

Conference Paper

East & West: Searching out for the Beauty Ideal

Sergelen Batchuluun¹ and Orgilbold Narandorj²

¹Professor of design department, Mongolian University of Science and Technology

²Lecturer of design department, Mongolian University of Science and Technology, founder of “Tengri Media” Agency

Abstract

This article describes the results of a comparative analysis of the ancient Greek sculpture Doryphoros in the western and eastern art canons, as well as the selected sculptures of the Bodhisattva Bodhisattva Maitreya from Gandharan, Indian, Nepalese, and Mongolian art. The authors also explore and integrate the aspects of the artistic notion of an ideal beauty, including aspects of oriental philosophy, aesthetics, human body’s proportion and compilation theory. This comparative analysis is based on G. Zanabazar’s sculpturing features and his skills through theoretical aspects. Studies have shown that Zanabazar’s Bodhisattva Maitreya is fully compatible with the classic western proportions and Buddhist strict canon. We show that both western and eastern artistic iconography have been developed to produce perfection in anthropomorphic expression. The classic correspondence was in religious art, as the western mentality seems to be the opposite and the imitation of both nature and the beauty of one’s sense of beauty.

Keywords: human body proportion relevance with art, corporeality, Buddhist art, Zanabazar, Bodhisattva Bodhisattva Maitreya, golden ratio, artistic canon

Corresponding Author:
 Sergelen Batchuluun
 b.sergelen@must.edu.mn

Published: 25 August 2020

Publishing services provided by
 Knowledge E

© Sergelen Batchuluun and
 Orgilbold Narandorj. This article
 is distributed under the terms of
 the [Creative Commons](#)
[Attribution License](#), which
 permits unrestricted use and
 redistribution provided that the
 original author and source are
 credited.

Selection and Peer-review under
 the responsibility of the
 Questions of Expertise in
 Culture, Arts and Design
 Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Art history as a whole is an exploration of human idea of beauty. Although the Western and Eastern point of view on beauty are different, the pursuit of beauty began thousands of years ago with the first civilizations. Many theories have emerged to elucidate the theory of beauty as the perfect proportions. Among them is the classical, or golden, ratio created by the ancient Greek Polykleitos and further developed during the Renaissance period by Leonardo Da Vinci and Albrecht Durer. We explore these artistic canons applying them to the images of Buddhist deities, specifically Bodhisattva Maitreya, that focuses eastern observation by analysis and synthesis. An interesting conclusion was drawn from Zanabazar’s sculpture of Bodhisattva Maitreya, by comparing artistic canons of Europe and Tibet. For the first time in the field of Mongolian art, we are analyzing correspondences between Western theory and artistic principles of Mongolian religious

 OPEN ACCESS

art. The analysis uniquely utilizes image of Bodhisattva Maitreya, deity of the High Enlightenment, from the Harvard Museum of Arts.

2. Eastern & Western Theories of Aesthetic: Similarities and Differences

Art has great power to create beliefs. At some point art works influenced humankind to evolve – a fact proven in art history. In this sense, the concept of expressiveness in art is more important, because it is grounded in the ideas of harmony and beauty.

The nature of beauty is one of the most enduring and controversial themes in Western philosophy and is — with the nature of art — one of the two fundamental issues in philosophical aesthetics. Beauty has traditionally been counted among the ultimate values, with goodness, truth, and justice. It is a primary theme among ancient Greek, Hellenistic, and medieval philosophers, and was central to eighteenth and nineteenth-century thought, as represented in treatments by such thinkers as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Burke, Kant, Schiller, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Hanslick, and Santayana. From the beginning of the twentieth century, beauty has ceased to be an artistic purpose and has plunged into philosophical studies. However, there has been an increasing interest in studying the issues in the last decades. [1]

The concept of beauty is described by the ancient Greek term "kalokagathia". The word "kalokagathia" is translated from Greek as "beauty and good." It describes the ideal of a perfect person developed in Ancient Greek culture. The idea that a person's inner and outer appearance must be perfectly harmonious is common in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Kalokagathia was the "ideal" of a perfect political, educational, ethical and aesthetic human being. Thus, in the Western philosophy of art and in the art itself there was the tendency to express inner perfection through the external beauty. However, in Western science the concept of the "corporeality" is described as a natural and cultural phenomenon at the junction of medical, natural and human sciences [2, p. 185]. For example: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, when considering the physical nature of human being, evaluated it merely as an external "reality", not an object's perspective, but a sense of meaning, a sense of depth. Indeed, the corporeality is the junction of inner and outer world expressed by the collective consciousness [3, p.182].

Those who were raised with the concept of kalokagathia had the tendency to express inner beauty by their external physical beauty. For example, the Greek sculptor

Polykleitos, who emphasizes external and internal beauty in his work "Diadumenos", harmoniously balanced the body and inner personality, while the Renaissance genius Michelangelo Buonarroti's "Last Judgment" depicted on the wall of the Sistine Church characterized Jesus Christ with gentleness, despite his youth and powerful muscles. The inner strength of Christ is manifested in his exaggerated physical appearance, but also in his compassionate appearance. It is obvious that with this role Michelangelo strove to present neither god nor man but the Superhuman. Auguste Rodin enlightened impressionism by portraying the realist genius of European literature Honoré de Balzac (*Balzac, étude de nu, grand modèle*) with a large belly, short arms, short legs, and advanced age. From its final version, this work is more appealing in its thinking and pursuit. In all three of these works, we can see a very general idea of a perfect man in the Western art.

It has been argued that in the whole Eastern Buddhist teaching meditation on well-being alleviates the suffering of selfishness, leading to the stage of perfection [4, p.77]. The East was never far away from the teaching of Buddha, and so was the art. Eastern ethics and aesthetics differ in their meditation characteristics. Therefore, the concepts of a corporeality and imagination were also different. Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Japanese, and Mongolian artists never depicted a muscular body to represent an enlightened being (deity). Instead, the body was absorbed by the more elegant and delicate features. At the same time, they never forgot about the proportions.

In the sculptures depicting the Five Tathagatas, the works of the Mongolian polymath, prodigious sculptor, painter, architect, poet, costume designer, scholar, and linguist High Saint G. Zanabazar, we can see the concept of the oriental essence in its perfect implementation. For example, let's take a look at his image of Amitābha. The Amitābha is depicted following the same canons as the Buddhist iconography. The deity Amitābha created by Zanabazar is depicted perfectly in the meditation position, sitting on the lotus throne, with his right hand raised over his left hand, with his palms facing up. His face radiates a light of peace, his body is broad, waist narrow, and the general physique is flexible within the taut pose. This image signifies the perfect mind in deep meditation. Although High Saint G. Zanabazar refused to depict a meditating face in his works, he "animated" his image and imbued it with authentically Mongolian appearance. He described the "mind" through body and appearance. Thus, in the work of High Saint G. Zanabazar, perfection coexists with the meaning of wisdom. [5]

3. Specifics of Perfect Human Description: Analysis and Synthesis

We have considered the following canons using a comparative analysis and synthesis:

1. Polykleitos's canon based on Golden Ratio
2. *The Vitruvian Man*, designed and developed by Leonardo da Vinci
3. Calculation ratio of the human harmony by Albrecht Durer
4. Tibetan ratio canon
5. Doryphoros by Polykleitos, 450-440 BC. Roman marble replica from Naples National Archeological Museum
6. G. Zanabazar, Bodhisattva Maitreya Buddha 17th century from Choijin Lama Museum
7. G. Zanabazar, Bodhisattva Maitreya Buddha 17th century from Harvard Museum of Art / Arthur M. Sackler Museum.
8. Bodhisattva Maitreya, 1st –2nd century Gandhara School. San Diego Museum of Art.
9. Maitreya, 11th–12th century. Indian style
10. Maitreya, 11th century. Nepal Casting. The Metropolitan Museum of New York.

In comparative synthesis, the authors selected Polykleitos's Doryphoros and four vertical Maitreya works of Buddhist art dating to the 2nd and 17th centuries.

First, let us turn to the analysis of Bodhisattva Maitreya from Gandhara school. Gandhara School is a Buddhist school of art created under the influence of Greek Hellenism. For the first time this school has depicted the deity in anthropomorphic form. Since it was developed under the influence of ancient Greek art, it must have been created according to the classic Polykleitos canon. We analyzed the image of Bodhisattva Maitreya Buddha from the San Diego Museum of Art. This Bodhisattva Maitreya deity, ornamentally dressed, with a muscular body, beard and curly hair, expressing the influence of Hellenism, loses in comparison to Polykleitos's sculpture Doryphoros. An interesting question is why the Gandhara's Bodhisattva Maitreya, created under the influence of Greek art, was made in a sloppy, plump way. The reason may be the difference in the relations between the East and the West, but there may have been an attempt to convey a mighty image, which, however, was the first attempt

to make an image of a deity. It was more traditional to depict a deity by representing divine features and decoration. Therefore, the artist didn't use emotion nor attempted to express divine enlightenment or emotion. The coincidence of the Tibetan ratio in the Gandhara Bodhisattva Maitreya also indicates the differences and the evolution of the Buddha figurine. The aspect ratio used for the deity's face is larger than in the Tibetan canon, and smaller than the Durer's canon. The large-eyed, tall-nosed figure looks pretty European, with its movement of the eyebrows towards the nose. On the other hand, the wide chin shows distinctive facial type of local population. This was the time when the Mathura and Gandhara schools developed, and in the 4th to 6th century B.C.E., the center of the Gupta kingdom moved to India.

Second, let us analyse the Indian style Bodhisattva Maitreya. It is a simple sculpture adorned with the large quantity of jewels, made of richly embellished and ornate ornaments. However, the sculptors were much too fascinated by the artistic representation of the deity's appearance rather than in the expression of ethical angle. As for the face, it has a broad nose and an elegant lower lip, but there's no expression as enlightenment, meditation or concentration. The feet of the deity are motionless, with pivoting stiffness in movement, low elasticity; the figure has too long hands, and low plasticity. In ratios for the sculpture, it is based on the octal system which does not differ much from the Western and Tibetan ratios. Facial ratios are similar to the Tibetan canon. The movement seems to be stagnant, while the Bodhisattva Maitreya of Zanabazar is a magnificent piece of art, with a very delicate and gentle movement.

Analysis on the Zanabazar's Bodhisattva Maitreya: For the first time, the sculpture stored in the Harvard Museum of Art, was analyzed by the Mongolian academic community. We also made comparison with the Bodhisattva Maitreya Buddha stored in The Chojjin Lama Temple Museum. Bodhisattva Maitreya has a resilient, eloquent realistic movement, which is a hallmark of Zanabazar's art. Because of the movement of body weight from one leg to another (a sign of the future deity), the waist has narrower width and slower circular movement compared to Bodhisattva Maitreya preserved in Mongolia: it can be said to have more feminine features. On the other hand, the Mongolian Bodhisattva has broader shoulders, shallower waist and is more masculine, also in facial features. In Buddhist art, there is no definite gender definition in the depiction of deities or Bodhisattva, which was expressed in the quests for the First Bogd.

The ideal of Mongolian female beauty included perfect features, soft white skin, thick lips, narrow black eyes, dark face and long delicate eyebrows. In terms of facial beauty, women are praised for their beauty, but there is also a saying that a handsome man looks like a woman. Thus, it is not surprising to see these images in the faces of deities. It

is very interesting that these features also appear on Bodhisattva Maitreya stored in the Harvard Museum of Art. The shape of the lips of the gods is important, and the content of any form is less prominent. But in the image of Bodhisattva Maitreya by Zanabazar, the lips have sensual definition, they are thick and shaped like an opening flower. On the other hand, the upper lip of Bodhisattva Maitreya in the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum is slim, while his lower lip looks thick, with an overall image of a small smile. Comparing Leonardo Da Vinci's facial ratio with Zanabazar's sculpture shows that there is significant overlap. This proves that the artist was knowledgeable enough to base his images on actual facial expression of human face. By adding Tibetan iconography images to this two Maitreyas, we can see that the proportions seem the same, but there are obviously some minor changes. Therefore, despite strict Tibetan canon demands to make the image of the deity alive, a careful study of the proportions of the facial features of a living person, as well as of the Mongolian face shows that the resulting canonic images were based on stylized and formalized approach to unique human forms. When analyzing the overall body shape of the sculptures, there are similarities between the movement of the two sculptures: the posture, the weight shift, the hands movements and position, the pendant and the costume. If we superimpose the golden ratio of Albrecht Durer and Leonardo Da Vinci's canon on Bodhisattva Maitreya stored in Harvard Museum of Art (the more feminine version), it coincides perfectly. Bodhisattva Maitreya stored in Chojjin Lama Temple Museum (the more masculine version) had slightly shorter leg. The 32 inner and 80 outer attributes of the deity required by canon are all integrated in the image making it more realistic. By comparing the sculptures of Bodhisattva Maitreyas above, it is possible to see the searching, changing, and creative nature of Zanabazar's art. Based on this, we can conclude that Zanabazar reflects the structural features of the Mongolian human body and also the gender.

4. Comparing the Canons of East and West

By comparing the Tibetan iconography and the image of Doryphoros made according to the classic golden ratio, we see that in Tibetan canon the neck is slightly shorter, while the chest and shoulders are higher. The other parts of the images are pretty similar to each other. Despite the opposite point of view as the Western and Eastern canons not only are the same in relation but also reflect anthropological features. In this article, we present comparative measurements demonstrating how the evolution of the Buddhist art. Sometimes it is proposed that the emergence of a canon or an iconography impedes the artistic thinking of an artist. This may also be true. For example, in ancient Egypt

throughout its history the rigid canon governing the depiction of images of its religion-based art were unchanged (unevolved) for 3000 years. But on the other hand, artistic geniuses like Zanabazar always sought out and developed the enriching aesthetic views within the rigid confines of the canon. Russian scientist M. Shishin said that the Buddhist artistic canon of art was permeated by the concepts of Love, Truth, and Beauty. They represent the highest spiritual values and constants of Mongolian culture. Indeed, Mongolian artists such as Zanabazar immortalized the works of Mongolian arts and its spiritual value.

5. Conclusion

Art canons can be derived not only from the artistic theory, philosophy and science of aesthetic but also from human body structures, mathematics and geometric methods, such as golden ratio. Therefore, striving to understand the artistic ideal of perfect man, the authors of this article combined Western, Oriental philosophy and aesthetics, human proportions and the issues of composition theory.

After comparing the Eastern and Western art canons with the works of art by Mongolian, Indian, Nepalese, and Greek artists, we have come to the following conclusions:

1. Both Western and Eastern artistic iconography have been developed to produce an image of perfection giving it anthropomorphic expression. The Western mentality seems to be the opposite, based on the imitation of nature and sense of beauty
2. Using comparative method, we demonstrate that the works of Zanabazar perfectly correspond with the classical proportions of the Western art. From this we can conclude that his works are at the same level in relation to all the classical works of the West. Religious character of Tibetan canons mean that they cannot step from the canon requirements but must adhere to them. However, G. Zanabazar's artworks reveal that he included a lot of creative innovations in his works while avoiding breaking the canon rules. His careful calculations, measurements and observations resulted in his interpretation of the figures of Bodhisattva Bodhisattva Maitreya.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

References

- [1] Sartwell, C. (2017). Beauty. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved January 19, 2020 from <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauty/>.
- [2] Vilyaeva, S. I. (2014). The Historical Development of the Understanding of Physical Beauty. *Journal of Cultural Studies Analytics*, vol. 29, pp. 185–201.
- [3] Nekrasova, N. A. and Goryainov, A. A. (2008). The Phenomenon of Human Corporeality. *Journal of Cultural Studies Analytics*, vol. 11, pp. 182–185.
- [4] Lama, A. G. (2003). *Meditation and Multidimensional Consciousness*. Moscow: Sadkhana Publishers.
- [5] Demenova, V. V. and Urozhenko, O. A. (2010). *Prostranstvo smyslov buddiyskoy metallicheskoj skul'ptury*. Yekaterinbug: Ural State University.