

# THE EVOLUTION AND SPREAD OF THE IMAGE OF "NAGAS BATHING SIDDHARTHA" IN BUDDHISM ART<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The image of the "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha", an important theme in Buddhist art, was produced in India and has appeared successively in Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, Shandong, Jiangsu, Sichuan, Tibet and other places in China during the process of Buddhism spreading to the east. However, its forms and contents differ in different regions and different periods. Therefore, it is conducive to understand the sinicization process of Indian Buddhist art and can

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deepen the understanding of the specific contents of Buddhist art exchanges to study the differences. The innovative point of view of this paper is that the distribution of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is “regional,” and the variation of its style reflects the route and regional characteristics of Buddhist transmission.

**Keywords:** Nagas Bathing Siddhartha. Evolution. Two nagas. Nine nagas. Sinicization.

## INTRODUCTION

The image of the “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is one of the important themes of Buddhist art to show the story of the nagas spraying water to bathe the Prince when he was born, which can be found in Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Henan, Hebei, Jiangsu, Tibet, Sichuan and other places in China, or museums in the United States, Japan, and other countries or regions. Judging from the 67 image data collected by the author, the province with the largest “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is Gansu, followed by Shanxi, Henan, and Shaanxi. The number of nagas in these images is not fixed, which though dominated by nine nagas, it also includes two, three, and four ones. Such as Geng Jian (2005, p. 91) argues that the birth image combines the Buddha’s birth plot with the images of other plots into a closely connected picture. The newborn Prince Siddhartha made the “Seven Step Declaration” or was being bathed in nagas.

Predecessors have done a lot of research on this, such as the “irrigation” section in Li Jingjie (2004, p. 76): *The Process of Chinese Acculturation in the Buddhist Fine Arts as Seen from Northern Dynasties’ Carvings in Stone Recounting Buddhist Tales. A Focus on Pre-Natal and Post-Natal Scenes* discusses the mechanization characteristics of the “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha”, carved in the Northern grottoes, and single figures from northwest India to central China when they spread from Xinjiang to northwest India. Wang Huihui (2014, p. 1) sorted out the Buddhist scriptures related to “Siddhartha Bathing” in *The Buddhist Story of Siddhartha Bathing: The Transformation from Text to Image* and discussed the reasons for the differences between the contents of these images and Buddhist scriptures. In addition, Liu Lianxiang’s (2014, p. 8) *Evolution of the Images of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha in the Buddhist Life Story of the Northern Dynasties*, and Ma Jidong’s (2017, p. 76) *Research on the Bathing Buddha Figures of the Northern Dynasties* and Ma Lan (2017, p. 1). *The Study on the Images of the Birth of Sakyā in the Northern Dynasties* also involved the same issue. On the one hand, these research results have laid the foundation for an in-depth discussion of

the content and style of such images, but on the other hand, their content mainly focuses on two nagas or nine nagas in the "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha". Seldomly, it involves the appearance evolution of three, four, six or eight nagas, let alone the in-depth analysis of the political background contained in the development and change of the number of dragon kings.

In order to study and discuss the evolution of the number of dragon kings in the image transmission from the nothing nagas, two nagas, three nagas, four nagas, eight nagas, nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha, etc., against the historical backdrop of various periods, this article intends to use the distribution of the picture in terms of region and time as a clue.

## 1 OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT PICTURE OF "NAGAS BATHING SIDDHARTHA" IN CHINA

Buddhist art is a unique form of expression that is influenced by both Buddhist teachings and art technology and materials. The discussion of this paper about the image of "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha" is no exception. According to the pertinent classics compiled in the "Taisho Tripitaka," the descriptions of "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha" in Buddhist texts are primarily divided into the following categories:

The first form is two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha. The classics related to it include the *Xiu Xing Ben Qi Jing*, translated by Zhu Dali et al. in the Eastern Han dynasty; *The Great Wisdom*, translated by Kumarajiva in the later Qin Dynasty; and the *Sutra of Great Renunciation*, translated by Jinagupta in Sui Dynasty. The second form is no nagas spraying water. The relevant records are only found in the *Buddhacarita*, translated by Dharmaksema in the Northern Liang Dynasty. The third form is four nagas for abhiseka. The relevant records are found in the *Tai Zi Rui Ying Ben Qi Jing*, translated by Lokaksema in the Eastern Han Dynasty. The fourth form is nine nagas for abhiseka. The relevant records are only found in *Lalitavistara Sutra*, translated by Dharmaraksa in the Western Jin Dynasty. Obviously, the related Buddhist scriptures have the most records of the two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka and appear earlier. In comparison, the fourth type of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka has fewer records and appears later, which is obviously not found in the early Buddhist literature. Therefore, "nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka" may not be the inherent tradition of early Indian and Central Asian

Buddhism, but a wrong conclusion in the translations of Buddhist scriptures influenced by Chinese culture.

To examine this issue, we must comprehensively discuss the two aspects of Buddhist scripture translation and images. In terms of translation, the record about nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka was first seen in the *Lalitavistara Sutra*, translated by the monk Dharmaraksa in Western Jin Dynasty. It can be speculated that nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha is more in line with the royal family's noble characteristics. Chen Huaiyu (2012, p. 5) said: "But this was not generally accepted by the translators of the Buddhist scriptures of the same period and the Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern Dynasties."

It was not until the Tang Dynasty, which was widely quoted by Tao Xuan, Tao Shi, Xuan Zang and others in the Buddhist literature. In terms of image practice, the image of the nine nagas spraying water, in the Buddhist art of the Northern Dynasties, has Chinese characteristics and is also a common shape familiar to the people at the time. The highest rulers of the Northern Dynasties, including Later Zhao (during the Stone Tiger era), integrated this art style with their Buddhist practices. At that time, the Buddhist ceremonial rite involved water being sprayed. When erecting the Yaoguang Temple in the Northern Wei Dynasty, after transferring the capital to Luoyang, the royal family continued to implement the notion of nine nagas spraying water for abhiseka, establishing the architectural art of nine nagas showering water.

Therefore, the image of the nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka is an art form that originated in China and has a close relationship with the sinicization of Buddhism. The image of the nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka, in the Buddhist art of the Northern Dynasties, became ubiquitous in Buddhist carvings and paintings and, gradually, spread around the central plains. Of the 67 images of "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha" collected by the author, two were distributed in Xinjiang about 411-637 years, during the Southern and Northern Dynasties, when the picture of "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha", which is found in Xinjiang today, had both two and nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha for abhiseka. They were affected by the dual expressions of India and the Central Plains in the image combination and layout. 26 of those images are in Gansu Province, mainly concentrated in the Mogao Grottoes of Dunhuang, in the Tang Dynasty, which is the area with the most pictures of the "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha". 10 of them are in Shanxi Province, mainly in the Yungang Grottoes, in the Northern Dynasties.

The statues are in the southeast of Shanxi, as well as the frescoes of the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Among them, the statue of Song Dexing, in the third year of Tai'an, in the Northern Wei Dynasty, in 457 AD, is the earliest one found image of nine nagas for abhiseka with the exact age. The image carving style also has the characteristics of Buddhist art in the Pingcheng period<sup>6</sup>.

Two other images were also found in the Yungang Grottoes. Most of the other ones were relics of the Northern Dynasties. Geographically, they were mainly located in the city of Peiping, in Jin Dynasty, and on the ancient roads leading to Luoyang in southeastern Shaanxi. Other such images, in Shanxi Province, are mostly left over from the Northern Dynasties, mainly distributed on the ancient road from Pingcheng to Luoyang. Eight images were found in the grottoes of Henan Province.

And statues, in the Luoyang area during the Northern Dynasties. The the earliest one appeared in during the period of Emperor Xiaoming, in the Northern Wei Dynasty. There are six images found in Shaanxi, mostly in the Northern Dynasties period. The earliest figure of nine nagas for abhiseka was the statue of Huangxing fifth year (471 years), unearthed in Wangjiaxiang, Xiguan, Xi'an in 1974. In Shandong and Jiangsu, one image for each of the nine nagas for abhiseka (Figure - 1), in the Northern Wei Dynasty, was found. Among which, the one in Shandong appeared in the stone carvings, in the Northern Wei Dynasty, while the one in Jiangsu appeared later on the stupa built in Qixia Temple, in the Sui Dynasty.

An image of nine nagas for abhiseka was found in Hebei, which appeared in the golden bronze statues of the Northern Wei Dynasty. One from Qinghai appeared in a mural in the Qing Dynasty. Three in Sichuan appeared in temple murals and grottoes after the Song Dynasty (Figure - 2). There are also four (Figure - 1) with statues of nine nagas. Although the site of the excavation is unknown, it can be inferred from the information provided by the stele that it was located in the northern central plains during the Northern Dynasties. The nine nagas image emerged mostly in the Central Plains region or the three provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan, near to the Central Plains region, during the Middle Paleozoic period, according to the chronological and geographic distribution of the image shown above. It

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<sup>6</sup> The Pingcheng era of the Northern Wei Dynasty was a period in which the Northern Wei Dynasty, founded by the Tuoba tribe of the Xianbei nationality, took Pingcheng as the ruling center for nearly a century from the first year of Tianxing to the 18th year of Taihe.

gradually migrated to the nearby regions of Hebei, Gansu, Jiangsu, Shandong, Sichuan, Xinjiang and Qinghai. The majority of the photographs in the aforementioned locations are of nine nagas. However, there are also pictures of one naga, two nagas, three nagas, five nagas, six nagas and eight nagas.

**Figure - 1** The Nine Nagas Bathing Siddhartha statue in Cave No. 4 of the Great Buddha Grottoes in Ansai District, Yan'an, Shaanxi



Photographed by the author.

**Figure - 2** Statue Tablet by Song Dexing in the Third Year of the Tai'an Regime in the Northern Wei Dynasty (457)



WANG, 2014. p. 3.

## 2 THE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION AND IMAGE COMBINATION OF “NAGAS BATHING SIDDHARTHA”

Judging from the 67 images of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” in 11 provinces across the country, their distribution has obvious regional characteristics, with different differences in different regions. The image is composed of a prince, nagas spraying water (one or more), a Dragon King, a platform, etc. In the image, several nagas spraying water have become the most obvious key factor. Liu Lianxiang (2017, p.94) said: “Whether it is two nagas or nine nagas spraying water, the cultural phenomenon it reflects is fundamentally different.” The geographical distribution is shown in the following table:

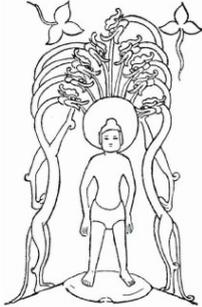
Table 1- Distribution and combination statistics of images of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha”

province	Image content	Image location	Era
Xinjiang (2)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Qizil Cave No. 99 (Figure - 6)  Figure - 6 Nagas Bathing Siddhartha (line graph) Cave No. 99, Kizil, late 4th century. (LIU, 2014, p. 9)	From 411 to 637 in the Northern and Southern Dynasties
	Two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Qizil Cave No. 110	From 411 to 637 in the Northern and Southern Dynasties

Gansu (26)		Stature No. 10 at Cave No. 133 of Maiji Mountain Grottoes	Northern Wei (504-534):
	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Dunhuang Mogao Caves No. 290(Figure - 3), 294, No. 61, No. 133, No. 205, No. 222, 156, 186(Figure - 4), 200, 202, 231, 240, 361, No. 85, British Museum Stein.Ch. 00114, SP99 Cave No. 76	Northern Wei -Tang-Song Dynasties
		 <p>Figure - 3 Nine nagas are spraying water over Siddhartha for Abhiseca in Cave No. 290, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, Northern Zhou Dynasty. (LIU, 2014, p. 12)</p>	
		 <p>Figure - 4 Nine nagas spray water over Siddhartha for Abhiseca in Cave No. 186, Mogao Grottoes, Dunhuang, Middle Tang Dynasty. (WANG, 2014, p. 6)</p>	
	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Dunhuang Cave No. 72	Five Dynasties
		Cave No. 454, Mogao Grottoes	Early Song Dynasty
	Five nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Dunhuang Cave No. 112	Mid-Tang Dynasty (Tibetan regime in ancient China: Tubo)
	Three nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Jingyao Temple Grottoes in Sunan Yugu Autonomous County	Qing Dynasty
One nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Dunhuang Cave No. 117	Mid Tang Dynasty 781-848	
No nagas	Cave No. 360 of Dunhuang Grottoes (only clouds and no dragons)	Mid Tang Dynasty 781-848	

Shanxi (10)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	<p>Cave No. 6 of Yungang Grottoes in Datong (Figure - 5)</p>  <p>Figure - 5 Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha (Photographed by the author)</p>	Late 5th century
		<p>A statue tablet made in the Dexing Period of the Song Dynasty (Japanese Private Collection) (Figure - 2)</p>  <p>Figure - 2 Statue Tablet by Song Dexing in the Third Year of the Tai'an Regime in the Northern Wei Dynasty (457). (WANG, 2014, p. 3)</p>	Tai'an third year in the Northern Wei Dynasty (457)
		Statue tablet unearthed in Southwest Shanxi	Yong'an 2nd year in the Northern Wei Dynasty (529)
		Murals of Chongshan Temple in Taiyuan	Ming Dynasty
		Murals of Jingxin Temple in Taigu	Qing Dynasty
	Six nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	A statue tablet by Zhang Bohe	Yanxing 2nd year in the Northern Wei Dynasty 472
	Unknown	A statue tablet by Rui Cheng	The 4th year of the Datong Regime in the Western Wei Dynasty (538)
	Unknown	A statue tablet by Zhang Zhenjingin Yuncheng	Unknown
	Unknown	A statue tablet by Yu Wenzhong	The First Year of the Wucheng Regime in the Northern Qi Dynasty (561)
	Severely weathered	Cave No. 41, Yungang Grottoes, Datong	Late 5th century

Shaanxi (6)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	A statue tablet excavated from Wangjia Alley, Xiguan, Xi'an in 1974 (collected by Xi'an Beilin Museum)	Northern Wei Dynasty Heping two years(461)
		A statue tablet excavated in	The Fifth Year of
		Xingping County (collected by Xi'an Beilin Museum)	Heping Regime in the Northern Wei
		um)	Dynasty (471)
		In 1983, the Maitreya Statue unearthed in Xi'an Xijiao Air Force Communication School	Northern Wei Dynasty
Shaanxi (6)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Cave No. 4 of the Great Buddha Grottoes in Ansai District, Yan'an, Shaanxi	Northern Wei Dynasty -Western Wei Dynasty
		Murals of Cave No. 36 of Yulin Cave	Five Dynasties
	Seven nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Xian Beilin Museum Collection	Statue of Northern Wei without a clear age
	One naga spraying water over Siddhartha	Cave No. 3 of Yulin Cave	Western Xia Dynasty

Henan (8)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	<p>Stature tablet by Dao Han (Figure - 7)</p>  <p>Figure - 7 Nine nagas are spraying water over Siddhartha the main chamber of Cave No. 290 in Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes. (LIU, 2014, p. 12)</p>	<p>The First Year of Xiaochang Regime in the Northern Wei Dynasty (525)</p>
		<p>The ninth niche of the north wall of Yongdao of Yanshi Shuiquan Grottoes</p>	<p>About the Emperor Xiaoming period</p>
		<p>Stature tablet in Qinyang</p>	<p>The First Year of the Wuding Regime in the Eastern Wei Dynasty (543)</p>
		<p>Stature tablet by Dao Ying in Qinyang</p>	<p>The Fourth Year of the Wuding Regime in the Eastern Wei Dynasty (546)</p>
		<p>Stature tablet in Junxian</p>	<p>The Third Year of the Wuping Regime in the Northern Qi Dynasty (572)</p>
		<p>A stature tablet by Cui Yongxian and others in the Pingdeng Temple of Luoyang (Figure - 9)</p>  <p>Figure - 9 Statue Tablet by Cui Yongxian and other in Luoyang, Northern Qi Dynasty, Hena. (LIU, 2014, p. 11)</p>	<p>Northern Qi Dynasty</p>
		<p>Niche S130 of Guyang Cave in Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang</p>	<p>Emperor Xiaoming Period of the Northern Wei Dynasty (516-528)</p>
		<p>Niche S174 of Guyang Cave in Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang</p>	<p>Emperor Xiaoming Period of the Northern Wei Dynasty (516-528)</p>

Unknown, presumed to be central northern China (6)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	<p>Statue of a cross-legged Maitreya, Collection of Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, USA (Figure - 8)</p>  <p>Figure - 8. The Stone Monument of Maitreya Bodhisattva (collected by Smithsonian Museum, USA), Northern Zhou Dynasty (6th century). (Collected by Smithsonian Museum)</p>	Late Eastern Wei Dynasty or Early Northern Qi Dynasty
		Statue tablet	The Third Year of the Yongping Regime in the North Wei Dynasty 510
		Statue of a cross-legged Maitreya, a Japanese collection	Northern Wei Dynasty
		Statue tablet	The Tenth Year of the Tianbao Regime in the Northern Qi Dynasty (559)
		Stone monument of a cross-legged Maitreya Bodhisattva (Collection of Smithsonian Museum, USA)	Northern Zhou Dynasty (6th century)
		Printmaking Shi Shi Yuan Liu	Ming Dynasty
Hebei (1)		Gilt bronze statue of the Yang Family (Collection of Nitta clan, Tokyo, Japan)	The First Year of Taihe Regime in the Northern Wei Dynasty (477)
Shandong (1)		Stone Carvings in the Northern Wei Dynasty (Taian Museum Collection)	Northern Wei Dynasty
Jiangsu (1)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	On the stupa of Qixia Temple in Nanjing	The First Year of Emperor Renshou in the Sui Dynasty 601
Qinghai (1)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	Picture 13 of the abbey around the Quran Temple	Qing Dynasty repainting
Tibet (2)	Two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	A statue in the main hall of Songzai Hall (three-story hall) of Ladakh Aqi Temple.	Late 12th century or early 13th century
		Aging Grottoes in Alizada County	About 13-14th century
Sichuan (3)	Nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha	No. 12 in Big Buddha Bay of Baoding Mountain Grottoes in Dazu, Chongqing-Ing	Built-in Song Dynasty, about from 1174 to 1252
		Stone Carvings of Yuanlong Temple, Yuchan Mountain, Luzhou	Ming Dynasty
	One naga spraying water over Siddhartha	Buddhist statues unearthed in Chengdu Wanfo Temple	The Southern Dynasties

Made by the author

From the perspective of iconology the table above shows that the nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha of Cave No. 99 in Zier Grottoes, in Xinjiang, are the earliest known image of this type. The cave was excavated from the 5th to the 7th century, after the translation of the Lalitavistara, on the outer wall of the right tunnel of the back room of the nine nagas for abhiseka. Chen Huaiyu (2012, p. 350) said: "There are two half-kneeling humanoid dragon kings in the picture. The Prince has a dragon (snake-shaped dragon) on its head". On the right wall of the main room of Cave 110, in the same grotto, only two dragons, kneeling on both sides of the Prince, are bathing. From the composition and combination of the picture, this set of pictures and the Buddha carvings, in the Gandhara area, have a close interaction. The naked princes and the serpentine dragons are all affected by the Gandhara region of Central Asia, while the Central Plains politics influence nine nagas.

The development of Buddhism in the Central Plains region, during this time, is closely related to the abundance of dragon bathing princes, which have been discovered in the provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan in the northern part of the Central Plains. These princes are most frequently represented by nine nagas spraying for abhiseka. Not only significant cities, like Datong, Taiyuan, Luoyang and Yecheng were constructed, but also enormous grottoes, like Yungang, Tianlong Mountain, Xiangtang Mountain and Longmen were dug out, in addition to a significant number of Buddhist temples. A large number of Buddhist grottoes and monasteries has been built along the routes from Datong, Shanxi, Luoyang, Henan, Yecheng, Hebei and Xi'an, Shaanxi. Judging from the data of the "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha" found in these three areas, it is most common to express the composition form of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha. There is also a small number of graphic combinations of one naga, six nagas, seven nagas and eight nagas. Specifically, a total of 22 images of nine nagas spraying for abhiseka was found in Shanxi, Shaanxi and northern Henan, including four ones in Shanxi, five in Shaanxi and 8 images in Henan. There are four ones with the unclear site of excavation and one of the prints from the Ming Dynasty. These images of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha are mainly concentrated in the Wei, Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties, so Pingcheng or Luoyang, at that time, should be the birthplace of such statues. Three images were found in Sichuan Province relatively late. A No.12 Buddha of Big Buddha Bay in Baoding Mountain Grottoes, in Dazu, Chongqing, was built in the Song Dynasty (approximately from 1174 to 1252). The Song Dynasty artisans carved nine dragon heads on the cliff walls, ingeniously leading water into the mouth of

the dragon to express the image story of nine nagas. Another stone carving for Yuantong Temple, Yuchan Mountain, Luzhou, Sichuan, built in the Ming Dynasty, shows the theme of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha. The third place is a Buddhist statue tablet unearthed at the Wanfo Temple in Chengdu, Sichuan, during the Southern Dynasties without a clear age. The back line of the stele engraves images of one naga spraying water over Siddhartha.

The pictures of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha, found in Gansu Province, are mainly concentrated in the Mogao Grottoes, in Dunhuang. Although the image combination has a variety of forms, such as one naga spraying water over Siddhartha, three nagas, five nagas and six dragon spraying water over Siddhartha, most of them are nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha. The period is large: from the Northern Wei Dynasty to the Tang and Song periods. One case was found in Qinghai Province. It was built late in the Ming Dynasty and repainted in the Qing Dynasty. It is shown in the cloister mural painting on the top of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha. There are two cases in Tibet later, from the twelfth century to the fourteenth century, showing two nagas spraying for abhiseka. In the Ladakh Aqi Temple, in the late 12th century or early 13th century, the image of the two nagas spraying for abhiseka appears on the skirt of the statue of the clay sculpture of Maitreya in the main hall of the Songzai Hall (three-story hall). Another spot was found in the Aqingou Grotto of Alizada, Tibet, built in the 13th to 14th centuries. The Buddhist story of two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha is shown, in the fifth scene, in the mural of Cave 2. The image shows the two dragon kings on the clouds above the Buddha.

Judging from the changes in the combination of the image of Nagas Bathing Siddhartha, a large number of pictures has been found in the Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes in Gansu Province and Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan provinces, in the northern part of the Central Plains, which was influenced by Chinese cultural traditions. But there are also many images representing no naga, one naga, five nagas, six nagas and eight nagas. These may be the cognition of the fuzzy stage, in the translated scriptures, and the artistic expression of the fuzzy stage of the ancient craftsmen. In other words, it is the fuzzy stage of cognition of the image transmission process. Shanxi is the earliest area where the image of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha has been found. The three provinces of Hebei, adjacent to Shanxi, Shandong and Jiangsu adjacent to Henan, are similar in image layout and carving techniques to the Northern Wei Dynasty in Central Plains. Sichuan, adjacent to Shaanxi

and Gansu. Due to its influence, most of them appear as a combination of images of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha. Xinjiang and Qinghai are farther away from the Central Plains area. They are represented by the two nagas bathing Siddhartha. It can be observed that they are less affected by the political context of the Central Plains. As a result, it has been hypothesised that they are directly impacted by the two nagas bathing in the Gandhara region of Central Asia and India. From Buddhist texts to images, from India to Central Asia and to the Central Plains, the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha image has evolved over time, with regional variations.

### **3 SPREAD OF THE “NAGAS BATHING SIDDHARTHA” IMAGE AND THE EVOLUTION OF FOREIGN ART STYLE**

The spread of the “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” image and the evolution of foreign art styles are specifically expressed in the following three points from the perspective of modeling:

Firstly, the change in the naga modelling features, which varies significantly from place to place and time. There is no dragon in the picture of Nagas Bathing Siddhartha in India. The image of the dragon spraying water (an Indian snake-shaped dragon) appears in the Gandhara and Xinjiang regions. The image of “the Chinese Dragon” has evolved from the Indian snake-shaped dragon to the Chinese dragon. It has experienced the evolution from no dragon to two to nine dragons. In the Kizil Caves in Xinjiang, the cultural factors of the Indian snake-shaped dragons are preserved in the early grottos and statues in Shaanxi, Shanxi and Henan. Indian snake-shaped dragons and Chinese dragons can also be found in the sculptures of some statues. During the transformation process, in the image carving of the Zhangbohe statue-like dragon, in the second year of Yanxing, the muzzle is obviously longer. The dragon head also has long horns, retaining the snake-shaped body without limbs. The image of the dragon in Cave 290 of Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, in the Gansu murals, has limbs. There is also a more typical head that resembles the Chinese dragon in Chinese culture. It has double horns, a large mouth, a protruding front muzzle, etc. As a result, the Chinese dragon gradually took the place of the Indian dragon in the process of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha spreading. The evolution of this process might not take place over time but rather simultaneously in various places, leading to various outcomes in various places.

Secondly, the change in the modeling features of the dragon king. The image of the dragon king has also evolved into various forms in the process of spreading among different cultural regions, including those directly represented by the dragon, those kneeling on one knee, those standing up, those two bodhisattvas with headlights and those two messengers without light. For example, the scene of the combination of characters in the statue, the one of the tenth year of the Tianbao Regime in the Northern Qi Dynasty (559), is obviously influenced by the art of Gandhara and is also the first appearance on the statue of China.

Third, the change in the modeling features of Siddhartha and the types of golden tables. In the process of regional transmission, the Siddhartha shape has obviously changed from being naked to wear clothes, which is specifically reflected in the image of a prince with a naked upper body, wearing ancient pants with a crotch, shorts and a skirt. Besides, the types of golden tables on which the Prince stands have obvious regional characteristics and differences, such as a round table with few feet, a round table with covered lotus, a curved table, a square straight table, an arched curved table, a curved table with figure eight, and a traditional Chinese style table. These modeling features not only reflect the localization of Gandhara style in China, but also the localization of foreign art styles.

During the process of cross-regional transmission, the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha is affected by the interaction of different regional cultural factors. On the one hand, it inherits the cultural factors of the origin of Indian Buddhism. On the other hand, it is transformed and integrated with local cultural factors during the cross-regional communication process. It formed its cultural characteristics. In the process of regional evolution and the sinicization of foreign art styles, it has experienced a complex evolution process. After analyzing the deep-seated change process, the author believes that the following three points can be summarized:

First of all, the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha is a product of the spatiotemporal environment of the prosperity of Buddhism and the transformation of Buddhist thought. It is closely related to feudal imperial power. From the time when the 67 images of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha, studied in this article, appeared, the nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha mainly appeared from the 5th century to the 9th century, from the Northern Wei Dynasty to the Tang Dynasty, among which there were many discoveries

in the Northern Wei Dynasty, a few ones in the Eastern Wei Dynasty, the Western Wei Dynasty and the Northern Qi Dynasty.

In the Tang Dynasty, there were many manifestations in Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes, which reflected the prosperous development of Buddhism in the northern central plains from Pingcheng, in the Northern Wei Dynasty, to Luoyang, and also the prosperity of the Buddhist kingship, such as Yungang Grottoes, Longmen Grottoes, Xiangtang Mountain Grottoes, etc., which the royal family built at huge expense. Along with the creation of the Kizil Grottoes and Maiji Mountain Grottoes, during the Northern Wei Dynasty, there are also numerous sculptures of folk statues and monolithic monuments. All of these have depictions of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha from Buddhist tales. The Nagas Bathing Siddhartha figure, which represented Maitreya beliefs, was the most successful work of Buddhist art in the Huang Mogao Grottoes during the Tang Dynasty.

This work also reflected the concept of the Tang Dynasty about the Buddhist kingship. The author believes that this is because the image of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha is a traditional Chinese culture that recognizes the concept of kingship in a more intuitive and visual form. So, it was understood and accepted by the general public at that time. The actual needs for doctrine and the need to propagate Buddhism doctrines also show that the prosperity of Buddhism, in the Middle Ages, emphasized the propaganda of Buddhist doctrines too. In short, the example of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha embodies the compatibility of Chinese Buddhism, and the representation of the image also reflects the strong Han culture of Buddhism.

Secondly, the image of Nagas Bathing Siddhartha reflects the route and the regional characteristics of Buddhism. Based on the geographical and temporal analysis of the 67 pictures of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha found so far, we can roughly describe the spread of the story of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha, as being a Buddhist story. During the period from Northern Wei to Sui and Tang Dynasties, the core areas for the propaganda of Buddhist art were Shanxi. The Central Plains area, dominated by Henan and Shanxi, was most prosperous in the Mogao Grottoes area of Dunhuang, Gansu, during the Tang Dynasty. The images spread widely in different areas, showing Hebei, Shandong and Jiangsu as the core to the surrounding areas, Sichuan and other places.

Based on the geographical distribution time and the quantity of the image of Nagas Bathing Siddhartha collected in this article, it can be speculated its propagation route. It is the process of going from India through Central Asia to Middle Earth, first through the translated scriptures. The sinicized expression of the Chinese language and the interaction of the Chinese cultural traditions in the translation of the scriptures changed from the image of two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha to nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha in the Chinese context. It should appear in the northern Central Plains area for the first time, forming Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan. Under the influence of Han culture, the core area of the region spread east to Hebei and Shandong, west to Xinjiang, Gansu and Sichuan, and south to Jiangsu.

There is something to discuss from Mr. Liu Lianxiang's viewpoint. Furthermore, from the political context, the change from two nagas spraying water over Siddhartha to nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha is the result of the political rhetoric needed in the northern Central Plains region. The theme of the Nine Nagas Bathing Siddhartha does not exist in the early Indian Buddhist literature, nor does the concept of nine nagas in ancient India, which is the tradition of Han culture.

The image of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha has undergone a continuous development process in historical transmission. The new ideas, which appeared in the Chinese translation of the early Buddhist literature, originated from the context of Chinese culture. At least, two aspects must be needed and reformatted in the Chinese translation of the Buddhist scriptures. One is the transformation of the dragon from early Indian literature into the dragon of Chinese culture. The other is the transformation of the two nagas from Indian literature into nine nagas. Through the spread of translated scriptures, Buddhism introduced the idea of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha to Middle- Earth. Dharmaraksa added nine nagas to the scriptures he translated as opposed to the two dragons of the Sanskrit translations.

To understand why the two dragons were replaced with nine nagas, one needs to be familiar with the Chinese cultural background at the time. The nine nagas have become a symbol of imperial power at least in the late Han Dynasty. The royal family of Luoyang, in the post-Han Dynasty, and the Three Kingdoms period all built the nine nagas Hall in Luoyang. The nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha, invented in the Lalitavistara by Dharmaraksa of the Western Jin Dynasty, had a lot to do with his travels in Luoyang and may also be influenced by the architecture of Luoyang Jiulong

Hall, as a symbol of royal status. Later, Dharmaraksa created the nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha, which became the ideological foundation of the Jiuguang Temple in the Northern Wei Dynasty. Chen Huaiyu (2012, p. 345) said: "In essence, nine nagas spraying for abhiseka is based on the introduction of the noblest symbol of kingship in the Central Plains into the Buddhist translation. Dharmaraksa had been translating sutras in Luoyang for a long time".

In ancient Chinese political life, nine nagas and Jiulong Hall were linked together. Therefore, Dharmaraksa introduced the nine nagas motif into Buddhist translation by using the nine nagas to embellish the emperor's authority and dignity in the political discourse of the Central Plains and to express the grandeur and majesty of the Buddha as the sovereign Prince. He was born in a Chinese political environment and employed two nagas to perform bathing, which is obviously not as forceful as the performance of nine nagas. It is another reason for changing the concept of two nagas showering water over Siddhartha to nine nagas. Appropriately, as a political rhetoric, nine nagas entered the Buddhist level from the court level, which was the result of the need for political rhetoric of the times, which is very common in ancient Buddhist art.

In a word, from the perspective of graphics, "dragon spraying water", in the image of "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha", has become the most obvious key factor. And snake dragons are all affected by the Kendra region in Central Asia.

From a regional perspective, the number of "Nagas Bathing Siddhartha" has been found in Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan provinces, in the north of the Central Plains, which is closely related to the development of Buddhism in the Central Plains during this period.

Its distribution is obviously regional and is closely related to the prosperity of religious development and the development route.

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, according to the data of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha found so far, they are mainly distributed in Shanxi, Henan and Shaanxi, in the Central Plains of the North, and Mogao Grottoes, in Dunhuang, Gansu, and earlier, in Xinjiang geographically. It was also found in a small amount

in Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Sichuan and other places. The earliest place with the exact chronology of the image of nine nagas spraying water over Siddhartha was Shanxi, in the northern central plains, during the Northern Wei Dynasty. Influenced by the Han culture in the Central Plains, the discovery sites of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha in northern China are mostly distributed along Gansu, Shanxi, Henan and Shaanxi and, gradually, spread to Hebei, Shandong and Sichuan. The “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” picture is a typical and common pattern in Buddhist art that expresses the story of the Buddhist tradition. Buddhism has experienced the transmutation process of the sinicization of foreign art styles in its spread. The change in its image structure is related to the spread of translated scriptures, the traditional cultural concepts of the Central Plains and other factors.

From the perspective of image analysis and religious development, this paper examines the causes of the change of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” by regional division. Based on the research of the image of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha”, in the sculpture art of ancient India and Gandhara, this paper compares the image with the image of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” in 11 provinces of China. It compares it between regions to obtain the development and change rules of the image of “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” and analyze its causes in combination with the literature materials. In other words, the evolution of the image of the “Nagas Bathing Siddhartha” is not only affected by political factors, such as the cultural disparities between the Central Plains and the Western Regions, but also by the path that Buddhism took for its spread and the work that is being done to translate the scriptures of the Buddha. The image combinations in different regions have similarities and differences. Its evolutionary process was endowed with different symbolic meanings by different people in different kinds of literature at different times and on different occasions and served different purposes. Nine nagas spraying for abhiseka was inspired by political rhetoric at the time and was introduced into Buddhist translations. Finally, it returned to the historical political reality and experienced a development process from the political rhetoric to the religious rhetoric and, later, to the political rhetoric. An in-depth study of the spread and evolution of the Nagas Bathing Siddhartha, images have an important academic value and a research significance for studying the evolution of foreign art styles in China.

## Recherche sur la propagation et la transmutation du "Dragon Bathing Prince" dans l'art bouddhique

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**Résumé:** L'image du "Dragon baignant le prince" est un thème important dans l'art bouddhique. L'image est née en Inde, et pendant le processus de propagation du bouddhisme vers l'est, elle est apparue dans le Xinjiang, le Gansu, le Qinghai, le Shanxi, le Shaanxi, le Henan, le Shandong, le Jiangsu, le Sichuan, le Tibet et d'autres endroits en Chine. Cependant, la forme et le contenu de ces images sont différents selon les régions et les périodes. L'étude de cette différence est non seulement propice à la compréhension du processus de sinisation de l'art bouddhiste indien, mais approfondit également la compréhension du contenu spécifique de l'échange de l'art bouddhiste l'art entre la Chine et l'Inde.

**Mots-clés:** Prince baigneur de dragons. Deux dragons. Neuf dragons. Sinisation.

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