

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND MEANING OF THE LOTUS SYMBOL IN - BUDDHIST ART

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The objective of this paper is to investigate the historical evolution and meaning of the lotus symbol in Buddhist art with reference to the religious literature and archaeological evidence. The research methodology of this study is mainly based on collected data from literature and artistic work. Data will be described and analyzed in order to search for the historical evolution and meaning of lotus symbol.

As a visual object, lotus symbol became a powerful medium of communicating miscellaneous thoughts of Buddhists throughout many centuries. Although some figures marked or drew on wall paintings and sculptures communicate their thoughts to a certain extent, they have not yet been completely investigated. To expose the meaning of the lotus symbol, this paper intends to find whether there are historical influences on the Buddhist art of lotus. For example, according to an Egyptian myth, the first sight or divine life had connections with a lotus flower representing the evolutionary process of nature. In Indian myths, the sum of petals conveyed a specific idea. For instance, a lotus of eight petals indicates eight directions and it was originated in the cardinal point of Brahma symbolizing the creation of visual objects by force of magic. In Roman art, the lotus of eight petals is represented as a symbol of the internal parts of earth and heaven in its circumference. It is believed that the lotus of thousand petals symbolizes the last reflection. The general shape of triangle in its center and the formless shape of the lotus probably symbolize great emptiness. According to new interpretations the symbol of lotus always represents the philosophical reality of the metaphysical act. Moreover in ancient societies such as Japanese, Chinese, and Egyptian the lotus symbolized a universal wheel. General aspect represented through lotus by these nations is the sun, which they believed as the cause of the origin of universe. In Egyptian art, the lotus is the symbol which represents the reality of the world. According to Buddhist literature there is ample evidence to develop a cosmology during the 6th century B.C. Thus, in early history, the lotus symbol evolved in a cultural process with miscellaneous thoughts. Although, we mainly focus on the different interpretations of the lotus symbol in this study, the manner in which this symbol has been used in Buddhist art should also be highlighted.