

Buddhism

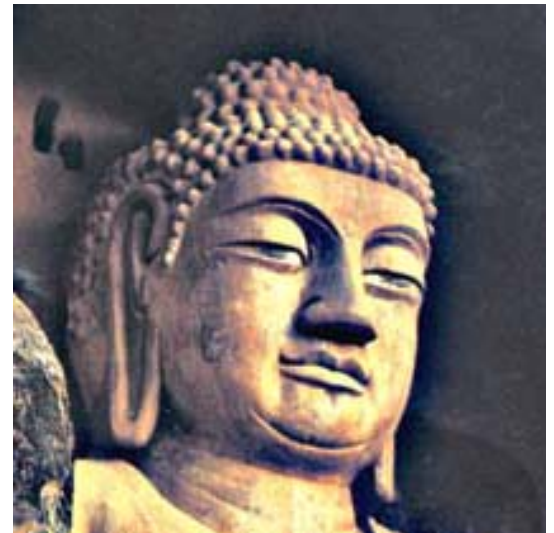
TO THE TEACHER:

OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT: To help students grasp the magnitude of impact of Buddhism by showing that Buddhism provided not just a new set of ideas, but also new forms of religious practice, new types of places to worship, and a large body of images of divinities.

TEACHING STRATEGIES: To get the most out of this unit, students will need to have been introduced to Buddhist doctrine and the ways Buddhism changed as it traveled from India to China. This unit calls for close comparison of images. If students have difficulty seeing the distinctions between different statues, they could be asked to describe in detail everything they observe, forcing them to look more closely.

To make this material more challenging, students could be asked whether they find the material on images, temples, or practices more interesting, then try to unpack what their answer indicates about their attitudes. Why do many Americans respond very positively to Buddhism as a set of ideas and practices? Did anyone in the class find himself or herself more attracted to the art than the practices?

WHEN TO TEACH: In a full survey of Chinese history, Buddhism is generally taught when the medieval period is covered. However, a course limited to more modern China could still use this unit since Buddhism remained an important part of Chinese culture into modern times. In a topically-organized course, Confucianism should be introduced before considering Buddhism. This unit would also be appropriate for use in teaching world religions.



It is widely believed that Buddhism was introduced to China during the Han period (206 BC-220 AD). After its introduction, Mahayana Buddhism, the most prominent branch of Buddhism in China, played an important role in shaping Chinese civilization. Chinese civilization, as well, exerted a profound

impact on the way Buddhism was transformed in China.

The influence of Buddhism grew to such an extent that vast amounts of financial and human resources were expended on the creation and establishment of impressive works of art and elaborate temples. This growing interest in Buddhism helped to inspire new ways of depicting deities, new types of architectural spaces in which to worship them, and new ritual motions and actions. In this section, we will look at Six Dynasties and Tang Chinese Buddhist images, view some early and late Buddhist temples, then take a glimpse at contemporary Buddhist practice.

Think about the following questions as you view this unit:

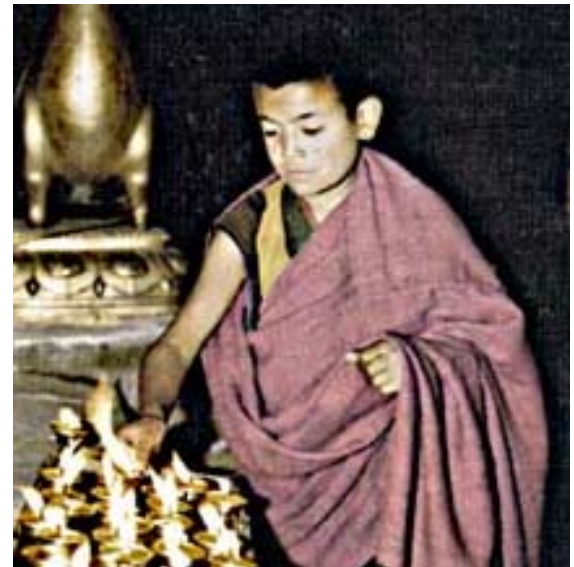
- *How were Buddhist images, temples, and practices adapted to Chinese circumstances? Keep in mind both chronological order and geographical variation wherever possible.*
- *What connections do you see between Buddhist doctrines and the physical trappings of Buddhism in China?*
- *Do you see anything in these images that would have contributed to the spread of Buddhism in China?*

Suggested Reading

Images



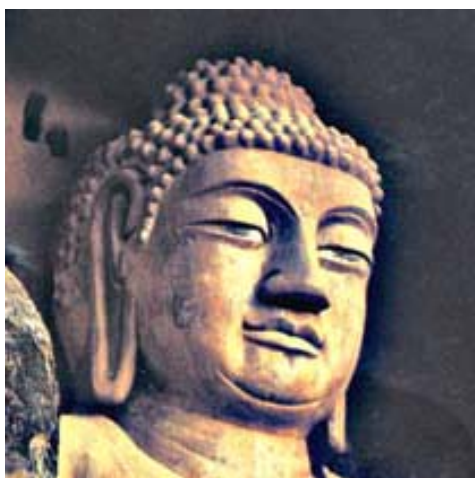
Temples



Practice

Images

Buddhism brought to China a large range of divine beings, all of whom came to be depicted in images at temples, either on their walls or as free standing statues. The earliest Buddhist images in China owed much to traditions developed in Central Asia, but over time Chinese artists developed their own styles. Here we look separately at the evolution of the different divine beings in the Buddhist pantheon, then look briefly at groupings of deities.



Buddhas



Bodhisattvas



Other Divinities



Groups of Deities

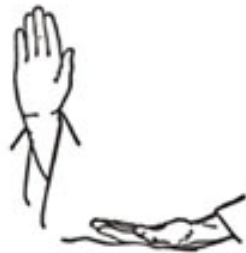
The images of each of these types of divine beings have been arranged in chronological order. To keep in mind geographical differences, look at the map below which shows the sites of the major temples represented here.



Buddhas

Literally, the term "Buddha" means "enlightened one." According to Buddhist beliefs, however, there have been innumerable Buddhas over the eons. This section will look primarily at Sakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism. Sakyamuni was born around 500 BC in north India. As a young man, unsatisfied with his life of comfort and troubled by the suffering he saw around him, he left home to pursue spiritual goals. After trying a life of extreme asceticism, he found enlightenment while meditating under a tree. For the next forty-five years, he traveled through north India, preaching, attracting followers, and refuting adversaries.

By the time Buddhism reached China, images of the Buddha played a major role in devotional practices. As you will see, the Buddha is usually depicted as austere in stature, pose, and dress. Otherworldly features are highlighted while human characteristics are de-emphasized. Mudras, or gestures performed with the hand, convey various actions. Here is a diagram of some of the more common mudras.



Mudra which grants absence of fear



Mudra of appeasement



Mudra of the knowledge fist



Mudra of touching the ground



Diamond handclasp mudra



Mudra of concentration



Mudra of the fulfilling of the vow

Mudra of turning the wheel of the law

SOURCE: Saunders, E. Dale. *Mudra: A Study of Symbolic Gestures in Japanese Buddhist Sculpture* (New York, Bollingen Foundation, 1960), pp. 51, 55, 66, 76, 80, 85, 94, 102.

In addition to the mudras, the Buddha is often depicted with other common conventions such as the lotus blossom, elongated ears, usnisa (the protrusion on the top of the head), and the urna (the raised dot in the middle of the forehead). These features refer to the life story of the historical Buddha. For example, the long earlobes remind one of the heavy ear ornaments the Buddha would have worn while still living in the palace.

To the right is a Sixteen Kingdoms period (4th century) gilded bronze Buddha statue.

What action does this mudra convey?

Early examples of Buddhist sculpture in China showed a greater Central Asian influence.

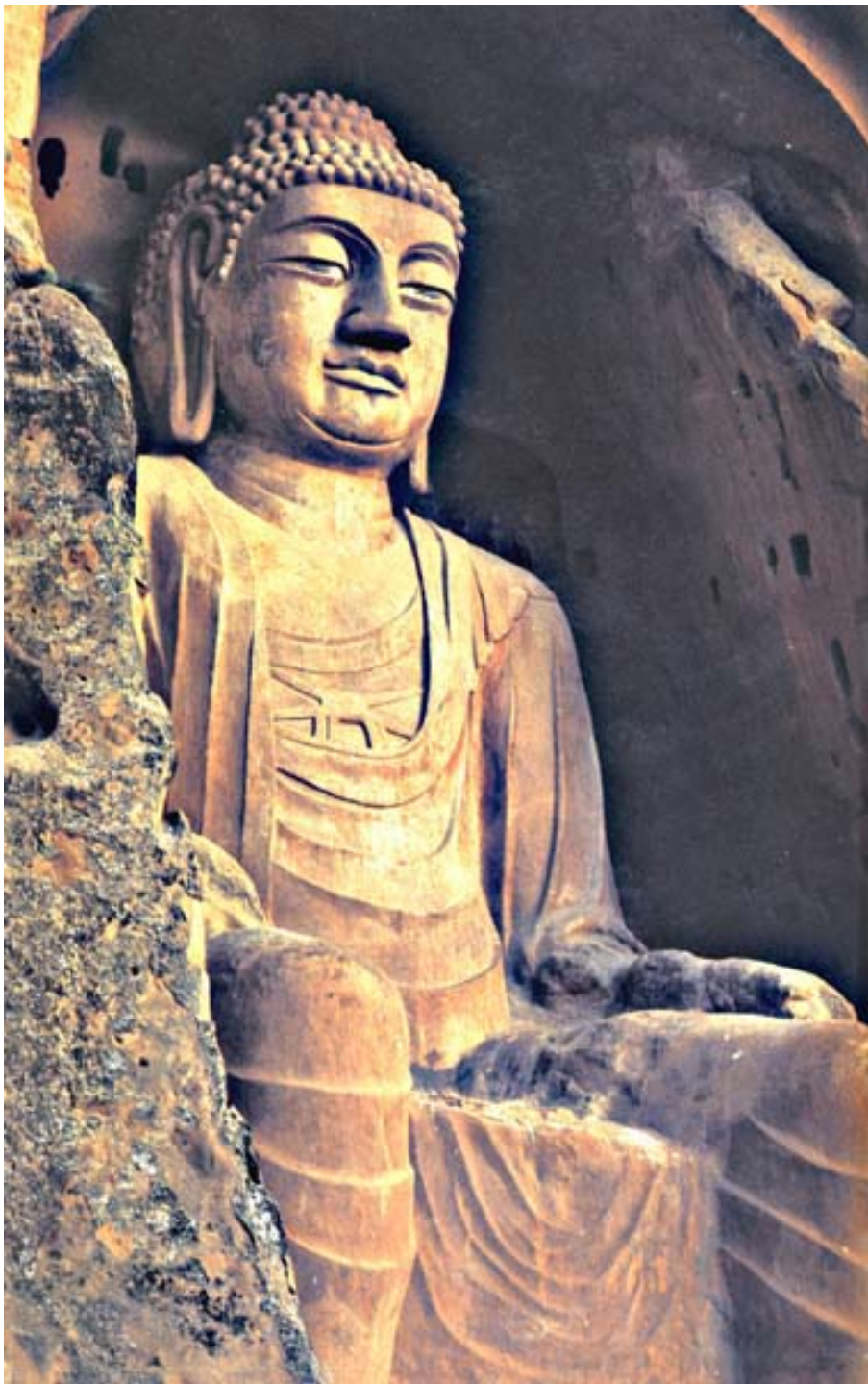
What aspects of this figure reflect the early foreign influences?



Gilded bronze seated Buddha, 4th c

Height: 32.9 cm (1 ft 1 in.)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian v. 3* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 34.



The seated Buddha to the left was carved from a stone cliff during the Northern Wei period.

Which visual features are employed in this sculpture to identify the figure as the Buddha? What may the artist be trying to represent with these features?

Stone Buddha at Mt. Xumi, 5th c Height: 20.6 m (67 ft 7 in)

SOURCE: *Xumishan shiku* (Beijing: wenwu chubanshe, 1988), illustration number 23.



This standing stone Buddha is from the cave temple complex at Maijishan and dates to the Western Wei period.

In comparison with the first Buddha presented in this section, what do you notice about the detail of the hair, face, and robes of this figure?

Stone Buddha at Maijishan, 6th c

Height: 225.5 cm (7ft 4in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 8 (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1988), p. 99.

What does this Buddha figure appear to be sitting on? Do you see any other figures on the screen behind the Buddha?

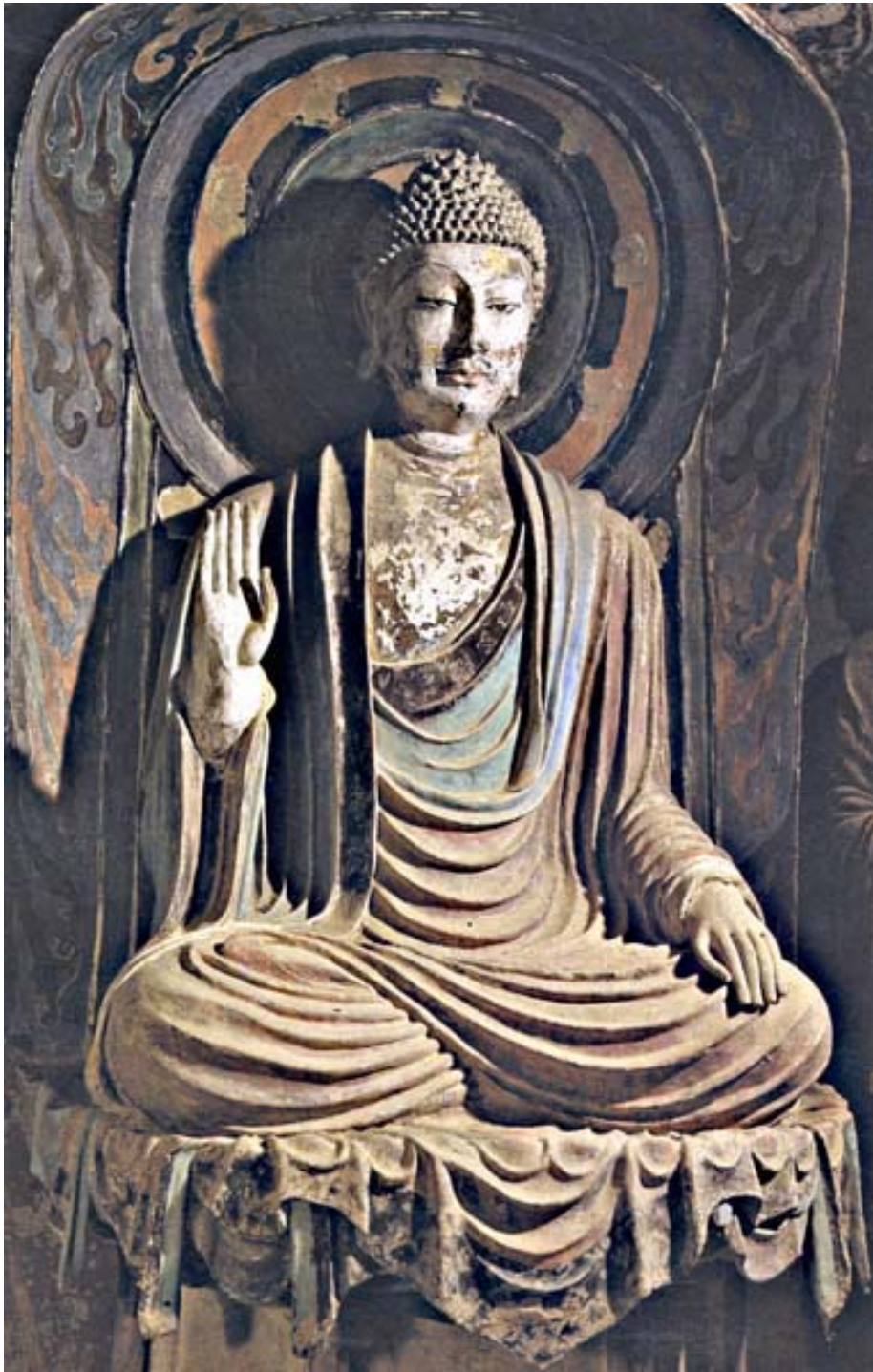
ANSWER: The Buddha sits on a lotus blossom. The lotus symbolizes purity and strength as it is able to thrive and grow even in murky waters. Also, if you look closely you will see small Buddha figures sitting in lotus blossoms all around the halo or mandorla behind the Buddha.



Northern Qi Seated stone Buddha, 6th c

Height: 161 cm (5 ft 3 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian v. 3* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 148.



Someone has suggested that this clay Buddha from Dunhuang looks more like a noble person from the real world. Do you agree?

Early Tang clay Buddha from Dunhuang, 7th c

Height: 167 cm (5 ft 5 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p. 88.



Tang gilded bronze Buddha

Height: 19.4 cm (7 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 4 (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 79.

What types of media were used to make the sculptures in this section? Why would different media be used?

SOME THOUGHTS: The creators of the large-scale sculptures found in cave temples were clearly limited in choice of medium to whatever type of stone was found at a chosen site. The statues of smaller scale, however, could be made from a variety of materials. Cost was a significant factor. Bronze was a more expensive material and technically more difficult to manipulate, and so was often reserved for small statues like the one you just saw. Unfortunately, no material is absolutely permanent. Bronze images are easier to preserve since, in comparison to stone and clay, they do not break easily, but over the centuries there have been periods of economic and social upheaval which have caused the melting down of bronzed objects.

Compare the two images below. How are they different in style? Does one seem more decorative? If yes, how so? Does one seem more naturalistic?



Tang period clay Buddha statue from the

Bingling Temple in Gansu Province

Height: 108 cm (3 ft 6 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 9 (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 149.



Mid-Tang period (713-765) Buddha from Dunhuang

Height: 218 cm (7 ft 2 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 9 (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 149.

Move on to [Bodhisattvas](#)

Bodhisattvas

Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who have put off entering paradise in order to help others attain enlightenment. There are many different Bodhisattvas, but the most famous in China is Avalokitesvara, known in Chinese as Guanyin.

Bodhisattvas are usually depicted as less austere or inward than the Buddha. Renouncing their own salvation and immediate entrance into nirvana, they devote all their power and energy to saving suffering beings in this world. As deities of compassion, Bodhisattvas are typically represented with precious jewelry, elegant garments and graceful postures.



To the left is a clay statue from Maijishan from the Northern Wei period.

What about this figure strikes you as being markedly different from the Buddha images you've seen?

SOME THOUGHTS: Besides the additional ornamentation, this Bodhisattva figure is depicted in a more active pose to reflect his more active role in helping others attain salvation.



Clay Bodhisattva from Maijishan, 5th c

Height: 142 cm (4 ft 7 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 8 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 95.

Below are two Bodhisattva stone reliefs, one (left) from Yungang and the other (right) from Majishan (both Northern Wei period, 5th century).



What differences between the two figures do you observe? Does one or the other seem to better represent the idea of the Bodhisattva?

Stone relief of Bodhisattva

from Yungang, 5th c.

Height: 127 cm (4 ft 2 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 159.

Stone relief of Bodhisattva

from Maijishan, 5th c.

Height: 155 cm (5ft 1 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 8 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 89.

The Tang dynasty ushered in a period of growth and prosperity, during which Buddhism flourished. Buddhist beliefs, temples, and art permeated almost all levels of Tang life. Surviving Buddhist sculpture reflects the wealth of the great Buddhist monasteries.

Many of these sculptures were decorated with rich, painted colors, which have faded with time. Try to imagine how these may have appeared when first made.

Below are two Tang Bodhisattvas, both from Dunhuang. One (left) was dated back to ca. 700, the other (right) to ca. 800.



Do you remember the Tang Buddha sculpture from Dunhuang?

Do these two Tang Bodhisattvas share characteristics with the Dunhuang Tang Buddha?

Painted clay Bodhisattva from
Dunhuang, ca. 700

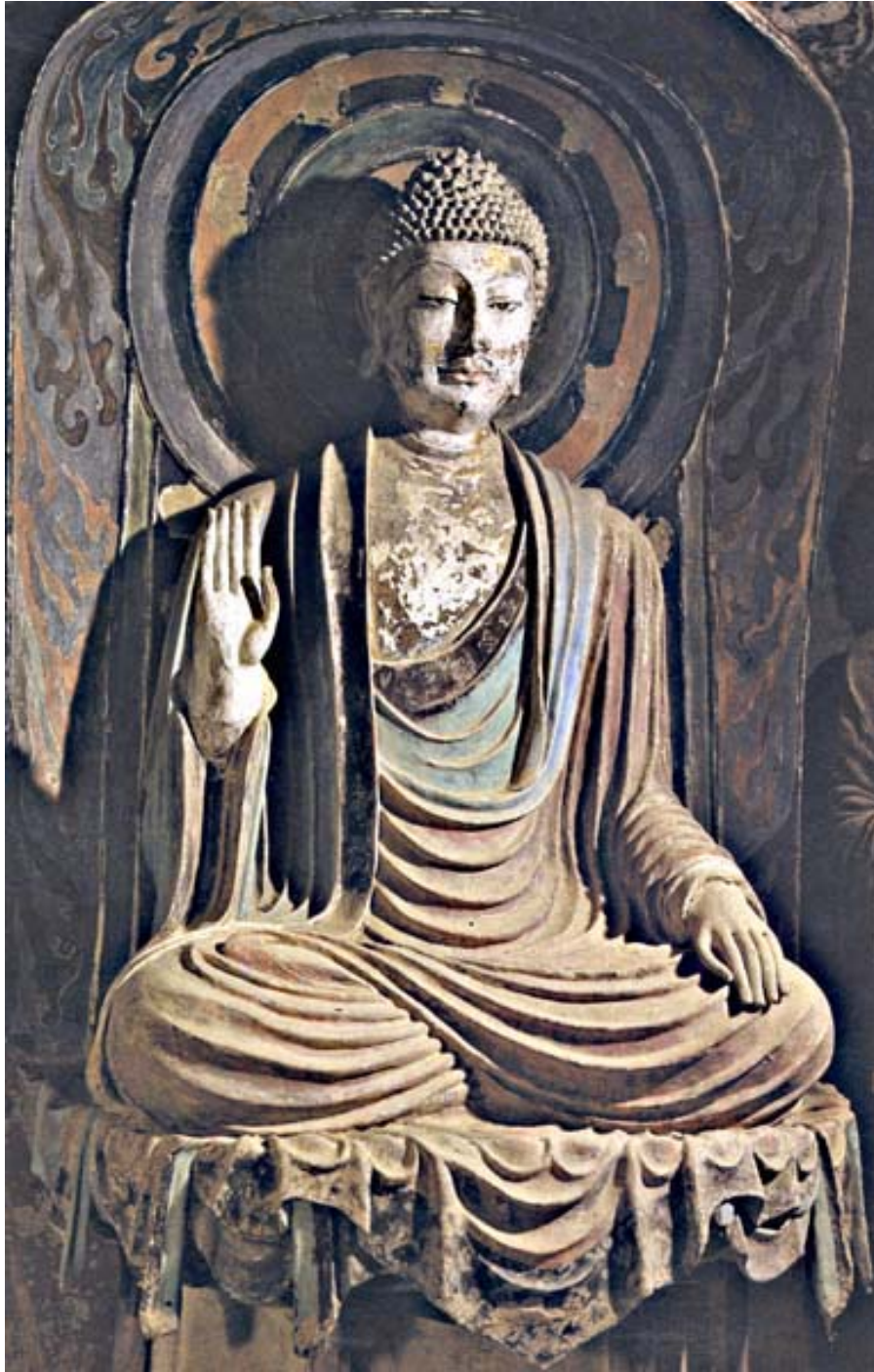
Height: 143 cm (4 ft 7 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji*
(diaosu) v. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghai
renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p.
160.

Painted clay Bodhisattva from
Dunhuang, ca. 800

Height: 159 cm (5 ft 3 inch)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji*,
Diaosu bian, v. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghai
renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p. 178.



The Tang Buddha Sculpture from Dunhuang

Height: 167 cm (5 ft 5 in)

One of the Bodhisattva figures below is an early Tang example and the other is a Sui example.



Stone relief of Bodhisattva

Height: 43 cm (1 ft 5 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji* (diaosu) v. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghairenmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p. 160.



Painted clay Bodhisattva

Height: 258 cm (8 ft 5 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 4 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 61.

Can you tell which one is the Tang example?

What helps you identify it?

ANSWER: The image on the right is an early Tang (682) Bodhisattva from Mount Wutai in Shanxi Province. The image on the left is a Sui (581-618) clay Bodhisattva from Majishan.



The image of Guanyin was traditionally depicted as a young Indian prince, but during the Tang the feminine characteristics of Guanyin became more prominent. To the left and below we have four Guanyin from the Sui and Tang periods. Try and see if you can follow this transformation from the images provided.

To the left is a Sui (581-618) Guanyin.

Guanyin statue, ca. 600

Height: 249 cm (8 ft 2 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 4 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 12.

Below are two Tang images of Guanyin. One (left) is from Fengxian Monastery at Longmen, the other (right) from Dunhuang.

Do you see the roots of Guanyin's manifestation as the Chinese Goddess of Mercy in these images?



Stone Guanyin at Longmen

Height: 13.3 cm (43 ft 7 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, *Diaosu bian*, v. 11 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 160.



Wall painting of Guanyin, 8th c. Height: 190 cm (6 ft 3 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, *Huihua bian*, v. 15 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 117.

After the Tang, the cult of Guanyin grew in popularity largely due to popular literature, folk stories, and artistic images. By the sixteenth century Guanyin had become a Chinese goddess figure. In some folk religions she had become independent from her Buddhist origins.

Below are two later examples of Guanyin images. The one on the left is from the Song and the one on the right is from the Ming.

What makes these figures appear more feminine than the previous images of Guanyin?



Song stone Guanyin from Majishan

(Cave 165)

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China*. Chinese Buddhist Association, ed. (Peking: Nationalities Publishing House, 1956), p. 55.



Ming painting of Guanyin

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian*, v. 8 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 81.

Other Divinities

Within Buddhist temples, in addition to the bodhisattvas, groups of other divine figures help to complete the Buddha's entourage. They venerate, protect, and support the Buddha in a hierarchical structure. In this section you will be introduced to some of the more common figures. These include divine kings, gods of strength, and apsaras.

Divine Kings



In Buddhist tradition, the divine kings were responsible for protecting the Buddha and his Law, the sanctuary, and the Buddhist congregation from dangers and threats of evil forces arising from the four cardinal directions of the compass.

What visual clues let you know that this is a protector?

Divine king from Dunhuang, ca. 700

Height: 167 cm (5 ft 6 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p. 129.



Look at the posture of this divine king. Why do you think there is a figure under his foot? Does this seem in conflict with Buddhist doctrine?

Early Tang divine king from Dunham

Height: 93 cm (3 ft 1 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 4 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 136.

To the right is an early Tang divine king from Xinjiang.

How does the overall appearance of this figure differ from the other two divine kings you have looked at in this section? Why do you think this sculpture might look different?

HINT: Think of geography.



Early Tang divine king from Xinjiang

Height: 149 cm (4 ft 9 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 7 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p. 91.

Gods of Strength

The Gods of Strength are wrathful deities who are often depicted as hyper masculine beings. Subordinate to the Divine Kings, they are responsible for fighting the evil forces of the world.

How do these gods of strength differ from the divine kings? Compare these two figures with each other. How are they different? Why do you think there is such a big size difference between these two sculptures (note the dimensions)?

HINT: Consider the medium used to make them.



God of Strength from Dunhuang, 7th c

Height: 252 cm (8 ft 3 in), clay

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 7 (Shanghai : Shanghai jemin meishu chubanshe, 1987), p. 54.

God of Strength from Hebei, 8th c

Height: 15.2 cm (6 in), gilded bronze

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 7 (Beijing : Beijing renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 57.

Apsaras

In Buddhist traditions, apsaras are heavenly beings. In depictions of paradise they hover above the Buddha. Apsaras are often depicted as female. When they are depicted in three-dimensional forms they are almost always done in shallow relief and not as a free standing sculpture.

From the two Northern Wei stone reliefs from Yungang shown below, why do you think apsaras are most often depicted in shallow relief while the other divinities are more often produced as free standing three-dimensional figures?



Apsara stone relief from Yungang, 5th c

Width: 100 cm (3 ft 3 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 35.



Apsara stone relief from Yungang (5th c) Width: 100 cm (3 ft 3 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 35.

SOME THOUGHTS: The practice of depicting apsaras in low relief may be due to their lively, active poses. Often shown as sprightly floating beings, the apsaras would be difficult to make into free standing three-dimensional figures. It may also have something to do with the hierarchical nature of the Buddhist pantheon.

To the right is a section of a Western Wei (6th century) mural at Dunhuang.

Besides the obvious difference of medium, how do the apsaras here differ from the Yungang figures above?

These figures have been likened to what in the west is considered an angel. Do you think they seem like western angels? Why or why not?



Ten apsaras from a wall painting at Dunhuang

Height: 161 cm (5 ft 3 in), Width: 110 cm (3 ft 7 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian*, v. 14 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 90.

Move on to [Groups of Images](#)

Groups of Images

Most of the time, people viewed Buddhist images not individually, but in assemblages. This was true both on the altars of temples and in the shrines people had in their homes. In looking at assemblages of Buddhist figures, it is important to notice differences in size and relative placement.



What do you notice about size, posture, and position in this grouping of images in a Dunhuang cave temple?

What is the effect of placing the Buddha in an assemblage?

Northern Wei stone relief from Yungang, 5th c

Height: 305 cm (10 ft)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 60.

Below are two sections of Western Wei (6th century) murals from Dunhuang. The first one is of two Buddhas flanked by two Bodhisattvas with two apsaras floating above, the other of the Buddha expounding his teachings. He is surrounded by similar figures.

What do you notice about the layouts of these two pictures?



Mural from Dunhuang, 6th c

Height: 80 cm (2 ft 7 in), width: 100 cm (3 ft 3 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian*, v. 14 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 101.



Besides the central placement of the Buddha figure what other visual clues identify him as the Buddha? List the features.

Can you identify the Bodhisattva and apsara figures?

What do you notice about the brushstrokes used to paint the figures?

SOME THOUGHTS: In an attempt to imitate Indian models which emphasized the plastic quality of the figures, painters used thick, heavy brushstrokes to paint this mural. As Buddhist painting evolved in China, painters began to adopt a more linear style which reflected Chinese aesthetic tastes.

Mural from Dunhuang, 6th c

Height: 330 cm (10 ft 9 in), width: 225 cm (7 ft 4 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian v. 14* (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 78.

Look closely at each figure in this bronze shrine. Identify each and tell what details are particular to this shrine.

ANSWER: The Buddha is in the center of the composition. The Bodhisattva figures are situated just below the Buddha and two gods of strength can be found along the bottom.



Bronze shrine, 584

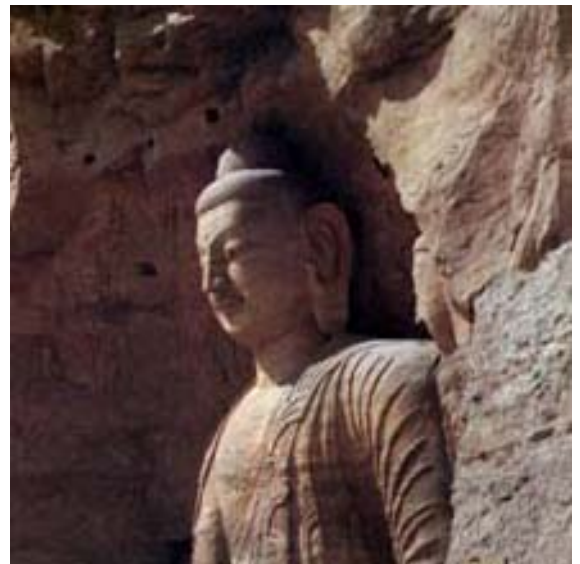
Height: 46 cm (1 ft 6 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian, v. 4* (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 1.

Temples



Most Chinese encountered Buddhist images within Buddhist temples, which came to be constructed by the hundreds and thousands across China as Buddhism gained followers. Before the end of the fifth century there were reportedly more than 10,000 temples in China, north and south. Some were undoubtedly small, modest temples, but in the cities many were huge complexes with pagodas, Buddha halls, lecture halls, and eating and sleeping quarters for monks, all within walled compounds. These temple complexes provided a place for the faithful to come to pay homage to images of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and meet with clergy.



The best evidence of the interior decoration of early temples is found in the surviving cave temples. Although only a few wooden buildings have survived from the Tang period or earlier, hundreds of cave temples have survived. Here we offer glimpses of the three most famous cave temple complexes, Dunhuang in Gansu Province, Yungang in Shanxi Province, and Longmen in Henan Province. Many of the images shown in the previous sections came from these temples. To get a sense of what urban temple complexes must have been like as architectural spaces, we can turn to temples still extant, even if they were built in later centuries. Here, we offer a tour of a Fayuan Temple in Beijing in the Urban Temples section.

Cave Temples



Urban Temples



Location of temples discussed

Cave Temples

The idea of constructing Buddhist temples by hollowing out rock faces was brought to China from Central Asia, where monuments of this sort had been constructed for centuries. Over the years, more and more caves would be excavated and decorated as pious acts on the part of monks and artists. Most of the cave temples were begun in the north during the Northern Dynasties. Cave temples at Dunhuang were begun in 366; at Bingling and Maijishan in the early fifth century; at Yungang in 460; at Longmen and Gongxian in the early sixth century. During the Tang period additions were made to many of these cave temple complexes, especially Dunhuang and Longmen.

DUNHUANG

Positioned in the furthest reaches of northwestern China, Dunhuang served as a gateway into China from Central Asia. Beginning in the fifth century, and continuing through the tenth, approximately five hundred rooms were carved into the area's soft rock. These rooms were decorated with sculptures and frescoes in styles which changed over the centuries. What you see here is only a tiny fraction of the art that can still be seen in the 492 surviving caves at Dunhuang. Below is a painted room in Dunhuang, which was first completed in the Western Wei period (6th century).



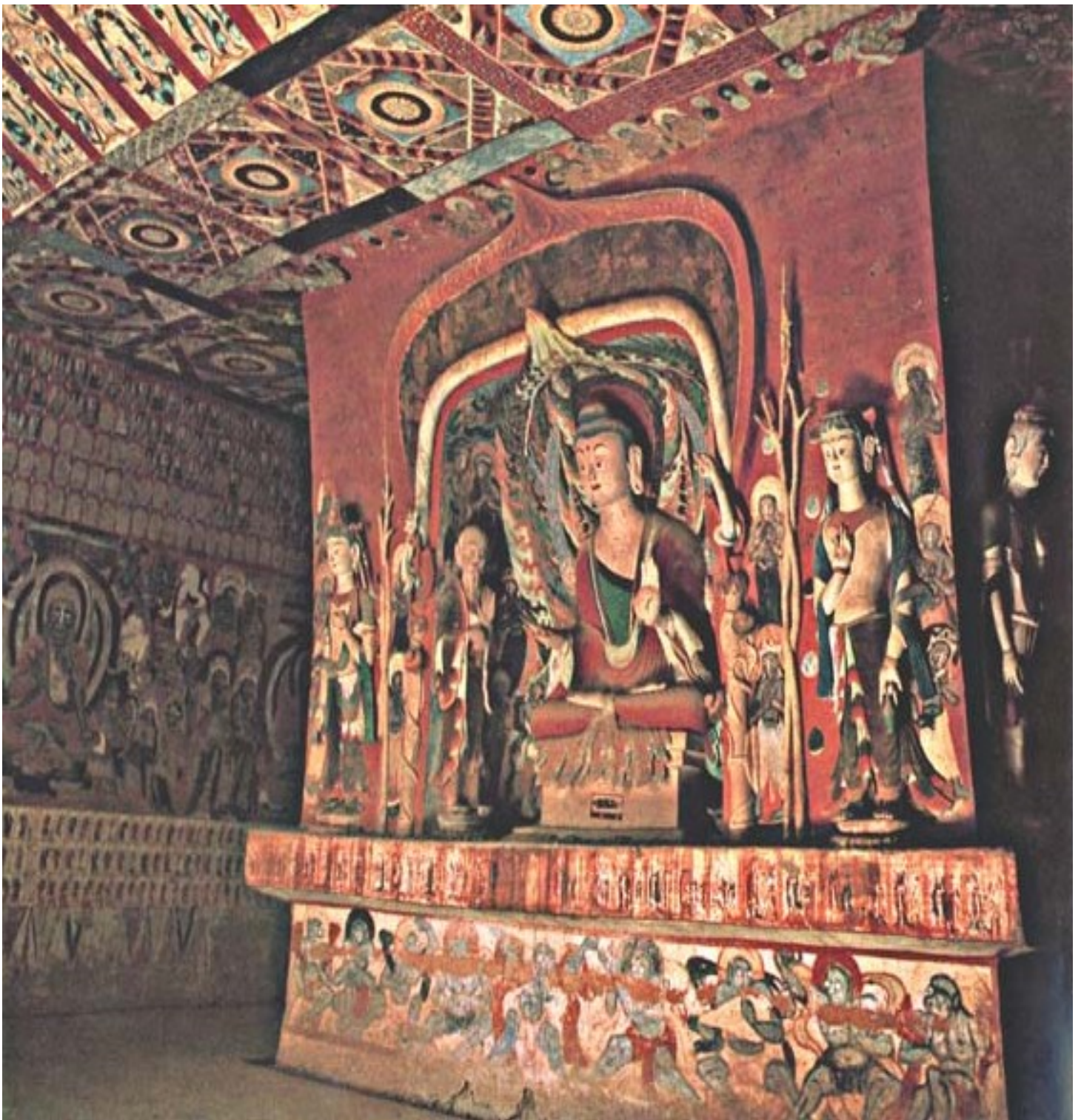
What visual effect is achieved by a room completely decorated with painted images? Does the style of the painted images evoke any particular emotional response from the viewer?

Cave 282 at Dunhuang Height: 316 cm (10 ft 4 in), width: 638 cm (20 ft 11 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Huihua bian*, v. 14 (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 102.

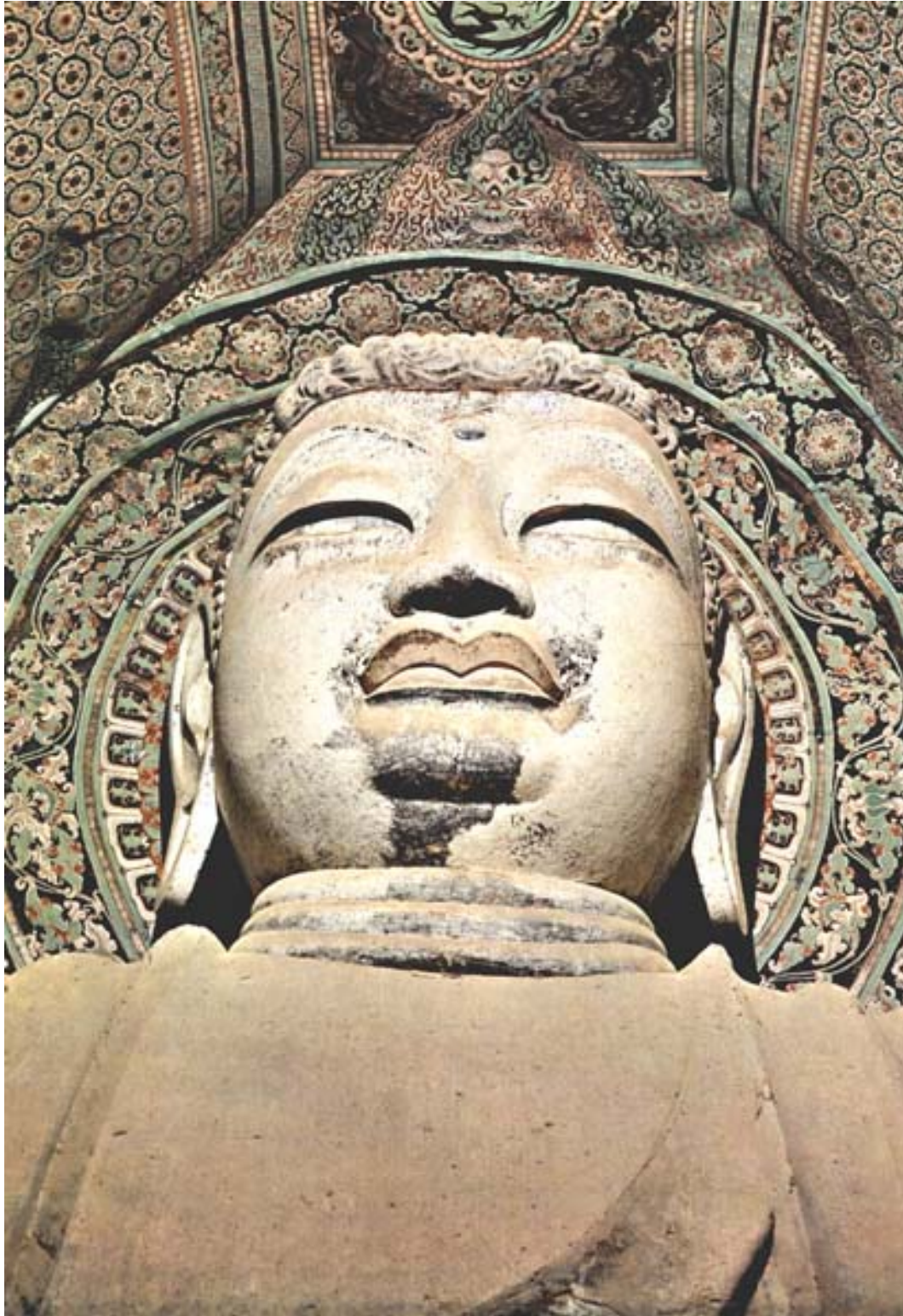
Below is a painted stone relief altar.

How many of the figures can you identify? How does the Buddha image in this group compare with Buddha images you have already seen in this unit?



Painted stone relief altar from Dunhuang

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Jianzhu bian*, v. 4 (Beijing: renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 9.



To the left is a huge Buddha from the mid-Tang (712-781).

Do you think images like this one had an impact on the financial relationship between the clergy and laity in Tang China? If so, why?

Do you remember seeing patterns like the ones in this background anywhere else in the unit? What do you think the patterns are meant to represent?

8th century Buddha in Dunhuang, cave 130

Head height: 210 cm (6 ft 10 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 7 (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 95.



SOME THOUGHTS: Do you remember this sculpture from the Bodhisattva section? Notice how similar the patterns are to the mandorla and ceiling patterns in the image you just saw. These delicate patterns and decorative colors referenced Central Asian models and were extremely popular during the Tang.

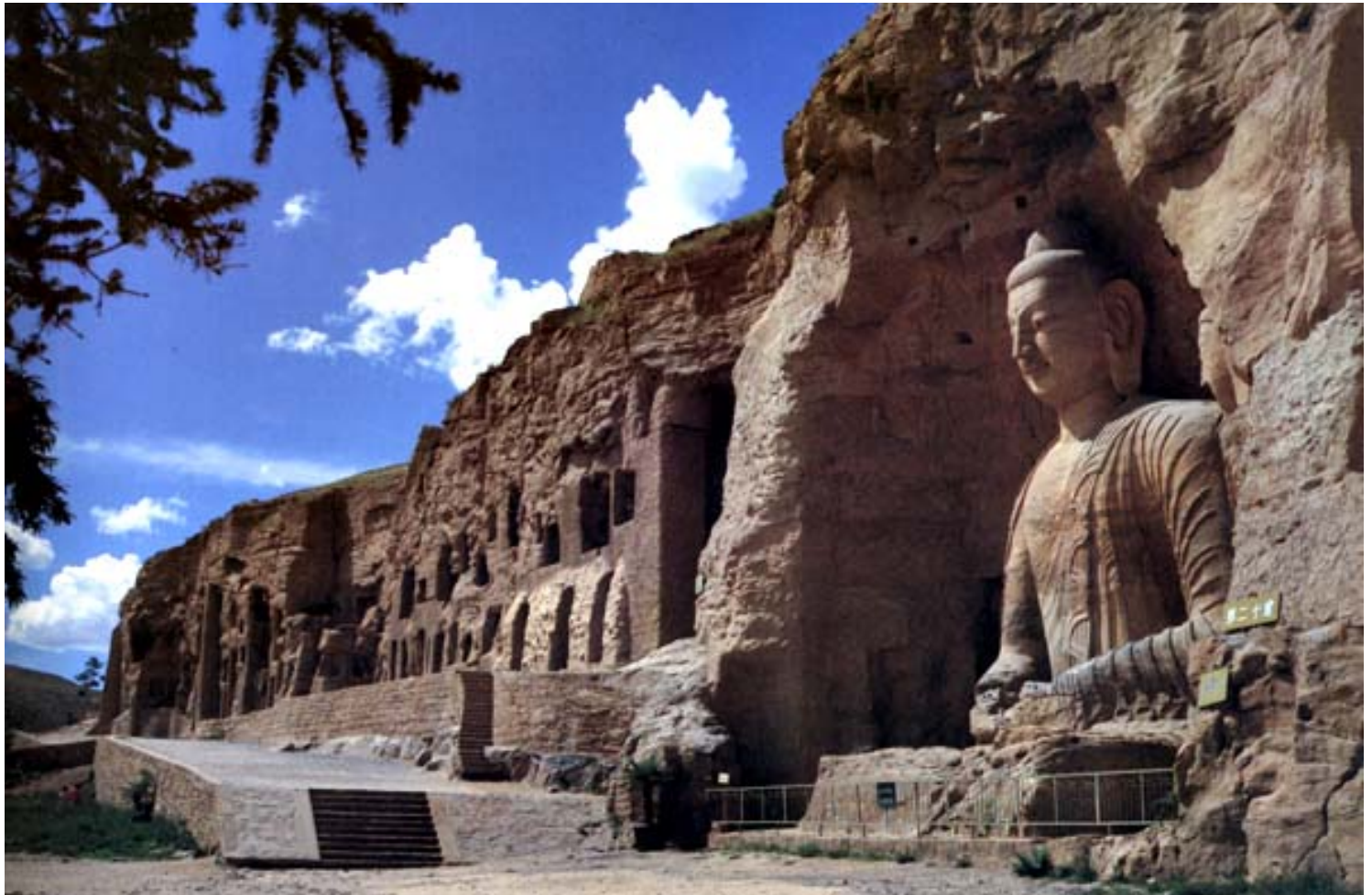
YUNGANG

In 386 the Northern Wei dynasty was declared by the Tuoba, a nomadic people from the north. As it consolidated power in north China during the fifth century, this non-Han dynasty found it beneficial to associate themselves with the burgeoning popularity of Buddhism. Despite this, the Northern Wei emperor Taiwu (r. 424-452) was persuaded by Daoist and Confucian officials at court to curb the Buddhist church. This persecution of Buddhism, begun in 446, lasted until his death in 452. Taiwu's grandson, Wencheng (r. 452-465) succeeded him and reinstated Buddhism to its previous, eminent position. One of the ways in which he made up for his grandfather's actions was by commissioning the

excavation of some of the enormous caves at Yungang.

Today, over 50,000 statues from the 52 caves survive. Below is an outdoor shot of Yungang. Most of the caves here (Caves 21-45) date back to the 5th century.

The front walls of many of the caves have eroded away, so that some of the larger statues can now be viewed from a distance, as seen below.



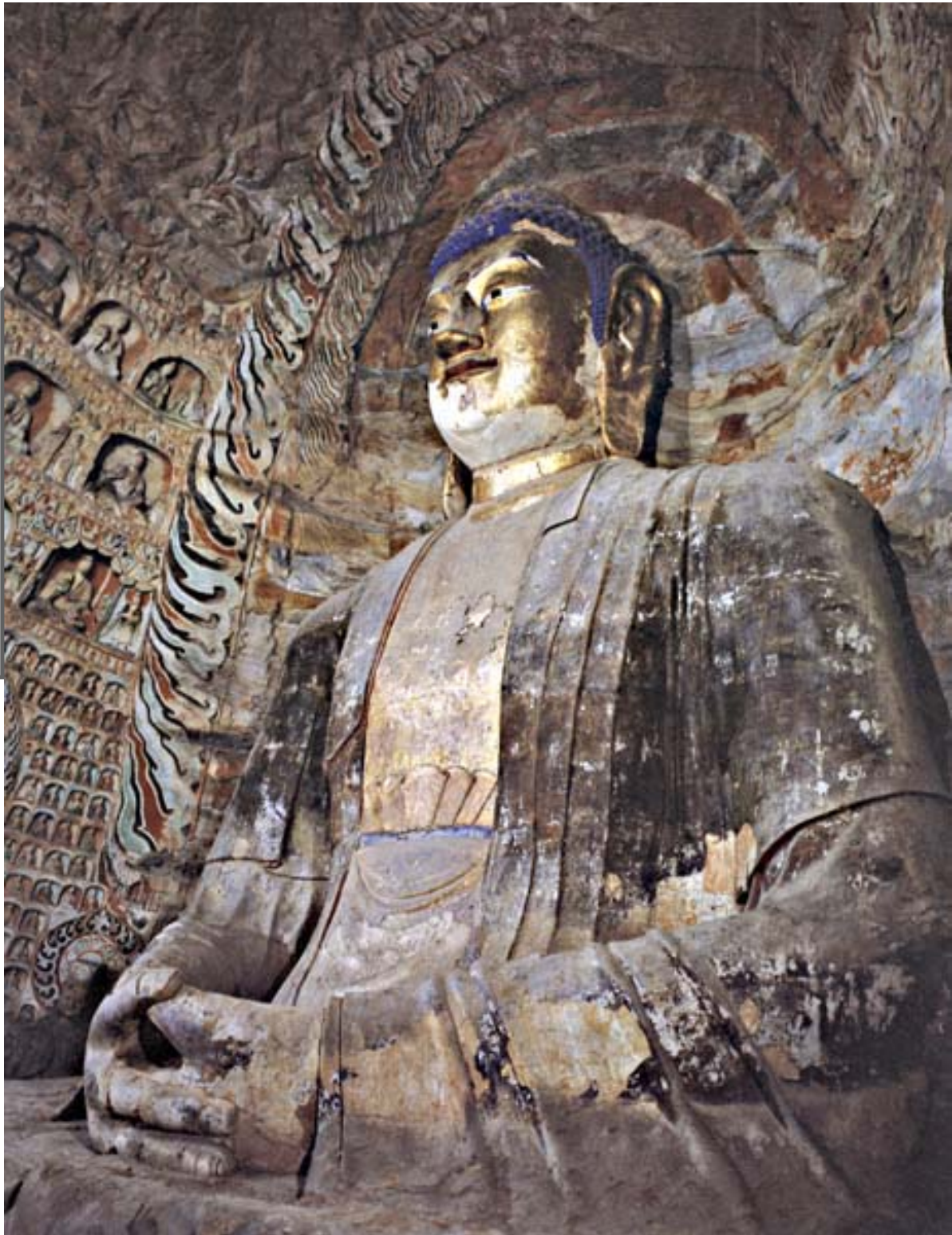
Caves of Yungang

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 180.

Below is an immense gilded Buddha from Yungang from the fifth century. It is approximately the height of a four-story house.

How do you think monuments like this one fit within the history of Buddhism during the Northern Wei?

SOME THOUGHTS: The rich details and enormous scale of this sculpture suggest that the patrons hoped to make a statement about their own spiritual devotion. After a period of repression, a ruler may chose to commission splendid or enormous monuments to establish the difference between his reign and that of his predecessors.



Northern Wei Gilded Buddha from Yungang

Height: 17 m (55 ft 8 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 20.



To the left is a close-up of figures carved into the cave wall at Yungang during the Northern Wei period (5th century). The bright colors are a modern attempt to restore the original painting.

Why do you think each Buddha figure is situated in its own niche?

Wall at Yungang, cave 11

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu pian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 119.



Here is another recently re-painted stone relief from Yungang, also fifth century.

Look at the composition of the art displayed on these walls. Why do you think these images were arranged the way they are?

Painted stone relief from Yungang, cave 10

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu pian*, v. 10 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 116.

LONGMEN

Although construction of the cave temples at Longmen were begun in the early sixth century, the bulk of the sculptures there date from the Tang period. One of the more illustrious patrons of the caves was Empress Wu, the controversial Tang ruler who commissioned approximately 380 images for the Longmen caves between the years 655 and 705.

Over 100,000 images can be found in the approximately 1,300 caves of Longmen. These images range in size from 2 cm (0.8 in) to 17 m (56 ft).

Here is a close-up of one of the central figure from Fengxian Monastery at Longmen, completed during the first half of the eighth century.



Can you tell which deity this is by just looking at the face?

Head height: 400 cm (13 ft 1 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji*, *Diaosu bian*, v. 11 (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 155.

Below we see a full view of the massive stone statue of which you just saw a detail.

With a full view can you now identify which figure was just shown to you? Can you identify the figure second to the right of him?



Height of the Buddha: 17.14 m (56 ft)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Jianzhu bian*, v. 4 (Beijing:Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1988), p. 8.

ANSWER: The Buddha is on the far left and the figure second to the right of him is a Bodhisattva.

A common theme at Longmen and other cave temples is the "thousand Buddhas," usually portrayed by small, repeated images.

What do you think is the effect of a repetitive image like this one? Why do you think someone would repeat an image of a sacred figure?



Wall of Thousand Buddhas, Longmen Height: 131 cm (4 ft 4 in)

SOURCE: *Zhongguo meishu quanji, Diaosu bian*, v. 11 (Beijing: wenwu chubanshe, 1988), p. 115.

Move on to [Urban Temples](#)

Urban Temples

The temples at which most Chinese monks and lay Buddhists worshipped were made of wood, built to last at most a few centuries. Some were in the mountains, built for monks who wished to remove themselves from the clamor of everyday life. Lay Buddhists might make pilgrimages to these mountain temples, but there were also Buddhist temples much closer at hand in every town and city. There are no extant urban temple complexes dating from Tang times, though there are some in Japan that were based on Chinese models. Here, to capture something of the physical, visual, and material impact of China's urban temples, we take you into a temple still in use today, the Fayuan (Dharma Origin) temple in Beijing.

Fayuan Temple Tour

Fayuan Temple is located in Beijing. It was first completed in the late seventh century during the Tang. Over the last thousand plus years, the temple was destroyed by warfare, fire, and even an earthquake. Thus it has had to be rebuilt many times, and most of its surviving buildings date to the seventeenth-nineteenth centuries.

Below is an artist's rendering of a bird's eye view of the temple complex.



The main gate of the temple is at bottom right. The side buildings are of secondary importance. They include halls to patron saints, halls to remember loved ones and temple offices.

The next layer out is made up of buildings used by monks and nuns rather than lay people. There are dormitories, study halls, and dining halls for those who live in the temple.

How do you think the layout related to the activities of the temple?

Fayuan Temple layout

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), inner cover illustration.

We begin our tour here at the southernmost point. The main gate is also called the mountain gate. Looking inside we see an incense burner set before the first central building and a pair of lions guarding the door, which are common to many kinds of buildings in China, not just Buddhist temples.

Try to size up the effect the lions have.

Can you imagine the building without the lions?

MORE: Lions are not native to China, yet they have become important symbols in Chinese culture. Manjusri or Wenshu in Chinese, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom is often depicted riding on a lion. The custom of having a pair of lions guarding a door is common and dates to the third century.



Mountain gate of Fayuan Temple

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 1.

Passing through the gate we glance to our right and left and see the drum and bell towers respectively. As the name implies, the drum tower houses a large drum and the bell tower, a bell.

When do you think these instruments are played? Why place them in their own architectural structures?



Drum tower

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 7.



Bell tower

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 7.

The central buildings are of primary importance. They house the shrines to Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other deities as well as scriptures and holy relics.

Straight ahead we see the first central building. The characters over the door tell us it is the hall of the Divine Kings, the guardians of this temple.

These temple buildings are good examples of traditional Chinese architecture. Even today there are attempts to incorporate elements of traditional Chinese architecture into new temple buildings.

In looking at these buildings from Fayuan Temple can you guess why people today would want to continue incorporating these elements into the architecture of new buildings?



Hall of the Divine Kings

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 7.

Below is the main hall for worship. Let's go up the steps and inside.

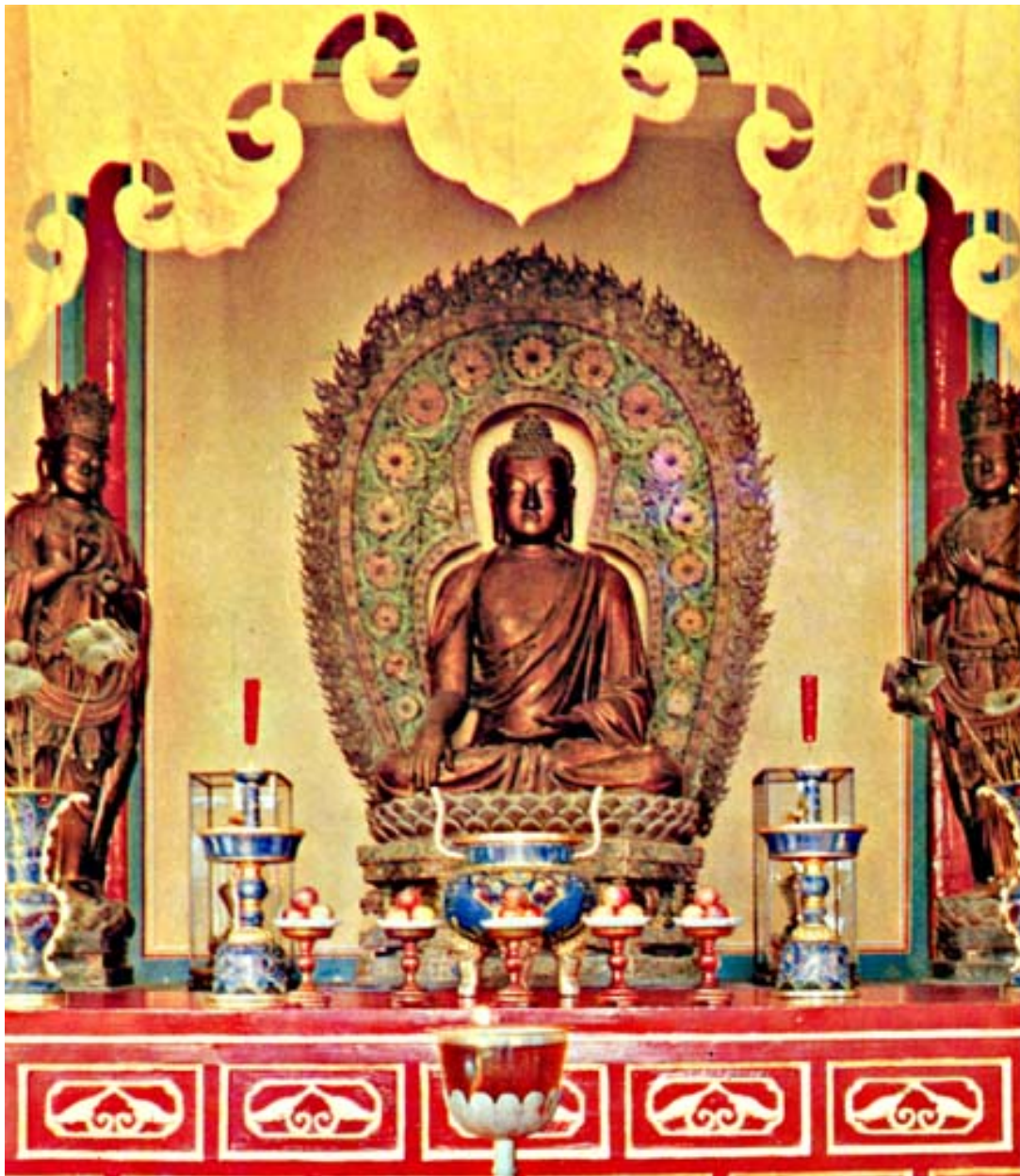
What do you think might be the function of the bronze object in the center of this picture, and the stone slabs to either side?

ANSWER: An incense container sits in the center, flanked by stone stele, or slabs, with inscriptions.



Main Hall

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 10.



To the left is the main altar in the temple. We see a gilded Buddha statue almost four meters tall in the center and two other figures. In front of them are a ceremonial incense burner, candles, a vase of flowers, and plates with offerings of fruit.

Can you identify the type of images flanking the Buddha on either side?

ANSWER: They are bodhisattvas.

Main altar

SOURCE: *Fayansi* (Beijing: Fayansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 12.

Further back in the temple compound we find the building that houses the Buddhist scriptures.

How is this building different from the other halls of worship?



Scripture Hall

SOURCE: *Fayuansi* (Beijing: Fayuansi liutongchu, 1981), p. 16.

Move on to [Buddhist Practice](#)

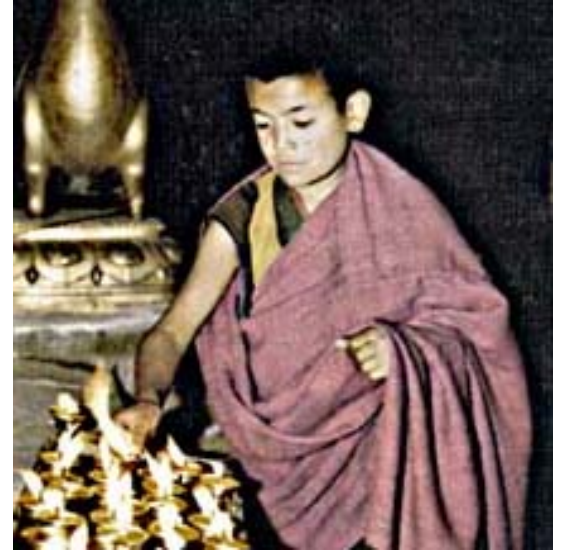
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Practice

Buddhism brought with it not just temples and images, but also ways of worshipping. Here we will look at some of the ways Buddhism is practiced in China today, looking separately at lay and clerical practice.

Regional variation in the material trappings of Buddhism should be kept in mind. The biggest divide is between areas where Tibetan Buddhism is dominant (Tibet, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia predominantly), and other regions of China. Buddhism arrived in Tibet by a different route, primarily from India, and although there was much interchange between Tibetan Buddhism and schools of Buddhism in Tang and later China, many differences in both doctrine and practice have persisted until today.



Monks and Nuns



Lay People

Monks and Nuns

Following the Buddha and the Dharma (teaching), the community of Buddhist monks and nuns, or *sangha*, constitute the third of the Threefold Refuge, a basic creed of Buddhism. Their behavior is strictly disciplined by the sacred canon. These monks and nuns adopt distinctive styles of appearance and behavior.

MORE: There were a variety of reasons for joining a monastery or nunnery. Pursuit of spiritual salvation and enlightenment was obviously an important reason for leaving secular homes. But some people also believed that Buddhist monastic life would be the best way to serve their social and economic needs. Widows, orphans and other displaced members of society could find refuge in Buddhist institutions.

In viewing this section it is important to note that what you see here is only a small sample of the incredible diversity existing among various schools of Buddhism. In addition, customs and rituals continue to evolve.



To the left is a picture showing the abbot from a monastery in Shanghai leading a religious service.

What do you notice about the architectural space? Do you think it is an appropriate space for a religious service? Why or why not?

Religious service in Shanghai

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 133.



The photograph at the left shows Buddhist nuns circling the Buddha's shrine in celebration of his birth date.

What does the shape of the shrine remind you of?

ANSWER: The architectural shape of the shrine derives from a pagoda model. Pagoda type architecture evolved from the Indian stupa and native Chinese towers.

Nuns at Kaifu Nunnery, Changsha, Hunan province

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 139.

To the right are nuns praying before mid-day meal.

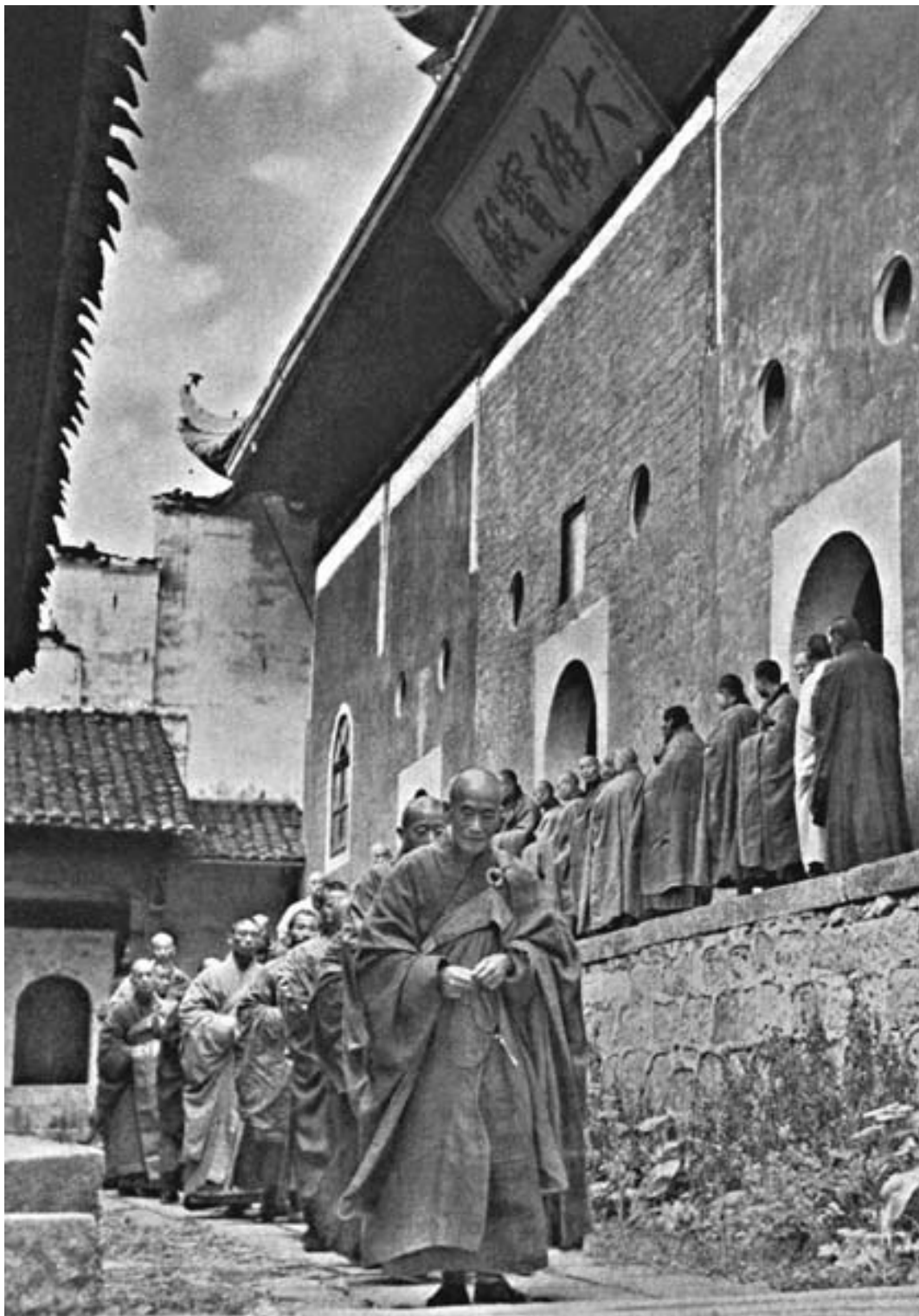
What do you notice about the seating arrangement? Why do you think they would sit in this arrangement during a meal?

ANSWER: The abbess sits at a head table while the nuns sit along two sides facing each other. By adhering to a regulated arrangement these nuns express the hierarchical nature of the Buddhist community. Also, in monasteries and nunneries the meals are taken in silence, so it is convenient to sit in single file rows one behind the other.



Nuns at Tongjian temple in Beijing

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 132.



To the left, monks at the Jiuhua Monastery in Anhui Province return to their living quarters after a religious service.

What do you notice about the way in which they proceed to their living quarters? Note the position of their hands; can you guess what this might mean?

Monks at Jiuhua Monastery

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 128.

Traditionally, children often joined monasteries and nunneries because their parents gave them to the church to fulfill a religious vow. These children lived within the monastery until they were able to become novices and prepare for their ordination.

Here are novices at Longchang Monastery on Mount Baohua kneeling in the temple courtyard for an ordination ceremony.

How does the last row of novices differ from the others, and why might this difference exist?



Ordination Ceremony at Longchang Monastery

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 126.

ANSWER: The long hair suggest that the last row of novices are women. Female novices customarily sit in the last row during ordination ceremonies.

Music and sound are important aspects of life in a Buddhist monastery. Bells, cymbals and other percussive instruments signal transitions between daily activities. They also accompany sessions of chanting that have a singing quality. These chants produce a distinctive, impressive sound and can last for hours.

To the right are monks reciting sutras at Shaolin Monastery (Henan province).

Can you locate two percussive instruments in this photo?



Monks at Shaolin Monastery

SOURCE: Faure, Bernard. *Buddhism*. New York: Konecky & Konecky, 1998, p. 89.

Today, greater ease of travel has facilitated international exchange for monks and nuns. The monks below are attending a ceremony to celebrate the commemoration of a stele inscription.

What do you notice about this delegation of monks? What do you think the two monks in the back are carrying?

ANSWER: The two monks in the back appear to be carrying *dungchen*. The *dungchen* is a type of Tibetan horn that sometimes can be as long as 14 feet and produces deep tones resembling the sound of a tuba.



Monks attending a ceremony

SOURCE: *Zhongguo* 619 (2000): 23.

Buddhism was imported into Tibet from India during the Tang period. Combining with the native religions, Tibetan Buddhism has emerged as an important branch of Buddhism, bearing distinctive characteristics of its own. The pictures that follow are mostly about monks from the Taer Temple (Qinghai Province), one of the six biggest Tibetan Buddhist temples in China.

To the right is a picture of a Tibetan Buddhist monk from Ningxia Province spinning the prayer wheels.

What do you think the symbols on the wheels are?



Tibetan Buddhist monk

SOURCE: Xiahe, 1988. Photo courtesy of Marc Abramson.



To the left shows Tibetan Buddhist monks praying.

What do you notice about the prayer hall?

Tibetan Buddhist monks at Taer Temple

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 35.

Below is a picture showing an outdoor religious service.

Why do you think the monks' robes are in different colors?



Religious service organized by Taer Temple

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 108.

Monks at Taer Temple print sutras.

Look at this picture and the one below. Why do you think sutras are still printed this way rather than with modern machinery?



Printing sutras

SOURCE: *Ta Er Si Monastery* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982), pl. 197.



Tibetan Buddhist monks

SOURCE: *Ta Er Si Monastery* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1982), pl. 196.

What do you think is the relationship between these two monks?

ANSWER: It is likely that the older monk is the master to the young novice. When someone enters a monastery they are usually adopted by an older monk, and develop a relationship similar to that of a father to a son.



What do you think this Taer Temple monk is doing?

ANSWER: He is performing a type of medical consultation. Some monks learn and earn degrees in the field of medicine.

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 73.

Tibetan Lamist Buddhism was patronized by the Manchu rulers of the Qing dynasty and found a following in some areas of China Proper, including the long-established Buddhist pilgrimage center at Mount Wutai (Shanxi Province)

To the right is a picture of monks at Jixiang Monastery on Mount Wutai listening to a lecture by the abbot.

What aspects of the abbot's appearance are used to denote his position?



Abbot lecturing at Jixiang Monastery

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 127.

Move on to [Lay People](#)

Lay People

Common forms of Buddhist practice for lay persons include visiting temples to pray, burn incense, place offerings of fruit or flowers at altars, and observe rituals performed by monks, such as the consecration of new images or the celebration of a Buddhist festival.



To the left is a picture showing people praying at a Buddhist temple in Shanghai.

What do you notice about the Buddha image?

Can you tell what it is made of?

SOME THOUGHTS: The Buddha sculpture is made out of jade. Do you think this would affect the way it is presented?

Worshipping in a Buddhist temple in Shanghai

SOURCE: *Buddhists in New China* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 138.

To the right is a picture showing Buddhist women's association in Taiwan meeting for worship.

Can you identify some objects seen in temples?



Taiwan Buddhist worship meeting

SOURCE: Photograph courtesy of Stevan Harrell.



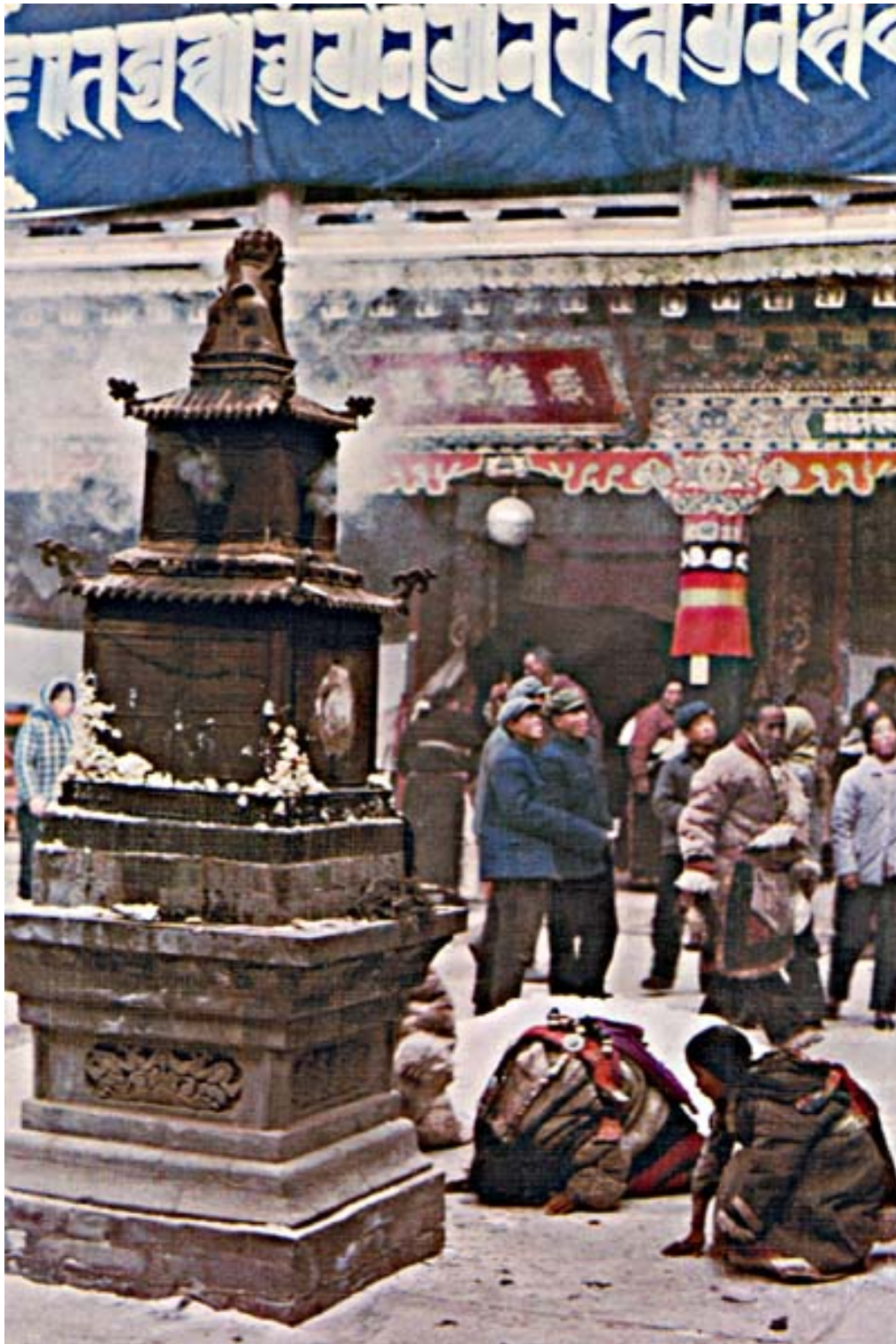
To the left is the image of a wealthy patron about to be enshrined in a temple in Taiwan.

Look closely and try to describe the situation.

Enshrinement ceremony

Photograph courtesy of Stevan Harrell.

Lay people are also active at Tibetan Buddhist temples. Here are some more scenes from Taer Temple in Qinghai province



This is a scene from Taer Temple in Qinghai Province.

To what kind of object are these Buddhists bowing?

Notice the position of the bow. What parts of the body are touching the ground?

Partial prostration

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 89.

The bowing figures above were engaged in partial prostration. The figures below are engaged in full prostration.

This bow begins by standing with hands overhead like the figure in red, then after touching the body at three or four points with the hands, the worshipper lays on the floor with the whole body in contact with the ground like the figure in white.

What do you think might be the significance of engaging the whole body in this manner?



Full prostration

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 21.

Here lay people observe a religious service at an altar adorned with dough figurines.

What do you notice about the figures? How does the material from which they are made relate to their appearance?



Adorned altar at Taer Monastery

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 97.



At left, lay people watch dancers perform.

Do you think the dance is religious in nature? Why or why not?

ANSWER: Tibetan monks traditionally perform colorful ritual dances during the New Year. These dances depict religious themes and characters.

Dancing performance at Taer Monastery

SOURCE: *Taer Lamasery* (Beijing: Shanghai renmin meishu chubanshe, 1985), p. 109.