

Pensive bodhisattva essay



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The Seated Maitreya statue is one of the many prominent Korean most respected artistic religious icons. The value of this sculptural work is amazing and sensational, cast in early 17th century, the statue is profoundly and elegantly associated interpretation of Buddhist principles of calm, silence and concern that leads to illumination. This statue, though in male form, is a genderless androgynous with soft and soft delicate hands and fingers that point towards enlightening on knowledge and compassion. Leaning towards meditation posture, it defies the weight of its big head and thickened neck. Generally, his naked upper body exposes his small, placid bones which lacks the usual musculature, covered by a loosely weaved drape are its legs which are entangled in a yoga pose with the feet's turned outward away from the earth. Principally, unlike other statues from diverse other cultures, it portrays the symbolic nature of the body over portraiture, pragmatism and motif.

Hence, this statue portends the principles which are imprinted in ideals of spiritual wisdom and compassion. Looking at its physical properties, this statue is approximately 83.2 cm in height. A Pensive bodhisattva from Korea, Three Kingdom Period (57bc-668ad) late 6th century, which was cast in Gilt bronze, and is national treasure number 78. According to Jonathan W. Best (1992), the trepidation of Buddhist icons as disclosures of religious reality was significantly a crucial aspect in the growth of a fixed iconography. Hence, for those who took icons as figurative phrases of multifarious, eternally legitimate perception of the truth, it was necessary that the symbolically significance aspects of an image be ageless. Therefore, this statue belongs to bodhisattva, this due to the fact that, bodhisattva, are credited with compassion which they employ to use the unlimited knowledge

and supernatural powers in them in order to help other beings, thus, the depiction of this statue, indicates that they were supreme helpers who were accessible to all due to their simplicity which is in line with Buddhism practiced in Korea during that time.

Difference between a Buddha and a Bodhisattva

The difference between a Buddha and a Bodhisattva is very minimal if not general; consider the fact that becoming a bodhisattva is regarded as an enormous step towards helping others. Though most people are self-motivated and principally work toward their own satisfaction, and when an individual does something towards the humanity, they expect a compliment whether in form of praise or a gift. However, bodhisattvas are more guided and motivated by compassion and love (McCallum, 1982). Their principal duty being to accomplish the greatest level that of being a Buddha.

Basically, the term bodhisattva is a Sanskrit phrase translated as bodhi (enlightenment) and sattva (being). Thus according to the principles of diverse forms of Buddhism practiced in early Korea, bodhisattvas were typically powerful aids, while Buddha's were personification of different aspects or approaches to dharma. Therefore both the Buddha's and bodhisattvas were omnipotent beings to the common layperson. However, Buddha's, were commonly regarded as more distanced from the common society than the bodhisattva. On artistic approach, both the Buddha and bodhisattvas were regarded as males and perhaps that is why they depicted in early Korean art. More so, other significant features linked to the depiction of a Buddha are fundamentally based on late Indian concepts of aristocratic male beauty (Best, 1992).

Buddhist statue that Resemble Pensive bodhisattva Korea

Several other statues are thought to bear some stylistic resemblance to pensive bodhisattva Korea. The two best known are found in the national museum of Korea and they are two gilt-bronze large statues. In the museum in Seoul, Korea, they are labeled as treasures 78 and 83. One of the similarities between the two is that they lack any apparent reference or inscription which can give a direction concerning their historical records which can be used to prove their provenance. Their heights are 83.2 and 93.5 cm high respectively. The statues exemplify a high level of skilled craftsmanship in the three kingdoms that existed in early Korea (McCallum, 1982). The transitions between the overlapping garment folds, parts of the body and the ornamentation of the statues are meticulous and subtle and they show the highest attention to detail. The treasure no. 78 is called the pensive bodhisattva wearing a crown topped with moon and sun design. It is called so because the center part of the crown is broken and it is believed to have held a sun disc placed on top of a moon crescent. It resembles the other bodhisattva in the manner in which the scarf is folded and covers both shoulders and flows down in an X-pattern which is similar to patterns observed among other bodhisattva. The modeling of the statue is schematized while the carving is apparently shallow. A feeling in the image is felt as the elegance and precision of the lines in the statue depict some kind of movement.

The subtle smile on the face of the statue is supposed to invite worshippers to share and experience the peace of the deity as well as experience his benevolence and generosity. Statue number 83 which is also seen to

resemble the Maitreya is considered much simpler though fuller in its modeling. The deep cut folds in the skirt which cascade over the rounded base where the bodhisattva is seated depicts more naturalist stance and reality. The statue portrays some liveliness through the interplay between the simplicity of the upper body compared with the lower part which has a tight skirt that clings on rounded knees. These two statues are seen as relevant not only because of their superb casting using gilt bronze over a wide format but for their ability to transform a work of art into a religious devotional image. The two statues are similar in that they have facial expressions that depict a lot of childlike innocence. They also do not have specific hand or other attributes that identify them. Their posture from the front appears erect although when they are viewed from the sides, they appear to have a slight bend on one leg. The slight bend is a representation of the thrice bent posture which was associated with a particular style of bodhisattva statues that were a symbol of Sui influence during the 7th century.

Another statue that almost resembles these two statues is the statue of pensive bodhisattva which is carved of wood. Its overall appearance, the simple modeling that is all over the body, the crown's shape and the overlapping drapery suggests that this statue may have originated from Korea. The suggestion that it could have originated from Korea is the red pine wood that was used to make this sculpture, which was not very common in Japan.

Cultural and political impact

The introduction of Buddhism in Korea had a significant influence on the culture, general life of the people and politics of the country. It also produced a significant influence on the culture and art of early Korea. One of the significant changes that were associated by the coming of the religion was the emergence of monks and religious buildings that were highly adorned with enshrined images. Its slow acceptance affected the general pattern of the life of Koreans (Lee, 1981). Being a religion, it had the power to influence thought patterns and way of behavior which greatly affected the way governance was done. The kingdom of Koguryo was the first to accept the religion in 372. The first major impact of the religion in China was the production of religious sculptures which were produced under the patronage of Northern Wei rulers (Best: 251). The kingdom of Silla received the religion in 528 through the activities of monks. Politically, the religion influenced the ruling class who actually propagated its spread through patronage of religious activities such as the set up of the religious images. Another influence was the participation by learned Chinese monks especially in the south of the kingdom that assisted in the translation of the Buddhist texts. This pattern generally spread to other regions which was effective in spreading the religion (McCallum, 1982). The spread of the religion seems to have affected the ruling classes who are said to have contributed to the building of temples to make the religion accessible to the people. In the Koguryo capital and in Hansong which is the current Seoul, a number of temples are in record as having been constructed a short time since the introduction of the religion. It can hence be argued that these statues introduce a religious inclination among all the people who started paying attention to Buddhist teachings which was evident in their attendance to

temples. The political influence can be associated with the leaders' adoption of the religion which is demonstrated by their patronage of the religious images construction. The adoption of this religion by the rulers like in the case of the Wei rulers must have translated to a significant influence of the religion on the masses that would most likely follow the examples set by the rulers. Culturally, there is a likelihood that the day today activities done by the people was interfered with. Buddhism represents a religion and a culture on itself which induces mannerisms in dressing, social activities and the nature of morals and values that reflects the teachings in Buddhism. At their inception, the Buddhist images presented a form of life that the natives were not used to implying that their cultural life was dramatically affected.

Other Objects on Exhibition

During the museum visit another statue, the Jar with Dragon and Clouds was also viewed. The jar appears gigantic placed on a foot that seems smaller than its size. Its size helps to accentuate the strength of the whole shape. It has a low mouth and sharp undercutting which helps emphasize its visual effect. The jar could have been constructed from two pieces and this suggestion is accentuated by the visible seam halfway the surface. The seam is a further suggestion that the jar was made in an official kiln in Kwangjin located in the Southwest of Seoul. Similar iron pieces under glazed jars were in the ancient days produced for government official functions and were produce using highly defined clay (McCallum, 1982). It could have also originated from rural kilns which produced similar vessels. The appearance and refined quality of this jar portrays a lot of skill ion the part of the designed since compared to the other vessels produced from the rural areas.

The vessels produced by the village kilns usually had a grey tint possibly because of high content of iron in the clay glaze and body. Historically, the vessel could have been completed any time during the 18th century, a time when Korean ceramics industry is considered to have been particularly vibrant. The possible quality of the vessel could have been supported by the development of celadon to punch'ong which laid a foundation for the development of porcelain. The appearance of white porcelain occurred around the period of mid-choson. This development helped to produce clay vessels that had a wide range of colors ranging from blue gray to snow white. In the vessel, an animal form, single and undulating encircles the vessel. The animal form is traditionally supposed to represent a dragon. As the creature depicts an image of round movement on the vessel, the brush strokes appears concise, energy filled and assured. The fungus shaped clouds, traditionally sketched on the top of the vessel are less visible due to the dominating figure of the vessel.