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A Buddhist Heracles in Boston – Expanded Research

Much of the West knows the Greco-Roman demigod Heracles/Hercules as a cultural icon, but he has long lost his religious significance here.¹ In the East, on the other hand, his image, though heavily transformed, reinterpreted, and almost certainly no longer Greek, has permeated a variety of religions, from Taoist rituals and popular religions to Buddhist sects.² The transformed deity's active worshippers now span a massive geographical range from Greater China to Southeast Asia and even California.³ This strange circumstance has its roots in a wave of cultural diffusions throughout the Old World that took place from Classical antiquity to the turn of the Postclassical era, and one contemporaneous relic of those historic diffusions is located right here in Boston. Housed in the world-renowned Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, it is known as the "Votive Stele."⁴

¹ See Disney's *Heracles* (1997), the word 'herculean,' and Andrea Deagon, 'Hercules in Popular Culture', 17 November 2003, <http://people.uncw.edu/deagon/herakles/popmain.htm>. By as early as the first half of the fourth century, he had been euhemerised by the Christian polemicist Eusebius in his *Praeparatio Evangelica*, who reported that he had actually been a King of Argos and not a god, and that he had been deified by the Greeks some 38 years after his death. See 'Eusebius of Caesarea: *Praeparatio Evangelica* (Preparation for the Gospel). Tr. E.H. Gifford (1903) -- Book 10', accessed 5 March 2022, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_pe_10_book10.htm.

² See I-Tien Hsing, 'Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China', trans. William G. Crowell, *Asia Major, Third Series* 18, no. 2 (2005): 103–54, and Zhaohua Yang, 'Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchuşma in Tang China' (Stanford University, 2013), <http://purl.stanford.edu/dp002kk6666>.

³ Yang, 'Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchuşma in Tang China'.

⁴ A votive is "an object made in recognition of a prayer fulfilled and donated to a shrine." See 'Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum', accessed 5 March 2022, <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/11370>. For the stele, see Figure 1 at the end of the document.

In the Votive Stele, the large Buddha, front and centre, his small disciples, attending to him on both sides, and the *bodhisattvas*, flanking the disciples, all stand on lotus petals in nearly identical poses.⁵ They differ only in their garments, hand gestures, and sizes: the disciples are relatively simple-looking, while the *bodhisattvas* look like disciples who have made great headway on their paths to enlightenment, as they are beginning to make similar hand gestures as the Buddha and are wearing new attires and pendant necklaces. The left *bodhisattva* even has a tall crown ornamented with pearls. Most elegant and enlightened of all is, of course, the giant Buddha himself, whose long robes hang loosely off his torso and arms in deep-carved ripples, and whose head is crowned by the *uṣṇīṣa*.⁶ Together, they embody the different stages of enlightenment and show that even ordinary disciples may achieve it and be saved from the endless cycle of life and death, “conveying a message,” as the Museum’s commentary states, of “universal and personal salvation.”⁷ Such messages would have appropriately encapsulated the aspirations of the 78 donors of the stele.⁸

The significance of the Votive Stele, however, extends far beyond its immediate meaning. For instance, both shoulders of the Buddha are covered (draped in a *saṃghāṭi*) in this stele, a

⁵ A *bodhisattva* is, in the conservative tradition of Theravada Buddhism, “a title exclusively identifying historical Buddhas ... in their previous lives, before their Buddhahood was attained.” By contrast, in the context of Mahayana Buddhism, which is more likely to apply to this stele, it is “any being who, out of compassion, has taken the bodhisattva vow to become a Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings” (ordinary people, not just historical Buddhas, can be *bodhisattvas* and become Buddhas as well). Thus, the *bodhisattva* in Mahayana Buddhism represents a sort of intermediate stage between the ordinary disciple and the fully enlightened Buddha. See the definition for ‘bodhisattva’ in John Bowker, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶ The *uṣṇīṣa* is “the swelling of flesh or the top-knot of hair on a *Buddha’s head, one of the 32 marks (*dvātriṃśadvaralakṣaṇa) of a ‘superman’ (*mahāpuruṣa), sometimes personified as a goddess such [as] *Uṣṇīṣa-vijaya.” See Damien Keown, ‘Uṣṇīṣa’, in *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 319.

⁷ ‘Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’.

⁸ Ibid.

representation that originated from an artistic tradition known as Greco-Buddhist or Gandharan art.⁹ The slight wave-like folds in the robes of the figures and the fact that this representation of the Buddha is even standing is yet another original characteristic of this Gandharan art.¹⁰ Moreover, conservative estimates place the production and dissemination of Gandharan art between the 1st and 7th centuries CE, so the makers of this stele, which was produced in 543 CE, were almost certainly contemporaries of the Gandharan artists, thus corroborating the possibility of immediate Gandharan influence.¹¹ Gandharan art was a syncretism formed by the post-Alexandrian Hellenistic artists of Northern India and Buddhist influences from the rest of the subcontinent.¹² It flourished and was disseminated to the rest of the world under the patronage of the Kushan Empire, a vast empire in Northern India and Central Asia founded by Tocharian migrants from modern-day Gansu, China.¹³ As such, this monument has an incredibly diverse cultural heritage, and the most significant aspect of the stele, therefore, lies in its transmitted iconography.

⁹ See Ju-Hyung Rhi, 'From Bodhisattva to Buddha: The Beginning of Iconic Representation in Buddhist Art', *Artibus Asiae* 54, no. 3/4 (1994): 207–25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3250056>. A *saṃghāti* is just “the monk’s upper garment” as per James C. Harles, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent, Second Edition*, 2nd ed. (Hong Kong: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁰ Harles, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*. Whether the iconic (human) representation of the Buddha also originated with the Gandharan tradition has long been a matter of scholarly dispute. Nevertheless, two things, at the least, remain clear: aniconic portrayals of the Buddha by orthodox artists *did* feature prominently in pre-Gandharan Buddhist art, and the Gandharan representation of the Buddha revolutionised his portrayals to come in much of South, Central, Southeast, and East Asia. For more information, see S. L. Huntington, ‘Early Buddhist Art and the Theory of Aniconism’, *Art Journal* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 401–8.

¹¹ Harles, *The Art and Architecture of the Indian Subcontinent*.

¹² J. H. Marshall, ‘The Monuments of Ancient India’, in *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 1: Ancient India*, vol. 1, 6 vols, The Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 612–48.

¹³ Ibid, Victor H. Mair, *The Tarim Mummies: Ancient China and the Mystery of the Earliest Peoples from the West* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008); E. J. Rapson, ‘The Scythian and Parthian Invaders’, in *The Cambridge History of India, Vol. 1: Ancient India*, vol. 1, 6 vols, The Cambridge History of India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), 563–92.

In particular, the two diminutive guardian figures on the base of the stele stand out for their symbolism.¹⁴ Both of the faded captions accompanying the guardian figures contain the Chinese characters 金剛主 (*jīngāng zhǔ* in Standard Chinese).¹⁵ As 主 has the approximate meaning of ‘master’ or ‘wielder’ and 金剛 means ‘*vajra*’ in Chinese Buddhism, the caption seems to be calling the figures “wielders of the *vajra*.”¹⁶ Indeed, the Museum’s own caption notes that the figure on the left carries “a thunderbolt.”¹⁷ A quick comparison with guardian figures from a mural in Cave 175 of the Kizil Caves in present-day Xinjiang, China, reveals the identities of these figures for what they are.¹⁸ Both the left guardian figure on the stele and the figures (left and right) in the Cave 175 mural carry double-headed diamond implements – *vajras*, and the guardian figures from the Cave are juxtaposed in a similar fashion as the stele guardians.¹⁹ Given those similarities, it is within reason to say that the guardian figures of the stele represent analogous figures as those on the Cave 175 mural; therefore, they are *vajrapāṇi*, *dharmapalas* from the Tantric tradition who wield *vajras* to protect temples.²⁰

¹⁴ For close ups of the guardians, see Figures 2 and 3.

¹⁵ Albeit with an older variant of 剛.

¹⁶ *Vajra*: A thunderbolt/diamond, also refers to a similarly empowered double-headed ritual implement in Tantric Buddhism. For 金剛, see Xian Li, ‘辭典檢視 [金剛：ㄐㄨㄥ ㄍㄤ] 教育部《重編國語辭典修訂本》2021’, 教育部重編國語辭典修訂本 (Second Edition of the Ministry of Education’s (Taiwan/Republic of China) Revised Mandarin Dictionary), accessed 12 March 2022, <https://dict.revised.moe.edu.tw/dictView.jsp?ID=94086&q=1&word=%E9%87%91%E5%89%B>.

¹⁷ ‘Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum’.

¹⁸ For the Kizil figures, see Figures 4 and 5 at the end of the document. For a more legible illustration of the left Kizil *vajrapāṇi*, see Figure 6.

¹⁹ Hsing, ‘Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China’. Also see Figures 4, 5, and 6.

²⁰ *Vajrapāṇi*: “One of the eight great *Bodhisattvas, especially associated with the transmission of *tantric teachings. His name derives from the thunderbolt (**vajra*) which he holds in his hand (pāṇi) as his emblem. Iconographically, he is encountered in a yellow peaceful form or a dark blue wrathful forms (sic).” Damien Keown, ‘Vajrapāṇi’, in *A Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford:

According to I-Tien Hsing, the depiction of the *vajrapāṇi* in Cave 175 evolved from depictions of the Greco-Roman demigod Heracles.²¹ Alexander the Great and the Romans brought their Heracleian fanaticism to Bactria and India, whereupon the Gandharans adapted the imagery associated with the figure of Heracles to depict their *vajrapāṇi*.²² One such Gandhara-style *vajrapāṇi*, located in the British Museum today, wears a lion-pelt on his head and is shirtless, both traits derived from the original Greco-Roman depictions.²³ He differs in that he holds in his hands not a club but a *vajra* (in his right) and a sword (in his left).²⁴ Through the cultural exports of the Kushan Empire along the Silk Road, this Gandharan depiction made its way to the Kizil Caves, which were then located in the ancient oasis state of Kucha (Qiuci), a Buddhist Tocharian kingdom in the Tarim Basin on the fringes of the Chinese imperial powers, which intermittently occupied and lost them.²⁵ Both Kucha *vajrapāṇi* have retained their *vajras* and lost their swords.²⁶ The left *vajrapāṇi* has retained the lion-pelt headgear, but he now wears a collared and lapelled garment.²⁷ The right *vajrapāṇi* has lost both the lion-pelt headgear and his naked look, wearing armour instead.²⁸

Oxford University Press, 2003), 322. The figures from the Cave 175 mural are *vajrapāṇi* according to Hsing, ‘Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China’.

²¹ Hsing, ‘Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China’.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. See Figure 7 for the Gandhara-style *vajrapāṇi*.

²⁴ Ibid. It contains the analysis of the Gandhara-style *vajrapāṇi*.

²⁵ Ibid. For more about Kucha and Imperial China, see Christopher I. Beckwith, ‘The Türk Empire’, in *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 512. The earlier sections cover a bit about Kucha as well.

²⁶ Ibid. See Figures 4, 5, and 6.

²⁷ Ibid. See Figures 4 and 6.

²⁸ See Figure 5.

Since the Cave 175 mural was made in period 2 of the Kizil Caves (approximately 395-530 CE), it likely predates the Votive Stele, which was made in 543 CE.²⁹ According to the Museum, the stele was built in the Eastern Wei empire, which occupied the north-eastern quadrant of China proper.³⁰ Given their visual similarities, neighbouring time frames, and geographical distance, it is possible that the depiction of the *vajrapāṇi* on the Votive Stele evolved from the Kuchean *vajrapāṇi*, and that the Votive Stele is therefore one of the next stages in the development of the Heracleian-*vajrapāṇi* motif.³¹ Indeed, the *vajrapāṇi* of the Votive Stele lose certain characteristics present in the Kuchean *vajrapāṇi*. For instance, the left *vajrapāṇi* in the Votive Stele no longer seems to be wearing a lion-pelt on his head.³² Moreover, the right *vajrapāṇi* has lost its *vajra*, and although the Museum's description says that it is carrying a flask of some sorts, a close examination of its arms and hands seem to suggest that it is either carrying no such flask at all or that whatever flask it is carrying has been sculpted in such invisible proportions that it is artistically insignificant.³³

Although this may seem like a trivial development, it is actually important to not only Chinese Buddhism but also Taoism. Ever since the Northern and Southern dynasties, Chinese temples (and derivatively Japanese and Korean temples) have often been built with two statues of *vajra*-wielding warriors placed on both sides of the temple gate.³⁴ The left statue is called the

²⁹ Hsing, 'Heracles in the East: The Diffusion and Transformation of His Image in the Arts of Central Asia, India, and Medieval China'.

³⁰ Qixiang Tan, *中國歷史地圖集 / The Historical Atlas of China*, 8 vols (Beijing: 中國地圖出版社 / China Cartographic Publishing House, 1988).

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³² See Figure 3.

³³ See Figure 4. For the Museum's description of a 'flask,' which, although I have tried many times, I still cannot find, see 'Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum'.

³⁴ Xiaodong Yao, '试述魏晋隋唐时期的“那罗延”信仰 / On the Faith in Nryana in the Weijin, Sui, and Tang Dynasties', *Journal of East China Normal University / 华东师范大学学报* 49, no. 2 (15 March 2017): 79–88, <https://doi.org/10.16382/j.cnki.1000-5579.2017.02.008>.

Guhyapāda (密跡金剛) – his mouth is agape, he holds a *vajra*, and his empty hand’s palm is open.³⁵ The right statue is called the *Nārāyaṇa* (那羅延天), and he was originally identified with Vishnu-Krishna in later Brahmanism.³⁶ When Mahayana Buddhism was transferred to China, the Chinese absorbed *Nārāyaṇa* as a Buddhist guardian, and his cult became incredibly popular with the people of the Wei, Jin, Sui, and Tang dynasties.³⁷ This was largely because his body was reputed to have been built in imitation of and imbued with the essence of a *vajra*, so people desired to attain his strength through recitation of *Nārāyaṇa* sutras.³⁸ Thus, the *Nārāyaṇa* statue is often depicted bare-handed and with his mouth tightly shut, as he, on account of his *vajra* body, symbolises latent strength.³⁹ Moreover, his hands are typically configured with one palm held forward and its fingers extended, while the other hand lies dormant around the torso, as one image of the *Nārāyaṇa* from Dunhuang demonstrates.⁴⁰ These descriptions of the *Guhyapāda* and *Nārāyaṇa* in relation to figures in Chinese Buddhist and Taoist temples sound strikingly similar to the *vajrapāṇi* on the Votive Stele. The left *vajrapāṇi* fearsomely holds a *vajra* while the right one, newly *vajra*-less, projects its power by gesturing in a similar fashion as the Dunhuang *Nārāyaṇa*, albeit horizontally transposed. The mouths of the figures on the Votive Stele have been photographed far too ambiguously to be compared with the *Guhyapāda* and *Nārāyaṇa*, but just going by their postures, arms, and juxtaposition, it seems as if they could very well be some of the earliest depictions of the two aforementioned Chinese temple guardians. If

³⁵ Yao. For the translation of 密跡金剛 as *Guhyapāda*, see Yang, ‘Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchuṣma in Tang China’.

³⁶ Yao, ‘试述魏晋隋唐时期的“那罗延”信仰 / On the Faith in Nryana in the Weijin, Sui, and Tang Dynasties’.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid. For the Dunhuang *Nārāyaṇa*, see Figure 8.

so, then this unassuming Votive Stele marks a major turning point – the point at which the *vajrapāṇi* ceased to be simply *vajrapāṇi* and diverged into the Guhyapāda and *Nārāyaṇa*. The Votive Stele can be read as part of the ongoing development of guardian figure iconography and, at least, appears to draw from the early Buddhist Gandharan style

This guardian pair is not only important to Buddhism – the two have also featured prominently in Chinese Taoism and folk religion as the Generals Heng and Ha (哼哈二将) ever since the publication of the Ming dynasty novel *The Investiture of the Gods* (封神演義).⁴¹

Moreover, the Guhyapāda has become one of the alternate sobriquets of the Mahayana and Tantric scatological, obstetrical, and talismanic deity *Ucchuṣma*, who has universally been venerated in Chinese Buddhism and Taoism ever since the Six Dynasties (c. 222 CE).⁴² Today, he is one of the central subjects of the many disparate Buddhist revivalist movements in Greater China, Southeast Asia, and even amongst Chinese-speaking communities in California.⁴³ Thus, it can technically be said that a greatly evolved image of Heracles is still worshipped in those regions, and that this stele, which at first may seem to be only an ancient votive offering, actually lies at the centre of that evolution as a testament to ancient China's remarkable cosmopolitan culture.

Today, however, this seminal stele lies not in its native North-Eastern quadrant of China proper that the Eastern Wei dynasty once controlled. Some 108 years ago, it was purchased by an aging American art collector named Isabella Stewart Gardner to be displayed in the Bostonian

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Yang, 'Devouring Impurities: Myth, Ritual and Talisman in the Cult of Ucchuṣma in Tang China'.

⁴³ Ibid.

museum bearing her name, where today it stands, a proud testament to the Gardner Museum's multicultural mission.⁴⁴

Born in 1840 to a wealthy Bostonian family, Isabella had already been exposed to the international experience by her tender teenage years.⁴⁵ When in 1863, her one-year-old son died of pneumonia, she travelled with her husband to northern Europe and Russia in an attempt to shake off her depression.⁴⁶ The end of one trip quickly turned into the beginning of another; soon, she had travelled to the Middle East and much of the rest of Asia.⁴⁷ By the mid-1880s, she had already begun collecting small bits of art and, most importantly, constructing aesthetic microcosms, such as a Japanese garden, that reflected her experiences and interests.⁴⁸ When her husband died in 1898, she began to pursue more vigorously their shared dream to construct an art institution for their collection, resulting in what is today the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.⁴⁹ She died in 1924, hoping to have left a celebrated and accessible instrument of public edification and stipulating that nothing in the galleries should be changed – that no items be acquired or sold from the collection.⁵⁰ As such, the Museum ranks among such wonders as Olmsted's Emerald Necklace as one of the great Bostonian landmarks to have been built during the Gilded Age in Boston.

⁴⁴ 'Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum'.

⁴⁵ 'Isabella Stewart Gardner | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum', accessed 21 March 2022, <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella-stewart-gardner>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Alan Chong, 'Introduction: Journeys East', in *Journeys East: Isabella Stewart Gardner and Asia* (Reading: Periscope Publishing, 2009), 479.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ 'Isabella Stewart Gardner | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum'.

The Gilded Age in Boston, like in other places across America, saw the rich get progressively richer and more grandiose.⁵¹ Museums such as the Gardner Museum prospered, and ever since, native inhabitants and tourists to Boston have been able to enjoy her passionately arranged art in all its diverse splendour. By making it accessible, the Gardner Museum helped to popularise unfamiliar art among people who would usually not be able to see it.

At the same time, however, inequality deepened. Indeed, central to this newfound prosperity was the exploitation of the common labourer.⁵² Further, this American exploitation and desire of the rich to outdo each other did not hurt only Americans. The story of the Votive Stele and its Chinese brethren tells of the darker side of the Gilded Age's effects on China.

Built in 543 CE in the Eastern Wei dynasty, as previously mentioned, the Votive Stele spent the next millennium and three centuries attached to whatever Chinese wall it first called home.⁵³ The 19th century would change this, however, as it saw a rapidly declining Qing empire serve the greater interests of the European and Japanese imperial powers that be.⁵⁴ Among these interests were the aesthetics of young international-minded travellers from those great nations. As Alan Chong explains, explorers such as the Gardners were, whether they directly supported it or not, direct beneficiaries of Western expansionism in Asia.⁵⁵ Many of the photographs that Gardner purchased, for example, had been staged by locals and Western entrepreneurs to represent Asia in bite-sized souvenirs that self-satisfied Western consumers could then proudly

⁵¹ All Chapters, '16. Capital and Labor | THE AMERICAN YAWP', accessed 21 March 2022, <https://www.americanyawp.com/text/16-capital-and-labor/>.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ 'Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum'; Nancy Berliner, 'Listening, Learning, Meditating: Isabella's Journey with Chinese Art', 7 December 2020, <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/blog/listening-learning-meditating-isabellas-journey-chinese-art>.

⁵⁴ Chong, 'Introduction: Journeys East'.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

take home with them.⁵⁶ The value of Asia itself (save for Japan) had become exceedingly dependent on its value to the West. This becomes painfully apparent through contemporary correspondences; Joseph Lindon Smith's 11 September 1910 letter to Mrs. Gardner, for example, features as a prominent side-piece a 'Chinaman' juggler whose sole, desperate purpose in the letter is to amuse the Western traveller, who has already stopped paying attention to him, with his fascinating, exotic deceits.⁵⁷ In that same letter, Smith notes the dramatic degradation of Chinese society – what was once imposing and holy had become dilapidated.⁵⁸ What once seemed a most admirable and religious devotion to traditional culture became gross negligence as the people became embroiled in their own desperate anarchic struggles for survival, and the mounting casualties of this sad state of affairs were the arts and traditions that could now barely sustain the emaciated frame of China's perishable modern civilisation.⁵⁹

Indeed, upon the turn of the 20th century, European and Japanese explorers stumbled for the first time upon Chinese stone carvings in long abandoned temples and flew immediately into collecting frenzies.⁶⁰ Without pause, Beijing dealers began to despatch local villagers to remove heads and whole statues from those old cultural sites.⁶¹ Among these rapidly removed ancient works was the Votive Stele.⁶² Because Isabella had then developed a passionate appetite for Chinese Buddhist sculpture and Eastern spirituality in general, she immediately purchased the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Joseph Lindon Smith, 'Letter to Isabella Stewart Gardner from The Grand Hotel Des Wagons - Lits, Limited, Peking, 11 September 1910', 11 September 1910, <https://www.gardnermuseum.org/experience/collection/31008>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Berliner, 'Listening, Learning, Meditating'.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

stele upon being recommended it and put it in the Chinese Loggia.⁶³ But although this stele was so callously removed from its birthplace, and though its iconographical significance seemingly went unnoticed in the West, at least it was well-preserved and now serves, as the Museum's website states, as the most important non-Western artwork in the collection.⁶⁴ Many other Chinese works were not so lucky. Isabella had also created a new, adjacent Chinese Room in the same year that she procured the stele, and she filled it with Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Buddhist paintings and objects arranged in her imitation of a traditional Chinese temple design.⁶⁵ But because she tended to use the Chinese Room for private affairs, she had never opened the Chinese Room to the public during her lifetime and never left clear instructions that it be opened after her death.⁶⁶ As such, her passing left the works of the Chinese Room in limbo – many were moved to storage only four years after she passed, and the Room remained relatively unused and unseen for the remainder of its existence.⁶⁷ In 1970, Director Rollin Hadley proposed that the contents of the Room be sold, as he and the board of trustees both regarded its collection as an ensemble of second-rate material.⁶⁸ Hence, on 17 April 1971, they auctioned off 120 items from the Chinese Room and converted the space into a café and a shop.⁶⁹ The 120 items, though not all Chinese, may well have fallen into the hands of private, non-Asian owners, where they could neither edify the public nor be guaranteed cultural appreciation. They would likely have been better off back in their home countries, and their home countries would have been better off as well, as there are many sites in China (just as there are in Greece) where prized cultural heritages

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 'Votive Stele | Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum'.

⁶⁵ Chong, 'Introduction: Journeys East'.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

have been carted off to foreign museums, and all that remains to ‘edify’ the locals are the headless figures or empty spaces that once would have told a grand story. Thus, the Gilded Age practice of obtaining foreign art for the stated goal of public edification sometimes involved culturally deleterious practices and left said foreign art in unappreciated limbo.



Figure 1: 'Votive Stele', 2 July 543 CE. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum⁷⁰

⁷⁰ *Votive Stele*, n.d., Photograph of stele front, n.d.,
https://www.gardnermuseum.org/sites/default/files/images/art/21/07/S8w4_c6_001.jpg.



Figure 2: Early Guhyapāda (left)⁷¹



Figure 3: Early Nārāyaṇa (right)⁷²

⁷¹ Alexander S. Jin, *Early Guhyapāda*, 6 March 2022, Cropped screenshot of photograph, 6 March 2022.

⁷² Alexander S. Jin, *Early Nārāyaṇa*, 6 March 2022, Cropped screenshot of photograph, 6 March 2022.



Figure 4: Kizil Cave 175, Left Vajrapāṇi⁷³



Figure 5: Kizil Cave 175, Right Vajrapāṇi⁷⁴

⁷³ Jianzhou Liang, 金剛力士 主室正壁
(左), 2012, Photograph of rear wall, 2012,
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48da23d20102e2cu.html.

⁷⁴ Jianzhou Liang, 金剛力士 主室正壁
(右), 2012, Photograph of rear wall, 2012,
http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_48da23d20102e2cu.html.



Figure 28. Mural of Vajrapāṇi

Courtesy of Zhang Aihong 張愛紅 and Shi Xiaomin 史曉明, eds., Kezier shiku xianmiaoji 克孜爾石窟線描集 (Anhui meishu chubanshe, 1974), p. 15.

Figure 6: Kizil Cave 175, Illustration of the Left Vajrapāṇi⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Alexander Jin, *Illustration of the Left Vajrapāṇi by Zhang Aihong and Shi Xiaomin*, 6 March 2022, Cropped screenshot of figure from Hsing., 6 March 2022.



Figure 7: Gandhara-style Vajrapāṇi from the British Museum⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *Fragment of a Panel Showing Vajrapāṇi and Other Attendant Figures*, n.d., Carved onto grey schist, broken. Carbonaceous quartz-muscovite-chloritoid phyllite., n.d., 1970,0718.1, The British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/image/1613358435>.



Figure 9: Dunhuang Nārāyaṇa⁷⁷

⁷⁷ *Dunhuang Narayana*, 2002, Photograph of mural, 2002, 第 49 页; 第 104 页。 , 《中国敦煌壁画全集·西魏》, 天津: 天津人民美术出版社, 2002 年, , <https://xbzs.ecnu.edu.cn/CN/html/PIC/hdsfddxbzxshkxb-49-2-79-4.jpg>.

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