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MAITREYA IMAGES IN ASIAN BUDDHIST  
FINE ARTS

DINH Hong Hai | Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences

# MAITREYA IMAGES IN ASIAN BUDDHIST FINE ARTS

*Dinh, Hong Hai*

## ***Abstract***

Within a few hundred years after its establishment in India, Buddhism had exerted an important influence on the arts in Asia. Thousands of Buddhist sites containing millions of pieces of artwork were created during the period, having a great effect on the dissemination of Buddhism in Asia after the Common Era. This paper looks at one of the most important images of Buddhism in Asia from that time until now: **Maitreya**.

Maitreya is a central idol of Buddhism, and has an important role in Buddhism and Asian society. The source of Maitreya in the Buddhist doctrines is murky, whereas the images of Maitreya as statues are enormous and intelligible. Thus, the paper focuses on the influence of the Maitreya cult via Maitreya images in Asia, and the dissemination of Buddhism through Maitreya images in Buddhist fine arts. In this paper the following main questions are explained:

- What is the Maitreya image?
- How does one recognize Maitreya images?
- Why has this image strongly affected Asian Buddhist fine arts?
- Why has it exerted such an important role in Asian cultural life?

To answer these questions, this paper compares the images of Maitreya in the homeland of Buddhism with those in other Buddhist countries in Asia. It also examines the influence of Maitreya images in the presence of a Maitreya cult in each country. By exploring Maitreya images and their influence in Asia, this paper contributes to the study of the dissemination of Buddhism through the fine arts.

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## **1. Introduction**

Two centuries after the establishment of Buddhism in Indian sub-continent, Buddhism had created a great current of art in Asia, which contributed to flourishing of Buddhist art in India. Under this artistic trend, many valuable artworks were created and a special social phenomenon emerged. This phenomenon gave rise to a revolution in Asian art, resulting in thousands of architectural buildings and millions of artworks in the next two millennia. This research focuses on one of the typical Asian Buddhist images, that is the image of Maitreya, from an artistic angle.

The development of Early Buddhism facilitated the imprint of artistic Buddhist images, especially Maitreya, on almost all great medieval civilizations along the famed Silk Route.<sup>1</sup> Almost civilizations from Northern India like Gandhara and Mathura; from Central Asia like Afghanistan and Pakistan; from Hymalaya like Nepal, Bhutan, and Tibet; from China, Mongolia, South Korea, Japan and so on was influence by Buddhist art at this time. The image of Maitreya appears in all of the important Buddhist centers of this period, including Gandhara, Mathura, Sanchi, Ajanta, Elora, Ladakh in India; Bamiyan in Afghanistan; Dun Huang, Long Men and Yun Gang in China. Many colossal statues set up in this period were statues of Maitreya. Noteworthy are the two 33-m and 54-m high statues of Maitreya in Bamiyan of Afghanistan (destroyed by Taliban forces in 2001), the colossal 71-m high statue of Maitreya in Xumishan, China, or the 26-m high bronze statue of Qianba Buddha in Tibet, etc. This manifests the significant role Maitreya image played in Asian Buddhist fine art in particular, and in Asian Buddhism in general, especially in the style of colossal statues.

After establishing its role as one of the three most important religions in the world, Buddhism disseminated its influence on many great civilizations. As such, the image of Maitreya also appeared in these countries that came under the impact of Buddhism. So far, Maitreya is still one of the central images of Buddhist art.

At present, the design of the Colossal Buddha Maitreya Statue has been completed, and the casting will begin in India. This 152-m high bronze statue requires US\$200 million, which will be contributed from social organizations, donors and Buddhists. Upon completion, it will

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<sup>1</sup> The Silk Route is the most important road for the exchange of trade, culture and civilization in the ancient and medieval time. This route spans from the center of ancient India through Central Asia, (across the Himalayas and China) and ends in Europe. Another sub-road divides from China to Korean peninsula and Japan.

be the biggest bronze Buddha statue in the world. Thus, Maitreya cult not only had strong impact on Buddhism in the past, but also in modern society as well.

It can be said that Maitreya is one of the most popular and important images in Asian Buddhist art. Moreover, the artistic image of Maitreya exerts great impact on Asian art in the last two millennia. Buddhist researchers, however, mention little about this image. This is a surprising given that there are hundreds of thousands of research studies from well-known scholars on other images like Sakyamuni or Avalokitesvara. In Asia, of the few research studies that have been done about Maitreya, we find those of Asha Das and In Chang Kim<sup>2</sup> the most noteworthy.

Asha Das presents an overview of the image of Maitreya in literature, history and art, with an emphasis on literature. Through the study of both original Pali and Sanskrit literature, Asha Das shows that relations among Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, and concludes that Indian culture gives rise to the image of Maitreya. Unfortunately, in the second part of the book, the author only lists the images of Maitreya in India and several other Asian countries without a specific conclusion on the role of this image in Buddhism in general and Asiatic Buddhist art in particular.

It can be said that the research of Inchang Kim has been the most comprehensive one on Maitreya until now. Inchang Kim successfully defended his doctoral thesis in India, the homeland of Buddhism, and developed it into an in-depth 249-page research paper on Maitreya. With 241 illustrations after reading more than 200 reference books and surveying almost Buddhist museums and holy sites in India, Inchang Kim had completed a fully data of Maitreya images in India.

In this research, Inchang Kim focused on Maitreya iconography in India without taking into consideration other Buddhist holy sites in Asia such as Bamiyan in Afghanistan; Long Men, Dun Huang and Yun Gang in China. These “gaps” need to be filled if we want to have a comprehensive study of Maitreya image in Buddhism in general and Buddhist sculptural art in particular.

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<sup>2</sup> Asha Das is a well-known contemporary scholar in India. Asha Das has conducted much research on Sanskrit, Pali and Buddhist literature. The research on Maitreya of Asha Das mentioned here is *Maitreya Buddha in Literature, History and Art*, Punthi Pustak, Kolkata, India, 2003.

Inchang Kim is a famed scientist in South Korea. He contributes greatly to the field of archeology – art, especially Buddhist art. The research on Maitreya mentioned here is *The Future Buddha Maitreya*, D.K. Printworld Ltd, Delhi, India, 1997.

To this end, this research expands its study to other Buddhist centers and Buddhist countries in Asia. It aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the Maitreya image and its role in Asian Buddhist art. Further, we would like to put forth an issue of global concern, that is the Saviour faith in the history of mankind and whether there are differences in the concepts of the Saviour – Maitreya in other religions and cultural regions. However, due to the limitation of time, this research is unable to answer all of the raised questions, but rather concentrates on fundamental issues. Hopefully, the scale of this project might be expanded to provide a more comprehensive study of Maitreya image and cult, its artistic iconography, and its role as a social phenomenon, a religious symbol and a global concept.

Regarding methodology: Given the unique nature of this research on Buddhist art, great importance is attached to the findings of fieldtrips, in which we can observe and compare reality to the Buddhist doctrines. In addition, I intend to the specialized methods of ethnology, sociology, cultural study and art study. Buddhist art not only aims a spiritual goal but also represents the “face” of a society or a Buddhist culture. As such, other fundamental methods are also used, including analysis, generalization, comparison, which combine into a systematic and inter-disciplinary approach. Given the close relation between Buddhist art and social phenomena, this research views the specific iconography of Maitreya in the whole system of societal phenomena which constitute this image in order to define its existence and evolution amidst social development.

## **2. The Maitreya cult in the history of Buddhism**

The formation of Maitreya cult, as well as other forms of beliefs and religions, stems from the spiritual need at the people. However, each belief and religion has its own goal and practice, leading to differences in origin and worshipping objects. As such, it is extremely difficult to define the origin of beliefs and religions. Many researchers have strived to answer the question: What is the origin of beliefs and religions? Their answers are basically one-sided or controversial. In the meantime, this need goes hand in hand with the lives of the people of all castes, communities and eras. The identification of the origin of Maitreya cult in this research just bears relative meaning, serving the purpose of researching into the existence, evolution, and influence of Maitreya image on Buddhist art.

In my opinion, Maitreya cult is not limited to Buddhists but goes beyond the influential scope of Buddhism. The image of Maitreya seems to merge with other beliefs and religions to become a global belief of the Saviour. Thus, the Saviour is represented not only through Jesus Christ of Christianity, the Messiah of Judaism, Brahman of Hinduism, Al Mahdi of Islam but also Maitreya of Buddhism. Further, we think that the image of the Saviour might have

appeared in people's mind when they were just primates. Therefore, in this research, we would like to concentrate on the following specific questions: How does the Maitreya cult come into being? What is the evolution of the Maitreya cult? What is the future of this cult?

### *2.1. Hypotheses of the establishment of Maitreya cult in the history of Buddhism*

As we have just mentioned above, if the spiritual demand of the people is taken into consideration, the Maitreya cult might have appeared when the mankind escaped the life of animals to become primates. Within the influential scope of Buddhism, Maitreya cult must have appeared after the establishment of Buddhism. The emergence of a similar belief stemming from Zoroastrianism in Iran at the same time with early Buddhism is considered the time the Maitreya cult came into existence.<sup>3</sup>

Buddhist doctrines referring to Sakyamuni have specific and exact time and dates. Meanwhile, written documents mentioning Maitreya Buddha have vague, mysterious dates which are hard to pinpoint. Of those who mention Maitreya, Asanga of India and Hsien Tsang of China are the two most prominent *shastris*. Their works provide the most significant evidence of the formation and existence of Maitreya Buddha and Maitreya cult.

Asanga (?320-390) established Yogacara, one of the two sects of Mahayana (the other one is Madhyamika). It is noteworthy that Asanga used the penname Maitreyanatha in these sastras, which were drawn directly from his understanding of Maitreya's teachings. However, Asanga only referred vaguely to Maitreya Buddha.<sup>4</sup> The time when Asanga wrote the above-mentioned sastras could be considered the landmark in the textuallization of Maitreya image. Here an issue should be put forth: Is there a person named Maitreya who disseminated the idea of these sastras to Asanga? Or is Asanga the mind behind and author of all these sastras? This important point plays a key role in identifying exactly who Maitreya is besides a vague and abstract image of the Future Buddha. So far, apart from legends and mysterious tales, nobody has found any evidence of a person named Maitreya.

Hsien Tsang, a Buddhist monk of the Tang Dynasty, lived in a time when Maitreya cult had already become popular in India. Hsien Tsang is a famed pilgrim and a *shastris* who contributes greatly to the spread of Buddhism in China. He is, moreover, a scholar well-versed in Buddhist tenets. His profound knowledge gives credit to his works, which also refer to

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<sup>3</sup> Inchang Kim, *The Future of Buddha Maitreya*, D.K. Printworld Ltd, Delhi, India, 1997, pp. 11 – 13.

<sup>4</sup> Inchang Kim, *op cit*, p 28.

Maitreya.<sup>5</sup> These pieces of information, however, do define the background of Maitreya but recognizes the existence of the Future Buddha.

I can conclude the following:

- The establishment of the Maitreya cult in the history of Buddhism is a process in meeting the spiritual demand of Buddhists.
- Maitreya is a religious image which emerged from Mahayana Buddhism's tenets.

These are also the main issues we would like to focus on in this chapter.

## *2.2. Maitreya cult in the development of Buddhist schools*

After establishing its role in Buddhism, the Maitreya cult has exerted great influence on the spiritual life of Buddhists. Starting from northern India, the Maitreya cult left its imprint in other regions in eastern, western, and southern India, including Gaya, Ladakh, Elora, Ajanta, and so on. Together with the expansion of the Silk Route, this cult contributed to form a vast region of Buddhist culture, from Kashmir to Afghanistan, Pakistan (formerly belonging to India), Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, China, Mongolia, Korea, Japan, Vietnam and a part of Europe. Via sea route, this cult came to Sri Lanka, Sumatra (now belonging to Indonesia and Malaysia), Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos and southern Vietnam. For the time being, the Maitreya cult reached its peak in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, with many Buddhist Holy sites and colossal Maitreya statues.

At the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium and at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, Islam suppressed Buddhism in India and in many other countries in Central Asia. Consequently, the Maitreya cult gradually lost its influence in cultural centers like India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and so on. However, small communities continued to preserve and uphold Buddhism and the Maitreya cult. In the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, Buddhism was revived in China after declining for a long period. Buddhist images of Indian origin gave way to those Sinonized images based on Chinese culture.

### **The Maitreya cult in Hinayana Buddhism**

Hinayana Buddhism evolved from original Buddhism, considering authentic teachings of Buddha Sakyamuni its tenets. Followers will practice these tenets to reach enlightenment and liberation. As such, in early Buddhism, different sects of Hinayana Buddhism always regarded Sakyamuni is a person. [specific person?] They didn't agree with the viewpoint of Mahayana

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<sup>5</sup> Hsien Tsang, *Si Yu Ki – Buddhist Records of the Western World*, Translated by Samuel Beal, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2004, p. 137, 155, 226, 227, 228 (First Half); 46, 47, 142, 143, 144, 215, 223, 224, 225, 226, 228, 313 (Second Half).

Buddhism which considered Sakyamuni an incarnation of a different “era” of Buddha. In different places of worship of Hinayana Buddhism, Sakyamuni plays a central role. Other deities, if any, are just subordinate ones. The image of Maitreya is just one of them. In his research, In Chang Kim has read many ancient documents and visited many vestiges in India, but found no evidence.<sup>6</sup> The evidence which In Chang Kim has found are vague and dated too late (2-500 CE), when the development of Mahayana Buddhism might have exerted its impact on Hinayana.

### **The Maitreya cult in Mahayana Buddhism**

In Hinayana Buddhism, Maitreya plays a subordinate role to Sakyamuni. Meanwhile, Mahayana Buddhism gives this image a more significant role. From its concepts of *karma* and *triad* (past, present, future), the tenets of Mahayana Buddhism define the position of the Future Buddha.<sup>7</sup> The establishment of Yogacara marked the unforeseen development of the Maitreya cult in India and further north. (This is the reason why Mahayana Buddhism is also called the Northern School). Over 1000 years from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, important Buddhist centers were built along the Silk Route, which expanded the influence of Mahayana Buddhism to include such places as China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam. In these centers, Sakyamuni image still played a central role besides countless eras, incarnations, and directions of Buddha and bodhisattvas. However, almost all large statues turn out to be those of the Maitreya. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, China saw the Sinonization of a form of the Maitreya cult based on the incarnation of the Pu Tai monk. It was then spread to all the Northeast region of Asia and a part of Southeast Asia.

### **The Maitreya cult in Vajrayana Buddhism**

Together with Hinayana and Mahayana, Vajrayana originates from Buddhism in India. Vajrayana occupies a special position in Buddhism of the Himalaya region. Here, the Maitreya cult has potential strength, though it does not yet bring about major trends like in Mahayana. Maitreya is one deity and bodhisattva among thousands of deities and bodhisattvas of Vajrayana’s pantheon. Moreover, Maitreya is the Future Buddha who will come into existence in the distant future.

It can be said that the Maitreya cult in Vajrayana as well as in Mahayana is the result of the evolution of Yogacara’s tenets of Asanga. Moreover, the popularity of this cult in the social level gives an important position to Maitreya in Mahayana and Vajrayana, marking the

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<sup>6</sup> Inchang Kim, op cit, pp 25-26.

<sup>7</sup> Inchang Kim, op cit, pp 16-32.

popularization and materialization of Buddhist tenets. As such, the evolution of the Maitreya cult in the development of Buddhist schools is basically the development of Yogacara's tenets in Mahayana and Vajrayana. This is the "officialization" of a folk belief in the cultural environment of northern India. This factor also contributes to the development of Buddhism into one of the three largest religions in the world. Moreover, as the Saviour, Maitreya became a popular global cult.

### *2.3. The Maitreya cult in the contemporary era*

The Maitreya cult has left its imprint on the development of Buddhism over its 2000-year history. In terms of material culture, the Maitreya cult has contributed to the construction of dozens of world cultural heritage sites, hundreds of national cultural heritage sites, and thousands of Buddhist Holy sites of high value. In addition, the Maitreya cult has contributed to the formation of an artistic trend which had greatly impacts the artistic life of Asia during the last two millennia. Regarding the spiritual aspect, this cult helps supplement Buddhist tenets, together with such concepts as compassions and wisdom. Therefore, the Maitreya cult has become more and more popular not only in Buddhist communities but also in other communities as well. This special social phenomenon shall be referred to in chapter 5.

It can be said that the Maitreya cult, with Maitreya as the Saviour in the past as well as at present, is a special spiritual demand for a better era by Buddhists. Their hopes for a new Golden Age and the appearance on earth of Maitreya, the Future Buddha helps them overcome all their sufferings they are enduring at present. This hope will not stop as long as mankind still has to bear sufferings. This is an important factor leading to the establishment of the Maitreya cult, its existence and development in the past as well as present.

In parallel with the Sakyamuni cult, the Maitreya cult has played a significant role in the existence and evolution of Buddhism. On one hand, the Maitreya cult expedites the development of Buddhism, especially its two schools Mahayana and Vajrayana. On the other hand, it sets up a form of a global popular religion, that is the consisting of Savior belief in Buddhism. The similarities regarding the Savior of different religions reveal that this is a great spiritual demand of the people from all racial and religious backgrounds all over the world. This spiritual need helps people overcome their sufferings while looking forward to a better future, though they are still far from it.

Apart from spreading the Maitreya cult through religious rituals and activities, another factor which plays a key role in deciding the existence and evolution of this cult is spreading this belief through Buddhist doctrines. These doctrines certify the "orthodox character" of Maitreya cult from the early stages of development of Mahayana Buddhism. The development

of the Maitreya cult into an orthodox religious movement over the last 2000 years is attributed to Great Shastris Asanga, who wrote five famed sastras under the penname of Maitreyanatha.

### **3. The image of Maitreya in the homeland of Buddhism**

Over its 2500 years of existence and evolution, Buddhism has contributed greatly to the civilizations of mankind with a huge amount of artistic artworks. Though Buddhism is no longer the national religion in India, its artworks are still meaningful to Buddhism in general and Buddhist art in particular. In India, representations of the Maitreya are diverse, leading to much difficulty in defining, analyzing, and evaluating them. Many images have become the topic of debate among academics in various fields, including anthropology, archeology, cultural studies, or sociology.

#### *3.1. The image of Maitreya in the art center of Mathura (Mathura school)*

In the history of India, Mathura is famous for art at medieval time. At present, the city of Mathura is in the Uttar Pradesh state, 150 km south of Delhi. The Golden Age of Mathura art lasted from the 1<sup>st</sup> century until the 5<sup>th</sup> century, under the reigns of Kushan (Kusana) and Gupta. Mathura is a natural art trend, combining Indian three major religions of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Jainism as well as other folk beliefs like Yaksha or Zoroastrianism, etc. Surrounded in such an artistic environment, Maitreya images in Mathura feature the combination of indigenous religions and other folk beliefs.

The characteristics of Maitreya images in Mathura include:

- a. A coil of hair, without scarf, having decorative characters of a bodhisattva such as earrings, necklace, bracelet;
- b. Holding a jar of water (kamandalu) in his left hand;
- c. A halo behind, covering two shoulders (bodhisattva) and a jar of water;
- d. Seated yogi with crossed legs (full lotus), holding a jar of water in his left hand;
- e. Seated yogi with crossed legs (full lotus), his right hand in the position of Abhya mudra.

These are main characteristics of Maitreya image in Mathura. However, it doesn't mean that all Maitreya images in Mathura have all of these characteristics. There are still minor differences. There are even images which don't clearly show any of these characteristics. Their positions among groups of statues<sup>8</sup> represent that of Maitreya, so we will temporarily consider them Maitreya images.

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<sup>8</sup> For example Manusi Buddha or Buddhist Triad.

As mentioned above, the Maitreya image in Mathura is an artistic image imbued with indigenous characteristics under the influence of indigenous religions and beliefs. As such, the presence of non-Buddhist indigenous cultural features is inevitable. These cultural features constitute the image of Maitreya and diversify its representations. It can be said that in this period the Maitreya image still carries many folk characteristics. It is these folk characteristics that help us define the first Maitreya image in this cultural environment.

The most important contribution of Maitreya images in Mathura is its vast number of relics to defining the coming into existence of Maitreya cult in India. From India, Maitreya images have developed gradually, establishing an artistic symbol, a cultural phenomenon of great significance in Asiatic Buddhism and Buddhist art.

### *3.2. The image of Maitreya in the art center of Gandhara*

Before touching on the Maitreya images on Gandhara, I would like to refer to the salient features of Gandhara which makes it distinct from other Buddhist art centers in India. The acculturation between the East and the West brought about a perfect Greco-Buddhist Art. The Greco-Buddhist art was established in Hellenistic Greco time under the Bactrian Kingdom (180-10 BCE) and reached its peak in the reign of Kushan. This European-Indian acculturation is attributed to Alexander the Great.

In 331 BCE, Alexander the Great launched an expedition from Europe across the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia stretching all the way to Central Asia and India. His victorious expeditionary forces set up a vast territory from Europe to Asia. After the death of Alexander, this powerful kingdom collapsed. However European civilization brought along with Alexander's troops, took roots in many cultural regions, including Gandhara. In successive dynasties from Alexander the Great to Maurya, Gandhara art continued developing, and flourished under the reign of Kushan, leaving a strong imprint on the world history of fine arts. The Greco-Buddhist art played a central role in this period. It combined harmoniously the Oriental abstract thought with the Western realistic mind. The two elements intermingled with each other. The images of Buddha, bodhisattva, and deities were represented in a realistic and anthropomorphic manner, resulting in perfect works of art. Maitreya is one of the typical images of this period.

The Maitreya images in Mathura art-center have indigenous and disproportioned characters. Meanwhile, the Maitreya images in Gandhara are well-proportioned and realistic. These are salient features to differentiate Maitreya images in Gandhara with other images of the same period. Though Maitreya images in Gandhara are not much different from those in Mathura in terms of the coil of hair, the jar of water and the halo, we can recognize easily the harmony of

his physical proportions and the exquisite details. Even in some standing statues, the ratio based on human head<sup>9</sup> is 1/7, similar to the standard ratio of European people. It should be noted that the well-proportioned anthropomorphic images in Gandhara had little influence on other Buddhist centers in India but later it followed the Silk Route to impact the art of Hymalaya, China, South Korea, and Japan. Thanks to exact calculations of anthropological dissections, the Medieval artists could set up colossal well-proportioned statues of Maitreya.

The Maitreya images in Gandhara feature the lively expression of the Maitreya images as a bodhisattva and an incarnation of the Future Buddha. This constitutes one of the most salient characters of Gandhara art which is distinct from other Buddhist centers of the same period. In Gandhara, artistic images are not only worshipping objects but also express deep feelings. Regarding forms of representations, Gandhara artists made a breakthrough in turning vague, abstract images into lively and human-like artworks. Thus, the Maitreya image becomes closer to human form, narrowing the gap between human beings and deities.

It can be said that artistic images in general and Maitreya images in particular of Gandhara art have reached their height in Buddhist art. Their contributions are not only meaningful for spreading Buddhism but also for the world fine arts. This marks an important point of art in the evolution of mankind's civilization.

### *3.3. The development of Maitreya's images in other Buddhist centers in India*

**Northern India.** Northern India covers a large area, including Jamu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uharachal Pradesh, and Punjab. The development of Buddhism and Maitreya images is mainly in Ladakh and the surrounding area of Hymalaya. Buddhism flourished here in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. The Maitreya cult has attached great importance to this area. Though having no great statues like those in Tibet or China, Maitreya images are often situated at the center of Buddhist temples. The Maitreya images here are varied; however, they gradually came to the posture of Bhadrasana.<sup>10</sup> This posture is popular in Vajrayana and exerts influence on the whole Hymalaya region.

**Eastern India.** Buddhist art in Eastern India features obviously indigenous characters. Many indigenous decorative elements are presented, such as the strip of silk, cloud, the string of beads, the bunch of flowers, the belt, making the statues appear more sophisticated and smart. A breakthrough was made in demonstrating the costumes in soft and thin cloth like silk,

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<sup>9</sup> This ratio is calculated by the distance from the top of the head to the chin, which is equivalent to one head compared with the height of the body. In the world fine arts, this is the most popular method to measure the ratio of the human body so far.

<sup>10</sup> See Illustration 1 in the Appendix of this research.

clinging to the body. Though it is a very difficult task, the artists succeeded in depicting such clinging clothes in granite, a type of hard stone. Another important element of Maitreya images in this area is the changes in the head. Instead of a simple coil of hair, the local artisans shape a stupa in the middle, flanked by two long tufts of hair, forming a crown on the head of Maitreya Buddha. Though there are lots of decorative details, they are harmoniously combined to make a lively and closely-related image. The expression of materials of the local artisans has reached a perfect level in the sculptural art of India.

**Southern India.** In comparison with Northern and Eastern India, Southern India saw the impact of Buddhist art later. Maitreya images are less diverse here than other regions. Still, there are beautiful statues with their own features, such as the Maitreya images in Nagapattinam.

Unlike those Maitreya statues with many layers of costumes in Gandhara, the Maitreya statues here are often depicted in bare torso, with such adornments as necklaces, bracelets, belts, and so on. Several statues feature costumes similar to a loincloth around the belly. The decoration for the head is stylized. All the coils of hair are combed upwards to represent the shape of a stupa. Around the base of this stupa is decorated with a circle similar to a crown. Other details like mudra, forms, postures are not much different from those in Northern India. In general, the Maitreya images in Southern India, especially in Nagapattinam have expressed a development in the Maitreya cult. This facilitates the creative minds of the artists to make artworks distinct from those in Mathura, Gandhara, or Northern India.

**Western India.** Western India has many Buddhist holy sites. Most notable are Elora and Ajanta, the two well-known “grotto cities” with had magnificent sculptural and architectural artworks inside various grottos. The creation of these works of art lasted nearly 1000 years of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. These are holy sites of many religions in India, including Brahmanism, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism. The most salient feature of Maitreya images here is the rolled coils of hair which is decorated with a stupa in front.

Looking at several Maitreya images in Indian art centers, we can recognize that the indigenous characters in these images with bear the imprint of Indian art. Right from the beginning of the Common Era, Gandhara art made a breakthrough in Indian Buddhist art and Maitreya images but failed to bring about a turning point in the development of Buddhist art in India. On the contrary, Indian Buddhist art continues to preserve its indigenous characteristics and regional features, which can be seen on every works of art. It can be considered a part of the conservative character of Indian art in particular and Indian culture in general. On the one hand, this conservatism helps preserve the characteristics of Indian culture and art. On the

other, it hinders the development of this culture. If it hadn't been for the Silk Route on land across Central Asia and on sea through Southeast Asia, Indian Buddhism might have still been an indigenous religion like Hinduism and Jainism.

#### **4. The development of Maitreya's image in the Asian Buddhist fine art**

As mentioned in chapter 1 it self, after establishing in sub-continental India, Buddhism has flourished in Asia, to become one of the three largest religions in the world. The strong development of Buddhism has expedited the socio-economic and cultural life of Asian people, and created Buddhist civilizations in medieval time. [???] In the field of art, Buddhism has shaped a major art trend in Asia, with thousands of architectural constructions and millions of artworks of high value. Among countless Buddhist artworks created in medieval time are many colossal Buddha statues set up along the Silk Route. Most of these colossal statues are Maitreya. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the biggest Buddha statue ever made is also that of Maitreya. All of this evidence show the development of Maitreya images in Asian Buddhist fine art in the past and at present.

The Maitreya image and cult exert different influence on three major Buddhist schools of Mahayana, Hinayana and Vajrayana. Therefore, it is necessary to categorize these artistic images to define the role of Maitreya image in each school.

##### *4.1. The image of Maitreya in Hinayana Buddhism*

Though Maitreya images appeared in Mahayana and Hinayana from early Buddhism, they didn't develop or became outshined by the central image of Sakyamuni. The reason is that Hinayana Buddhism only recognizes the role of Sakyamuni. Thus, other images are merely subordinate deities. The Maitreya image is no exception. Therefore, it is no surprising when we see the image of Sakyamuni as the central image in every Hinayana temples. What surprises here is that despite such firm tenets, the Maitreya images has taken a considerable position in monasteries of Hinayana, through the mutual influence of Buddhist schools. As a result, we would like to categorize Maitreya images in Hinayana Buddhism into two types: Maitreya images in the viewpoint of the original Buddhism, and Maitreya images of Hinayana Buddhism under the influence of Mahayana Buddhism.

Our goal is to differentiate the influential elements of Hinayana and Mahayana through the Maitreya images in the context of lesser and lesser separation among Buddhist schools.

##### **The Maitreya images in the viewpoint of original Buddhism**

As my presentation in section 2.2., given the viewpoint of no acceptance of any image, which is the incarnation, nirmanakaya, or istadevata of Sakyamuni, non-Sakyamuni images are considered bodhisattvas. As such, the biggest role of Maitreya images in Hinayana altars is

Maitreya bodhisattva, which is situated with other bodhisattvas or other deities under, on the two sides or surrounding Sakyamuni. Given their subordinate role, Maitreya images in Hinayana are small in scale, not outstanding in form though they still have the characteristics of each region and period.

**The importation of Maitreya images from Mahayana to Hinayana Buddhism.** So far, Buddhism has developed hundreds of sects and sub-sects. Over the time, Mahayana tenets have exerted influence on almost all sects inside and outside Mahayana Buddhism. Hinayana, though separated from Mahayana, show clear impact in the field of art, especially the Maitreya image. The importation of Maitreya images from Mahayana to Hinayana Buddhism only took place in several periods in the past.

#### *4.2. The image of Maitreya in Mahayana Buddhism*

Besides the central position of Sakyamuni, Maitreya is an artistic image of great importance in spreading Mahayana Buddhism, creating a revolution in Asian Buddhist fine art. Mahayana can be considered the foundation for the development of the Maitreya cult, while Maitreya images are one of the most effective tools for the spread of Mahayana Buddhism. The Maitreya images are obvious evidence of the role of artistic images in spreading Buddhist tenets. In reality, only shastris or scholars well-versed in Buddhism could read and understand thoroughly the profound meaning of Buddhist tenets. Therefore, the language which can be used to spread Buddhist tenets quickly to all walks of life is the language of sculptural art. Thus, the spread of Buddhist tenets is always concretized into artistic images.

**The role of the Silk Road in the development of Mahayana Buddhism, and Maitreya image.** The Silk Road was an important transportation road that connected East and West in ancient – medieval time. It crossed the harsh Gobi desert and the Himalaya, the highest mountain range in the world. This road helped the small tribes living along the road gain access to the great civilizations, creating a foundation for their development into countries in Central Asia and Himalaya region. Thanks to this road, Buddhism expanded to the east and the northeast, covering the nations in Central Asia, Himalaya, China, Mongolia, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and finally becoming one of the major world religions. In this process, Maitreya is one of the most important artistic image which has left an imprint on civilizations along the Silk Road. Largest statues are those of Maitreya. It manifests that Maitreya cult and image and Mahayana Buddhism are significant factors what shaped Buddhist civilizations along the Silk Road.

**Representations of Maitreya image in Mahayana Buddhism.**

The representations of these images through sculpture are easily recognized. They are not as complicated as in the Maitreya images of the earlier stage. The Maitreya images in Mahayana Buddhism can be categorized into two groups:

- The Maitreya images according to the prototype in India
- The Maitreya images according to China's Pu Tai monk

The Maitreya images have originated from a religious symbol to sculptural artworks of high value in both content and form. On one hand, these art works assert the strong influence of Mahayana Buddhism and the Maitreya cult on Asian Buddhist fine art. On the other hand, they create the premise for further spread of Mahayana Buddhism and Maitreya cult to civilizations in Asia.

**Stages of development of Maitreya image in Mahayana Buddhism.** After having firmly established in subcontinental India, the Maitreya image has exerted its influence on almost all Buddhist schools, especially Mahayana Buddhism. Together with the continuous development of tenets of Mahayana Buddhism, the Maitreya cult has appeared in most of Buddhist centers in India. Moreover, this image has crossed the border of India to impact on a large area in Asia. If early Buddhism is considered the primary period of Maitreya images, the time after early Buddhism until the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium is the heyday of Maitreya images. Coming next is a declining period in the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium followed by a restored period from the middle till the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium:

Stage 1: From the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

Stage 2: From the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE to the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE

Stage 3: From the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE to the 11<sup>th</sup> century CE

Stage 4: From the 12<sup>th</sup> century CE until the present

The reasons why I select these landmarks are as follows: The 3<sup>rd</sup> century saw the end of early Buddhism. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, specifically in 845 at the end of the Tang dynasty, Buddhism was suppressed in China. Buddhist monastery was dissolved, and Buddhists forced to come back to secular life, leading to the decline of Mahayana Buddhism in China. At the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Maitreya images were restored in the form of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk while a former form of the Maitreya was still preserved in Hymalaya.

**The Maitreya image as The Saviour.** As mentioned earlier, almost all colossal statues of Buddhism are those of Maitreya. Here one question should be raised: Why are most of the great statues devoted to Maitreya, but not Sakyamuni or other important images? It can be said that it is the role of Maitreya as The Saviour, which leads Buddhist followers to build such

huge statues. As Buddhist followers believe that Maitreya – The Saviour will descend on earth in the future and the heyday of Maitreya Buddha will end all the sufferings of mankind is enduring, they express their belief in Maitreya through massive statues. Colossal Maitreya statues can be considered symbols of religious belief.<sup>11</sup> UNESCO has listed them as World Cultural Heritage Sites. This is the recognition of the artistic value and remarkable creativeness of Asian people in the past.

Up to now, Buddhism has developed into many schools and sects. However, the belief in Maitreya Buddha – the Future Buddha – the Saviour of Buddhism becomes even stronger. This finds expression in the contribution of Buddhists all over the world to set up the colossal Maitreya statues in India. Thanks to this, we can also note the significant influence of religions on culture and art. In turn, art helps preserve cultural values and religious belief.

#### *4.3. The image of Maitreya in Vajrayana Buddhism*

Vajrayana Buddhism is one of the three Buddhist trunks, together with Hinayana and Mahayana. Vajrayana is in fact a branch of Mahayana. It was firmly established around the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. At present, though there are many hypotheses about the birthplace of Vajrayana, most of Buddhist scholars hold that it is Nalanda. Due to its usage of tantric techniques and esoteric transmission, Vajrayana is not as popular as Mahayana and Hinayana. It became prominent in Northern India and Hymalaya, then spreading to Tungang highlands in China and Mongolia. At its heyday, the *khan* of the Mongolian empire considered Vajrayana their national religion.

In Vajrayana, the Maitreya image doesn't take the leading important role as in Mahayana. However, it is perfected at a very high artistic level. The Maitreya image is standardized for almost all artistic representations, including pictures, statues and reliefs. This image has been chosen to make the colossal Maitreya statue in India, the biggest ever built in the world.

**Mode of plastic arts for Maitreya image in Vajrayana.** Maitreya images in Vajrayana are categorizing into two types: standing and sitting. However, those standing images are far and few between. The principle presented here is for the sitting Maitreya images. Regarding the standardization in accordance with fine art, we can recognize the fundamental characters as follows:

- The ratio of the seated body compared with the human head unit is 5.5
- The distance from the chin to the bottom of the seated body is 2.5
- The distance between the two shoulders is 2

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<sup>11</sup> The colossal Maitreya statue in India is named *Symbol of Peace*.

- The distance from the knee to the heel is 2

The standardization of the plastic arts combines with the philosophy of Buddhist doctrines, resulting in artworks imbued with artistic and scientific values.

**Value of the Maitreya image in Vajrayana.** In Vajrayana Buddhism, there aren't many huge and magnificent works of Maitreya images as in Mahayana Buddhism. However, they reach a high artistic level, conveying both the accuracy of plastic arts and philosophy through the manifestation of art. The strict principles of plastic arts applied to Maitreya images in Vajrayana have turned them into standard models in the process of spreading Buddhist art all over the world.

The Maitreya image in Vajrayana marks an important point in the development of Maitreya image in Buddhist art. It is not merely worshipping or decorative objects but also an artwork of high value and profound meaning. Together with the magnificent Maitreya statues of Mahayana Buddhism, the Vajrayana's Maitreya image can be considered perfect artworks in Buddhist art, given their content, form and mode of representation. These are also the everlasting values of each and every work of art, whatever its artistic environment might be.

#### *4.4. The image of Maitreya through the manifestation of Pu Tai monk*

As mentioned above, the Maitreya images in Vajrayana is the expression of the perfection of plastic arts. Meanwhile, the Maitreya images represented by the Pu Tai monk shows a breakthrough in the development of this images. After its heyday in most of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium, Buddhism fell into decline. Buddhist monasteries in India and China, the two biggest Buddhist centers in the world, were destroyed in around the 9<sup>th</sup> century. In China, however, Buddhism is still preserved among the common people. As such, China's Buddhism came under obvious influence of Chinese folk culture. One of the most typical elements is the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk.

**The Chinese origin of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk.** Until now, there have been many legends and folk tales about the origin of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk. Historical documents have also noted differently about this issue. In general, we can summarize as follows: the Pu Tai monk was a Chinese monk. He lived around the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century. He had a lot of magic and could attain rebirth. He announced that he was an incarnation of Maitreya Buddha. Thanks to this Chinese origin, the Maitreya image, which originally stemmed from India, escaped from complete destruction.

**The symbolic character of the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk.** Rarely have there been any artistic images which can retain its symbolic character in time and space like the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk. Over 1000 years have elapsed, this image still preserves its original

symbolic features. Although it has been spread to almost all countries following Mahayana Buddhism, its fundamental form is basically unchanged. Whenever and wherever it is made, the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk has the following features: Short, fat body; Mountainous belly, leaving it exposed, uncovered by clothes; Bald head; Genial physiognomy (hence its name Jolly Buddha, Laughing Buddha); and one of his two hands touching the string of beads. There might be minor changes regarding clothes, cloth bag, sitting posture or standing position. Generally, the typical characters mentioned above are kept unchanged. The image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk is a breakthrough in Buddhist sculptural art. It is a milestone in the development of an image originally bound by Mahayana Buddhism tenets into a popular artistic image. This popular character has contributed to the promotion of the Maitreya image among the people in countries following Mahayana Buddhism, creating a widespread belief in the region. Moreover, the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk has grown out of the scope of a religion to become a symbol of happiness and peace – the desires people often strive for.

**The popularity of the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk inside and outside Mahayana Buddhism.** After its coming into existence and establishment in China, the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk spread quickly to all over China, then to Korea, Japan and Vietnam. This image has been also brought along with Chinese migrants to their new settlements. Consequently, the influence of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk is not only in Asia and countries following Mahayana Buddhism but also in almost all continents. Gradually, the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk has replaced the images of Maitreya which originate from India in Buddhist pagodas. The image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk marks a new chapter of the Maitreya image in Asian Buddhist fine art. Moreover, this image marks a major change of a religious concept.

It can be said that the image of Maitreya in Asian Buddhist fine art is an important point in the panorama of Asiatic art. The establishment, existence and development of this image have asserted the role and position of Buddhism in the formation of Buddhist civilizations in Asia. The image of Maitreya not only plays the role of artistic image but also as symbol of faith and the inspiration for the artists. It is this inspiration what has resulted in valuable cultural heritages, unique artworks, and above all, a culture imbued with Asian values. As the Future Buddha and the Saviour of Buddhism, the image of Maitreya has grown out of the boundary of an artistic image to become a symbol of peace, the desire for which mankind is striving. This symbol has been and is being concretized in the colossal Maitreya statue in India, the largest of this kind ever built in the world.

## **5. The influence of the cult and image of Maitreya in Asian Buddhist fine art**

Rarely have there been any religious images with profound, widespread and long-lasting influence like that of Maitreya in Asiatic Buddhist art. Moreover, this image have been socialized at a high level to create a major artistic trend of mankind. So far, Maitreya has become a special cultural phenomenon, exerting its influence on multi aspects of Asian society over the last 2000 years. Further, as the Saviour, the Maitreya image tended to merge with other forms of Saviour-based beliefs to become a major religion in the world.<sup>12</sup>

### *5.1. The influence of the cult and image of Maitreya in the religious life in Asia*

As mentioned earlier, the influence of Maitreya image and cult has gone beyond the scope of Asiatic Buddhism and tended to become a type of global popular belief – the Saviour belief. So far, this image has become an indispensable part of Buddhism, especially Mahayana and Vajrayana.

The Maitreya image and cult not only exerts influence on Buddhist clergies and followers but is also a part of the people who are not Buddhist devotees. They don't recite or chant Buddhist sutras everyday but they believe in the causality and blessings of Buddhist deities. They believe strongly in the future when the Maitreya – Saviour shall save them from all the sufferings and help them take rebirth in the heyday of the Maitreya Buddha. We temporarily call them a new class of Buddhist believers. The number of them tends to increase fast in countries separated from the former USSR after its collapse.

Over the past 2000 years, the influence of the Maitreya image and cult in the religious life of Asia has brought about great cultural values, contributing to the civilization of mankind. In daily life, together with Buddhism, the Maitreya image and cult helps people to strive for truthfulness, uprightness and beauty, wisdom and non-violence (ahimsa). In addition, the Maitreya image and cult makes the people believe in a better future. This belief helps them avoid extreme actions when they are driven to an impasse. Therefore, the Maitreya image and cult can be considered part of the future religion of mankind. This religion shall aim all its goals to benefits of all human beings. It should strive for belief and hope, no discrimination among races and classes, and no provocation of hatred. This constitutes part of the Millennium

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<sup>13</sup> At present, there are several groups of religious activists follow the tendency of establishing. the Maitreya-based Saviour belief in the US and Europe. This new issues goes beyond the scope of this research study. See the web page: <http://mindis.com/MINDIS.shtml>.

Development Goals the World community is striving for. At present, in the context of increased terrorism, the existence and evolution of the Maitreya image and cult generates a necessary counter-balance so that the people can direct their mind to a noble ideal and a better future though there is still much work to do ahead.

### *5.2. The influence of the cult and image of Maitreya in Asian Buddhist fine art*

Apart from profound impact on the religious life, the Maitreya image and cult exerts strong influence on the Buddhist art in particular and Asiatic art in general regarding both content and form. In terms of content, the Maitreya image has established many forms of pictures, statues and reliefs. Especially given its vague and abstract origin the Maitreya image is one of the few icons that have generated an everlasting inspiration for the artists. Regarding form, the influence of the Maitreya image and cult has resulted in a huge amount of artworks. In addition, this influence has also given rise to major artistic trends. In the last few decades, the socialization of this image has been expedited. [??What does this mean?] Due to great differences in Maitreya images of different countries and cultural regions, we temporarily divide the influence of the Maitreya image into three phases:

- Phase 1: From the establishment of the Maitreya image and cult to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium. This phase marks the coming into existence, the establishment and popularization of the Maitreya images. During this phase, the Maitreya images are diverse, but still imbued with Indian cultural features.
- Phase 2: From the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This phase witness the coming into existence and development of the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk, an artistic image imbued with Chinese characteristics.
- Phase 3: From the 20<sup>th</sup> century until now. Short as it may be, this phase sees great changes in culture and society. The image of Maitreya has been popularized all over the world thanks to the globalization.

### *5.3. Socialization phenomenon of Maitreya image in Asia*

So far, Maitreya has become an indispensable image in Buddhist art and an important feature in Asian art. Furthermore, this image has gone beyond the scope of a religion to be a symbol of happiness, belief and hope. This is the reason why this image has been more and more popularized in many Asian countries and all over the world. This is the socialization of this image. With regard to the meaning of the Maitreya image in plastic arts, rarely have there been any icons that could reach such a widespread popularity as the Maitreya images. Originating from an Indian religious image, the Maitreya image has become popular in almost all cultures in Asia. Moreover, this image even turns into Laughing Deity, Lucky Deity and so on – the

folk deities in the form of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk. This image has been secularized to become souvenirs (pictures, statues) or to serve interior decor. This is a rare phenomenon in orthodox religion. So what is the reason for this? In my opinion, this is the result of a process of exchanges between Buddhism and Pantheism, between Chinese culture and Indian culture, and between orthodox cultural elements and folk ones. The three most significant factors which contribute to this spread are folk culture, plastic arts and globalization.

**The role of folk culture toward the socialization of the Maitreya image.** In reality, folk culture not only exerts its influence on a single image like that of the Maitreya or a single religion like Buddhism. Rather, it impacts multiple aspects of Asian people. This is a particular significant characteristic of Asian culture. Even now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, elements of folk culture still constitute the basic foundation for Asian culture. In comparison with other artistic images and Buddhist images, the Maitreya image is subjected to the most influential impact of folk culture.

**The role of fine art toward the socialization of the Maitreya images.** The reverse impact of plastic arts on folk culture in general and the Maitreya images in particular took place as early as the time of the Sinonization of the Maitreya images. This orthodox image of Indian Buddhism merged with Chinese deities symbolizing happiness, benevolence to create a new Buddhist image of Chinese origin. The widespread popularity of this image is attributed to its features of fine art. With its easily recognized features and jolly physiognomy, the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk has won over the hearts of all walks of life. Its symbolic characters make it easier to reproduce in various materials while still retaining the fundamental features. It gives account to the fact that the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk has grown out of the scope of a country (China) and a religion (Buddhism) to become a special phenomenon of not only Buddhism but also of other religions as well.

**The role of globalization toward the socialization of the Maitreya image.** It is inevitable that globalization will influence all aspects of socio-cultural life. In such a context, the socialization of the Maitreya image has been further and widely expedited. The image of Maitreya in the form of souvenirs has been brought by pilgrims to many places in the world. When this demand increases, the supply should meet it. It shall satisfy the need of not only pilgrims but also tourists, who suddenly recognize the beauty of this souvenir icon and will want to bring it home.

In the context of strong globalization, the popularization of such a highly valuable image as that of Maitreya is an inevitable process. Especially as the Saviour and symbol of belief, happiness, equanimity and peace, the image of Maitreya has won over the hearts of a large

number of this cult's followers. Through this image, belief and art has been combined harmoniously to create a religion-belief element of profound social meaning.

The influence of the Maitreya cult and image in Asian Buddhist fine art can be said to be the most obvious manifestation of the social relation between religion and art. Originating from an important image of Buddhism, through the folk characteristics of the Asian culture, the Maitreya image has exerted its influence back on the Asian culture, generating a special cultural phenomenon. This image helps us clearly see the relationship among religion, culture and art. Being well aware of this relation is the best way for us to identify the multi diachronic and synchronic layers of culture. In this chapter, we have generalized all the relations mentioned above through the image of Maitreya in Asian Buddhist fine art. However, due to the limited scope of the research study, we haven't been able to further study these relations. We hope that through contents provided here readers can have a concise look at the Maitreya cult and image and its influence in Asian art in general and Buddhist art in particular.

## **6. Conclusion**

Through our research study about the image of Maitreya in Asian Buddhist fine art, we temporarily come to the following:

1. The Maitreya cult is the special combination between Zoroastrianism – a form of folk belief and Buddhism – a major religion to create a popular belief of the Saviour of Buddhism. So far, nobody can identify the accurate time this cult came into existence. However, we can confirm that the Maitreya cult was referred to in Buddhist doctrines after Asanga wrote five famous sastras, marking the coming into being of Yogacara, one of the two important sects of Mahayana Buddhism.
2. The Maitreya image came into existence in the cultural environment of Northern India. This is also the place that gave rise to many large religions like Brahmanism, Hinduism, Jainism and so on. Therefore, the influence of indigenous features on this images is inevitable. This also explains why the Maitreya images in Indian Buddhist art has become so diverse. Besides the Maitreya images with Indian indigenous characters, the Maitreya images in Gandhara emphasizing an important mark of Indian art in medieval time – the Greco-Buddhist art school. Under this, Buddhist artistic images, including Maitreya in Gandhara become an evidence for the acculturation between India and Europe in this period.
3. The development of the Maitreya image in Asian Buddhist fine art instigated a revolution in sculptural art in Buddhist countries in medieval time. A series of colossal Maitreya statues were set up along the Silk Route, the bridge spanning between great

civilizations from Asia to Europe. The Maitreya image not only resulted in colossal statues based and Indian prototype in Asian art but also made a breakthrough in the making of artistic images imbued with Chinese characters – that is the image of Maitreya – Pu Tai monk. It is this image that has internationalized the Maitreya image of Buddhism all over the world, which creating a symbol of Oriental beauty.

4. Together with the popularization of the Maitreya images in art, the Maitreya cult in Buddhism has strongly developed over the past 2000 years to form a global popular belief, the belief of the Saviour – Maitreya. So far, this belief not only affects the spiritual and artistic life of Buddhist followers but also their life as well. It shows that once an artistic image is combined harmoniously with spiritual elements it will have great influence on culture and society.
5. The Maitreya image is spread not only within Buddhist art. It has been socialized at a high level to generate a trend of worshipping and displaying of Maitreya statues among people who are not Buddhist devotees. This socialization, or more precisely, the popularization of an orthodox religious image, has never been seen in any other religions, such as Catholicism, Islam, etc. Special studies should be made to explore this issue from the angle of sociology.
6. At present, in the context of more and more contradictions among religions, much attention should be paid to such a popular, as the belief of the Saviour – Maitreya as this constitutes a part of the *Millennium Development Goals* put forth by the world community. Once again, the biggest ever statue of colossal Maitreya Buddha in the world is going to be built in India. It carries the message: Peace, compassion, wisdom, benevolence – the ideal that all people in the world are striving for.

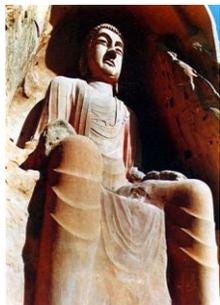
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## Appendices

Some of Maitreya Images in Asian Buddhist Fine Arts

<p>1.Maitreya Image in Tibet</p> 	<p>2.Maitreya Image inThangka Painting</p> 	<p>3.Maitreya Image in Japan</p> 	<p>4.Maitreya Image in Xumishan - China</p> 
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5.Maitreya Image in Ladakh ,  
India



6.Maitreya Image in  
Gandhara, Pakistan (Ancient  
India)



7.Maitreya Image in Korea



8.Maitreya Image in Thailand



9.Maitreya Image in Nepal



10.Maitreya Image in  
Bamiyan, Afganistan



11.Maitreya Image in Vietnam



12.Maitreya Image in  
Singapore

