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Charles Lang Freer and the collecting of Chinese Buddhist art in early-twentieth-century America

Daisy Yiyou Wang

The industrialist and founder of the Freer Gallery of Art, Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919), was the first American collector to assemble a major museum collection of Chinese Buddhist art. He also travelled to China to create and commission a significant body of textual and visual materials documenting Buddhist art and architecture. This article makes use of archival sources to analyze qualitatively and quantitatively his collecting in this field. Although Freer has long been considered a collector who embodied the notion of art for art's sake, it is shown here that in addition to aesthetic considerations, his Chinese Buddhist collection was shaped by scholarship and by a spiritual approach, as well as by market conditions and international relations. This case-study will help us understand the complex dynamics of collecting in this field in early-twentieth-century America.

THE founder of the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, Charles Lang Freer (1854–1919), played a critical role in the history of collecting Chinese art in the United States from the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century. After accumulating substantial financial resources in the railroad car manufacturing business in Detroit, Freer retired from active business around 1900 and devoted himself to art collecting. He is remembered as a leading American collector and advocate of Asian art who left a noteworthy legacy at the time of his death – the national museum of Asian art then under construction and an eclectic body of American and Asian artworks.

Among the areas of strength in the collection that Freer bequeathed to the Freer Gallery of Art was his Chinese collection, which had begun to take shape in 1893 and which had grown in volume and quality since that time, laying the foundation of the gallery's important Chinese collection today.¹ Freer assembled the first major American museum collection of Chinese painting and the most important Neolithic jade collection from the Liangzhu culture (c. 3300–2250 BC) outside China. Another category that figures prominently in the collection is Buddhist art. Freer was the first American to assemble a major museum collection of Chinese Buddhist art consisting of sculptures, paintings, ceramics and textiles, acquired

between 1902 and 1919. In addition, he created and commissioned a significant body of textual and visual materials documenting Buddhist art and architecture in China. Although Buddhist art was a later collecting interest for Freer, occupying about 12 per cent of the Chinese collection in volume, it formed a crowning achievement of the collection with particular strength in stone and gilt-bronze sculptures from the fifth to the eighth centuries and Buddhist paintings from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries AD (see online Appendix 1). His pioneering collection has played a significant role in stimulating the study of Buddhist art and has been featured in the gallery's installations and in a number of special exhibitions, such as *Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan* presented at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC, in 2011 (Fig. 1).

How did Freer form a significant collection at the time when interest in Chinese Buddhist art was at the nascent stage in America? Why did it fascinate him and where did he situate it in his own multi-cultural collections and in America's national museum of Asian art? Through a study of Freer's Buddhist art collection, with a focus on paintings and sculptures as well as archival materials ranging from his diary to his correspondence, purchase records, and photographic images, this article examines the complex factors that



Fig. 1. The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery's presentation of the exhibition *Echoes of the Past: The Buddhist Cave Temples of Xiangtangshan*, showing the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, and the monsters from the North Cave at the Northern Xiangtangshan, 2011. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

influenced the formation of his collection. It first traces Freer's trajectory of collecting from 1902 until his death in 1919, with a particular focus on his visits to China in 1909 and 1910–11. Other factors that shaped his understanding and collecting of Buddhist art are analyzed, including scholarship, his spiritual approach, international relations, and prevailing market conditions. The article ends with a discussion of the tension between his desire to collect and display Chinese Buddhist art in America and his concern over preservation of Buddhist monuments in China.

Forming the Chinese Buddhist art collection

The beginning, 1902–1909

The first Chinese Buddhist piece in the collection acquired by the Freer Gallery is a painting depicting five protectors of the Buddhist Law (*luohan*) laundering by a stream (Fig. 2). With an inscription recording the artist's name, Lin Tinggui, and the year, 1178, it is Freer's first major Chinese painting acquisition, and remains one of the most important items in the entire collection. As a set, this painting – along with ninety-nine other paintings – was brought from China to the Buddhist monastery of Daitokuji in Kyoto, Japan around the fifteenth century. In 1894 this painting and over eighty others from the set were sent to Europe and the US to be exhibited and sold. According to Ernest

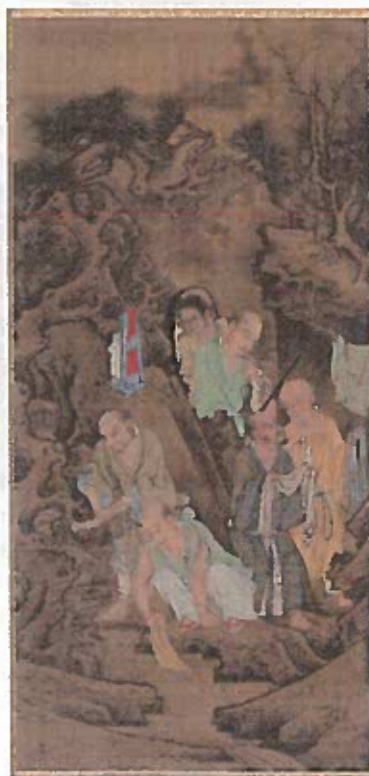


Fig. 2. *Luohan Laundering*, Lin Tinggui, China, Southern Song dynasty, 1178, hanging scroll (mounted on panel), ink and colour on silk, 112.3 x 53.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, gift of Charles Lang Freer, F1902.224. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

F. Fenollosa (1853–1920) was an authority on Japanese art at the Museum of Art and History in Tokyo. He was presented as an expert on organizing the exhibit and purchased it for the Freer Gallery as his adviser and collector of works of art.² Five paintings in this set (F1907.139).³ In 1903, a three-dimensional Chinese glaze ceramic relief (F1903.221).⁴ This relief, coming from the Bunkyo (1867–1940) collection, was a consultant to Freer.

Compared to Freer's earlier interest in Japanese art, his later interest in Chinese material (see online article) was a later interest in Chinese material (see online article). His first Buddhist acquisition was a Buddha and a Bodhisattva – in Japan at \$500 each. The same year, he received a bronze statuette of Guanyin as a gift from Matsuki \$5,600 for his collection – an early Chinese eleven-headed Guanyin Pagoda in Xi'an (F1902.224).

The year 1909 was a crucial commitment for Freer. In 1909, while Freer's collection was concentrated on Chinese painting purchases in 1909.⁵ He added that year, mostly gifts, to medium scale purchases were Buddhist, a Chinese, mainly from Ta Ge Chung. In 1907, Freer's Buddhist sculpture purchases were mostly from lights of Freer's collection. Freer's first bronze sculpture purchase was \$200 from Mahan in Shanghai (F1902.224). Freer identifies it as a devotee Zhao Lu grandfathers, the

F. Fenollosa (1853–1908), then curator of Japanese art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and a leading authority on Japanese and Chinese art, this painting was presented as a gift to Fenollosa to thank him for organizing the exhibition at the museum. In 1902 Freer purchased it for \$1,640 from Fenollosa, who served as his adviser and supplier of Japanese and Chinese works of art.² Five years later, Freer purchased another painting in this set from an unknown source in Tokyo (F1907.139).³ In 1903 he paid \$204.75 for his first three-dimensional Chinese Buddhist object – a sixteenth-century glazed ceramic tile with a seated bodhisattva in relief (F1903.221). The tile, made to decorate a building, came from the prominent Japanese dealer Matsuki Bunkyo (1867–1940), who had been a major supplier and consultant to Freer since 1896.⁴

Compared to painting and ceramics, sculpture was a later interest in Freer's collecting of Chinese material (see online Appendix 1). In 1907 he acquired his first Buddhist stone sculptures – two small stelae with a Buddha and two flanking bodhisattvas in relief – in Japan at \$50 each (F1907.505, F1907.506). In the same year, he received from Matsuki a small gilt-bronze statuette of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (*Guanyin*) as a gift (F1907.521). In 1909 Freer paid Matsuki \$5,600 for his first major sculptural acquisition – an early eighth-century figure depicting the eleven-headed *Guanyin* originally from Qibaotai Pagoda in Xi'an (F1909.98).

The year 1909 marked the onset of a more serious commitment. As indicated in online Appendix 1, while Freer's prior collecting activities had concentrated on Chinese ceramics, his sculpture and painting purchases began to increase significantly in 1909.⁵ He added fifty sculptures to his collection that year, mostly gilt bronzes and stone stelae of small to medium scale. Among them forty-seven pieces were Buddhist, and twenty-three were purchased in China, mainly from the Beijing-based antique shop Ta Ge Chung. In contrast, he acquired no Chinese Buddhist sculpture in 1908, and only four pieces in 1907, mostly from Japanese sources. One of the highlights of Freer's 1909 acquisitions in China was a gilt-bronze sculpture depicting *Guanyin*, purchased for \$200 from Mah Zuh Kee, probably an antique shop in Shanghai (F1909.266). Bearing an inscription that identifies it as a commission in AD 453 by the female devotee Zhao Luyuan, to commemorate her deceased grandparents, this piece is the earliest known dated

example depicting *Guanyin* as a lotus bearer (*padmapani*). While all of Freer's Chinese painting acquisitions before 1909 were made in Japan or from Japanese sources, in 1909 he added ten Buddhist paintings to the collection, all of which came from Chinese sources including three antique shops – Loon Gu Sai, Riu Cheng Chai, and Pao Ming Sai – and an individual Mr Ho in Beijing.⁶ From 1909 to his death in 1919, Chinese Buddhist art was collected consistently every year.

It is noteworthy that Freer's Japanese Buddhist art collection pre-dated his Chinese Buddhist acquisitions.⁷ Only during his third visit to China in 1909 did he begin in earnest to look for Buddhist art in China. His prior visits in 1895 and 1907 were brief and limited to Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Shanghai. In 1909 he spent nearly six weeks in China and travelled extensively for the first time. Experiencing at first-hand the vastness of the country, as well as the breadth and depth of its art and culture, was critical to the reshaping of Freer's collecting strategy, signalling that while he still held Japanese art in high regard, his focus was now shifting to Chinese art. Freer was convinced by his adviser Fenollosa that, historically and aesthetically, Chinese and Japanese art shared one tradition and that the sources of inspiration of many examples of Japanese art and architecture could be traced to China. During his visit to China in 1909, Freer wrote, 'The glimpse I am getting of old China during this hurried trip confirms the impression I have received from various sources during recent years. In comparison, Japan seems only an imitative doll!'⁸

The reasons for shifting the focus of his collecting from Japanese to Chinese art were also practical. In 1906 Freer's gift – his growing personal collection of Asian and American art and a gallery yet to be constructed – was accepted by the US government. With a future national museum in Washington, DC, and a collection for the American people in mind, Freer embarked on more ambitious collecting activities, placing greater emphasis on Chinese art. Although his Chinese collection had begun in 1893, by 1908 it remained in no way comparable in volume or quality to his Japanese and Persian collections – two areas of prior interest. Online Appendix 1 shows an imbalance among the various categories of Chinese art he collected from 1893 to 1908, at which time his main interest lay in ceramics. From time to time, a few paintings, textiles and bronzes were added. Prior to



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1907 jade and sculpture were not represented in the collection. In order to fill these gaps and raise the overall level of his Chinese collection, Freer travelled to China in 1909 to purchase works of art in substantial quantity and at competitive price. This strategy of going directly to the source was consistent with his approach to American art collecting from the late nineteenth century onwards: rather than relying on dealers' brokerage, he preferred purchasing works directly from the likes of James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) and other artists as a way to lower costs.⁹

While in China in 1909, Freer as an experienced collector active in the US, Japan, and Europe, became convinced that China – particularly Beijing – was the most important treasure-house of art that he had ever encountered. He was thrilled to discover that supplies of Chinese paintings were rich, and that they were less expensive than works of inferior quality that could be found in Japan and Europe – despite the idea he had held earlier that ancient Chinese paintings had largely been destroyed in China and could now be found only in Japan. In 1909, while Freer purchased in Japan forty-five Chinese and Japanese works of art at a cost of \$29,008, he spent \$24,856 on 191 pieces of Chinese works in China. In these acquisitions the average price per piece on the Chinese market was nearly one fifth of that in Japan.¹⁰ To avoid media attention and potential competitors, Freer hired local assistants and rented a place away from his hotel in Beijing in which to examine and purchase works offered by visiting dealers and collectors.¹¹ To his delight, he found no serious competition from anyone with knowledge and ambition comparable to his own. His purchases in a month filled up nine cases, one of which weighed over 300 pounds – hence the rumour arose that Freer was a buying agent for American auction houses. Online Appendix 1 shows that in 1909 Freer acquired 298 pieces of Chinese art, which in volume marked his highest annual acquisition since 1893. With his background as a successful businessman, Freer knew well the law of supply and demand: concerned at the possibility of rising prices on the art market fuelled by his substantial purchases, he ended his buying activities after a month's stay in Beijing and began to plan his next trip to China.¹²

The last trip to China, 1910–11

Freer's last and longest visit to China lasted from September 1910 to February 1911 and culminated

in a study trip to the Longmen Caves and other Buddhist sites in Henan province. His first-hand experience of the grandeur and the splendour of Buddhist art and architecture in China was critical to his development as an art collector; it not only enhanced his understanding of Buddhist art in general and the acquisitions he had made in particular, but also influenced his future collecting activities. Although he spent about seven weeks in total in Japan immediately before and after this stay in China, it was China that was undoubtedly his primary destination. His main goal was to study and collect Chinese sculptures, paintings, ceramics and related works produced between the third century BC and the thirteenth century AD.¹³

After arriving in Beijing in September 1910, Freer immediately gathered the team of assistants with whom he had worked in the previous year and set up the same space to review and purchase works from dealers and collectors. Freer's concerns about rapidly rising prices in the art market and the growing number of collectors from Europe, coupled with the unstable political situation in China and the Chinese government's possible ban of exporting art, prompted him to collect with a sense of urgency.¹⁴ Largely due to this trip, the volume of Freer's annual Chinese acquisitions in 1911 reached its highest point since 1893 (see online Appendix 1). Buddhist art figured prominently in his acquisitions during 1911, and China remained his main source of supply.¹⁵ Among forty-six Chinese Buddhist sculptures collected that year, thirty-four pieces (mostly small or medium-size gilt-bronze and stone sculptures) came from China. A sixth-century marble stele depicting the future Buddha Maitreya, for example, was acquired from the antique shop Ta Ge Shang in Beijing, a major supplier during this trip (F1911.411). In addition to sculptures, Freer collected thirty-three Buddhist paintings in 1911, which formed the largest of his annual acquisitions in this category between 1893 and 1919. Among them, twenty-nine pieces came from Chinese sources, mostly from antique shops and collectors in Beijing and Shanghai.

From 19 October to 13 November 1910 Freer was away from Beijing, visiting Buddhist sites and other places of interest in Henan province. The highlight of this journey was a pilgrimage to one of the most important Buddhist sites in China – the Longmen Caves, where he spent nearly two weeks exploring

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Long before art collection Buddhism, i Japanese Bu familiarized l raphy. Prior ited many im including the Horyuji Terr Temple Con 1910 Freer h cated collect greatest ach and Renaissa stantly comp had studied Cave Temple direct access ments of Ch our and line world.¹⁷ He sponsored se largest at Lo

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caves and sculptures created mainly from the fifth to the eighth centuries. This visit to Longmen firmly established the centrality of Chinese Buddhist art as the manifestation of supreme spirituality and perfection of form in Freer's East Asian art collection.

Long before Freer started to build his Chinese art collection, he had developed a keen interest in Buddhism, its art and its architecture. He collected Japanese Buddhist paintings and sculptures, which familiarized him with Buddhist concepts and iconography. Prior to his 1910–11 trip to China, he had visited many important Buddhist sites and monuments, including the Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, India, the Horyuji Temple in Nara, Japan, and the Borobudur Temple Compounds in Magelang, Indonesia.¹⁶ By 1910 Freer had become a well-travelled and sophisticated collector with exposure to some of the world's greatest achievements in Egyptian, Greco-Roman and Renaissance art. With this background, he constantly compared Chinese Buddhist art with what he had studied earlier. His encounter with the Longmen Cave Temples at a time when few Westerners had direct access to them convinced him that the achievements of Chinese Buddhist art – particularly in colour and line – were unparalleled anywhere in the world.¹⁷ He wrote in his diary about the imperially sponsored seventh-century Fengxiansi Temple, the largest at Longmen:

Its immense figures are extraordinary, especially the two great figures standing side by side on the huge north wall . . . I am reminded by these two figures of the stronger sculpture of Greece and the work of Michelangelo, but I feel at Lung-men [Longmen] in the presence of these two huge giants greater imagination, keener character, deeper truth and more force than I have felt in the sculpture at Athens or Rome. To be sure the environment here is matchless and the history and tradition here like that at Athens and Rome is very important, but at Lung-men there is a religious spirit felt far finer to me than at the other cities named.¹⁸

Freer's visit to Longmen reconfirmed his conviction that the sources of Japanese Buddhist art could be traced to China. He compared the relief sculptures in the Guyang Cave – the earliest of the Longmen Caves, built in the late fifth and the early sixth century – with the mural paintings in Horyuji and other Buddhist temples in Japan:

The vertical sides of the walls contain three regular lines of large recesses, each containing beautiful Kwanyins [Guanyin] all having attendants recall the painted wall decorations at Horiuji [Horyuji] . . . The decorations cut in varying ways

and of many designs around these recesses are unequalled elsewhere at Lung-men [Longmen] and excel in delicate grace and charm anything of the sort I have heretofore seen . . . floating angels with musical instruments suggests the source of decorations seen at several great Japanese temples.¹⁹

Chinese Buddhist art held additional appeal for Freer as he saw the Longmen Caves as a manifestation of aesthetic harmony and as a point of contact among elements from a variety of cultures, a quality he enthusiastically sought in forming and displaying his multicultural collections. He marvelled at the Buddhist images at Longmen: 'Every line has its reason and meaning all the result of various influences. Buddhism, which then had millions of followers all over northern and central China, furnished inspiration; Gandhara, Greek and Sassanian models furnished fresh forms.²⁰ Yet in Freer's eye the monuments at Longmen were of supreme quality, as he noted, 'Here we have suggestions of Greece, Egypt and even Italy – Botticelli. But I doubt if anywhere better action, refinement, grace of line or feeling can be seen.'²¹

By this time Freer possessed an impressive knowledge of Chinese art. His interest and perspectives were clearly reflected in his diary as well as the photographs and rubbings he commissioned during visits to a number of Buddhist sites. When he saw the Iron Pagoda built in the Song dynasty (960–1279) in the Youguo Monastery in Kaifeng, he particularly noted its glazed tiles in the diary:

Priest said . . . the prominent yellow tiles with seated Buddhas were placed in the openings by the first Ming Emperor Hung wu [Hongwu] . . . This pagoda is very beautiful seen nearby or from a distance. Its low toned colors are very fine and at a distance resemble ancient iron with exquisite patinas.²²

His encounter with the tiles *in situ* might have given him a new and contextualized appreciation of the comparable tile he had provisionally collected seven years previously from Matsuki Bunkyo (F1903.221). His visit to the Iron Pagoda also stimulated his interest in purchasing in Kaifeng a fragment of a tile with yellowish glaze, which was reportedly used in the construction of the Iron Pagoda (F1911.549).²³

Freer's experience with Buddhist objects and sites in China clearly influenced his later art collecting in terms of subject-matter, style and period. The Central Binyang Cave, built in the early sixth century, impressed him with the monumental Buddha in the rear wall (Fig. 3). Freer particularly noticed its hand gestures and



Fig. 3. Buddha and two disciples in the rear wall, Central Binyang Cave, USA A.1 12.5. GN.092. Charles Lang Freer Papers, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, gift of the estate of Charles Lang Freer. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

garment with graceful folds across the entire front of the pedestal.²⁴ The Buddha bears striking resemblances to the sixth-century stone sculpture of much smaller scale acquired by Freer four years later from the New York-based art dealer Dikran Kelekian (1868–1951) for over \$10,000 – one of the highest prices he paid for a single Chinese Buddhist sculpture (Fig. 4).

Freer left China in 1911, eager to return to visit the Yungang Buddhist Cave Temples in Datong, Shanxi province, and other sites in China. One month after his return to the US, he suffered a stroke, which rendered him unable to travel abroad thereafter. In the same year, the Xinhai Revolution ended China's dynastic history and turmoil plagued the country for the next few years.

New directions, 1912–1919

Although Freer was unable to travel to China after 1911 due to deteriorating health and upheavals in China, his interest in Buddhist art objects of that



Fig. 4. Seated Buddha, China, Eastern Wei dynasty (534–550), stone, 131.4 x 82 x 32.6 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, gift of Charles Lang Freer, 1914.36. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

country remained robust. The year 1913 saw his largest annual acquisition of forty-nine Chinese Buddhist sculptures, while in 1916 he acquired forty-two sculptures and fifteen paintings (see online Appendix 1). Appendices 2 and 3 show that Chinese Buddhist paintings and sculptures stood out in terms of market value in his 1916 acquisitions; the average prices of \$1,130 paid by Freer for paintings and of \$1,032 for sculptures were higher than that of any other categories. The price-range of his 1916 Buddhist sculpture acquisitions varied: twelve stone sculptures, mostly of medium- or large- scale, were distinguished by their

impressive average price, in bronze or iron, purchased at the

After 1911, Freer acquired large-scale, high-quality sculptures, including large-scale, high-quality sculptures, including sculptures originally purchased at Xiangta. He was willing to pay high prices for stone sculptures. One of his major Chinese acquisitions was a large-scale bodhisattva sculpture acquired in that year (the American acquisition number is 1925) (F1916.35). *River*, attributed to the Northern Wei (c.1049–1106), is one of the most treasured Chinese emperor

Freer's Chinese acquisitions in 1912 and 1919 came from distinct areas of special interest. Freer's acquisitions came from Buddhist painting and Chinese collector and collector Y'uen C. T. owner of the S. K. T. Wong (Wang) Company C. T. the owner of the S. Van Ching Lee (Freer ten Buddhist that year.²⁵ Such Freer believed that things in general were Although Freer's resources around the suppliers between 1911 with whom he had his last two trips. After 1911 he relied on who gave him access of art. Freer informed areas of interest; agents, from collection antique markets.

impressive average price of \$3,167, while twenty-nine bronze or iron sculptures, mainly small-sized, were purchased at the average price of \$132.

After 1911, Freer increased his efforts to acquire large-scale, high-quality Chinese Buddhist stone sculptures, including a group of near life-size sculptures originally from the sixth-century cave temples at Xiangtangshan in Handan, Hebei province. He was willing to purchase outstanding examples of stone sculpture at prices comparable to those of major Chinese paintings and American paintings, two other areas of concentration in his art collecting. For \$5,000, he obtained in 1916 the early eighth-century Chinese stone sculpture depicting a standing bodhisattva (F1916.365). For the same amount, he also acquired in that year the oil painting *Late October* by the American artist Dwight William Tryon (1849–1925) (F1916.354a–b), as well as the painting *Shu River*, attributed to the Chinese painter Li Gonglin (c.1049–1106, F1916.539). The *Shu River* was one of the most treasured pieces in the collection of the Chinese emperor Qianlong (1711–1799).

Freer's Chinese Buddhist art purchases between 1912 and 1919 came from dealers and firms with distinct areas of specialization. In 1916, for instance, his acquisitions came from nine suppliers. Among them, Buddhist paintings were sold exclusively by native Chinese collector and dealers, including the Shanghai collector Y'uen Chi P'ang (Pang Yuanji, 1864–1949), owner of the Shanghai antique firm *Baoyi zhai* K. T. Wong (Wang Jiantang), owner of *Lai-yuan & Company* C. T. Loo (Lu Qinzhai, 1880–1957), and the owner of the Shanghai antique firm *Wenyuan zhai* Van Ching Lee (Li Wenqin, c.1869–1931), who sold Freer ten Buddhist paintings for a total of \$11,550 that year.²⁵ Such an arrangement was attractive, for Freer believed that the quality of their abundant offerings in general was high, and their prices competitive. Although Freer made acquisitions from a variety of sources around the globe, his most important suppliers between 1912 and 1919 were Chinese dealers with whom he had forged special relations during his last two trips to China between 1909 and 1911. After 1911 he relied on this select group of suppliers, who gave him access to a large number of fine works of art. Freer informed his suppliers of his particular areas of interest; dealers gathered objects from their agents, from collectors, and from important sites and antique markets. On receiving approval from Freer,

they shipped objects to him for inspection. Freer was often in a privileged position to determine the final prices in these transactions; the amount paid was usually 50 to 70 per cent of the price asked.²⁶

In contrast, the Buddhist sculptures that Freer collected between 1912 and 1919 were offered mainly by non-Chinese dealers and firms. Abel William Bahr (1877–1959), for example, supplied mostly low-value, small-scale bronze sculptures, like the head of a Buddha for \$5 (F1916.218). On the other hand, the prominent New York-based dealer Dikran G. Kelekian (1868–1951) focused on high-value Chinese stone sculptures. In 1916 he sold Freer eight sculptures at the average price of \$4,369.²⁷ Among them was the standing *Guanyin* for \$17,500 – the highest price Freer ever paid for a single Chinese Buddhist object (F1916.364).

The significant and consistent growth of Freer's Buddhist collection from 1912 to 1919 formed part of his overall Chinese collection-building project, which were related to a number of important events in his life as well as new developments in the circulation and reception of Chinese art. The availability of a large quantity of high-quality works from China after the fall of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) contributed to the burgeoning market for Chinese art in America. At a time of political and financial unrest, imperial collections, important private collections, and excavated objects surfaced on domestic and international markets. Such a condition was noted by Freer in 1916:

The present season in America has been very active in art circles. Many beautiful paintings and the other art objects have come here from China during the last few months . . . I am sure that many Chinese collectors are now disposing of their chief treasures, largely, I believe, on account of the general insecurity in China.²⁸

Although the US government formally accepted Freer's gift in 1906, it was only in 1915 that the site of the Freer Gallery of Art – the future home for his collection – was determined. A year later, plans for the gallery were approved and the ground was broken. Freer is known not only for his ambitious collecting projects but also for his meticulous and exacting curatorial attention to collection display in his future gallery – as in his own residence in Detroit. As the gallery was taking its shape, Freer's collecting activities and his vision for display in the future gallery became more narrowly connected. According to the floor-plan, created around 1916, the Chinese collection was

to be given the greatest amount of space assigned in Asian art in the gallery (Fig. 5).²⁹ Freer became more actively involved in Chinese collecting. As online Appendix 1 indicates, although he began to collect Chinese art in 1893, half of the over 3,000 Chinese objects he bequeathed to the gallery, including some of the outstanding paintings, sculptures and jades, were acquired from 1915 to 1919. The pace of his collecting accelerated between 1915 and 1917 with all the major categories except painting reaching their highest point in volume since 1893. In 1916 the total number of Freer's annual Chinese purchases reached its apogee of 663. Moreover, in 1915 Freer settled in New York City – the international centre for Chinese art trade – where he worked closely with leading dealers and collectors. It is noteworthy that all of his 1916 Chinese Buddhist sculpture acquisitions came from New York-based dealers, including Dikran Kelekian, Abel William Bahr, and Yamanaka Sadajirō (1866–1936).

Compared to the Japanese and Persian works that interested Freer around the same time, Chinese objects available on the market were competitive in price and quality. This became a key factor in Freer's location of Chinese art at the centre of his Asian

collecting activities in his last few years. By 1914 he no longer focused his purchasing effort on Japanese art because he found it was possible to buy at lower price much finer examples by early Chinese artists.³⁰ In 1916 Freer spent over \$300,000 on 663 Chinese pieces, including many important paintings, jades and sculptures. In contrast, he purchased in the same year sixty-six Japanese pieces, including sixty-two Edo period (1615–1868) textiles, for a total sum of around \$2,584. In the field of Persian art, Freer noted that the price of fine Persian ceramics became much higher during the 1910s than he felt justified in paying and he resolved to concentrate on Chinese art collecting.³¹ In 1914 while purchasing a twelfth- or thirteenth-century Syrian ceramic jar for \$5,010 (¥1914.58), he acquired from the Paris-based antique firm Worch & Company a late-sixth-century Chinese Buddhist gilt-bronze altarpiece for less than \$5,000 (Fig. 6).³²

The momentum of Freer's Chinese Buddhist art collecting, however, was affected by America's entry into World War I in April 1917 and the consequent heavy increase in taxation and shortage of transportation. On 3 October 1917 the US Congress passed the War Revenue Act, increasing income taxes to unprecedented levels in order to raise funds for the

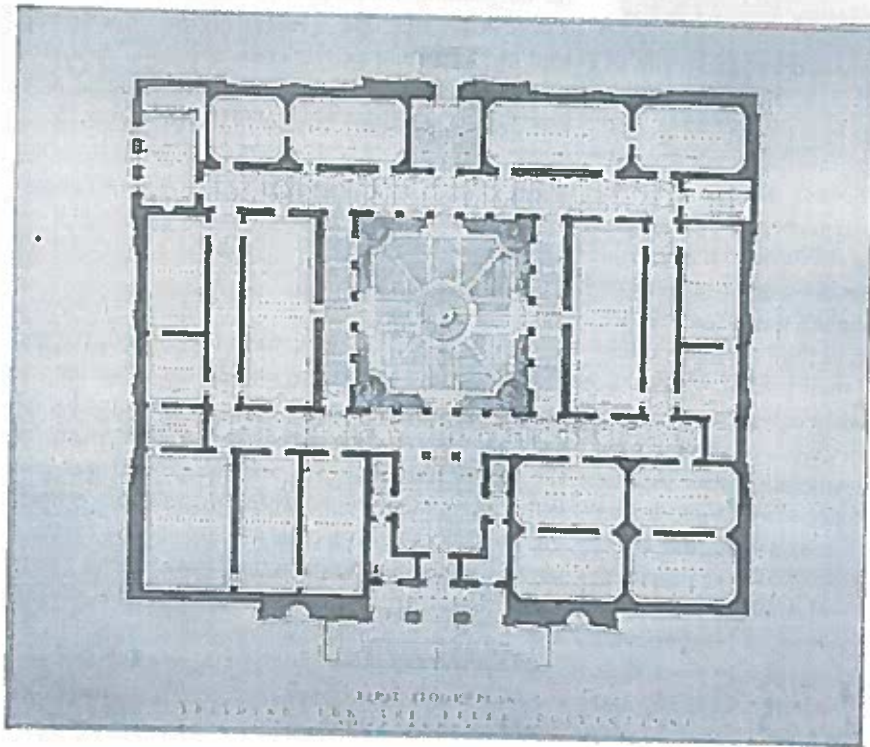


Fig. 5. First-floor plan, building for the Freer Collections, c. 1916. Freer Gallery of Art Building Records. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.



Fig. 6. Altarpiece Sui dynasty, 597. Gallery of Art, gi of the Freer Gall

war effort. Fo from 10.3 per One month af Freer wrote to Boyuan zhai S

The money den ened the purch after peace has risky to attempt friends have all ing seriously of

The War Rev a tax of 10 per By April 1918 American gov importation o reason for the in China betw

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Fig. 6. *Altarpiece with the Amitabha Buddha and two bodhisattvas*, Sui dynasty, 597, bronze with gilding, 32.1 x 14.1 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, gift of Charles Lang Freer, 1914.212-h. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery.

war effort. For incomes of \$1,000,000, the rate went from 10.3 per cent in 1916 to 70.3 per cent in 1918.³³ One month after the passage of the War Revenue Act, Freer wrote to the owner of the Shanghai antique firm *Boyuan zhai* Seaouke Yue (You Xiaoxi):

The money demanded for war purposes has very much lessened the purchases of Chinese art in this Country, and until after peace has been declared, I feel that it would be very risky to attempt to make further sales in this Country. My friends have all practically stopped buying and I am thinking seriously of doing likewise myself.³⁴

The War Revenue Bill was enacted in 1918, placing a tax of 10 per cent on all artworks sold in the US.³⁵ By April 1918 the shortage of shipping had led the American government to take steps to prohibit the importation of art objects.³⁶ This was no doubt one reason for the pause in Freer's purchases from dealers in China between March 1918 and June 1919.

Due to all these constraints, Freer's overall Chinese purchases fell from 398 in 1917 to seventy-three in

1918, reaching the lowest point in terms of annual acquisitions between 1912 and 1919 (see online Appendix 1). His Buddhist art purchases in 1918 were meagre; he acquired one painting and one sculpture, both from K. T. Wong in January. After the war ended, his collecting activities began to recover in 1919: the total number of Chinese purchases increased from seventy-three in 1918 to 178 in 1919, when five Chinese Buddhist paintings and four Buddhist sculptures were added to Freer's collection.

Why Chinese Buddhist art?

Freer as a connoisseur and curator-collector

Often characterized as an art-for-art's-sake type of collector, Freer was drawn to the aesthetic quality of Chinese Buddhist works. When visiting the Youguo Monastery in Kaifeng in 1910, he devoted a great deal of attention to a group of *luohan* figures, documenting in detail their materials, techniques, colours, texture and condition:

These eighteen Lohans [luohans] are of excellent artistic quality – the nine in that part of the temple still with roof are in fair condition – the remaining nine have little or no cover and are much damaged, but still retain great expression – These Lohans are of wood – partially hollow – over the wood, plaster, in parts, ¼ of an inch thick was applied and over the plaster paper which in turn was painted and gilded, the color being now very fine-gold, rose-red etc. But the wood without its plaster, paint or paper, shows rugged and forceful work.³⁷

This approach was articulated during his visit to the cave temples at Longmen, when he claimed: 'I am not here to look into the intricate questions of inscriptions and dates, even if I were competent, I shall be more deeply interested in learning what I can of its aesthetic importance, its beauty, and its relation to the other sculpture and painting of which I am a student.'³⁸ Such a comparative method was illustrated by Freer's study of a stone figure of the Buddha's disciple Ananda in the Binyang South Cave. He associated the painted stripes on the robe of Ananda with the patchwork design on the Buddhist garments depicted in paintings in his own collection, and probably the painting of a *luohan* he attributed to Li Gonglin in particular (F1904.297).³⁹

Freer's interest in Buddhist art, however, went beyond the concept of beauty and formal analysis. His visits to Buddhist sites and his collecting of Buddhist

art reflected his growing interest in Chinese religions, culture and history. His personal library held not only art literature but also a substantial collection of books on Chinese history, philosophy and Buddhism, such as Ernest J. Eitel's *Handbook of Chinese Buddhism*. He came to Longmen and other Buddhist sites as an inquisitive student who had familiarized himself with Chinese culture and history. For example, he visited Luoyang with a clear understanding of the history of the city as a major cradle of Chinese civilization, an ancient capital and a Buddhist centre.

Freer's deep interest in Chinese Buddhist art was stimulated and informed by the scholarship of his time, particularly that of Fenollosa, Freer's adviser and a leading American authority on Asian art. In his book *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, Fenollosa proposed the centrality of Buddhism in the development of Chinese art as he stated: 'The introduction of Buddhism into China from India, and eventually through China to Korea [Korea], Mongolia, Manchuria, and Japan, was one of those stupendous revolutions, like the carrying of Christianity to the Gentiles, which obliterate racial and national lines, and bring humanity to pay common tribute to spiritual forces.'⁴⁰ Fenollosa's book was intended to trace how profoundly Chinese and Japanese civilizations in general, and art in particular, were gradually transformed by Buddhism. In line with Fenollosa's ideas, Freer commented on the impact of Buddhism on Chinese art after visiting a few cave temples at Longmen:

Buddhism, which then had millions of followers all over northern and central China, furnished inspiration . . . more of the spiritual essence of nature found expression, less materialism prevailed . . . More knowledge of the world outside of China was creeping in and making its art universal . . . Buddhism was adding quiet thoughts – refuge in an ideal world – philosophy and beauty was understood.⁴¹

In terms of medium and period, Freer was focusing on Chinese Buddhist paintings, which he dated from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries. His sculpture collecting concentrated on works he dated between the third and the eighth century as a way of complementing his growing Chinese painting collection, since surviving early paintings were extremely hard to find.⁴² It is noteworthy that while actively pursuing Buddhist art, Freer became increasingly interested in ancient Chinese objects including bronzes, ceramics and jades produced in the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220) or earlier. Aiming at building a well-rounded

Chinese collection, Freer began to collect nearly all the major categories of Chinese art in 1911 (see online Appendix 1). In this light, Buddhist sculptures which he ascribed to the third to the eighth centuries would have filled a gap in chronology and category between his ancient art collection and painting collection, and thus provided a cornerstone for his overall Chinese collection.

The floor plan created around 1916 for the future Freer Gallery signalled Freer's emphasis on Chinese Buddhist sculptures, which were to occupy the Sculptures Room, the second-largest room among the gallery's eighteen exhibition rooms, and the Peacock Room (Fig. 5).⁴³ The floor plan also alluded to Freer's chronology- and medium-based vision for Chinese art display: the Sculptures Room was placed at the northeast corner of the gallery adjacent to two Bronzes Rooms and the Chinese Paintings Room. The Sculptures Room would stand out with three-dimensional works of compelling scale given that the rest of the gallery space was mainly to be occupied by small to medium-sized ceramics and bronzes as well as two-dimensional works including American paintings, prints and drawings, and Chinese and Japanese paintings.

In collecting both Buddhist paintings and sculptures, Freer showed little interest in works he dated to the fourteenth century or later. This preference can be partly explained by Fenollosa's teaching that Chinese art reached its apex in the eighth century during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), and again to a second culmination in the eleventh and the twelfth centuries during the Song dynasty, to fall from that point to a low level of degeneration.⁴⁴

In the mid-1910s early Buddhist figurative sculptures from China proved to be particularly attractive to Freer and were gaining prominence as a recognized category of fine art in American museums. The 1916 inaugural exhibition in the Harrison Rotunda of the newly built University Museum (currently the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) featured more than thirty Chinese sculptures. The sculptures on view were highlighted by the museum director George B. Gordon (1870–1927) in his preface to the exhibition catalogue, where he wrote:

In assembling the collections to form the exhibition, first attention was naturally given to the Fine Arts and the keynote of the exhibition is struck by the Chinese sculptures. These powerful creations of early Chinese artists exercise a dominating influence and sustain the supreme position of

sculpture the highest ideals.

While collecting Freer and Gordon Chinese stone expert in Chinese articulated the sculpture in the category of Chinese Art, I stone monument of the Chinese meaning that these stone Chinese people. Thus that were Chinese sculptures': attention to the facade from western Greece, of the art of C

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sculpture the world over as a means of giving form to the highest ideals . . .⁴⁵

While collectors and museum professionals like Freer and Gordon marvelled at the aesthetic quality of Chinese stone sculptures, Freer's acquaintance and an expert in Chinese art, John C. Ferguson (1866–1945), articulated the uneasiness of the Western concept of sculpture in the discourse of Chinese art at a time when the category called 'Chinese sculpture' remained a subject unfamiliar to Westerners.⁴⁶ In the book *Outlines of Chinese Art*, Ferguson carefully chose to use the term stone monument instead of stone sculpture. In his discussion of the Longmen Caves Ferguson introduced the Chinese term, *shixiang* or stone figure, and *zaoxiang*, meaning erected according to design. He stated that these stone images were religious emblems to the Chinese people rather than items for aesthetic appreciation. Thus, he cautioned those American museums that were enthusiastic about the so-called 'Chinese sculptures': 'It is sufficient for me to have called attention to the fact that whatever admiration they may elicit from westerners, whose traditions have been derived from Greece, these figures do not form an essential part of the art of China.'⁴⁷ He further explained:

Shapes and decorations have been as subsidiary to sculpture as illustrations are to the text of a book. The beauty of the writing of the inscription has been the standard by which Chinese connoisseurs have judged the value and importance of stone monuments. This is very different from the standards of western countries where calligraphy has never been elevated into a place among the Fine Arts.⁴⁸

Two important publications in 1909 illustrated different approaches to Chinese stone images. The French Sinologist Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918), who played an important role in stimulating interest in Chinese Buddhist sculptures in the West, published his *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale* as a compelling record of his 1907 trip to the cave temples at Longmen and other Buddhist sites.⁴⁹ The first two volumes published nearly 1,200 photographic images recording Chavannes' journey, which inspired Freer's later commission of 160 glass plate negatives documenting Chinese Buddhist monuments and other places of interest.⁵⁰ In the same year, the prominent Chinese official and collector Duanfang (1861–1911) had his collection of over 300 stone pieces published in the catalogue *The Records of the Stones in the Tao Studio Collection* (*Taozhai cangshi ji*). The catalogue's focus is clearly

on inscriptions; it has no illustrations, and some entries contain passing references to Buddhist images. The main interest of traditional Chinese scholars and collectors like Duanfang in Buddhist stone images was primarily epigraphic and historical. This approach was markedly different from that of most Western art collectors of Freer's time, who were collecting figurative stone sculptures primarily for their aesthetic value rather than inscribed pieces without fine images.

As a connoisseur, Freer believed that the ability to distinguish the genuine from the fake was critically important to students of Chinese art and copies offered opportunities for study.⁵¹ He noted that forgeries were everywhere on the art market, which posed the biggest challenge for collectors of Chinese art.⁵² While he purchased in 1909 in London (perhaps knowingly) a modern piece in the style of a sixth-century gilt-bronze sculpture of *Guanyin* at the price of \$35 (F1909.402), a few months later he acquired in Beijing an authentic comparative piece for \$250 and kept both in the collection, probably for study purposes (F1909.264).

Although Freer was regarded as a leading expert and collector of Chinese art, he had no formal training in the subject, or in Buddhism. In his time Chinese painting scholarship was still at its infancy in Europe and America, where few authenticated early paintings were available for study. A number of paintings Freer considered to belong to the Song dynasty have been reattributed and given a Ming (1368–1644) or a Qing dynasty date. A group of *luohan* paintings he acquired as works by the Chinese painter Li Gonglin has been reassigned to the fourteenth-century Japanese artist Ryōzen (F1904.297). Freer named all the sculptures of bodhisattvas he studied at Longmen *Guanyin* regardless of their different identities and attributes. Given the large-scale pillage that took place soon after he left China, Freer's detailed observations on Chinese Buddhist objects and sites in his diary and correspondence along with the photographs and rubbings he commissioned remain valuable despite these errors.

Spiritual quest

Freer's initial interest in Buddhism can be traced back to 1894 and 1895, when he began to study Buddhist monuments during his first visit to Sri Lanka, India

and Japan. He came to the Longmen Caves in 1910, not only as an art student but also as a pilgrim of sorts embarking on a spiritual journey. His diary and correspondence, often mixing the objective and the emotive, revealed an intensely spiritual and nearly mystical experience. He noted the impact Longmen had on him:

Its grip upon me constantly increases, it makes me almost feverish an influence from the souls of these stone saints . . . Centuries of work of the great Chinese artistic periods are represented here – it cannot be appreciated in full by any one person during an average life time. Its beauty is varied and has something new to disclose each time it is seen. It's of a fascinating and illusive kind. Behind and deeper is its spiritual meaning which forces itself upon one constantly, and this side of the matter is entirely beyond my understanding. I should have to live many lives to grasp it.⁵³

Although Freer was not formally initiated into Buddhism, he related on a personal level to the Buddhist concepts of suffering, incarnation and enlightenment, having experienced a difficult childhood, the premature deaths of his parents and siblings, and his retirement from active business in his mid-forties. Buddhist teachings and art objects offered him an opportunity to be in communion with a higher realm beyond the gruesome reality he had to deal with. The acute awareness of mortality due to his deteriorating health toward the end of his life added a sense of urgency to his search for spiritual consolation and therapeutic power in Buddhist art. When Freer was seriously ill, his close friend and fellow art collector Agnes Ernst Meyer (1887–1970) brought him a pair of hands broken off from a ceramic *luohan* figure. Meyer observed Freer's deep emotional response to their spiritual quality: 'Frequently he sat thoughtfully in his big armchair next to the window lovingly clasping these hands in his.'⁵⁴

Freer's fascination with Chinese Buddhist art can be placed in a broader intellectual and social context in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries. As the notion of the religion of art – that is, the experience of art as a mystical moment of contact with a world beyond ordinary consciousness – gained currency in Euro-American art circles, Chinese Buddhist art, particularly that encountered by Freer *in situ* at Longmen, appealed to him as a perfect manifestation of the confluence of art and religion.⁵⁵ The instability of rapid industrialization and urbanization, economic upheaval, and

war spurred an interest in things long ago and far away. Freer, as well as his fellow Asian art collectors Fenollosa and William Sturgis Bigelow (1850–1926), turned to artistic and spiritual traditions in Asia. In the United States, there was a growing interest in Buddhism, marked by the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 when Sōen Shaku (1860–1919) travelled to the US to represent the Zen school. When Freer embarked on his first Asian journey to visit Buddhist sites in 1894, *The Gospel of Buddha*, an anthology of addresses presented at the World's Parliament of Religions, was published.

Preserve or purchase?

From the early 1910s onwards, major Chinese sites including Longmen were severely damaged due to the lack of care and protection, and the subsequent removal of sculptures from their sites and their dispersal to Japan, Europe and the United States. The pillage on a massive scale of important Buddhist cave temples coincided with the onset of instability in China. Turmoil and weak governance encouraged illicit practices in the antique trade, as observed by the prominent international dealer of Chinese art C. T. Loo: 'Following the Revolution in 1911 sculptures gradually came into the market and many fine examples were taken from the Lung men [Longmen] caves.'⁵⁶ Although Chinese laws and regulations restricting the export of antiquities were in existence as early as 1914, dealers found ways to secure and ship large-scale, high-quality pieces out of China.⁵⁷

During and after his visit in 1910 to the Longmen Cave Temples, Freer was alerted to the man-made and natural damage to the site. He arrived at a time when the caves were given little attention by the Chinese. During his two-week stay, he saw only a couple of native visitors. The local government was preoccupied more with riots and crimes perpetrated by bandits rather than cultural heritage preservation. Inside the caves Freer noticed missing parts, as well as poorly made additions, plaster restorations and garish added colours, which compromised the aesthetic quality of the caves and their sculptural programmes. He saw in many places damage to sculptures caused by seeping water, which resulted in surface dissolution and mineral deposition.

After Freer returned to Detroit from his last visit to China, he was prompted by what he had witnessed to establish a plan for an American institute of archaeology

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in China. In 1911 Freer expressed his hope that the American government would appoint a committee to protect precious art objects in ancient cities in China so that, through research conducted by American scholars, the world could gain a better understanding of these Chinese treasures.⁵⁸ In 1913, Freer received the disturbing news that the cave temples at Longmen had been looted on a large scale by dealers and by local people with the cooperation of Chinese officials. This added a sense of urgency to Freer's vision to build the archaeological institute based on collaboration between the Chinese government and international experts. Unfortunately, his plan evaporated, largely due to the outbreak of World War I.⁵⁹

For the most part of his stay at Longmen in 1910, Freer was accompanied only by his assistants and by soldiers supplied by local officials to protect him. While opportunities presented themselves, Freer was not directly involved in removing or purchasing any significant stone sculptures from the Longmen Caves or from other sites during this visit to China. However, he purchased from unknown sources in Kaifeng, a city about 100 miles from Longmen, five stone fragments reportedly from Longmen, measuring 5 to 9 inches in width at a cost of \$1 each (F1911.545-549). Their incomplete state and less attractive appearance suggested that they were probably collected as study pieces. Before his departure, he collected as mementos thirty-nine pebbles from the bank of the Yi River that runs between the eastern and western mountains of Longmen, where hundreds of caves were located. He had each of them fitted with a wooden stand so that they could serve as weights when he wished to view Chinese handscrolls. Freer's choice of not removing significant objects directly from Buddhist sites in China was carefully made to avoid any association with looting, and beyond this diplomatic consideration, Freer in his diary and correspondence expressed sincere respect for Chinese art, culture and people as well as a strong desire to preserve ancient moments in China.

After 1911, despite Freer's awareness of his status as a leading art collector and the impact of his collecting activities on the art market, he actively acquired important stone sculptures, including the standing *Guanyin* probably from the Wanfo Cave at Longmen, offered by the art dealer Kelekian (F1916.364). Freer preferred pieces that were already outside of China at the time of his purchases, probably to avoid the stigma of association with the

looting of Buddhist sites. Such a practice, commonly accepted by American collectors and institutions in the early years of the twentieth century, helped generate a demand for Chinese Buddhist sculptures in America. One of the justifications for such practice was the 'salvage paradigm', that Chinese Buddhist sculptures were seen to be held in negligence or in peril and should be saved and appreciated by the Americans equipped with scientific knowledge and aesthetic sensibility. Freer's collecting of Chinese art was also justified by the universalist collecting and display philosophy envisioned for his future museum: 'My greatest desire has been to unite modern work with masterpieces of certain periods of high civilization harmonious in spiritual suggestion, having the power to broaden esthetic culture and the grace to elevate the human mind.'⁶⁰ While Freer was genuinely generous in making his collection accessible through public displays in the exhibition space and private viewings in the spacious study rooms designed for visitors and scholars in the gallery to be built, he approached Chinese Buddhist art mainly with the American audience in mind, as he noted in 1910, after his visit to the Guyang Cave – one of his favourite cave temples at Longmen: 'The scale and exquisite proportion of the decorative features of this temple are inspiring. I wish that all young American architects and decorators might see this work.'⁶¹

Freer's collecting of Chinese Buddhist art was a matter of knowledge, spiritual and aesthetic interest, as well as strategy and competition. A shrewd businessman and ambitious collector, he approached his subject with a vision of building an outstanding museum collection in the West. The desire to purchase Buddhist objects removed from their original sites may have been prompted by not wishing to be left behind by other collectors and institutions. In 1919, ten days before his death, Freer wrote to the Shanghai-based dealer K. T. Wang, specifying items he would like to acquire, such as one or two fine early Buddhist paintings and one or two early block-printed books illustrated with drawings of Buddhist deities.⁶² This suggested Freer's close attention to the collecting activities of a number of European explorers in China. In 1907 Aurel Stein (1862-1943) became the first European to enter Cave 17 in Dunhuang, which contained over 40,000 early manuscripts. Stein removed some 7,000 manuscripts to be sent to the

British Museum, including the world's earliest complete survival of a dated printed book made in 868 – the *Diamond Sutra* with an illustrated frontispiece. A few months after Stein's trip, the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot (1878–1945) studied the remainder of the manuscripts in the cave and purchased items now at the Guimet Museum and the National Library of France. In 1907 Édouard Chavannes came to China to tour many Buddhist monuments and sites, which resulted in the publication of the multi-volume *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale* between 1909 and 1915. This publication made major Chinese Buddhist sites and sculptures known internationally to scholars, dealers, and collectors like Freer; unintentionally, it also stimulated interest in the removal of works from their sites.⁶³

Freer was also alert to the seminal interest in Chinese Buddhist art on the part of other collecting institutions in the US. For example, Okakura Kakuzō (1862–1913), a consultant to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (and later, the museum's curator of Chinese and Japanese art) was in China in 1906–7 and again in 1912 to purchase Chinese works for the museum, with a particular interest in Buddhist and Daoist paintings and sculptures. As two of the most active museum collection-builders of their time in the field of Chinese art, Okakura and Freer were probably aware of each other's ambitions. The University Museum in Philadelphia in 1916, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1918, featured prominently large-scale Chinese Buddhist sculptures in their displays of Chinese art.⁶⁴

Freer's fellow American collectors of Chinese art, such as John Pierpont Morgan (1837–1913), Henry Frick (1849–1919), and John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874–1960), concentrated on high-value later ceramics. For example, Rockefeller in 1915 paid over \$1.5 million for a group of Ming and Qing porcelains from the Morgan collection through the art dealer Joseph Duveen (1869–1939).⁶⁵ Although Freer had accumulated considerable wealth, his resources for art acquisition were in no way comparable to those of Rockefeller. To excel, Freer had to formulate a unique acquisition strategy to collect intelligently, seeking less-understood but important and rare objects. Buddhist stone sculptures, as a newly emerged and relatively inexpensive category, met Freer's collecting criteria. The art dealer Marcel Bing (1875–1920) reportedly purchased the head of a Buddhist image

in China for 10 Chinese dollars. Another dealer, C. T. Loo, commented that the rising popularity of sculptures encouraged him to develop a new line in Chinese art.⁶⁶ Freer purchased in 1913 from a Parisian dealer the sixth-century seated bodhisattva originally from the North Cave at the Northern Xiangtangshan (F1913.57) for the sum of \$5,000 while John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was paying ten times as much for a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century enamel porcelain figure in 1915.⁶⁷

Conclusion

This article has traced qualitatively and quantitatively the development of Freer's Chinese Buddhist art collection from 1902 to 1919. Although Freer has long been considered a collector who embodied the notion of art for art's sake, his collection of Chinese Buddhist art is shown here to have been conditioned by many factors, including aesthetic, intellectual and spiritual considerations as well the art market and international relations. This case-study will help towards an understanding of the complex dynamics in collecting Chinese Buddhist art in early twentieth-century America. Despite the limitations in Freer's collecting activities, his legacy has brought seminal interest in Chinese Buddhist art to the United States, and continues to inspire new projects to broaden its access and enrich our understanding of it in America and beyond.

Supplementary information

Online appendices at jhc.oxfordjournals.org record, respectively, Charles Lang Freer's Chinese acquisitions for the Freer Gallery of Art, 1893–1919, his Chinese acquisitions for the year 1916, and his Chinese Buddhist acquisitions for that year.

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Notes and references

- 1 Unless noted otherwise, all the objects included in the paper were acquired by Charles Lang Freer and later bequeathed to the Freer Gallery of Art, although the scope of Freer's overall

collecting presented

- 2 Ernest F. Lang Freer Gallery A Gift of the see H. N. Oriental 1979), pp. article art instances
- 3 The infor in the art <http://www>
- 4 T. Lawton DC, 1993),
- 5 See Tomlin
- 6 Freer G. IGAAR, 199 Gallery C.
- 7 Freer's Jap: when he p bodhisattv sale of the in New Yo M. Sackler
- 8 C. L. Freer Lawton an
- 9 See Lawto
- 10 Art Vouche
- 11 C. L. Freer
- 12 C. L. Freer
- 13 'Detroit ex Academy A
- 14 C. L. Freer
- 15 IGAAR, 19 Buddhist a
- 16 Lawton an
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- 19 C. L. Freer
- 20 C. L. Freer
- 21 C. L. Freer that while Buddhist p in works in century pa Gospels wi in Egypt in
- 22 C. L. Freer
- 23 Folder 9: Inventories transferred
- 24 C. L. Freer
- 25 Art Vouche relationship cit. (note 2)

- collecting activities was larger. Other objects he collected were presented to individuals and other institutions, or were sold.
- 2 Ernest F. Fenollosa to C. L. Freer, 27 October 1902, Charles Lang Freer Papers. Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Archives. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Gift of the Estate of Charles Lang Freer (hereafter CLFP). Also see H. N. Tomlinson, 'Charles L. Freer: Pioneer Collector of Oriental Art' (PhD thesis, Case Western Reserve University, 1979), pp. 362–3. The prices of the objects discussed in the article are all calculated in US dollars. The prices in many instances include shipping costs and customs fees.
 - 3 The information and the images of the objects mentioned in the article can be searched by their accession number at <http://www.asia.si.edu/collections/edan/default.cfm>
 - 4 T. Lawton and L. Merrill, *Freer: A Legacy of Art* (Washington, DC, 1993), pp. 100–10.
 - 5 See Tomlinson, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 557.
 - 6 Freer Gallery of Art Acquisition Records (hereafter FGAAR), 1909, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Collection Management Department.
 - 7 Freer's Japanese Buddhist art collection was formed as early as 1900 when he purchased a nineteenth-century stoneware figure of the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (*Kannon*) (1900.13) from the auction sale of the Edelman Collection at the American Art Association in New York. See FGAAR, 1900, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery Collection Management Department.
 - 8 C. L. Freer to Frank J. Hecker, 18 October 1909, CLFP. Also see Lawton and Merrill, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 86–7.
 - 9 See Lawton and Merrill, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 20, 31–53.
 - 10 Art Vouchers, November–December 1909, CLFP.
 - 11 C. L. Freer to Frank J. Hecker, 17 September 1909, CLFP.
 - 12 C. L. Freer to J. M. Kennedy, 30 September 1909, CLFP.
 - 13 'Detroit explorer, traveler tells of Chinese discoveries', *Buffalo Academy Notes* 6 no. 3 (1911), p. 71.
 - 14 C. L. Freer to Frank J. Hecker, 25 December 1910, CLFP.
 - 15 FGAAR, 1911 show that Freer's other sources of Chinese Buddhist art supply in 1911 included Europe and Japan.
 - 16 Lawton and Merrill, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 60–65.
 - 17 C. L. Freer to Frederick W. Gookin, 31 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 18 C. L. Freer diary, 31 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 19 C. L. Freer diary, 4 November 1910, CLFP.
 - 20 C. L. Freer diary, 30 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 21 C. L. Freer diary, 31 October 1910, CLFP. It is noteworthy that while enthusiastically collecting Chinese and Japanese Buddhist paintings and sculptures, Freer was also interested in works in other religious traditions, such as the seventh-century painted cover of the Washington Manuscript of the Gospels with the Four Evangelists (F1906.297–298), acquired in Egypt in 1906.
 - 22 C. L. Freer diary, 22 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 23 Folder 9: 'Art Inventories: Miscellaneous objects' in Art Inventories: Box 12 lacquers-Photographs, and lists of objects transferred to Washington, 1921, CLFP.
 - 24 C. L. Freer diary, 31 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 25 Art Vouchers, 1916, CLFP. For a detailed account of Freer's relationship with native Chinese dealers, see Tomlinson, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 637–64.
 - 26 C. L. Freer to Seaouke Yue, 1 September 1919, CLFP.
 - 27 Art Vouchers, April and May 1916, no. 3; June and July 1916, no. 8, CLFP.
 - 28 C. L. Freer to Marcel Bing, 2 February 1916, CLFP.
 - 29 Lawton and Merrill, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 248–50.
 - 30 W. Cohen, *East Asian Art and American Culture: A Study in International Relations* (New York, 1992), p. 54. Also see C. L. Freer to Marie Meyer-Riefstahl, 17 March 1914, CLFP.
 - 31 Dikran G. Kelekian to C. L. Freer, 6 April 1916 and C. L. Freer to Dikran G. Kelekian, 24 April 1916, CLFP.
 - 32 Art Inventories, CLFP.
 - 33 Hugh Rockoff, 'U.S. Economy in World War I,' *Eh.net encyclopedia*, accessed 3 March 2012, <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/us-economy-in-word-war-i>.
 - 34 C. L. Freer to Seaouke Yue, 15 November 1917, CLFP.
 - 35 'The War Art Tax', *American Art News*, 14 September 1918, p. 4.
 - 36 C. L. Freer to Seaouke Yue, 18 April 1918, CLFP.
 - 37 C. L. Freer diary, 22 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 38 C. L. Freer diary, 30 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 39 C. L. Freer diary, 1 November 1910, CLFP.
 - 40 E. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art: An Outline History of East Asiatic Design* (London, 1912), p. 28.
 - 41 C. L. Freer diary, 30 October 1910, CLFP.
 - 42 C. L. Freer to Charles Walcott, 28 April 1909, CLFP.
 - 43 Lawton and Merrill, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 248–50.
 - 44 Fenollosa, *op. cit.* (note 40), p. 5.
 - 45 G. B. Gordon, 'An exhibition of oriental art', *Museum Journal* (March 1916), pp. 2, 4.
 - 46 Stanley Abe has addressed the reasons behind the growing prominence of sculpture in Euro-American historical surveys of Chinese art. See S. K. Abe, 'Collecting Chinese sculpture: Paris, New York, Boston', in Alan Chong and Noriko Murai (eds), *Journeys East: Isabella Stewart Gardner and Asia* (Boston, 2009), pp. 432–42.
 - 47 J. C. Ferguson, *Outlines of Chinese Art* (Chicago, 1918), pp. 107–8.
 - 48 J. C. Ferguson, *Survey of Chinese Art* (Shanghai, 1939), p. 35.
 - 49 É. Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la Chine septentrionale*, tome II, vols 1 and 2 (Paris, 1909).
 - 50 'Detroit explorer', *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 71.
 - 51 For Freer's attitude toward copies in painting, see Ingrid Larsen, "'Don't send Ming or later pictures': Charles Lang Freer and the first major collection of Chinese painting in an American museum", *Arts Orientalis* 40 (2011), p. 27.
 - 52 C. L. Freer to Gaston Migeon, 19 January 1910, CLFP.
 - 53 C. L. Freer Diary, 11 November 1910, CLFP.
 - 54 A. Meyer, 'The Charles L. Freer collection', *The Arts* 12 (August 1927), p. 20. For Freer's search for restorative power in Chinese art, see K. Pyne, 'Portrait of a collector as an agnostic: Charles Lang Freer and connoisseurship', *Art Bulletin* 78 (March, 1996), p. 88.
 - 55 For a detailed analysis of the notion of the religion of art, see Pyne, *op. cit.* (note 54), pp. 75–6.
 - 56 C. T. Loo, Preface to *An Exhibition of Chinese Stone Sculptures*, by C. T. Loo and Company (New York, 1940).