

Colossal Buddha Statues along the Silk Road

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Abstract

Beginning in the northwestern region of India, and spreading through Central Asia and the rest of Asia along the Silk Road, the making of colossal Buddha statues has been a major theme in Buddhist art. The colossal Buddha statues predominantly feature Śākyamuni (the Historical Buddha), Maitreya (the Future Buddha), and Vairocana (the Transcendant Buddha), and they were fashioned out of religious devotion and frequently in conjunction with notions of Buddhist kingship. This paper examines the religious, social and political circumstances under which these colossal statues were made, focusing on examples from Central and East Asia made during the first millennium CE. Beginning in the 1990s, there was a revival of making colossal Buddha statues across China and elsewhere. The paper also briefly compares the current wave of building colossal Buddha statues with historical examples.