



Trans/Form/Ação

ISSN: 0101-3173

ISSN: 1980-539X

Universidade Estadual Paulista, Departamento de Filosofia

Tong, Jie

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Trans/Form/Ação, vol. 46, Esp., 2023, pp. 285-290

Universidade Estadual Paulista, Departamento de Filosofia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2023.v46esp.p285>

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# COMMENT ON

## “THE EVOLUTION AND SPREAD OF THE IMAGE OF "NAGAS BATHING SIDDHARTHA" IN BUDDHISM ART”

*Jie Tong*<sup>1</sup>

Commented Article: LIU, Xiaodan; XIA, Huiwen; MA, Tao, DANG, Qi. The evolution and spread of the image of “Nagas bathing Siddhartha” in Buddhism art. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp journal of philosophy, v. 46, Special Issue, p. 263- 284, 2023.

This is a scintillating work taking into stock the evolution and spread of the image of Buddha’s bathing at Nagas in Buddhism Art. Liu et al (2023) have not neglected even the slightest nuances and subtle changes that took place in the evolution and dissemination of the image of Buddha’s bathing. The representation of Nagas bathing Siddhartha illustrates the history of Buddhism and geographical diversity. It can be summed up as the dissemination of the Buddhist legend of nine Nagas dousing Siddhartha in water based on the geographical and historical study of the 67 images of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha collected so far. The Central Plains, which Henan and Shanxi dominated, were most affluent in the Mogao Grottoes area of Dunhuang, Gansu, during the Tang Dynasty. The images spread widely in various areas, showing Hebei, Shandong and Jiangsu, as the core to the nearby areas, Sichuan and other places. Shanxi was the primary location for Buddhist art propaganda during this time period (HÄRTEL; MARIANNE, 1982).

<sup>1</sup> Ph. D. Ningbo University Zhedong Culture Institute, Ningbo University, Ningbo, 315211 – China.  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8703-5246>. E-mail: [t8250101@126.com](mailto:t8250101@126.com).

<https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2023.v46esp.p285>



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It is possible to hypothesize on the dissemination path of Nagas Bathing Siddhartha based on the geographical dispersion time and quantity of the image collected in this article. It involves first travelling through the translated scriptures before travelling from India through Central Asia to Middle Earth. Due to the sinicized portrayal of the Chinese language and the interplay of Chinese cultural traditions, the image of two nagas pouring water over Siddhartha was changed to nine nagas showering water over Siddhartha in the Chinese context. Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan should be the first to emerge in the northern Central Plains region where it should initially appear (SMITH, 1998). Under the influence of Han culture, the centre of the area grew to include Hebei and Shandong in the east, Xinjiang, Gansu and Sichuan in the west, and Jiangsu in the south. There is a subject to discuss, in Mr. Liu Lianxiang's opinion. In addition, the political rhetoric required in the northern Central Plains region caused the alteration from two nagas splashing water over Siddhartha to nine nagas pouring water over Siddhartha (FOLTZ, 2010).

The motif of the Nine Nagas Bathing Siddhartha and the notion of the Nine Nagas in Ancient India, which is the legacy of Han culture, do not appear in early Indian Buddhist literature. In the course of historical transmission, the picture of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha has experienced continual development. The Chinese translation of the early Buddhist literature introduced certain novel concepts rooted in Chinese culture (GRÜNWEDEL, 1901). The Buddhist texts must be translated into Chinese with at least two facets added and presented differently. Two examples include the metamorphosis of the two nagas from Indian literature into nine nagas and the dragon from early Indian literature into the dragon of Chinese culture. Buddhism brought the concept of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha to Middle-earth through the dissemination of translated texts. Instead of the two dragons that appeared in the Sanskrit translations, Dharmaraksa inserted nine nagas. One must be aware of the historical Chinese cultural context to comprehend why the twin dragons were changed to nine nagas (JARRIGE, 2001).

The nine nagas represent imperial strength, at least since the late Han Dynasty. During the post-Han Dynasty and the Three Kingdoms period, the royal family of Luoyang built the nine nagas Hall in the city. The nine nagas Dharmaraksa of the Western Jin Dynasty, sculpted to sprinkle water over Siddhartha in the Lalitavistara, had much to do with his travels in Luoyang. It is conceivable that the construction of Luoyang Jiulong Hall, as a symbol

of royal rank, also had an effect. Later, Dharmaraksa constructed the nine nagas dousing Siddhartha in water, which served as the philosophical fulcrum of the Jiuguang Temple throughout the Northern Wei Dynasty. According to Chen Huaiyu (2012, p. 345), “In essence, the incorporation of the noblest representation of monarchy in the Central Plains into the Buddhist interpretation is the basis for the nine nagas spraying for abhiseka. In Luoyang, Dharmaraksa had been interpreting sutras for a while.” (KOSSAK *et al.*, 1998).

Jiulong Hall and the nine nagas have a connection to ancient Chinese politics. Dharmaraksa used the nine nagas to portray Buddha’s magnificence and splendor as the royal Prince and to enhance the emperor’s power and dignity in the political discourse of the Central Plains, thus introducing the theme of the nine nagas into Buddhist translation. Another reason for modifying the idea of two nagas pouring water over Siddhartha to nine ones is that the Prince was raised in a Chinese political setting and used two nagas to perform bathing, which is less potent than the performance of nine ones. Nine nagas appropriately reached the Buddhist levels from the court level as political rhetoric, which was the outcome of the necessity for political rhetoric at the time and is highly prevalent in old Buddhist art (LEE, 2003).

The Central Plains of the North, specifically Shanxi, Henan and Shaanxi, as well as the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu, and previously in Xinjiang, are where the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha has been reported to be most prevalent. Additionally, it was discovered in small quantities in Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Sichuan and other locations. Shanxi in the north central plain, during the Northern Wei Dynasty, is the first location with a definite chronology of the depiction of nine nagas dousing Siddhartha in water. The discovery locations of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha in northern China, which were inspired by the Han culture in the Central Plains, are mostly scattered along Gansu, Shanxi, Henan and Shaanxi. Subsequently, they were extended to Hebei, Shandong and Sichuan. A frequent and popular motif in Buddhist art that tells the tale of the Buddhist lineage is the image of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha.” As Buddhism has grown, foreign art forms have undergone a transformation known as sinicization. The dissemination of translated scriptures, Central Plains cultural traditions and other elements are all connected to the alteration in its image structure (LEIDY; STRAHAN, 2010).

The geographical variety of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is examined in this study from the perspectives of image processing and religious development.

In 11 Chinese provinces, the image of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is described in this article. In order to comprehend the development of the “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” picture and to analyze its reasons in conjunction with the literature materials, it compares it across areas. This comparison is based on research on the image of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” in the sculpture craftsmanship of the Indus Valley civilization and Gandhara. As a result, the development of the image of the “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is influenced not only by political factors, such as the cultural differences between the Central Plains and the Western Regions, as well as the route that Buddhism took for its spread and the ongoing work to translate the Buddha’s writings (LERNER, 1984).

There are both commonalities and variances among the image pairings in various places. Its enabling was given various symbolic interpretations by various authors in multiple genres of literature at different points in time and for various reasons. The political language of the day served as inspiration for the phrase “nine nagas spraying for abhiseka,” which was added to Buddhist translations (SCARRE, 1991). Following a progression from campaign discourse to religious viewpoints to political rhetoric, it later returned to the historical and political reality. Studying the dissemination and development of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha pictures is crucial for understanding how foreign art forms have changed throughout the history of China.

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Received: 07/01/2023

Approved: 10/01/2023

