

The sinicization and secularization of some Graeco-Buddhist gods in China

Juping Yang



The Global Connections of Gandhāran Art

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Edited by
Wannaporn Rienjang
Peter Stewart

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Gandhāran 'Atlas' figure in schist; c. second century AD. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, inv. M.71.73.136 (Photo: LACMA Public Domain image.)



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Contents

Acknowledgements	iii
Illustrations	iii
Contributors	iv
Preface	vi
Wannaporn Rienjang and Peter Stewart	
Part 1 Global perspectives	
Gandhāra perceptions: the orbit of Gandhāran studies	1
Warwick Ball	
Part 2 The Graeco-Roman connection	
On the crossroads of disciplines: Tonio Hölscher’s theory of understanding Roman art images and its implications for the study of western influence(s) in Gandhāran art	29
Martina Stoye	
Roman sarcophagi and Gandhāran sculpture	50
Peter Stewart	
The transmission of Dionysiac imagery to Gandhāran Buddhist art	86
Tadashi Tanabe	
Part 3 Asian influences	
Buddha on the Rocks: Gandhāran connections through the Karakorum mountains	105
M. E. J. J. van Aerde, A. D. L. Mohns, and A. G. Khan	
Buddhist temples in Tukhāristān and their relationships with Gandhāran traditions	135
Shumpei Iwai	
More Gandhāra than Mathurā: substantial and persistent Gandhāran influences provincialized in the Buddhist material culture of Gujarat and beyond, c. AD 400-550	156
Ken Ishikawa	
Part 4 Gandhāra and China	
Cross-cultural Buddhist monastery ruins on the Silk Road and beyond: the layout and function of Buddhist monasteries reconsidered	207
Joy Yi Lidu	
The sinicization and secularization of some Graeco-Buddhist gods in China	234
Juping Yang	
Part 5 Epilogue	
De-fragmenting Gandhāran art: advancing analysis through digital imaging and visualization ...	251
Ian Haynes, Iwan Peverett, Wannaporn Rienjang with contributions by Luca M. Olivieri	

The sinicization and secularization of some Graeco-Buddhist gods in China¹

Juping Yang

Introduction

It is generally admitted that the sinicization or ‘Chinization’ of Buddhism was a long process. However, there is still much discussion in Chinese academia about when the process began and was largely realized, and how and to what extent it involved adaption to and fusion with Chinese traditional culture. I am well aware that I have insufficient expertise to take part in such specialist discussion. The purpose of this paper is therefore to offer my macroscopic observations on the evolution of Graeco-Buddhist figures in China, and to try to analyze the background and the context of these changes.

As we know, there are different opinions about the foreign elements in the development of Gandhāran art. The hypotheses of Greek and Roman origins predominate. Even among these there are disagreements about which tradition is more important (see, for example, the contributions by Stoye and Stewart in this volume). However, no matter which is given priority, the fact that Roman culture was in many respects the continuation and development of Greek culture is undeniable. So the essence of Gandhāran art is a fusion or combination of Indian Buddhism with the plastic art and religious ideas of the Graeco-Roman world. It is therefore not surprising that some deities from Graeco-Roman mythology became the prototypes for Buddhist figures in Gandhāran art, such as Apollo-Buddha, Herakles-Vajrapāṇi, Nike-Apsara, Atlas, Helios-Surya, Tyche-Hariti, and so on. Nevertheless, their iconography was not static. With the spread of Gandhāran art out of its homeland in the northwest of the Indian subcontinent, the Buddhist figures had to be adapted to the new cultural environment. In China the change appears more conspicuous and fundamental. For example, the Buddha styled on Apollo provided the imagery for Chinese emperors of the North Wei Dynasty (北魏, AD 386-534), and even the personification of Empress Wu Zetian (武则天) of the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). The ‘Atlas’-style man appeared in the tombs of non-Buddhists. The Nike-Apsara first of all turned into flying deities in Heaven, Feitian (飞天), and eventually went so far as to be assimilated by the foreign Nestorian Christians in the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271-1368). However, the most characteristic example is Herakles-Vajrapāṇi who not only lost his *vajra* and the position of bodyguard of the Buddha, but also unfortunately degenerated into a warrior guarding the tombs of non-Buddhists in Tang Dynasty. This paper will consider just a few more similar cases in order to illustrate the particular multi-cultural syncretism that occurred in China.

From Herakles-Vajrapāṇi to the Worrier Figurine²

Herakles is a demigod and hero in Greek mythology. Why would he be combined with the Vajrapāṇi of Buddhism? One answer seems to point to Alexander the Great and his expedition to India. It is pointed out that he and his father claimed Herakles and Zeus as the ancestors and progenitors of their family.³

¹ This paper is one of the preliminary outputs of research for the key project sponsored by the National Foundation for Social Science of China: *Hellenistic Civilization and the Silk Road* (15ZDB059). Many thanks to Dr Peter Stewart for inviting me to participate the conference in March 2019 and for his hard work on correcting my paper. I am also indebted to Professor Daniel Waugh for his precious directions about its modification. I am also grateful to those who offered me their generous helps in various ways, such as Professor Osmund Bopearachchi and Mr Joe Cribb.

² The Chinese scholars Xing Yitian (I-Tien Hsing) and Xie Mingliang have made in-depth studies on this subject. See Hsing 2005: 103-154; Xie 1997: 32-53.

³ Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, 4.11.6-7; Kallisthenes says that Alexander is ‘a son of Philip, a descendant of Herakles and of Aiakos, whose forefathers came from Argos to Macedonia, and have continued to rule the Macedonians not by force but in accordance with custom’. Aiakos in Greek mythology is also the son of Zeus. Alexander’s mother Olympias claimed to be a descendant of the Aeacidae. So Alexander also established descent from Zeus through his mother. Plutarch also states: ‘As for the lineage of Alexander, on his father’s side he was a descendant of Herakles through Karanos, and on his mother’s side a descendant of Aiakos

The images of Herakles and Zeus appeared earlier on the coins of Amyntas III (392-390 BC), Perdikkas (364-359 BC), and Philip II (359-336 BC) respectively, before the conquests of Alexander the Great. On the way to the east, Alexander minted his own coins, the Herakles/Zeus type (Figure 1). On the obverse is the image of Herakles's head wearing the lion's scalp helmet and on the reverse is Zeus seated on his throne. Although he died suddenly in 323 BC, the heritage of his empire did not vanish and his coins still circulated in the Hellenistic world created by him, and even beyond. Seleukos, one of the Diadokhoi, inherited the largest legacy in Asia. Although Seleukos abandoned India soon, in c. 305 BC, and the two satrapies in the upper provinces declared their independence from the Seleukid Kingdom around the middle of the third century BC, one of the new kingdoms, the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom became the centre of the civilization of the Hellenistic Far East.



Figure 1. Silver tetradrachm of Alexander the Great, minted at Babylon, 325-323 BC. (From the Andritsaena Hoard, Elis.) Obverse: head of Herakles. Reverse: seated Zeus. New York, American Numismatic Society, 1944.100.80601 (Photo: copyright ANS: <http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.80601>.)

In the early second century BC, the Greeks in Bactria crossed the Hindu Kush and entered north-west India, and remained there for nearly two centuries. These so-called Indo-Greeks tried to retain their Greekness, but at the same time they were obliged to accept local culture, including Buddhism and local deities. Some of them apparently even converted to Buddhism and become Buddhists, notably the famous Indo-Greek King Menander.⁴ Herakles appeared in various forms on the coins of some Indo-Greek kings, for example Euthydemos I and his son Demetrios.⁵ Patron deities generally appear on the reverses of Hellenistic coins. Therefore, besides Herakles other Greek deities such as Zeus, Athena, Apollo, the Dioskouroi, Poseidon, Artemis, Nike, Helios, Hermes, etc. also appeared on the coins issued by these Greek kings in Bactria and India. The worship and popularity of these deities not only promoted their fusion and identification with Buddhist figures, but also contributed to the development of Gandhāran iconography. The identification of Herakles with Vajrapāṇi is a typical example. He was known for his valor, his fearlessness in the face of hardship and danger, and his supernatural strength displayed in the twelve labors. So it is natural that he was accepted by Buddhists and was identified with Vajrapāṇi (the bodhisattva with 'Vajra in [his] hand') who became the bodyguard and guide of the Buddha in the early art of Gandhāra.

This radical change can be seen in the sculptural group of the Buddha and his attendants at Tapa-e Shotor at Haḍḍa. Herakles still wears his lion-skin draped on his left shoulder, passing over his back and reappearing over his lap, while his club had become Vajrapāṇi's thunderbolt or diamond pestle (Figure 2).⁶ However, the similarity in the sitting position between the Vajrapāṇi and the Herakles on the coin of Euthydemos is apparent (Figure 3).

through Neoptolemos; this is accepted without any question' (Plutarch, *Alexander*, 2.1). According to Greek mythological tradition, Karanos, the descendant of Herakles, was the first king of Macedonia. Isokrates exhorted Philip II to conquer Persia like his ancestor Herakles who had destroyed Troy. (*To Philip*, 109-115). All these sources attest to contemporary Greeks' acceptance of the story that Philip and Alexander were the descendants of Zeus and Herakles. It is therefore understandable that the images of Zeus and Herakles appeared on coins of kings of Macedonia. (All citations of English translations from the Loeb Classical Library.)

⁴ The tradition was that he once had a long discussion on the Buddhist doctrine with a master of Buddhism, Nagasena, and finally he was determined to abandon his throne and become a lay Buddhist. For the details of his story in the *Milindapañha* and the arguments around him, see Yang 2016: 111-22.

⁵ See Bopearachchi 1991: pls. 2-3 (Euthydème I, 1-16, 35); pl. 4-5 (Demetrios I, 1-3).

⁶ See Tarzi 1976: 394-396, figs. 9, 10 and 11; Boardman 2015: fig. 122; F. Tissot, 'Afghanistan ix. Pre-Islamic Art', in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, I/5: 544-547, fig. 3/4; an updated version is available online at <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/afghanistan-ix-preislamic-art>> (last accessed 16th January 2020).



Figure 2. Clay sculpture of Herakles-Vajrapāṇi in niche V2 at Tapa-e Shotor, Haḍḍa, Afghanistan (now destroyed). Second to fifth century AD. (Photo: Francine Tissot, courtesy of Professor Osmund Bopearachchi.)



Figure 3. Reverse of silver tetradrachm of Euthydemus, showing Herakles sitting on a rock covered by the lion-skin and with a club resting on his right leg; c. 230-190 BC. New York, American Numismatic Society, 1995.51.28. (Photo: copyright ANS, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1995.51.28>.)

Similar figures of Herakles-Vajrapāṇi could be seen in the early period of Gandhāran Buddhist art (Figures 4 and 5). From these images, we can see that Herakles had become the Buddha's guardian. Sometimes he wears Herakles's 'helmet' of the lion-scalp; sometimes he only has the *vajra* pestle, converted from Herakles's club; and sometimes he is nude or half-naked.

It is this kind of Herakles-Vajrapāṇi that was spread into China and was transformed gradually into a Chinese folk deity. Two changes are worth noticing.

One is his position and role in the Buddhist temples and grottoes. He rarely stood side by side with the Buddha as he used to do in earlier Gandhāran art. Moreover, his symbol, the *vajra*, was sometimes lost or become a sword. The pelt helmet generally remained but it is hardly recognizable whether it is of lion or tiger. He seems to become a Lokapāla (heavenly king) and often stands at the entrances of temples. We can see such a change clearly from Cave no. 205 of Dunhuang Grottoes and Maijishan Grottoes (Figures 6 and 7).⁷ Why might this change have taken place? The reason seems to be explained by his original role. Although he was a guardian deity (Dharmapāla) of the Buddha and the Dharma, nevertheless, with the deepening and expanding of sinicization of Mahāyāna Buddhism, his rank became lower and lower, so that his position was replaced by the disciples of the Buddha Śākyamuni and the other Buddhas and bodhisattvas, such as Dipaṅkara and Maitreya.

Another factor is his secularization. His clay figurines appeared as protectors in the tombs of non-Buddhists in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) (Figures 8, 9, and 10). This means he was accepted by Chinese as a secular deity as early as this period. Even so, these figurines still remain some features of Herakles-Vajrapāṇi, such as the lion/tiger-scalp helmet, the paws tied on chest, and even the club that reappeared in his hand in one tomb. There is some debate among Chinese researchers as to the identity of the helmets, namely, whether they are scalps of lions or tigers. Some scholars think that the headgear of the warrior figures originated from warriors wearing the pelts of beasts in Tubo (modern Chinese Tibet, and parts of Qinghai and Gansu) and Nan Zhao (modern Yunnan). Even if this hypothesis sounds somewhat rational, the images of the warrior from Tubo might also have been influenced by Central Asian and Indian Buddhism, that is to say, by the Herakles-Vajrapāṇi of Gandhāran art, as Hsing has suggested (Hsing 2005: 139-145).

⁷ For the details of the clay statue, see Hsing 2005: 124-126, fig. 31.



Figure 4. Herakles-Vajrapāṇi with the Buddha, from a Gandhāran scene of the Buddha's First Sermon; c. second century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 1980.527.4. (Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, CC Zero Licence.)



Figure 5. Herakles-Vajrapāṇi with the Buddha, in a Gandhāran scene of the Dīpaṅkara Jātaka from Jamalgarhi; c. second century AD. Kolkata, India Museum. (Photo: courtesy of the Warburg Institute, London.)



Figure 6. Clay sculpture of Vajrapāṇi, Maijishan Grottoes, Gansu, China. Bei Zhou (北周, AD 557-581). (Photo: author, August 2007.)



Figure 7. Vajrapāṇi (right) wearing the pelt of a tiger in Dunhuang Grottoes, Cave no. 205, early Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907). (Photo: after Liu 2003, 129, pl. 112.)



Figure 8. Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) tricolour warrior figurine, excavated in the village of Hongqing, Baqiao district, Xi'an. Xi'an Museum. (Photo: author, July 2013.)



Figure 9. Pottery warrior figurines from a tomb of the Tang dynasty, Changzhi, Shanxi Province. (Photo: after Shen 1962, pl. 8.1-2.)

Figure 10. Pottery warrior figurine from a tomb of the Tang dynasty, Xian County, Hebei Province. (Photo: after Wang 1990, pl. 4.1.)

Why should the Buddhist Vajrapāṇi become a warrior figurine guarding the tombs of lay people? The answer must be sought in the Chinese cultural tradition, especially in funerary culture. Strictly speaking, in China, there were no discrete religions like Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Confucianism was the soul or core of Chinese traditional culture, but it has never been a religion. It was a kind of secular ideology, or an ethical philosophy that provided directions for the administration of the state and personal morality and social behavior; in another words, it was a way of life for Chinese people. Confucius was a man not a god. He was a teacher, a master, not a founder or a preacher of one religion. His ideas were favored by the emperors of China in the Han Dynasty and gradually became the principles of Chinese political and social life. So when Buddhism spread into China it faced a vast challenge to make itself adaptable to the needs of Chinese society. It was not until the Tang Dynasty that the sinicization of Buddhism was realized. It is not a coincidence that Vajrapāṇi become a warrior guarding the tomb at this time. Since Vajrapāṇi had the duty and power to protect the Buddha, it was entirely feasible that he could protect the dead in the nether world.



From Nike-Apsara to Feitian (飞天)

The Apsara was originally a female sprite of water and cloud in Indian mythology. Its earliest extant sculptural representation is probably that of the *stūpa* at Bharhut in central India, dated to the second century BC (Figure 11). At that date the anthropomorphic image of the Buddha had not yet been created, so the two winged Apsaras fly face to face above a *stūpa*, one of the symbols of the Buddha, holding a garland and a



Figure 11. The winged, flying Feitian (Apsaras) holding garland and palm, on a relief Bharhut, India, second century BC. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington. (Photo: author, March 2014).

palm branch respectively in their hands. It seems possible to discern some similarities between them – and particularly the various apsarās in Gandhāran art – and Nike, the Greek goddess of Victory. Can we assume that there are links between them? Some evidences seem to support that possibility.⁸

At first, we should notice the basic features of Nike's image in classical art. She has two wings, and often holds a wreath with one or both hands when she dedicates it to other Greek gods and goddess, such as Zeus or Demeter. On the coins of Hellenistic kings, she frequently stands on the extended hand of Zeus and flies to crown him with a wreath. We can also see such examples on the 'Poros' medallion issued by Alexander, and the coins of Seleukos I and some Indo-Greek kings (Figure 12).⁹ It is noteworthy that the Apsara in Gandhāran art played similar roles. Generally, she flies above the head of the Buddha and has two wings, as we see both in Gandhāra and Central Asia (Figure 13), and in the temple of Tumshuk in Xinjiang, China (relief preserved in the Musée Guimet in Paris). However, with her spread into China, her image was changed. For example, she became a dancing-girl or a musician with an instrument such as flute, *pipa*, or *sheng*, instead of the garland, palm branch, lotus branch, or similar. Her



Figure 12. Nike and Zeus on the reverse of a silver tetradrachm of Seleukos I, minted at Sardis, 282-281 BC. New York, American Numismatic Society, 1944.100.78148. (Copyright: ANS, <http://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.78148>).

⁸ John Boardman has also noticed the similarity between the Apsaras and the classical Victory (Nike), and attributes it to influence from the west. See Boardman 2015: 132-133, fig. 70.

⁹ On the coins of some Graeco-Bactrian and Indo-Greek kings, Nike stands holding wreath. See Boppearachchi 1991: 379, figs. 10 (Antimaque I, 5), 14-15 (Antimaque II, 1), 22 (Eucratide I, 22-23), 31-33 (Menandre I, 22, 27, 31-34), 37 (Straton I, 29-30), 44 (Philoxene 12), 48 (Epandre, 2-3), 49 (Menandre II, 1-2), 50 (Artemidore, 5-6), 51 (Archebios, 11). Some coins show Nike standing on the right hand of Zeus and crowning him. See Boppearachchi 1991: 380 and figs. 26 (Heliocles, 3.4), 49 (Menandre II, 4), 39-40 (Antialcidas, 1-5, 9, 12, 13).



Figure 13. Gandhāran relief showing the Buddha with Brahma, Indra, and Apsaras; c. second century AD. Art Institute of Chicago, inv. 1995.263. (Photo: Art Institute of Chicago, CC0 Licence.)

feet, even her legs, were gradually lost and became a long flying skirt fluttering in the wind (Figures 14-17).¹⁰ Although there needs to be further discussion about whether Nike actually influenced the evolution of the image of the Apsara in Gandhāran art, it is a fact that the Apsara iconography originated in India and finally become the Feitian in China, a flying dancing-girl or a musician in the Buddhist paradise. In the Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271-1368), the Buddhist Feitian even reappeared on the funerary stelae of Nestorian Christians in the city of Quanzhou, in Fujian Province in the south of China (Figures 18 and 19).

In the evolution of Nike-Apsara to Feitian, we can see three evident features. The first concerns her identity. Generally, she preserved her female gender. Of course, there are some Apsaras who look male or masculine in Chinese Grottos, yet they are only exceptional cases.¹¹



Figure 14. Painting of Apsaras in Cave no. 7, the Western Thousand-Buddha Grottoes, Anxi Yulin Grottoes. North Wei Period (AD 386-534). (Photo: after Dunhuang Academy 1997; fig. 204).



Figure 15. Painting of an Apsara in Cave no. 285, Dunhuang Mogao Grottoes. Western Wei period (AD 535-556). (Photo: after Dunhuang Academy 1982a, fig. 138).

¹⁰ Note that such Apsaras appeared firstly in Dunhuang, Yulin Grottoes in the North Wei (AD 386-534), then spread into the central China. Also see Sizer 1925: plates ('stone votive stele', left); Priest 1930.

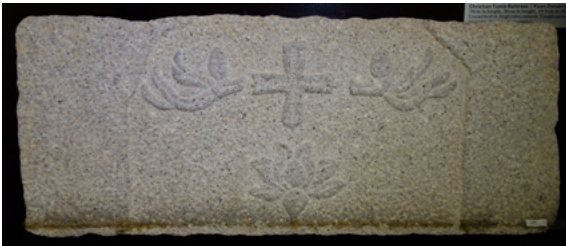
¹¹ Such Apsaras mainly appeared in Dunhuang Grottos and Yungang Grottoes. See Zhao 2008: 81, 125.



Figure 16. Sandstone relief of flying Apsara from Tianlongshan Grottoes, Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. Northern Qi Dynasty, c. AD 570. Kansas City, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (Photo: Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, <https://art.nelson-atkins.org/objects/22804>).



Figure 17. Earthenware tile with image of Apsara/Feitian, from Xiuding-si pagoda, Henan Province. Tang Dynasty, seventh century AD. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. 65.178.2 (Photo: Metropolitan Museum, CC0 licence).



Figures 18 and 19. Flying Feitian (Asparas) on the funerary stelae of Nestorians, Yuan Dynasty (AD 1271-1368). Quanzhou Maritime Museum, China. (Photos: author, December 2015).

The second is her intimate relation with the Buddha. Although she ceases to be the flying sprite (the celestial maiden) who offers a wreath or garland to the Buddha, she still appears above or around him. Her role seems changed. She becomes a musician, or a dancer whose duty is to celebrate the happiness and joy of Sukhāvātī, the Pure Land or Western Paradise. The third is her posture of flying in the sky. Actually, her flying posture did not change even if her legs and wings were gradually lost in China.

Apart from the two more characteristic cases above, we could identify some other, similar examples of iconographical transformation, such as the Atlantean figures of Gandhāra art and the god of sun, Surya. Although the manner of their transformation and adaption in China cannot be detected clearly, it seems certain that they have a direct relationship with some Greek deities and Buddhist figures. Their evolution in China also reflects the sinicization and secularization of Gandhāra art.

From Atlas to Atlantean Figure (力士)

Atlas once supported the Titans in their war with the Olympians. After their defeat, Zeus condemned him to hold up the sky (Ouranos) on his shoulders at the western edge of the earth (Gaia) and prevent the two from embracing. So in the classical art, he often carries a globe or a celestial sphere on his back. Many similar images appear in Gandhāran Buddhist sculptures (see also Stewart's contribution to the present volume). Generally, the 'Atlas'-figure squats supporting the *stūpa* on his shoulders or with two hands upwards, and sometimes he has two wings on his back (Figure 20; cf. Figure 3 in Stewart's contribution to the present volume). Later his image was brought to China, and he became a strong Buddhist figure who could support the very high Buddhist tower (塔, Chinese-style *stūpa*) (Figure 21). His image was also borrowed for the tombs of lay people to support the stone bed on which the coffin was laid. By this time, his role had become that of a strongman (力士, atlantean figure), with no wings, with his two hands held up to support the stone bed (Figure 22).



Figure 20. Gandhāran 'Atlas' figure in schist; c. second century AD. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, inv. M.71.73.136 (Photo: LACMA Public Domain image.)

From Helios-Sūrya to Kingly Figure

Some Chinese scholars have noted the similarities between the murals of the Sun god (日天) (Figure 23) and the moon god (月天) (Figure 24) in China and the relief of Sūrya (the *deva* of the Sun) discovered in Bodh Gaya in India (Figure 25). They further identify them with the Greek sun god Helios, who rides a chariot drawn by four horses every day from dawn to sunset (Figure 26) (Zhang 2009: 38-40). Similar figures have also been discovered on some pieces of brocade of the Sui and Tang Dynasties in the north-west of China. The most representative one is from Dulanreshui region of Qinghai Province. A kingly figure wearing a crown sits on a chariot drawn by six horses, three on



Figure 21 a and b. Atlantean figures supporting *stūpas* with their hands. From Cave no. 10, Yungang Grottos. Northern Wei period, AD 471-494. (Photo: author, September 2017.)

either side, pointing in opposite directions (Figure 27). It is noted, however, that such figures had fused the Greek Helios with other cultural elements from Iran, India, and China (Zhao 1995: 179-183, fig. 4.3). This link seems rational and logical, but we need more evidence to verify this hypothesis because the differences between the images of Sūrya and Helios on the Chariot is too distinct. Nevertheless, transitional evidence might illustrate the mystery of this transformation. On the coins of some Indo-Greek Kings, we find very similar images of Helios who drives the chariot drawn by four horses (Figure 28) (Bopearachchi 1991: fig. 23 [Plato, 1-3]). Most probably this is the image that served as model for the creation of sun god (Sūrya) on a chariot in Gandhāra art (Boardman 2015: 99). Similar examples could also found in Mathurā and in Gandhāra during the first to third centuries (Figure 29). The appearance of similar images in the murals of Dunhuang caves and the brocade of Dulanreshui are presumably the result of this acculturation.

Conclusion

The secularization or sinicization of some Graeco-Buddhist gods of Gandhāran art was a natural evolution. In fact, it also mirrored the sinicization of Buddhism itself. It is astonishing that Buddhism, an Indian religion, finally became a localized religion and one of the three main

streams of the Chinese cultural tradition that influenced Chinese history for nearly two thousand years. Generally in history, Buddhism was welcomed by the ruling classes, represented by the emperors of all dynasties, except a few of them who persecuted Buddhism in specific periods, mainly because of economic conflicts. Consequently, the doctrine of Buddhism largely accorded with the ideology of the monarchs, and was helpful and useful for imperial rule. Some Confucianists and Taoists initiated debates rejecting Buddhism on the basis of specific problems: for example, which system emerged earliest in China – Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism – and which one should occupy the highest position in Chinese society? And should Buddhists worship the emperors or not? But the final outcome was that



Figure 22 a, b, c, and d. Naked strongmen supporting the stone funerary bed from the tomb of Sima Jinlong; AD 484? Datong Museum. (Photo: author, September 2017.)



Figure 23 a and b. The Sun God in his chariot, Cave no. 285, Dunhuang Grottoes. (Photo: after Dunhuang Academy 1982a, fig. 116.)



Figure 24 a and b. The Moon Goddess in her chariot, Cave no. 285, Dunhuang Grottoes. (Photo: after Dunhuang Academy 1982a, fig. 117.)



Figure 25. Relief of Sūrya from the stūpa at Bodh Gaya, India; 2nd-1st century BC. (Photo: after R.R. Mitra, *Buddha Gayā: The Hermitage of Śākyamuni* [Calcutta, 1878], 406, via British Library Flickr Commons.)



Figure 26. Marble relief of Helios from the Temple of Athena, Troy; early 3rd century BC. Berlin, Altes Museum. (Image: after Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon, 6th edn., vol. 9 [Leipzig, 1907], 143; scan by NN via <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helios-Metope,_Troja,_Athena-Tempel.jpg>.)



Figure 27 a and b. 'Helios' on two pieces of brocade, Northern Dynasty and Sui Dynasty, discovered in Dulanreshui, Qinghai Province. (Image: after Zhao Feng 1995: fig. 1.5, 6.)



Figure 28. Silver coin of the Indo-Greek king Plato, second century BC. Reverse with image of Helios standing on a chariot drawn by four horses. (Photo: courtesy of Professor Osmund Bopearachchi.)



Figure 29. Sūrya, the sun god, winged, with nimbus, From Mathurā. First century AD (?). (Photo: after Coomaraswamy 1927: fig. 44.)

Buddhism adapted itself thoroughly to Chinese tradition and became one of the main components of Chinese civilization.¹² With the deeper and wider spread of Buddhism in China, its mysticism lessened progressively and its sinicization and secularization become swifter. Some Buddhist figures gradually became members of the Chinese pantheon and were worshipped as folk deities by ordinary Chinese people. So it is understandable that Herakles-Vajrapāṇi, the Nike-Apsara, Atlas, and Helios-Sūrya could be transformed into Chinese-style figures and accepted willingly by Chinese, even become the funerary motifs such as Vajrapāṇi and Atlantean figures.

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