

BUDDHISM IN CHINA



Mahayana and integration

p.86-108 Buddhist Art

BUDDHISM MOVES Farther EAST

In this chapter we look at Buddhism in China.

As we have seen previously, when Buddhism gets to China, it takes on different looks as it integrates with already existing beliefs.

Really important for our purposes are:

1. Integration with Confucianism and Chan (or Zen).
2. Ways the Mahayana belief in the need to accumulate merit was equated with the Chinese love of ancestor worship found in Confucianism.
3. Ideas of Pure Land Buddhism



One major theme, shared among most Chinese schools of Buddhism was that of the **Western Paradise of Amitabha**.

These are both from the Yungang caves.

CHINA_HISTORY

Despite centuries of commercial activity along the Silk Road, bringing Chinese goods to the Roman Empire and causing numerous cities and small independent states to flourish, knowledge of the artistic heritage of this vast area remained largely unknown until the early twentieth century.



The Silk Road and related trade routes

CHINA_HISTORY

While China's earliest history is made up of legends and has no contemporary written record, archaeology confirms that societies have been living in China since at least 6000 years ago.

Around 3000 years ago the last Shang sovereign was defeated by the forces of Zhou, they went on to rule an increasingly large territory, reaching from Beijing in the north, to the Yangzi river valley in the South. As the land lords began to fight among themselves, it became a time of strife, prompting reflection and philosophizing by one Master Kong...better known in the west as **Confucius**.



In 1899 peasants unearthed pieces of polished bone and turtle shells. These relics were inscribed with characters and date to 1500 BCE. They are thought to be the earliest examples of the elaborate writing system still in use in China today.

CHINA_HISTORY

China history is divided into dynasties.

The Shang Dynasty 1700-1100BCE

Zhou 1100-221 BCE

Qin 221-207 BCE and

Han 206-220 ACE and on...

The Qin—(221-206 BCE) the first Emperor of Qin won and reigned by the sword. He built an expansive empire based on law and punishment, which dealt a blow to the teachings of Confucius.

He began building walls to surround the country and laid the foundation for a unified, integrated empire. Even though the empire didn't last long, it influenced future Chinese empires.



Kneeling archer, Qin Dynasty.

CHINA_HISTORY

However, it was the expansion of the Han Dynasty (206BCE-220 CE) that brought China into contact with the West.

Thought of as the 'barbarians' that encircled their world, military expansion sent Chinese military into the nomadic areas to the north which provided them with access to Central Asia.

This then opened up the routes that carried Chinese silk as far away as Rome.

We have talked about the Silk Road many times in this class. China is the reason for the name.



A gilded bronze oil lamp in the shape of a kneeling female servant, dated 2nd century BCE, found in the tomb of Dou Wan, wife of the Han prince.

CHINA_BUDDHISM

When Buddhism entered China from India, its exotic nature, with chanting, strange colored robes, incense and foreign images, was an attraction for many Chinese disillusioned with Confucianism.

Admitting the impossibility of saying "when or how the first Buddhist missions in China began", Kenneth Saunders mentions Ashoka and the *Fayuan Zhulin* (written 688 CE) noting missionaries arriving in Qin Dynasty (221–206 BCE) China.

This Buddhist encyclopedia claims that in 217 BCE, the monk Li Fang and seventeen others arrived in Xi'an – but this legend is uncorroborated by historical sources.



A Jiangnan funerary jar from ca. 250-300 CE, decorated with a row of Buddhas seated on lotus-petal thrones, said to be one of the earliest examples of Chinese Buddhist art.

CHINA_BUDDHISM

Buddhism entered China in the 2nd century at a time when the Chinese people had become disillusioned with traditional Confucian values. To bridge the gap between the cultures of India and China, Buddhist translators borrowed Taoist vocabulary to express Buddhist ideas.

Buddhism took on a distinctively Chinese character, becoming more respectful of duties to the family and the ancestors, more pragmatic and this-worldly, and more consistent with traditional Chinese respect for harmony with nature.

During the T'ang Dynasty (618-907), Buddhism was expressed in a series of brilliant Chinese schools including the Ch'an School of meditation that came to be known in Japan as Zen.



Ch'an ink painting by Li Po, *Like Water or Clouds*, 699-752

CHINA_BUDDHISM

Evidence of early Buddhism in China was discovered by archaeologists in the 19th century, Bezeklik includes 77 Buddhist rock-cut caves cut into sandstone.

Most have rectangular spaces with rounded arch ceilings often divided into four sections, each with a mural of the Buddha.

Sandstone did not lend itself to carving but it did to painting.

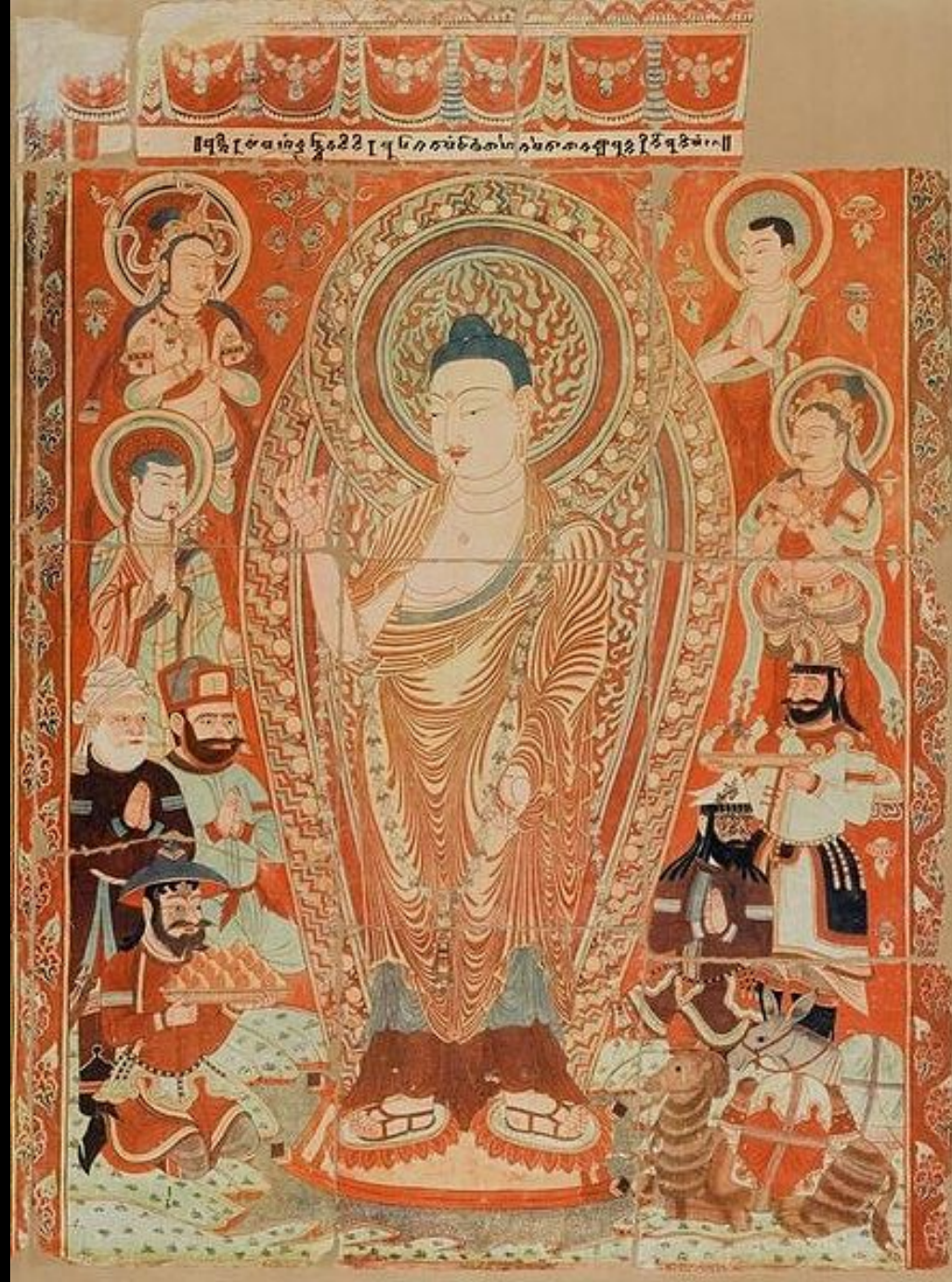
During the late nineteen and early twentieth century, European and Japanese explorers found intact murals buried in sand, and many were removed and dispersed around the world.



CHINA_BUDDHISM

The effect of the paintings in these caves is of entire ceiling covered with hundreds of Buddha murals.

Some murals show a large Buddha surrounded by other figures, including Indians, Persians and Europeans.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_LONGMAN CAVES

Formative phase of Buddhist art is represented by groups of cave shrines in the north at Yungang in Shanxi province and at Longmen near Luoyang.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_YUNGANG CAVES

The major works at Yungang, in Shanxi province, were created around the same time as those at Ajanta...around 460 by the Wei rulers.

They consist of over 50 caves, 20 with important inscriptions and statues. The largest figure is nearly 14 meters high and was once protected by a multi-story wooden façade.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_LONGMAN CAVES

A particular Chinese tendency of combining linear, calligraphic surface decoration with sculptural form, elegant drapery and elaborate decorations is seen.

This colossal Buddha was carved out of the rock. Evidence of the emphasis on Mahayana vision of the Buddha as a transcendent figure.



Above: from Yungang Caves, Shakyamuni and Prabhutaratna with Maitreya (the future Buddha). A popular story from the Lotus Sutra.

CHINA_BUDDHISM_LONGMAN CAVES

The square faces and bodies of the figures in cave 20, and their linear drapery, suggest artists worked from drawings or sketches carried back by pilgrims from holy sites in India.

All are dedicated by Tuoba Wei rulers.



In 494 the Wei rulers shifted their capital to Luoyang and began another program of cave shrines at Longmen.

This is the same image from the previous slide. Here you can see the scale with people in the picture.



Buddhist Longman Caves with Buddhist Sculpture. Notice the large scale images.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_LONGMAN

Instead of images, the center of many of the Yungang caves was occupied by a single square tower, cut from the cliff to form a **square pagoda**.

With little resemblance to the Indian stupa, these pagodas still maintained space for circumambulation and solid core and were used for the same purpose as the Buddhist Indian Stupa.

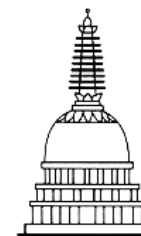
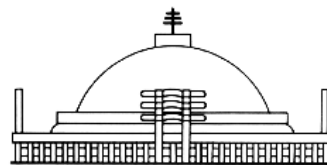
The Chinese pagoda (a term coined by the Portuguese) derived from the Indian Buddhist Stupa, but the development was influenced by earlier Chinese wooden architecture—in particular watch-towers from at least the Han dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE)



Indian Stupa to the left. Chinese pagoda to the right.

EVOLUTION OF BUDDHIST ARCHITECTURE.

- a. Early Indian stupa. 3rd century to early 1st centuries B.C.
- b. Later Indian Stupa. 2nd century A.D.
- c. Chinese pagoda. 5th-7th centuries.
- d. Japanese pagoda. 7th century.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_PAGOTAS

The Chinese erected pagodas in a variety of shapes and of wood, stone and brick...but the variations of the square, multi-tiered type continued to be the favored design.

The Chinese pagoda uses the parasol on top of the Indian harmica as model for the design.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_PAGOTAS

Later Chinese Buddhist pagodas bore little resemblance to the Indian model of the Stupa.

Inspired by wooden models, elaborate doors and functional interiors began to conform to cosmological schemes.



CHINA_BUDDHISM

When Buddhism was introduced in China, around the beginning of the Christian era, it had to accommodate an established Confucian system.

Within Confucianism, practical, secular paternalistic values were favored.

The competing Daoism included magical tendencies.

In a process of grafting on or convergence, Chinese Buddhists emphasized the similarities between these doctrines.



Seated Buddha, clay, China

Notice the traditional attributes of the Buddha with a downcast head, eyes closed, simple and austere.

CHINA_CONFUSIONISM

Confucianism is thought of as more of a philosophy than a religion, the main theme of Confucianism is the conduct of human relationships for the attainment of harmony and overall good.

Society was an ordinance of heaven and the five relationships; ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder and younger, and friends.

Respect flows upwards, from the young to the old, from the subject to ruler.

Virtues like piety, honesty and loyalty formed the basics for schooling and emperors sought to establish common moral values to create a unified empire.

CHINA_DAOISM (Taoism)

Since Buddhism was imported to China from India and Confucianism is really a philosophy, Taoism is thought to be the only home grown religion in China.

Legend has it that at the end of his life, the teacher, Laotzu, headed west towards what is now Tibet. He left a 5000 character text called the Tao Te Ching (Dao De Jing). Or *the Book of the Way*.

It is basically an expression of the unity of the universe and of the path we, humans have to be part of that unity. It is very affected by nature.

Laozi, 8-11th cent.



CHINA_BUDDHISM Influences

So, the Mahayana belief in the need to accumulate merit was equated with the Chinese love of ancestor worship found in Confucianism.

Buddhism's emphasis on Karma and the accumulation of merit, with accountability, suggesting that one could shape or affect one's own destiny, which had appeal to the business ethic of the merchant classes, providing a connection with an important segment of Chinese culture.



Altarpiece dedicated to the **Maitreya** (386-534)

CHINA_BUDDHISM_ Early Images

Early images of the Buddha follow Gandharan influences with hair, robes, youthful face but with hands held horizontally instead of flat in the lap.

Two important differences are seen in the distinctly Chinese facial features and in the more 2-Dimensional treatment of the details—it's more flat.

Gandharan
Buddha from
earlier in the
semester.
Remember?



Brundage seated Shakyamuni, 338 China

CHINA_BUDDHISM_ Early Images

By the middle of the sixth century, both Buddhist art and ritual practices had been well assimilated into Chinese culture.

The earlier dominance of linear patterns gave way to an interest in three dimensional structure...closer to the Indian aesthetic.

Gandaharan
Buddha from
earlier in the
semester.
Remember?



Buddha Qi (479-502)

CHINA_BUDDHISM_ Tao (Dao) Influence

The Daoist eremitic tendencies were likened to Buddhist monasticism.

By the 12th century we see in the scroll, the theme "Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are one". Depicts Taoist Lu Xiujing (left), official Tao Yuanming (right) and Buddhist monk Huiyuan (center, founder of Pure Land) by the *Tiger stream*.



You probably recognize this image of the Buddha. It's an image from the story of his life when he became an ascetic and fasted. This was a popular image in Tao influenced Chinese Buddhism.

CHINA_BUDDHISM_ Tao (Dao) Influence

The Indian cosmology divided the universe into sectors with particular deities assigned to each. The southern region, surrounded by oceans and mountains, with Mt. Meru rising in their center, was the domain of the gods and of humankind.

In Chinese Buddhism, influenced by the Taoists, the focus of devotion shifted to the western regions. Countless versions of this paradisiacal land were painted, even carved, upon walls of temples and cave shrines.

These scenes included an array of figures, bodhisattvas, protectors and monks...all occupying richly adorned palaces, while the skies were filled with flying deities who carried banners and scatter jewels on those below.

Yungang, with the many Buddhas and bodhisattvas. ---NOTE: these still have paint.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_IMPORTANT

Three major figures were emphasized each with different roles to play:

1. **Amitabha**, the ruler of paradise
2. **Avalokiteshvara** (or Guanyin in Chinese) thought to save those in distress, also functioned as the intermediary, escorting souls of the believer into Amitabha's Pure Land.
3. **Maitreya**—the Buddha of the future, in heaven awaiting his eventual appearance in the world.

We have discussed these figures in Buddhism earlier. I said they would be important later on. It really happens here.



This is a sculpture of Amitabha, the ruler of paradise. We see this Buddha seated on a lotus throne with attendants on either side. He is surrounded by all the Buddhas of the past and present, waiting in the heavenly realm.

CHINA_BUDDHISM

One major theme, shared among most Chinese schools of Buddhism was that of the **Western Paradise of Amitabha**.

Whether in painting or sculpture, the Pure Land of Amitiaba was filled with heavenly splendor and previous Buddhas.



The heavenly Paradise of Amitabha, in sculpture and painting.

CHINA_BUDDHISM

Most of the art and ritual was inspired by the three schools of Buddhism (Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana).

The popular subjects such as preaching Amitabha or Amitabha presiding over the Western paradise were common to many sects.

In this painting we see Amitabha in all his glory. We can see he has the elongated ear lobes, the topknot and seated posture of the traditional Buddha. But as opposed to the humble teacher we've seen earlier, here he reigns over heaven with jewels and riches, while sages and bodhisattvas wait to attend.



CHINA_BUDDHISM

By the sixth century, the most important influence was the Chinese creation of the **Tiantai—a comprehensive doctrine that preached a belief in the Buddha-potential within all beings.**

The Tiantai school derived its doctrine from the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra emphasized faith, advocating devotion that exceeded good deeds or personal sacrifice as the primary means to salvation.

It also allowed women to be among the elect, contributing to its growth in popularity.

The Lotus Sutra now becomes a popular set of stories to depict in art.



The Lotus Sutra begins with Shakyamuni preaching from Vulture Peak, propounding the Law and introducing the tenants of the Tiantai.

This event is depicted in the embroidery showing Vulture Peak as mountains behind the mandorla of light behind the Buddha.

CHINA_BUDDHISM

During the Tang dynasty, Avalokiteshvara's image had assumed such great demand it contributed to the rise of block-printing.

WOOD BLOCK PRINTING

One of the most globally significant innovations of the Tang and Song Dynasties (618-1279) was the invention of woodblock printing and movable type.

Prints were made from a carving in wood that could be reproduced many times as opposed to paintings, which had to be made one at a time.



Woodblock print, Jingangjing

These prints helped spread the beliefs of Buddhism, while at the same time, printmaking changed the way people accessed information.

Printmaking and movable type only came to the West in the 1600's when Guttenberg used the technology in Europe.

CHINA_BUDDHISM

Another popular image in Chinese Buddhism was that of famous monk portraits.

These were favored by certain schools as part of the tradition of worshiping the elders.

We will see this in Japan as well.



Meditating Monk, 900 from Cave 17
Dunhuang. Ink on paper

CHINA_BUDDHISM

We have learned that Avalokitshvara, the Buddha of compassion was very popular in China (Tibet as well).

He is often depicted in his more feminine form (known as Guanyin) in China.

By the end of the Song dynasty, in 1279, despite textual sources noting the irrelevance of gender for a bodisattva, images of those beings had become noticeably more feminine.



Guanyin, 12th to 13th Century,

CHINA_BUDDHISM

The traditional standing pose now had a seated one, languid with right hand resting on the raised knee, this was known as the Lalitasana (the pose of royal ease).

It suggested the confidence of royalty...the self-assurance of imperial power.



After the Tang period, the image of Maitreya (the future Buddha) began to be merged with a legendary hero, called Budai, (hemp sack), a portly, laughing and generous individual who went about the countryside spreading cheer and befriending children.

Maitreya



CHINA_BUDDHISM

The traditional groups of images such as Shakyamuni or Amitabha surrounded by bodhisattvas and monks continued to appear, especially in Pure Land temples though their role was diminishing in favor of subjects related to contemporary values.

The materials changed giving a greater degree of realism.

A number of once lesser subjects such as luohans (arhats) and patriarchs now rose in importance.

Notice how the Lohan has the attributes previously associated with the Buddha.



Lohan, Ming, China

CHINA_BUDDHISM

Beginning with the Tang period, the Luohan were portrayed as intense, often bizarre individuals, humbly dressed but always with an expressive, focused gaze, reflecting their profound spiritual attainment.

These individuals had always been important even in early Buddhism for they represented the concept of individual effort, achievement through self-control, study and individual striving—contrasted with the Bodhisattva who denied personal nirvana to save others.

Monks and patriarchs had been a part of Buddhist iconography from the early periods in India. Now the image of the monk became a major aspect of Buddhist art and in addition countless idealized images began to appear quite real.



Lohan, China

CHINA_BUDDHISM

The arhats came to benefit others as a model of individual striving.

The Buddhist arhats found a parallel in the reclusive, eccentric Daoists, with the belief that insight is gained through individualistic, unorthodox practices.

<http://82nd-and-fifth.metmuseum.org/divinity>

Lohan, China— this one is in the Metropolitan Museum.



CHINA_BUDDHISM_persecution

The **Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution**

initiated by Tang Emperor Wuzong
reached its height in the year 845 AD.
Among its purposes were to appropriate
war funds and to cleanse China of foreign
influences.

As such, the persecution was directed not
only towards Buddhism but also towards
other foreign religions, such as
Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity and
Manichaeism. Only the native Chinese
ideologies of Confucianism and Taoism
survived the upheaval relatively
unaffected.

Reasons for persecution:

Economic

Social

Religious

CHINA_BUDDHISM_shift

The once vigorous creativity of Chinese Buddhist art was gradually eroded by Confucian values, and as Daoist practices were revived and imperial patronage diminished, the religion slipped into secondary position in the culture.

Even though Buddhism was strong in the early part of the second millennium, it never really recovered from the persecutions of the ninth century.



Ming Painting of the emperor.

CHINA_BUDDHISM_persecution

There were actually 4 different Buddhist persecutions in China between the 5th and 10th centuries.

1 and 2--In 574 and again in 577, Emperor Wu had Buddhist and Taoist images destroyed and their clergy returned to lay life. He believed the temples had become too rich and powerful, so he confiscated their land and gave it to his own soldiers.

3-- In 845, Taoist Emperor Wuzong of the Tang Dynasty initiated the "Great Anti-Buddhist Persecution" in an effort to appropriate war funds by stripping Buddhism of its financial wealth and to drive "foreign" influences from China

4--In 955, Emperor Shizong (r. 954-959) of the Later Zhou (951-960), due to the need for copper, ordered that Buddha statues be destroyed so that copper could be used to mint coins.

REVIEW

This week we looked at what happened to Buddhism when it entered China, a country with already existing beliefs in both Confucianism and Taoism (Daoism).

The Mahayana tradition in Buddhism developed to include Pure Land Buddhism which focused on the heavenly realm and rewards awaiting there.

Images of the Buddha change a lot in China. This is where it is important to differentiate between the traditional historic Buddha and the one we see now.

NEXT WEEK

Next week we talk about what happens with Buddhism as it moves to Japan and Korea.

This is our last big push in discussing the history of Buddhism.

The following week we return to India and Hinduism where a Muslim invasion changes the way things look in art.