

Fig. 1 Cave 272, Mogao grottoes, Dunhuang.

Đông Dương style – the zenith of Sinitic influence

The major period of when Sinitic transfers were adopted into Cham art corresponded to the zenith of Chinese art during the Tang dynasty (618-906 CE). Cham king Indravarman II (r. 875-99 CE), a devoted follower of Mahāyāna Buddhism with a strong interest in tantric practice, built the Đông Dương temple complex at the beginning of his reign in 875 CE. Iconographic evidence suggests Champa was then in direct contact with Tang China.¹² The Đông Dương temple complex is dedicated to the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, named in the inscription as Lakśmīndra Lokeśvara. The principal deity may have been a female Avalokiteśvara in bronze, which was unearthed in 1978 (Cat. 18 BTC 1651-BTĐN 535). The female Avalokiteśvara form is extremely rare in Cham art and possibly have been the equivalent of an early Guanyin of the Indochinese peninsula and precursor of the Vietnamese goddess Quan Âm.

The first feminized transformation of Avalokiteśvara is taken to have occurred in China, and Pierre Dupont is the first scholar who reflected her being reflected in Cham art.¹³ However, when the Chinese Guanyin began to transform into the female form is still unresolved. Yu Chun-Fang proposed the transformation began from the sudden existence of the androgynous Water-Moon Guanyin in the 10th century, which was increasingly depicted in a clearly feminine fashion

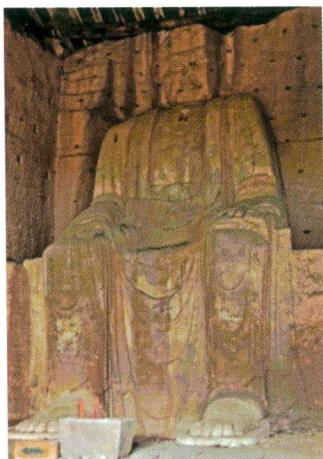
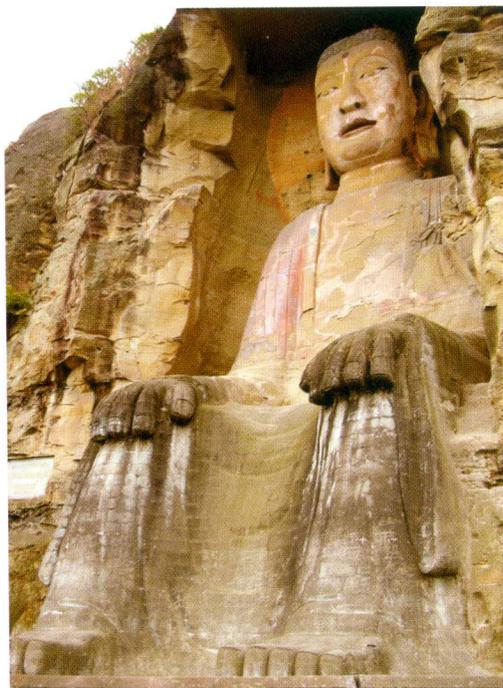


Fig. 2 Shi Fo temple, Chengdu.

Fig. 3 Ban Yue mountain, Zi Yang city. (Photo: Grace Chiao-Hui Tu)



after the Song dynasty (960-1279 CE).¹⁴ Gu Cheng-Mei instead referred to the Avalokiteśvara Buddharāja tradition in the tantric school, which was widely applied by Asian rulers as a political ideology after the 7th century. Gu suggested that empress Wu Zhao (Wu Zetian, r. 690-705 CE) of the Tang dynasty precipitated the move to a female form of Avalokiteśvara by using a feminized form of the Amoghapāśa Buddharāja to rule her dynasty.¹⁵ John Guy's research on the Avalokiteśvara imagery of Yunnan during the Nanzhao (738-937 CE) and the later Dali kingdom (937-1094 CE), traced a pan-Asian wave of interest in Mahāyāna Buddhism and the elevation of the popular Bodhisattva from the subordinate deity to primary cult status. This did not occur in India but was favoured by many rulers in Southeast Asian countries.¹⁶ Guy further linked the Cham Bodhisattva cult to the Nanzhao kingdom of Yunnan, where it was elevated to a state religion. Whether something similar occurred in China under empress Wu, before the Nanzhao kingdom claimed their independence from Tang China, has yet to be researched.

The monumental sandstone Buddha (Cat. 16 BTC 183-13.5) of the Đông Dương monastery (*vihāra*) is seated in the 'European' position with pendant feet (Sanskrit: *bhadrāsana*; Chinese: *Shanjiadiezhou* 善跏趺坐 or *Yizhou* 倚坐) and with both of his hands resting palms down on his knees. Buddhas seated with pendant legs can be found in Indian, Southeast Asian and Chinese Buddhist art traditions,¹⁷ however, the *mudrā* with both hands on the knees is only known in China and Đông Dương.

Buddha images in *bhadrāsana* are usually identified in China as Buddha Maitreya, who will descend to earth in the future, as mentioned in the *Descending Sūtra*.¹⁸ The representation of Buddha Maitreya in *bhadrāsana* made its first appearance in China under the Northern Liang dynasty (421-39 CE) as a symbol of salvation and political renewal (Fig. 1).¹⁹

His importance was reaffirmed when empress Wu claimed herself to be equal to Maitreya in order to legitimize her assumption of imperial power in 690 CE.²⁰ Great numbers of Maitreya images were produced in response to empress Wu's proclamation of a female universal emperor, and the icon became a standard under the Tang dynasty. The Tang Maitreya is known in various *mudrā*, most commonly with his left hand on the knee and palm down, and the right hand half raised in *abhaya* or *vitarka mudrā*. The *mudrā*