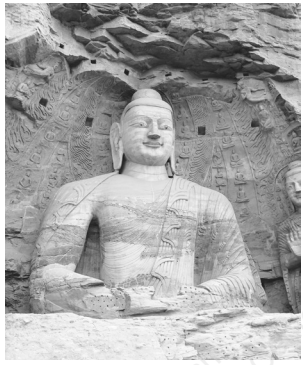


Fo Guang Shan
International Translation Center

Buddhism and Sculpture

Buddhism in Every Step C10
（英文版）

Venerable Master Hsing Yun

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International Translation Center

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Written by
Venerable Master Hsing Yun

Translated by
Fo Guang Shan
International Translation Center

Edited and Proofread by
Venerable Yi Chao, Louvenia Ortega,
Michael Tran, and John Gill

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Buddhism and Sculpture

Sculpting is a way of creating artwork from any material that can be sculpted into a three-dimensional form, such as wood, rock, metal, clay, and plaster, as well as other materials. When sculpting, artists work with passion, care, and dedicated hearts to bring out the power in the spirit of their art. It is this dedication that makes sculpture long-lasting and valuable.

Buddhism is known as "inner knowledge." It is an elevation and purification of life that can be likened to sculpting the heart. The eighty-four thousand Dharma doors, just like the sharp knife of a sculptor, carve and sculpt to trim away the ignorance, habitual tendencies, and afflictions that have accumulated from our past lives. The Dharma is also like the sculptor's hands, pulling and kneading to form the compassion and wisdom of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. After the hardship of severe forging, hammering, and burning, from the sparks of the starter stone burst the illumination of one's life.

Buddhist sculpture expresses the grandeur of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It maintains the tradition

of devotion from the Buddha's time and possesses the Buddhist function of civilizing people. Moreover, Buddhist sculpture maintains the accomplishments of the people's wisdom, culture, and art, especially the creations of Buddhist artists, which contain their realization of the Dharma and their devotion to Buddhism. Such sculpture, when appreciated from the outside, expresses the purity, virtue, and beauty of life. When seen from inside of the work, it expresses the transcendent and respectable qualities of the artist. Therefore, sculpture becomes a convenient media for propagating the Dharma.

I. The Development of Buddhist Sculpture

Buddhist sculpture began with the carving of Buddhist imagery. According to the records in chapter 28 of the *The Numerical Discourses* [*Ekottarika Āgama Sutra*] and chapter 5 of *The Record of the Western Regions* [*Datang xiyu ji*], during the Buddha's time, the king of Kausambi, King Udayana, used sandalwood to sculpt a five-foot-tall image of the Buddha. This was the birth of Buddhist sculpture.

Large amounts of Buddhist sculpture have been discovered dating back to the time of King Asoka, of the Indian Mauryan dynasty, who ruled five hundred years after Sakyamuni Buddha's nirvana. King Asoka was so deeply moved by the Dharma that he ruled his

country in accordance with it. He constructed stupas in every place that the Buddha taught the Dharma as well as building many temples, caves, and stone columns inscribed with edicts. Aside from the great artistic value of these treasures, King Asoka's works make a significant contribution to substantiating the sutras and to the study of the history of Buddhism.

During the reign of the Kusana Kingdom, King Kaniska was also very devoted to the Dharma, and much like King Asoka, he constructed his own temples and pagodas in the Gandhara area as well as sculpting large amounts of statues and images. Due to a long period of exposure to Greek art and culture, the sculptures of King Kaniska reveal a heavy influence from Greek styles. This style, a combination of Indian and Greek sculptural techniques, is called the Gandhara style. During this same period, a style known as the Mathura style flourished mainly in the southern parts of India. Though influenced by the Gandhara style, the Mathura style shows a more prevalent native Indian influence. While the Gandhara style reveals an inward calm, the Mathura style is much more steady and powerful.

In the 4th century, the Gupta Empire was considered the golden age of Indian art with the Ajanta Cave's work being the most impressive. During this time, India was attacked by barbarians, causing native and foreign cultures to clash against each other

and India's art to mature. China's sculpture was highly accomplished before Buddhism was introduced to China. After Buddhism was introduced and integrated into Chinese culture, Chinese art and sculpture became enriched with greater and deeper beauty. This beautiful artistry can be seen in the carved pillars found in Buddhist temples, as well as in statues, caves, and other forms of Buddhist art. During this time, wood carvings, stonework, and clay sculpture became the dominant mediums.

In the late era of the Eastern Han dynasty, there was a temple building that housed a bronze statue of the Buddha. This is considered one of the earliest forms of Buddhist sculpture in China. During the Eastern Jin dynasty, Buddha images were the main work of sculptors, and were very popular at the time. Venerable Master Daoan constructed a Sakyamuni Buddha statue that was over three and a half meters tall, while Zhi Huihu at Wujun Shaoling Temple built a similar Buddha statue made out of gold. Dai Mu and his son once constructed an Amitabha Buddha and two bodhisattvas for Qishan Yinlin Treasure Temple.

After the Northern and Southern dynasties, Chinese sculpture began to evolve as Buddhism became more widespread. This period is characterized by the combination of traditional techniques with foreign trends as well as the dominance of stone

as a medium. The rough and open style typical of Indian sculpture gradually emerged in China, bringing Chinese sculpture into a new era. This fusion of styles unfolded into the union of architecture, sculpture, and mural painting, which led to new innovations in cave art.

One can see the progress of Buddhism in China based on the change of style in sculpture. For example, the tall, magnificent Buddhist statues in the caves of Yungang are very similar to the Indian Gandhara and Gupta styles. At the end of the Northern Wei dynasty, due to the movement of the Han style and the impact of Buddhism in the people's daily lives, sculpture from this period and onward bore a more Chinese style. The Sui and Tang were considered the golden dynasties for art, combining foreign culture with Chinese traditions; their sculptures had many beautiful and proportional forms and peaceful expressions.

During the Tang dynasty, statues entirely expressed the Chinese style of sculpture. Most of these masterpieces came from the period of Empress Wu Zetian; it was because of Empress Wu's great propagation of the sculpting of Buddhist statues that the era of Buddhist sculpture reached its climax. The period of Emperor Tang Xuanzong was considered to be another golden era for Chinese Buddhist statuary. Statues from this period appeared to be livelier

in form with a more mature style that had never been seen before, making the artwork feel more complete. One of the most famous sculptors of Chinese history, Yang Huizhi, was born during this time period. His most representative pieces include the arhat statues in Baoshou Temple at Jiangsu province and the thousand hands thousand eyes Avalokitesvara statue.

II. Examples of Buddhist Sculpture

Buddhist sculpture covers a wide range of forms, mainly consisting of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, guardians, and gods. Sculptures can also represent Buddhist stories from the sutras, depicting their characters and scenery. Cave sculpture is the most important form of Chinese sculpture, with many amazingly creative works completed inside caves. For example the Maiji Mountain Caves, located at an elevation of one hundred forty two feet, is known for the pagoda on top of the mountain and the temple at the foot of the mountain. The cave sculpture covers the entire mountain, containing more than a thousand grand Buddha statues and has been well preserved throughout the Northern Wei, Sui, Tang, and Song dynasties.

The Gansu Jingchuan province's southern cave was constructed in the early Wei dynasty. Non-relief sculptures and relief sculptures fill the cave. The Longmen Caves have over 140,000 Buddha statues,

making it one of the most difficult and challenging sculpture projects ever conceived.

The sculpture techniques of the Tang dynasty affected the Buddhist sculpture of the Japanese Asuka period. The Vairocana Buddha statue is famous for representing the grandeur and wisdom of the Buddha. The Vairocana Buddha is the largest statue in the cave and is the most richly symbolic.

Construction on the Yungang Caves began around the 5th to 6th centuries. It is one of the three caves that is most treasured in Chinese Buddhist art. The Five Caves of Tanyao are the grandest ever constructed. Other caves are also well known and rich in decoration like the Xiangtangshan Caves of Hebei and Henan. These magnificent structures contain stone columns, stone carved sutras, and other works of sculpture.

King Asoka of India erected a series of round, sculpted columns containing teachings of the Buddha at significant locations where he preached the Dharma. Columns were also erected at Deer Park Monastery, as well as in Bactra, Lumbini, and Rajagrha.

Deer Park is the place where the Buddha first taught the Dharma after his enlightenment. Located within the grounds is a fifteen-meter-tall stone column with a teaching on not disturbing the harmony between monks. On the top of the column are four

interconnected stone lions standing at the center of a Dharma wheel facing outward in each of the four directions. This arrangement is meant to symbolize the first time that Shakyamuni Buddha turned the wheel of the Dharma and preached with a voice as powerful as a lion's roar. Beneath the structure is an upside-down lotus, which appears delicate yet powerful. Venerable Xuan Zang described this as "the nectar within the stone, crystal-clear and pure." This type of lion column was a great symbol of the Dharma during King Asoka's time, in addition to symbolizing the economic strength of his country. This Dharma wheel, or Dharmacakra, in the Sarnath Lion Capital adapted from the columns would later come to symbolize the Indian Republic after its independence from the British Empire.

Aside from depictions of various kinds of Buddhist iconography, another prominent type of Buddhist Sculpture is the creation of stone sutras. Stone sutras are sutra texts carved on the surface of stone. In China, Confucianism was the first to carve manuscripts into stone; other well-known early stone carvings include the Xiping stone-cut manuscripts from the Han dynasty as well as the Kai Chan stone sutras from the Tang dynasty. New caves were constructed during the Northern Wei dynasty for the explicit purpose of preserving the Dharma by storing stone sutras. Stone sutras from the Northern Qi

dynasty are the oldest stone sutras which are still preserved today, while the largest known carvings are Hebei's Fangshan stone sutras. Examples of other styles of stone sutra carvings include:

1. Sutra wall carvings: during the Northern Qi dynasty, Henan's Mt. Beixiang Hall had copies of *The Vimalakirti Sutra* [*Weimojie jing*], *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala Sutra* [*Srimaladevisimhanada Sutra*], the *The Bei Sutra* [*Bei jing*], and *The Sutra of Maitreya's Attainment of Buddhahood* [*Mi'le Chengfo jing*], carved upon the walls. During the Sui dynasty, the Dazhu Cave in Henan was inscribed with *The Lion's Roar of Queen Srimala Sutra*, *The Lotus Sutra* [*Saddarmapudarika Sutra*], and *The Nirvana Sutra* [*Parinirvana Sutra*]. In the Song dynasty, the walls of Henan's Kaifengfu Fan Pagoda were inscribed with *The Ten Wholesome Actions Sutra* [*Shishan Yedao Jing*]. Additionally, Jiangsu Yunyan Temple contained walls with "The Universal Gate Chapter" of *The Lotus Sutra* carved within them. The Six-Harmony Pagoda at Hangzhou, Zhejiang province has *The Sutra of Forty-two Sections* [*Sishier Zhang jing*] carved inside the pagoda. During the Tang dynasty, the Henan Longmen Mt. Xiang

Cave was inscribed with the Nirvana Sutra. The Hebei Juyongguan Pass Street Pagoda has the Yuan dynasty's manuscript of *The Ushinishavijaya Namgyalma Dharani Sutra* [*Foding Zunsheng Tuoluoni jing*] carved upon the walls in six different languages, including Sanskrit, Chinese, Mongolian, Arabic, Tibetan, and the Western Xia dynasty language. This particular engraving is important because it allows scholars to compare the various texts and languages, and therefore it is considered to be of extreme historical value.

2. The moya cliff sutra inscriptions: some stone sutras are carved on cliffs, like Shandong's Mt. Tai Jingshiyu cliff's large font *Diamond Sutra*. It is unclear who carved the sutra and when, though the carver is sometimes referred to as Tang Yong. The text has a total of more than nine hundred characters, each character created with a rich and wholesome quality, making it the most significant carving of its kind. Inside the Shandong Mt. Culai Buddha Cave, there is a part of *The Great Perfection of Wisdom Sutra* from the Northern Qi period. Preserved in the Shanxi Liao province's Wulaideng is *The Flower*

Adornment Sutra's [*Avatamsaka Sutra*] "Accomplishment Chapter."

3. Stele sutras: sometimes sutras are carved onto both sides of an individual stele. These kinds of stele sutras are usually very numerous, and stored inside a stone room. The most well-known set is Hebei's Fangshan stone sutras. Between the years 605–616 CE, Venerable Jingwan of Youzhou Zhiquan Temple began engraving sutras on stone due to the Northern Zhou and Northern Qi dynasty's abolishment of Buddhism. Fearing that Buddhism would disappear, Venerable Jingwan vowed to carve what he called the "Stone Canon." The products of his efforts are preserved within Hebei Fangshan Yunju Temple. The Stone Canon took a total of 480 years to complete, the first of its kind in history, and the most complete. Not only can Jingwan's Stone Canon be used to correct errors in future editions of the sutras, but it is also valuable data for the history of calligraphy and art.

Besides the ones in China, stone sutras can also be found in Korea and Japan. Korea is known for the stone *Flower Adornment Sutra* in the Huaeomsa Temple located on the slopes of Jiri-san, in Masan-myeon, Gurye County, in the province of Jeollanam-do. Japan's Uchi Kawasurugake Cliff engraved *Nirvana Sutra* is the oldest of its kind. In Fukuoka, there is a stone-engraved *Amitabha Sutra* [*Amituo jing*], which is an imitation of China's Xiangyang Longxing Temple's stone sutra in Hubei. This version of *The Amitabha Sutra* is known for containing twenty-one additional characters compared to the other versions. According to some, it was transmitted to Japan in the Song dynasty, and therefore it is treated as a national treasure.

The sutra pillar is a kind of Buddhist stone sculpture where stone sutras are stored and also serve as valuable memories of the propagation of the Dharma. While the sutras are typically engraved upon the main body of the pillar, the top of the structure as well as the base are decorated with images of Buddhas, bodhisattvas, flowers, and clouds. Similar sutra buildings in India are mostly engraved around the walls of Buddhist buildings. Steles are erected in front of pagodas and depict heavenly maidens, Dharma wheels, people, and animals.

China's sutra pillars were popular from the Tang dynasty to the Liao and Song dynasties. One purpose

of these pillars, such as *The Dharani Sutra* [*Tuoluoni jing*] pillar, was for devotees to acquire merit. These pillars were also sometimes used to commemorate certain venerables. These sutra pillars are commonly known as tomb pillars. Examples of significant sutra pillars include:

1. The Hebei Zhaozhou *Dharani Sutra* pillar: located inside the Hebei province and built during the Northern Song dynasty, this sutra pillar was built by stacking stones eighteen meters high. It was the tallest sutra building at the time. The engraved Buddhist characters, animals, flowers, and other stylistic elements display the high accomplishments in design during the Song dynasty.

2. Yunnan Kunming's *Ksitigharba Bodhisattva Sutra* pillar: built during the Dali dynasty, this sutra building has seven layers. Engraved within the first layer are four vajra guardians and the Sanskrit text. Other layers were carved with images of the Buddha. The craftsmanship in each layer is very detailed and delicate. It serves as an important resource for those who wish to research the minority culture and sculptural techniques of Yunnan.

In Korea, during the 11th century, in order to protect themselves from intruders, the people made a vow and carved the Great Buddhist Canon—also known as the Goryeo Buddhist Canon. Later it was destroyed by the Mongolians, but in the year 1251 it was reconstructed with a total of 6,529 chapters and 81,258 plates. It is now kept in the Dharma Treasure Temple or "Haeinsa." In 1871, the King of Laos gathered 2,400 monks for a conference to compile the sutras for the fifth time. Once completed, the approved canon was carved onto 729 sheets of marble in the Pali language.

III. The Sculpting of One's Heart

As can be seen in the many examples of Buddhist sculpture mentioned above, a tremendous amount of time and effort goes into each work of art, as the sculptors continue to push against the boundaries of their own strength and resources. Only the very highest of religious devotion can stimulate one's inner strength in this fashion. Appropriately, there is an old saying that goes, "three bows per carve" while a sculptor is working on a statue of the Buddha. Through the process of creating art, the sculptors are also purifying their minds. Therefore, it can be said that the sculptor is also sculpting his heart.

Studying Buddhism is much the same as sculpting. When the Buddha reached enlightenment under the bodhi tree, he sighed in wonderment, "Marvelous! Marvelous! Every sentient being originally has the same wisdom and merit as the Tathagata."

The Flower Adornment Sutra says, "To understand the mind of all Buddhas of the past, present, and futre, one should contemplate that all dharmas originate from the mind." All sentient beings have Buddha nature—it is merely obscured by greed, anger, and ignorance. However, only we can sculpt ourselves and discover the original nature of the Buddha.

For example, by using the five precepts, ten wholesome actions, four means of embracing, and the six perfections to sculpt ourselves into the Buddha's "thirty-two marks of excellence and hundred dignities," we can contemplate thus: When sculpting the hands, make the vow, "I vow to keep my hands downward and to comfort the minds of all." Become a person of compassion. When sculpting the face, make the wish, "I wish all sentient beings to have the dignified appearance of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva." When sculpting the eyes of the bodhisattva, try to feel that you are "observing sentient beings with compassionate eyes." When sculpting a pair of ears, reflect upon Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva's ears, always willing to listen with righteousness, attentiveness, and wholesomeness, looking for sentient beings that are

suffering, and rescuing them from sorrow. When sculpting a pair of feet, make the wish, "I wish that all sentient beings had magical feet that take them to the place where everything is as good as one's wish." This will allow them to fly or go without hindrance and practice Buddhism while creating works of art. When sculpting a mouth, wish that sentient beings can properly comfort and encourage others with good words and are willing to propagate the Dharma throughout the world. When sculpting a body, wish that all sentient beings have the proper demeanor and diligence to serve others, and pay homage to the Triple Gem. Sculpting a heart that is connected to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, one vows that all sentient beings' hearts are filled with compassion, willing to give, to forgive, to cherish, to accept, to be nimble with quick reflexes, to treat others with a pure heart, and to judge properly and peacefully. This means that when the mind is truly pure, it is unwavering. Therefore, everything is seen to be pure. From there, the pure mind expands outward from the personal to the universal. When the heart is pure, this land is pure regardless of what happens. One has completed and fulfilled his life with such a heart.

Buddhism has expanded the scope of what sculpture is capable of, but sculpting also expresses the essence of Buddhism. Each complements the other and fills a splendid page in the book of human

religion, history, culture, and education. People can appreciate the beauty of art through Buddhist sculpture and find inspiration for their religious conviction and devotion. Wholesome thoughts grow in people's minds as they relate to Buddhist sculpture through their hearts. It is through fields like sculpture, as well as others, that Buddhism is allowed to continue and gain influence.

The Flower Adornment Sutra says, "The heart is like a painter who can paint all kinds of colors." In a Buddhist context, sculpting sculpts a kind heart—it carves out ignorance, the ill temperament of past lives, and annoyances while elevating one's moral characteristics. The true meaning of sculpting is to construct a purified society and a happy, healthy life.

The beauty of all sculpture lies in not only the quality of the workmanship or its value as art but also in what it has to communicate to others. The greatness of Buddhist sculpture, statues of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gods, as well as other Buddhist art and the sutras themselves, is that they silently communicate the Dharma and have been doing so for several thousand years. These works of art are steady, calm, and dignified. They contain within them limitless compassion and the strength of many vows to imperceptibly elevate the personalities of others while purifying their minds and hearts.