to be reproduced through the fifth century. It was a common intellectual and mental exercise, not restricted to any levels of practitioners nor exclusive to any particular figure. Contemplating under a tree makes a practitioner's life analogous to the Buddha's, since Śākyamuni was born, enlightened, preached and entered nirvana under a tree. Because of these connections, it was believed that Buddhists who followed the Buddha's path would attain enlightenment as the Buddha did. Another reason that Śākyamuni encouraged his disciples to contemplate in nature is to keep them away from secular life, which disturbs one's peace of mind.

In China, practising meditation or contemplation in natural settings had been popular in the late third to the sixth century. In the *Gaosengzhuàn*, abundant records mention monks contemplating or meditating under trees or in nature, for example Faan 法安 (exact date unknown), Huiyuan's 慧遠 (334-416) disciple, meditating under a tree and preaching to a tiger;³⁵ Tanhuo 曇霍 (active during 401-07 in Gansu), constantly inhabiting in a graveyard under a tree;³⁶ Qiunabatuoluo 求那跋陀羅 (*Gunabhadra*, 394-468), always meditating under a tree in the temple;³⁷ and Fawu 法晤 (?-489), seated and meditating under a tree the whole day.³⁸ These records demonstrate that in the fifth century, when Chinese Buddhists and artisans started to build

³⁴ T 211.4.601a. “一以妻婦宅舍爲牢獄故。二以兒子眷屬爲桎梏。”

³⁵ T 2059.50.362b. “民以畏虎早閉閭，安徑之樹下通夜坐禪，向曉聞虎負人而至投之樹北，見安如喜如驚跳伏安前，安爲說法授戒。”

³⁶ T 2059.50.389c. “常居塚間樹下”。

³⁷ T 2059.50.345a. “恒於寺中樹下坐禪”

³⁸ T 2059.50.399c. “有時在樹下坐禪，或經日不起。”

cave-temples, they were already familiar with the practice of contemplating under a tree. With abundant visual experiences from both objects from Gandhara and monks' daily practice in China, they started to delineate such an image in cave-temples.

Mogao Cave 275 contains two contemplative statues which are possibly the earliest ones surviving today. Both are seated in niches formed by a double tree arch. The form of the arch seems to be an innovation by artisans at Mogao, as no antecedents have been discovered from either to the west or to the east of Dunhuang. It could have been a modification from an existing visual tradition from the west which was supported and encouraged by textual materials. In any case, it was unlikely to have been merely an artistic choice of decoration and probably denoted a specific meaning, as the image of a contemplative figure under a tree appeared in later representations in 471 in Shaanxi and Hebei (Figs. 3.20 and 6.2). The existence of the same iconography in Hebei and Shaanxi, almost a thousand kilometres apart, suggests that the tree and the contemplative deity as a fixed setting as widely accepted in northern China, possibly to visualise the Buddha's teaching of contemplating under a tree.

In the example from Hebei, dated 471, it is portrayed on the back of a bronze, 25.8 cm in height, and the image on the front side of the bronze is a standing Buddha, the identity uncertain, but possibly a Maitreya Buddha (Section 6.2.1.3). Three other similar examples from Hebei are dated to 484, 489 and 498 by the dedicating inscriptions. These three bronzes have a Guanyin on the front and a pensive bodhisattva under a tree on the back (Figs. 6.2, 6.4 and 6.6). Judging from these bronzes, in the second half of the fifth century in Hebei, the pensive image was usually portrayed on the back of a bronze, and not exclusively to be used with any deity. The exact meaning and purpose of such an image can not be certain, as there is no inscription referring to the contemplative image – their identity and purpose were always left unstated. It could have simply functioned as a reminder to prompt Buddhists to practise intellectual exercise.

In the stone stele from Shaanxi, dated to 471, the image of a bodhisattva contemplating under a tree is also depicted on the reverse (Fig. 3.24), with a series of *jātaka* and Śākyamuni life stories (Fig. 3.23). As Audrey Spiro has suggested, the direction of reading the pictorial units is from the one on the far right at the bottom register leftwards and upwards in a zigzag movement.³⁹ The contemplating figure at the right upper corner is the end of the story line of Śākyamuni's biography. Being the end of the temporal movement of the images on the reverse surface, it also suggests the beginning of another story, i.e. the images on the obverse. It connects the two surfaces of the stele, which represent the past and present life of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni and Future Buddha Maitreya respectively. The contemplative bodhisattva in this pictorial context serves as a transit from a practitioner in pursuit of enlightenment, images on the reverse, to a being of full awakening, the icon of the Buddha on the obverse. The image of contemplating under a tree might have served as an admonition to remind Buddhists the intellectual side of the Buddha's teaching, which can serve as a bridge to enlightenment.

In the above examples from Hebei and Shaanxi, being on the reverse of Guanyin, on the back of possibly Maitreya Buddha or next to the infant Śākyamuni, except for the similarity in image, there seems to have been little correlation in the iconographical contexts in which the contemplative bodhisattvas participate. This might suggest that there was not a fixed identity for this deity at this stage or in these regions. It could have been used and interpreted flexibly by contemporaneous Buddhists in accordance with whatever the pictorial contexts demand.

With respect to the iconographical sources, the Hebei and Shaanxi images might have been developed from the earlier examples in Mogao Cave 275; however, in Mogao Cave 275 the pensive bodhisattva are cut as a pair, each under a double tree, all in symmetry, but in works from Hebei and Shaanxi the bodhisattva appears singularly

³⁹ Spiro 131.

under a single tree, forming an asymmetrical composition. The compositional structures of these two groups do not fit. It could also be possible that the Hebei and Shaanxi pieces were made after sources from the Western Regions; nevertheless none of the Chinese images was depicted within a narrative scene as those from Gandhara, and none of the Gandharan images are carved with the tree next to the deity, but usually behind him. Alternatively, it is possible that there were other visual materials, either from the west or innovated in China, serving as pictorial sources for both Hebei and Shaanxi but no longer obtained today. In any case, the similarities and differences among these images show that the contemplative images were used in distinct contexts and for different purposes at different sites and formed respective visual traditions.

Between c. 484-89 at Yungang, a tree appears next to the contemplative bodhisattvas in the triad of the cross-legged Maitreya and two contemplative bodhisattvas in Caves 9 and 10 (Figs. 3.12 and 3.13), but this combination at Yungang was probably only experimental, as Caves 9 and 10 have the only two instances of the pensive deity under a tree at Yungang of its heyday, i.e. before the capital moved to Luoyang in 494. And there is only one known example cut after 494. The scarcity of this image reveals that Buddhists at Yungang probably did not appreciate the significance of the tree in this triad in that it did not take root at Yungang.

However, the image of a single contemplative figure under a tree rapidly increased at the time after the transfer of the capital to Luoyang in 494. Approximately ten examples remain in the Guyang, Lotus, Weizi, Huoshao and Putai Caves at Longmen. In these caves, artisans combined the two existing visual sources: the iconographical structure established at Yungang in which the pensive deities are arranged as a pair to flank the central icon (Section 8.1), and a tree next to the pensive deity circulated in Hebei and Shaanxi from c. 471. At Yungang the contemplative bodhisattvas serve as Maitreya's attendants at his sides to remind Buddhists practising intellectual and mental training to pray to be reborn to Maitreya's palace, i.e. Tusita

Heaven, so their doubts can be solved and questions can be answered by Maitreya (Section 3.2.1). The images of a figure contemplating under a tree in Hebei and Shaanxi, as discussed above, are visualisations of the Buddha's teaching. The merging of the iconographical structure and the contents of the images in this new arrangement brings the significance of the two together, emphasising the practice to advance one's intellectual and mental level so as to understand the impermanent nature of things and to liberate one's mind.

The addition of the tree not only occurs in images of the conventional structure, but also takes place in another iconographical tradition, Prince Siddhartha's farewell to his horse Kanthaka. At Yungang, artisans made a clear distinction between iconographies of Maitreya and Siddhartha – the tree belonging to the former and the horse belonging to the latter were never combined together in one image (Section 8.1). The juxtaposition of horse and tree started to appear in the Luoyang metropolis (Figs.4.32 and 4.34) from c. 510s and also at other contemporaneous sites such as Nannieshui (Figs. 5.6, 5.7 and 5.13). As discussed in Section 3.2.3, Prince Siddhartha's farewell represents Siddhartha's last attachment to and detachment of his secular life – after the farewell, he went into the forest and became an ascetic. It also symbolises Śākyamuni's determination of discovering salvation for all beings and his great compassion that for all things he renounces his princely life. The addition of the tree in this theme is possibly meant to highlight the intellectual path Śākyamuni chose to attain enlightenment.

Furthermore, it revealed an important development of the doctrine regarding Śākyamuni's life. As explained in the *Dazhidu lun* by Nāgārjuna, the most symbolic moments of Śākyamuni's life all took place under a tree, including his birth, enlightenment, turning of the Dharma wheel, and nirvana. Buddhists in China had been making images of these symbolic events from the fourth, and especially the fifth century such as the images of Śākyamuni's birth under a tree in the stone stele from

Shaanxi, dated 471 (Fig. 3.23). By adding a tree next to Siddhartha and Kanthaka, the sixth-century Buddhists and artisans in Luoyang claimed this event in Śākyamuni's life of the same importance as the other four and placed them as parallels. This particular image does more than emphasises the intellectual path Śākyamuni took to his full awakening.

At Nannieshui, the image a contemplative bodhisattva under a tree was produced in large quantity, approximately thirty images documented during my fieldwork. In these images, the foliage and branches of the tree often protrude from the edge of the niches, creating the spatial illusion that the niche is situated behind the tree as if a cave deep in a forest. Moreover, mountains are often carved as the foreground of such an image (Figs.5.7, 5.13, 5.15, 5.16, 5.32 and 5.33). These arrangements together place the contemplative bodhisattva in a natural setting, and also make the tree as an inseparable element of a natural setting. The tree and the natural environment together echo the Buddha's teaching discussed above, namely contemplating under a tree and leaving the complications of urban life behind.

In some images of this type from Nannieshui, a double tree replaces a single tree and creates a symmetrical composition (Fig. 5.32 and 5.33). This design was even more popular in the adjacent area Hebei than at Nannieshui. Although in Hebei the double tree serving as the aureola of the main icon in a stele is not exclusive to the contemplative deity, in sculptures of bodhisattvas, the double tree almost only accompanies the pensive deity (Section 6.3). The intimate relationship between the tree motif and the pensive deity in China had begun from the beginning of the fifth century in Gansu and continued to develop throughout northern China. In the sixth century in Hebei it finally integrated with the indigenous motif of the intertwined tree. The intertwined tree, *lianlimu* 連理木 or *mulianli* 木連理 had been an auspicious sign in Chinese culture since at least as early as the Han dynasty, symbolising not only the emperor's virtue of fulfilling filial piety and statecraft but also prosperity, happiness and

unity of the common people.⁴⁰ The “Treatise on Portents” in the *Weishu* records ninety-one instances of intertwined trees. Fifty-three of these instances were recorded for the period 494-534, and sixteen for the period 534-50. After a century’s development, the tree originally to visualise a Buddhist teaching was finally integrated with the indigenous Chinese auspicious image.

8.5 Religious significance of meditating monk and reborn being

In the formation of the contemplative bodhisattva as an independent and primary deity, a number of visual elements came to be conventionally depicted together with him. Each one of the elements contributed a certain meaning to the religious contents of the deity. At the early stage of the figure's development, these visual elements were used to refer to an existing reference such as a text, to remind viewers of what they had read, seen or heard, so they could recognise and comprehend the significance of the image. With the circulation of products from different places, artisans were aware of the range of expressive possibilities associated with the contemplative image. They selected the visual elements appealing to them, or those which reflected the popular Buddhist concepts at the time, and integrated them into their own works. The visual elements that consistently appeared in the later stage of the formation of the contemplative bodhisattva belief mainly include the tree, reborn being, and meditator. As Section 8.4 has discussed the significance of the tree, the section aims to review the meanings of the meditators and reborn beings and reveal the overall significance the pensive bodhisattva represented.

As discussed in Section 5.2.3 and 5.3, meditators started to appear with the pensive bodhisattva in the second quarter of the sixth century at the site Nannieshui

⁴⁰ Yen Chuan-ying 嚴娟英, “The Double Tree Motif in Chinese Buddhist Iconography,” *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 14.5 (1979): 4.

(Figs. 5.6, 5.25 and 5.26) and in the third quarter of the sixth century in Hebei (Figs. 6.21, 6.33 and 6.34). As meditators are rarely depicted with other bodhisattvas, these images show that practitioners, particularly monks, have a close connection with the contemplative bodhisattva image. They likely had artisans to portray themselves meditating beside the pensive deity. It was probably because this deity represented the path they chose to attain enlightenment.

As discussed in Section 5.2.2 and 5.3, another novel image, the reborn beings, represented another aspect of belief of the pensive bodhisattva. It also appeared at the last phase of the formation of this belief, from the mid-sixth century in Nannieshui and Hebei. At Nannieshui, a image shows a reborn being emerging from a lotus (Fig. 5.19) and a number of them exhibit that the commissioners had artisans portrayed them as reborn beings on lotuses paying homage to the deity (Fig. 5.14, 5.16, 5.17, 5.23 and 5.24). In Hebei, the reborn being is also often depicted with the contemplative bodhisattva (Figs. 6.24, 6.25, 6.26, 6.28, 6.29 and 6.34). This design may suggest that by commissioning a contemplative bodhisattva, patrons wished to be reborn to a pure land after their death, a common wish of all Buddhists in the fifth and the sixth century.

The images of reborn beings reveal that the pensive bodhisattva was also favoured by average people. Since in the fifth and sixth century Buddhist institutions played a significant part in the image-making activities, they might have instructed or promoted the image and the teaching, which was important for monks themselves. A large number of inscriptions disclose that the images were made under guidance of monk masters, *yishi* 邑師, and organised by Buddhist societies, *yi* 邑, such as the pensive statues shown in Figs. 6.33 and 6.34. Under the instruction or promotion by monks, when lay Buddhists wished to commission an image for family members, they also had the pensive statues made.

8.6 Pensive bodhisattva as a shared iconography

With an inscriptional analysis which focused on structure and grammar, Section 8.2 demonstrates that the term *siwei* in the inscriptions identifies the pensive deity. This section employs the same analytical method and shows, based on inscriptions, that the image of the contemplative deity could also represent other divine figures such as Prince Siddhartha, Longshu and Maitreya.

The following lists the subject parts of the inscriptions, dated 545, 546, 561 and 596, on steles discussed in Section 6.2.2.2:

敬造白玉太子思唯[惟]像一區 (545)
respectively had a white jade *taizi siwei* statue made

敬造太子思惟像一區 (546)
respectively had a *taizi siwei* statue made

造玉太子像一區 (561)
had a jade *taizi* statue made

造太子雖遺[思惟]像一區 (596)
had a *taizi suiyi* [*siwei*] statue made

These passages identify the contemplative statues as *taizi*, literally the crown prince. As earlier scholars have suggested, this term in these inscriptions most likely refers to Prince Siddhārtha (cf. Chapter One). Since the term *taizi* identifies the subject-matter of the statues, the term *siwei* in the first two inscriptions suggests the gesture of the deity, i.e. contemplating.

In the inscription, dated 557 on a stele, introduced in Section 6.2.2.4, the passage regarding the identity of the deity reads:

敬造弥勒一區
respectively had a **Mile** (Maitreya) [statue] made.

This passage states the identity of the contemplative bodhisattva as Maitreya (Fig.6.32). This is the only known inscription from Hebei identifying the contemplative bodhisattva as Maitreya.

An inscription in a stele, now in the collection of National Museum of History Taiwan, possibly crafted in Shanxi, also identifies a contemplative bodhisattva image as Maitreya (Fig.8.4). The inscription reads:

西面次堪[龕]弥勒佛主陳□暉⁴¹

Donor of the **Mile** fo (Maitreya Buddha) in the second niche on the western side, Chen ...hui.

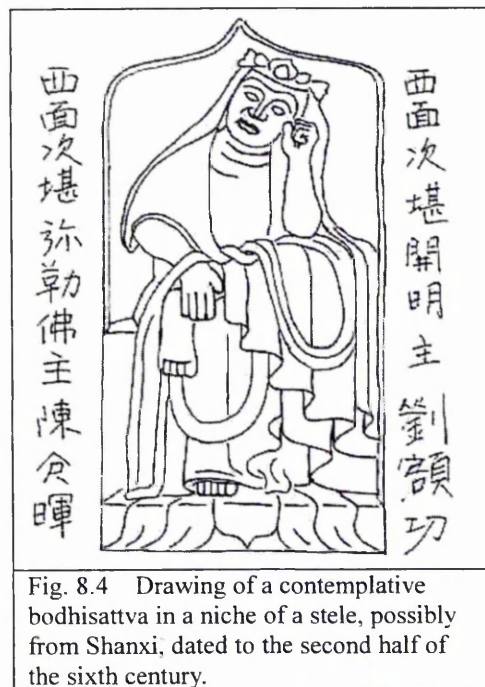


Fig. 8.4 Drawing of a contemplative bodhisattva in a niche of a stele, possibly from Shanxi, dated to the second half of the sixth century.

Although the deity is stated to be a Buddha, the image shows him as a bodhisattva. The identity of this pensive deity is Maitreya.

In section 6.2.2.3, several inscriptions identify the pensive statues as Longshu *siwei*:

⁴¹ I transcribed this inscription on 5 August 2009 in the National Museum of History, Taipei.

敬造白玉龍樹思唯像一區 (552)

respectively had a **white jade Longshu siwei statue** made

造白玉龍樹思惟、常經一部，並各造迄 (555)

a white jade **Longshu siwei** and a sutra (*changjing*) were both completed respectively

These passages identify the subject-matter of the statues as Longshu, and the term *siwei* in these passages refers to the gesture of contemplation. The figure Longshu 龍樹 in sutras refers to the Indian monk Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250) whose writing formed the basis of the Middle Way School (Madhyamaka, *zhongguan* 中觀) of Mahayana Buddhism. Kumarajiva inherited Nāgārjuna's legacy and translated several of Nāgārjuna's treatises, such as the *Dazhidu lun*, which explains the twelve austerities, *shier touluo*, including the passage that a practitioner should dwell under a tree, as discussed in Section 8.3.

Mizuno Seiichi argued that the term "*longshu*" in the inscriptions is merely the description of the double tree in the steles and insists that a figure contemplating under tress should be identified as Prince Siddhartha, based on Śākyamuni's biographies.⁴² However, Mizuno was unable to explain why the tree is so important that it should be documented in the inscription and named as "*longshu*". By contrast, Sasaguchi Rei thinks that the contemplative bodhisattvas "placed under the dragon trees were regarded as representations of Śākyamuni Buddha after the enlightenment".⁴³ She believes that since Śākyamuni is referred to as dragon, *long* 龍, several times in the *Middle Length Āgama Sutras*, i.e. *Zhong ahan jing*, the tree under which Śākyamuni attained enlightenment thus can be called as dragon tree, *long shu*.⁴⁴ Lee Yu-min, based on the Maitreya sutras, proposes that since Maitreya reaches his enlightenment under the *longhua shu* 龍華樹, literally "dragon flower tree", the term *longshu* refers to the *longhua shu*, and identifies the contemplative figure as Maitreya.⁴⁵ These three

⁴² Mizuno, "Hanka shiyuizō ni tsu i te" 247.

⁴³ Sasaguchi 107.

⁴⁴ Sasaguchi 107-08.

⁴⁵ Lee Yu-min, "Banjia siwei xiang zaitan" 52.

assertions are all based upon Buddhist texts.

However, an examination on the contemporaneous inscriptions reveals that the term Longshu refers to the Indian monk Nāgārjuna. A passage in the inscription of the Stele of the Toutuo Temple 頭陀寺碑, dated to the Southern Qi (479-502) reads:

.....馬鳴幽讚，龍樹虛求.....⁴⁶

Maming preached serenely, and Longshu sought with an open mind.

Another later inscription, dated 679, reads:

.....馬鳴闡三乘之旨.....龍樹彰十地之資.....⁴⁷

Maming explained the meaning of the Three Vehicles..... Longshu made cleared the requirements of the Ten [Bodhisattva] Stages (daśabhūmi).

Both passages are written as couplets, the term Longshu serving as a parallel to the name Maming 馬鳴 (the Indian monk Aśvaghosa, c. 100-60), and thus refers to the Indian monk Nāgārjuna, known as Longshu in China. These inscriptions demonstrate that the Indian monk philosopher Nāgārjuna had become so widely known from the fifth century that Chinese Buddhists inscribed his name in steles.

Based on the inscriptional analysis and the popularity of Nāgārjuna, the term “Longshu” in the inscriptions of the contemplative bodhisattva steles most likely refers to the Longshu *pusa*, Nāgārjuna bodhisattva, who was believed by Chinese Buddhists to be the author of the *Dazhidu lun*, which explains and encourages the practice of residing under a tree. He was considered as the founder of the Middle Way School (Mādhyamaka), a highly intellectual training towards enlightenment including

⁴⁶ “Qi: Toutuo si bei 齊·頭陀寺碑” Hubei jinshizhi 湖北金石志, *Zhongguo lidai shike huibian dianziban* 中國歷代石刻彙編電子版 25 September 2008.

⁴⁷ “Tang shi: Ma Junqi zao shifutu song 唐十·馬君起造石浮圖頌” *Bachongshi jinshi buzheng* (second edition) 八瓊室金石補正 (二編), *Zhongguo lidai shike huibian dianziban* 中國歷代石刻彙編電子版 25 September 2008.

understanding the emptiness of Dharma.⁴⁸ According to the *Fu fazang yinyuan zhuan* 付法藏因緣傳 compiled in 472, Longshu was born under a tree and attained his enlightenment because of a divine dragon:

始生之時在於樹下，由龍成道因號龍樹。⁴⁹

[Longshu] was born under a tree, and attained his enlightenment because of a dragon. Thus he was called “Longshu”.

Several possible reasons considered together probably inspired Chinese Buddhists and artisans to portray Longshu as a contemplative bodhisattva under a double tree wound by dragons. It is worth noting that the two commissioners of the three extant contemplative statues, inscribed as Longshu *siwei*, involve monks. The statue, dated 552, was commissioned by Monk Baofu; the one, dated 558, was dedicated to Monk Shencan 神燦 and his deceased brother.⁵⁰ Another statue is inscribed as Longshu *siwei xiang*, dated 547, now lost, but the inscription recorded in the gazetteer *Dingxian zhi*, states it was commissioned by a local Buddhist society, *yiyi* 邑義, instructed by monks.⁵¹ This suggests that the pensive Longshu Bodhisattva statues were associated with those who would have had a deeper understanding of the development of Buddhist teaching and probably recognised the connection between Longshu, the intellectual practice founded by him, his encouragement of dwelling under a tree, and also his life story—born under a tree.

The above analysis demonstrates that the contemplative bodhisattva image was used to represent divine figures of different identities, including Siwei Bodhisattva,

⁴⁸ Paul Williams, “Madhyamaka,” *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London; New York: Routledge) 55-76.

⁴⁹ T 2058.50.317b.

⁵⁰ Feng Appendix III no. 95. “……佛弟子張寄興夫妻二人，為亡息永康、息比丘神燦，敬造白玉龍樹思惟像一區……”

⁵¹ “Eastern Wei: Fengle Qidi ersi zaoliangji 東魏·豐樂七帝二寺造像記” *Dingxian zhi* (first edition) Jinshi pian 定縣志(一編) 金石篇上, *Zhongguo lidai shike huibian dianziban* 中國歷代石刻彙編電子版 25 September 2008. “大魏武定五年歲次乙卯三月戊辰朔八日，豐樂七帝二寺邑義人等，慨悼浮俗，生滅難遣，眾行缺然，知何自運，故仰為皇帝陛下，師僧父母，邊地眾生，敬造白玉龍樹思惟像一區，詳崇供養……”

Prince Siddhartha, Maitreya and Longshu. The contemplative posture is also adopted to represent a Buddha, as introduced in Sections 4.2.5 (Fig. 4.28) and 5.2.4 (Fig. 5.37).

This iconography was not restricted to any particular deity but to represent and emphasise a particular religious significance, i.e. the intellectual path to enlightenment.

8.7 Conclusion

After approximately a century's development, the contemplative bodhisattva image finally established its own identity, Siwei Bodhisattva, in the sixth century. As the name of the deity signifies, he represents the intellectual path to enlightenment. Its placement under a tree also represented the Buddha's teaching of keeping away from the complications of family or urban life and contemplating at a tranquil place, which was often interpreted by artisans' as a natural setting and placing the bodhisattva within a landscape. Since Śākyamuni encourages all Buddhist practitioners to contemplate upon his teaching, several divine figures are sometimes represented in this particular posture, including Prince Siddhartha, Maitreya and Longshu.

Moreover, during the establishment of the belief in the contemplative bodhisattva, in addition to the tree, two other images frequently appeared in the pensive images. The meditating monks echo the religious contents the pensive deity represents—an intellectual path to enlightenment. The reborn beings, and the portraits of lay commissioners as reborn beings, reveal that the pensive bodhisattva was also adhered to by lay Buddhists. After the establishment of the belief and the pensive bodhisattva as an independent deity, in many images he no longer needs the visual elements to help identify him or the religious contents he represented. He can stand alone for himself without further visual element as references.

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