

The Tongzi Temple site at Longshan Mountain, Taiyuan City, Shanxi

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Abstract

In 2002, the excavation conducted to Tongzi Temple recovered the entire site of the monastery built in the Ming Dynasty. Trial excavation was conducted on the north side of the stone lantern, and the coring tests were conducted to the peripheral areas of the temple, by which two caves of the Tang Dynasty were recovered. The focus of the excavations in 2004 was the Giant Buddha Pavilion, the porch of which was recovered, yielding large amounts of architecture parts. In 2005, excavations were conducted to the architectural remains on the north and south sides of the porch of the Giant Buddha Pavilion. In 2006, excavations were conducted to the north part of the Giant Buddha Pavilion, from which some stone Buddhist sculptures of the Northern Qi and Tang Dynasties were unearthed. The excavations confirmed that the Tongzi Temple was first built in the Northern Qi Dynasty and provided new data for the researches on the Buddhist architectural types of the Northern and Tang Dynasties.

Keywords: Buddhist monasteries-excavations (archaeology)-China; cave temples; Northern Dynasties; Sui and Tang Dynasties; Tongzi Temple site (Taiyuan, Shanxi).

Introduction

The Tongzi Temple located on the north peak of the Longshan Mountain 25km to the southwest of Taiyuan City, Shanxi is a Buddhist monastery that was famous from the Northern Dynasties through the Tang Dynasty. Prior to the excavation, the site had a Northern Qi (550–577 CE) Buddha statue, a few grottos, and the earliest extant stone lantern known to date in China. Estimated by the architecture and the remaining artifacts, the temple was a special type of Buddhist institution that integrated grottos together with a ground monastery courtyard. From 2002 to 2006, the Institute of Archaeology, CASS, the Shanxi Provincial Institute of Archaeology and the Taiyuan Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology jointly excavated this temple site. In addition to a large number of architectural parts and exquisitely carved statues, archaeologists also found two

previously unknown Tang (618–907 CE) caves carved into the cliff. The excavation clarified both the layout and the date of the temple.

The temple site

The eastward-facing temple is divided into northern and southern parts; the distance between the two parts is 65m. The northern part is the ruin of the Giant Buddha Pavilion, which connects to an open arch hollowed out in the rock behind it. Inside the arch can be seen the contours of a now-missing trinity of deities from the Western Pure Land: Amitabha, Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. In front of the pavilion is the Northern Qi stone lantern. To the south are the remains of the monastery. On the eastern and western sides of the monastery are five caves dating to the Northern Qi. On the eastern side, between the Giant Buddha Pavilion and the monastery are the two Tang stone caves carved out of the cliff (Figures 1 and 2).

1. The Monastery. The monastery is rectangular in plan and enclosed by stone walls. It is 45.5m long from east to west, and 31.8m wide from north to south. Located in the central axis are a series of structures, including the front gatehouse (*shanmen*), a Tang Dynasty Dharani Pillar, and the main hall. On each side of the axis are side buildings as well as drum and bell towers. The temple yard is paved by irregular-shaped stone blocks (Figure 3).

The main hall, five bays wide and two bays deep, measures 17.7m in width and 7.5m in depth. On the platform in front of the main hall is the Tang Dharani Pillar. The side walls, back wall, and the walls of two end bays of the façade of the main hall were all built of stone (Figure 4). The central bay and the two bays next to it have doors. Inside the main hall is a rectangular stone platform for Buddhist statues.

The side building on the south is three bays wide and two bays deep. It is 12m wide and 5.1m deep. The remaining wall is 3.2m high. The roof has collapsed.

The side building on the north is a cave made of stone. It has two rooms connected by a corridor. The building is 12m wide, 7.4m deep and 3.2m high.

Both remains of the drum and bell tower are square platforms. The height of the platform preserved today is 1.9m; each side measures 4m long.

The front gate has a single bay both on the longitudinal and transverse directions. Remaining parts include a pair of weight-bearing stones on each side of the threshold and the bases of two stone columns outside the door.

2. The Ruins of the Giant Buddha Pavilion. In addition to the pavilion, there is a porch, the ruins of a subsidiary architecture on the northern side of the porch, and uncertain

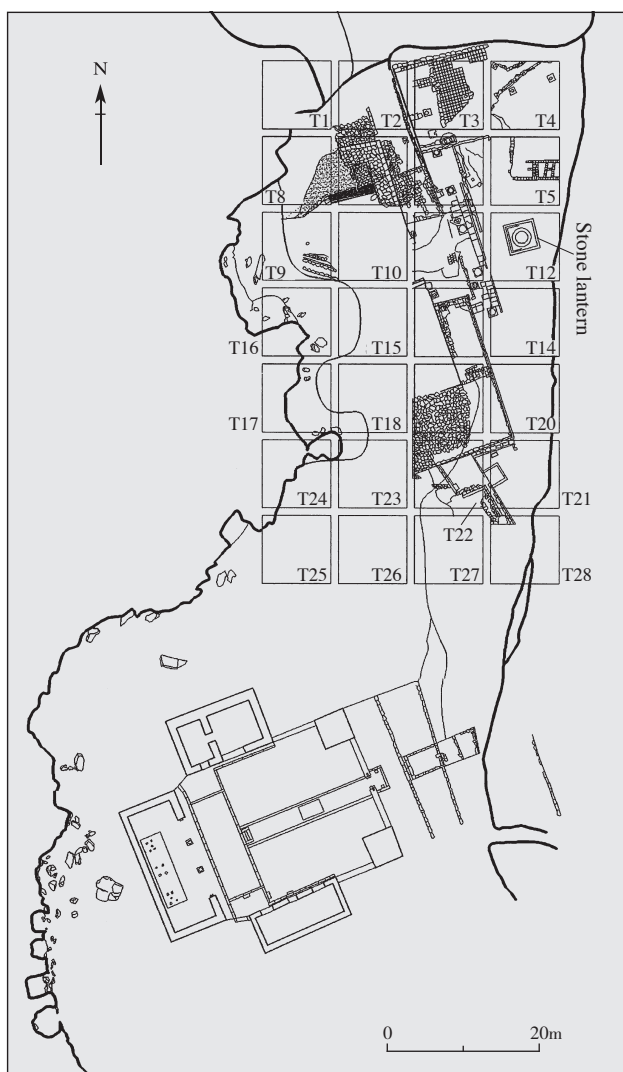


Figure 1 The general plan of Tongzi Temple Site.

remains on the south (Figure 5). The stratigraphy consists of 10 simple layers of deposit (Figure 6). The so-called pavilion is a cave carved into the cliff, with walls on the south, east, and north sides. Based on the stratigraphical deposits, archaeologists recognized an earlier and a later phase in construction of the pavilion.

The walls were part of the earlier phase of construction. The walls were built using rectangular stones. The distance from south to north is 34m, and from west to east is 15m. The remaining height is 7.5 to 8m. The eastern wall, 2.5m thick, is decorated small, carved the Thousand-Buddha images (Figure 7). The northern wall, which is 2.6m thick, is connected to the cliff, as is the southern wall. The thickness of the southern wall is unclear, because the southern part of the pavilion was not excavated.

The retaining walls were built during the later phase of construction of, and were built next to the earlier walls. The eastern retaining wall has two sections, both starting from the bays next to the central bay of the main hall



Figure 2 The Tongzi Temple Site (S-N).

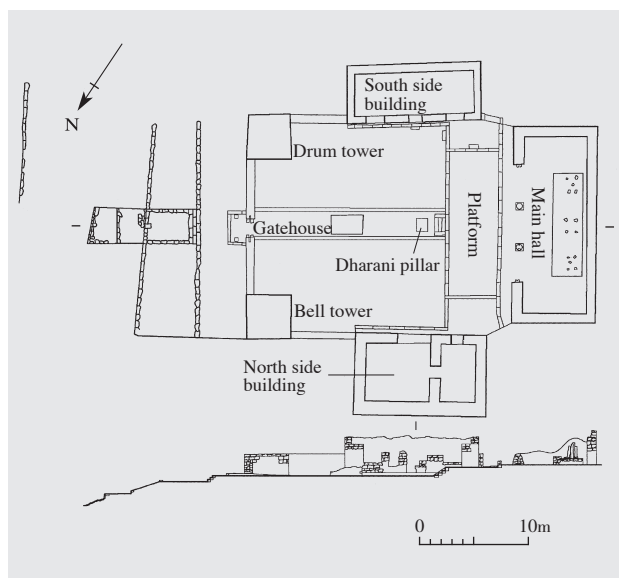


Figure 3 The plan and longitudinal section of the monastery of Tongzi Temple.



Figure 4 The remains of the main hall of the monastery of Tongzi Temple and the platform in front of it (E-W).

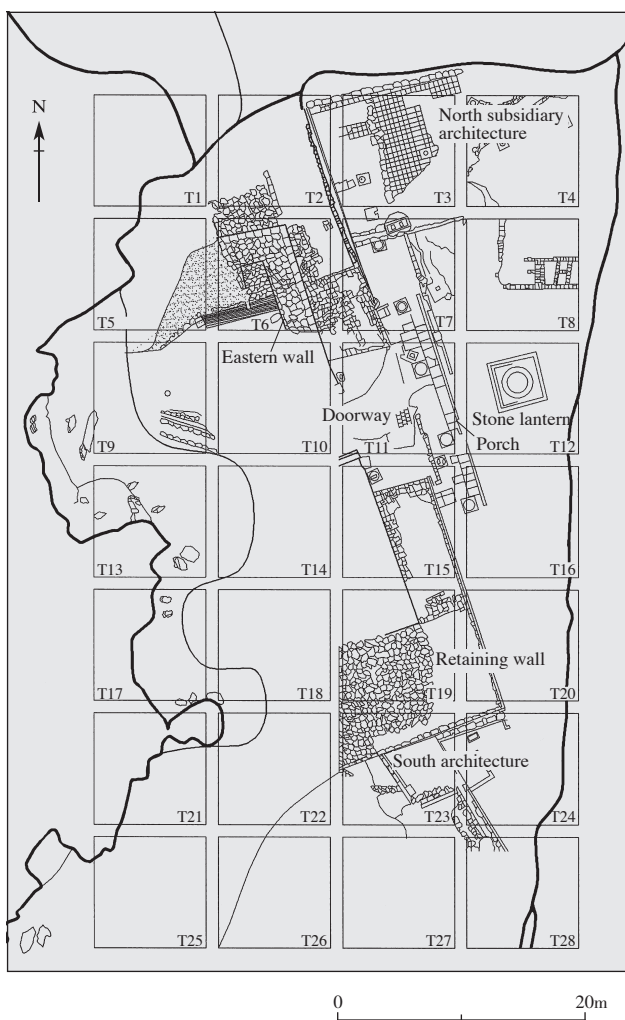


Figure 5 The plan of the Giant Buddha Pavilion of Tongzi Temple.

(Figure 8). Each wall is 20m long, with a height as it remains today measuring 0.8 to 4.4m, and a thickness of 4.4 to 4.9m. The northern and southern retaining walls are 9.8m wide and 8m high. The retaining walls are slightly sloping inwards, and their exterior surfaces are uneven.

The deposit inside the pavilion cave was more than 14m deep. The archaeologists have so far only excavated the northern part of the pavilion, and have not yet reached the bottom. In the center of the cave was a giant Buddha statue; to its north are burnt wooden columns, chunks of clay, rubbles and debris from renovation and repairs.

3. The Porch. The five-bay wide and one-bay deep porch stands in front of the retaining wall of the pavilion. The porch is 27m wide. The five bays on the façade are different in width, with the central bay measuring 5.8m wide, and the next two bays measuring 5.4 and 5.2m wide respectively. The depth of the central bay is 6.8m. There are five remaining lotus-shaped raised stone bases for the pillars of the porch eave, lined up north to south and measuring 1.1m on each side (Figure 9). Inside the doorway on either side is a flat stone pillar base measuring 1m on each side. One corner of each of the stone bases was overlapped by the wall of the early phase of the Buddha Pavilion.

The floor of the central bay was paved of square bricks decorated with rope pattern. The floors of the bays next to the central bay were made of stone slabs that were laid after the retaining walls were built.

In the porch are the partial remains of a platform that was apparently built in two phases. The earlier part of the platform made of stone slabs was built at the same time as the stone base of the porch eave pillars. Only the central bay and the bays flanking it were kept in the later phase.

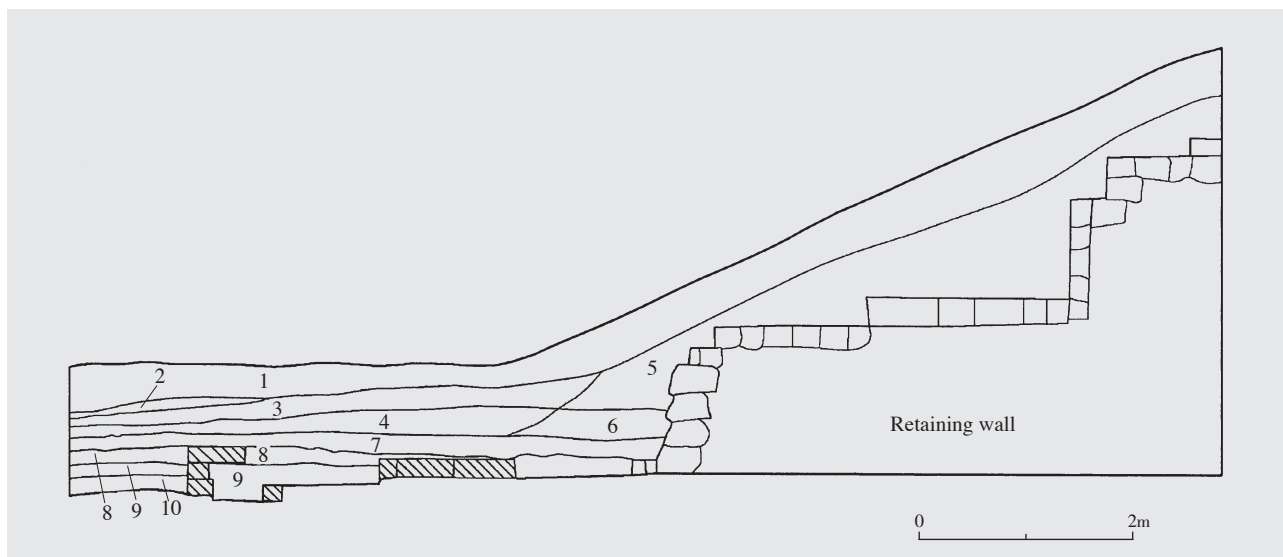


Figure 6 The cross-section of the south wall of excavation grid T7.

1-3. dark alluvial deposits 4 and 5. light gray sandy deposit mixed with gravels 6. artificial coal layer 7 and 8. light gray sandy deposit mixed with rubbles 9 and 10. rammed-earth layers



Figure 7 The eastern wall of the earlier phase and the retaining wall of the later phase of the north part of the porch of the Giant Buddha Pavilion (S–N).



Figure 8 The eastern wall and the north section of the retaining wall seen from the inner side of the Giant Buddha Pavilion (W–E).



Figure 9 The porch of the Giant Buddha Pavilion (N–S).



Figure 10 The north subsidiary architecture of the porch of the Giant Buddha Pavilion (E–W).

There are the remains of steps south of the porch. A small portion of the platform built in the later phase can be found in front of the two bays from the north side.

4. Architectural Foundation on the North of the Porch. The foundation is slightly higher than the porch. The eastern side of the foundation is damaged. The length from south to north is 12m, and the remaining width from east to west is 12.5m. The floor was paved with square bricks. Judging from the three remaining square stone pillar bases, the architecture was likely a three-bay one facing south.

The Tang caves

Two Tang caves are on the cliff facing east; archaeologists numbered them as Caves 6 and 7 (Figure 11).

Cave 6 has a domed ceiling and a nearly circular floor plan (Figure 12). The cave is 1.92m wide, 1.94m deep, and 1.8m high. Outside the rectangular door on each side one guardian is carved. Next to each guardian is carved

a five-story pagoda. In the center of the cave sits a statue of Maitreya wearing *kasaya* with the collar opening in the middle, holding Bhumyakramana mudra (Figure 13) and with a disciple on each side. A bodhisattva is carved on the north wall and another on the south wall.

Cave 7 is located south of Cave 6. It has a domed ceiling and an oval floor plan. The opening is 1.45m wide, 1.1m deep, and 1.25m high. On the north side are the remains of a guardian figure (Figure 14). This unfinished cave has an altar against the back wall, but no statue was found. Outside the cave is a round sculpture Tang Buddha statue (Figure 15), which is likely to be the one formerly located inside the cave.

The unearthed artifacts

In the caves, archaeologists found stone Buddha statues dating from the Northern Qi to Tang Dynasties, and a huge amount of building material, including bricks and tiles.

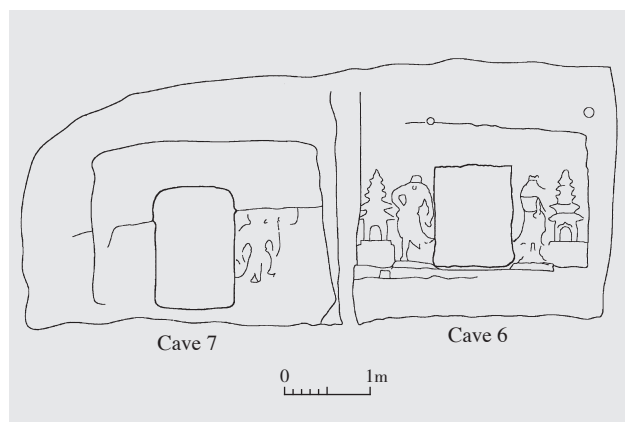


Figure 11 The general external elevation of the Caves 6 and 7.

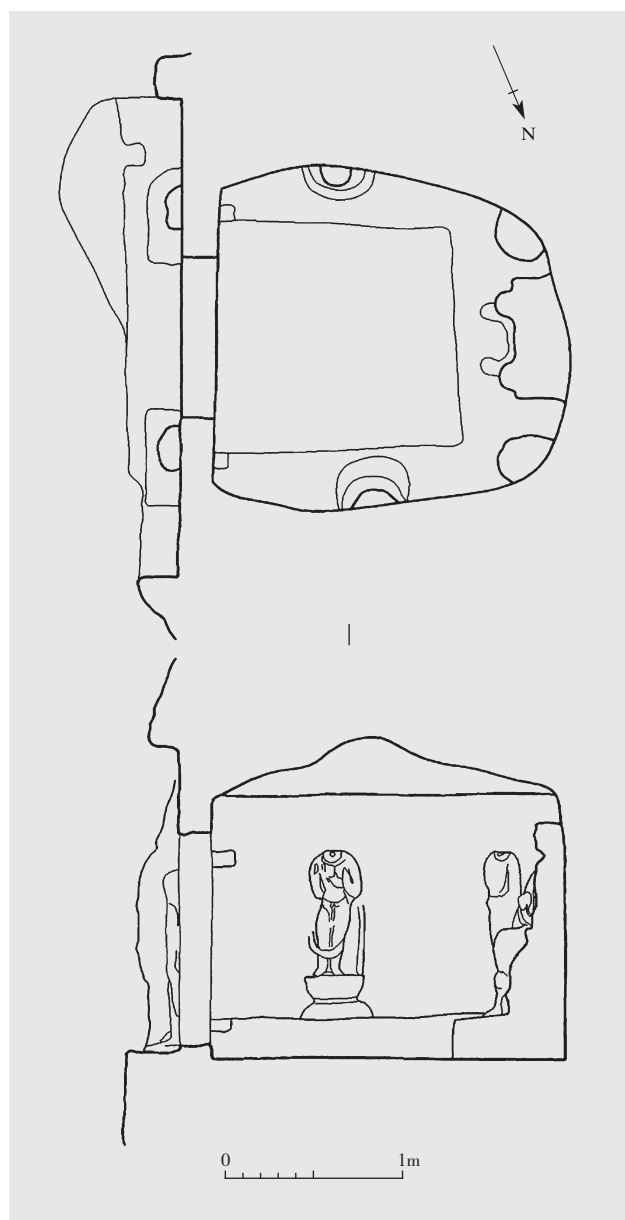


Figure 12 The plan and longitudinal section of Cave 6.

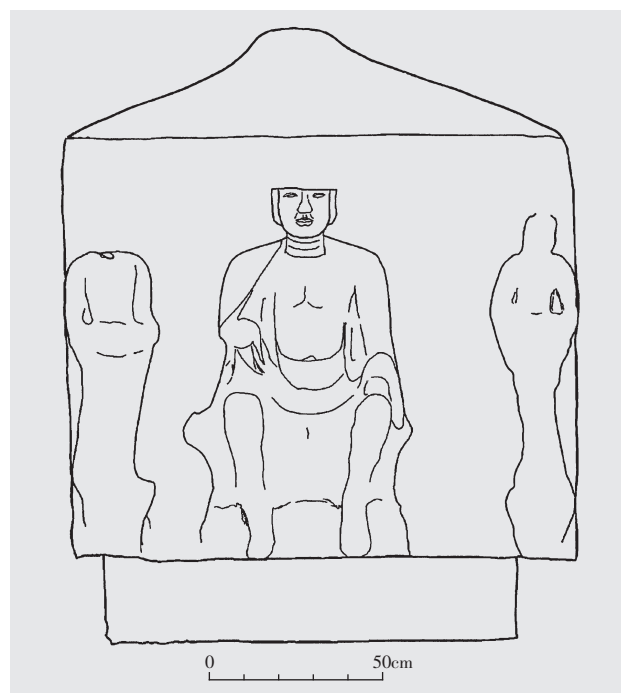


Figure 13 The elevation of the back wall of Cave 6.

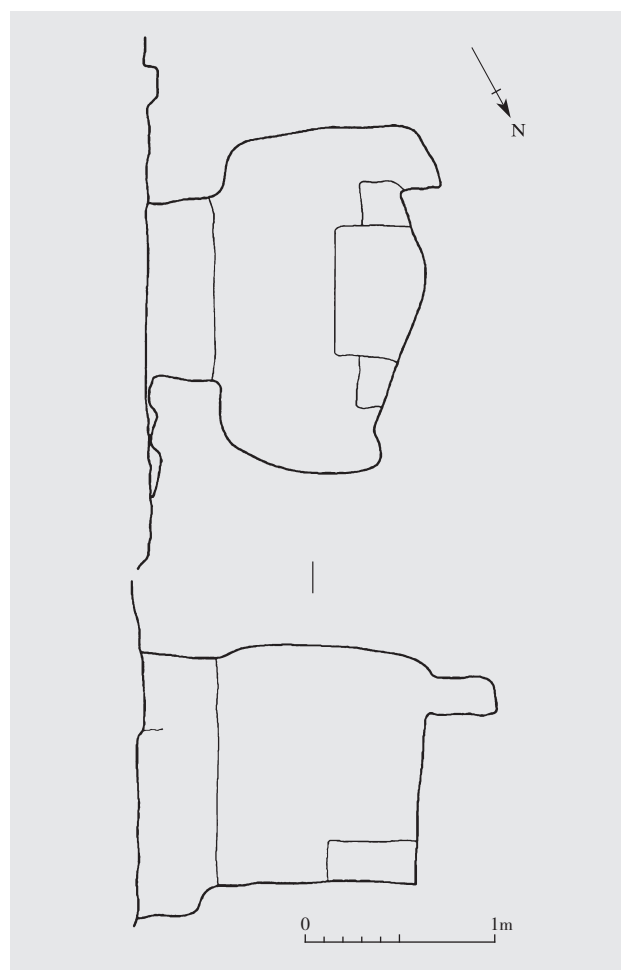


Figure 14 The plan and longitudinal section of Cave 7.

1. Stone statues

A total of more than fifty sandstone statues were found, including the heads, hands, feet, and torsos of Buddha, bodhisattvas, guardians, and arhats. Most of the pieces date to the Northern Qi with few dating to the Tang Dynasty.

The six Northern Qi Buddha heads are round sculptures or carved in high relief. The hair is either straight or coiled, with a low and flat *usnisa* on top. On some of them, the original paint and gold foil are still visible. The measurements of the cataloged heads are: STT06T10:1, 25cm high (Figure 16:6 and Figure 17); T10:2, 21cm high (Figure 16:2 and Figure 18); T10:3, 30cm high (Figure 16:1 and Figure 19); T10:4, 30cm high (Figure 16:4 and Figure 20); T10:5, 22.17cm high (Figure 16:5 and Figure 21); T10:6, 20cm high (Figure 16:3 and Figure 22).

The three Northern Qi bodhisattva heads all have crown and oval face. The measurements are: STT06T10:7, 25cm high (Figure 23:2 and Figure 24); T10:8, 22cm high (Figure 23:1 and Figure 25); T10:9, 20cm high (Figure 23:3 and Figure 26).

The two Northern Qi guardians wore flowery crowns and had square-shaped faces with wrinkled foreheads and wide open eyes. STT06T10:10, 21cm high (Figure 27:1 and Figure 28); T10:11, behind his head is a halo, 22.5cm high (Figure 27:2 and Figure 29).

Fragments include 13 sculptured hands, among them, four from Buddha statues and seven from bodhisattvas. All of them are of the Northern Qi Dynasty. STT06T10:24 is the right hand of a Buddha statue, 15.5cm long (Figure 30); T10:49 is also a right hand, but of a bodhisattva. It holds a peach-shaped object. The hand is 18cm long (Figure 31). T10:50 is the left hand of a bodhisattva statue, holding a lock-shaped object. The hand measures 16.5cm long (Figure 32). T10:19, a right hand of a bodhisattva statue, holding a lotus bud, is 16.5cm long (Figure 33). T10:14, a right hand of a bodhisattva statue, holding a lotus stem, is 8.5cm long (Figure 34).

There are two statues of disciples carved in the Tang Dynasty. STT06T10:51 is the round sculpture of Ananda; his head, feet, and right hand are gone. His right shoulder is exposed and his left hand holds a string of beads. The

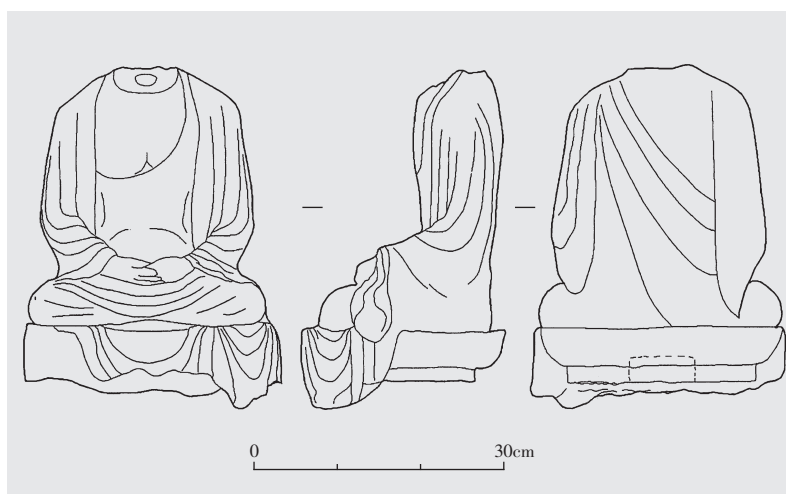


Figure 15 The Buddha statue of the Tang Dynasty outside the Cave 7.

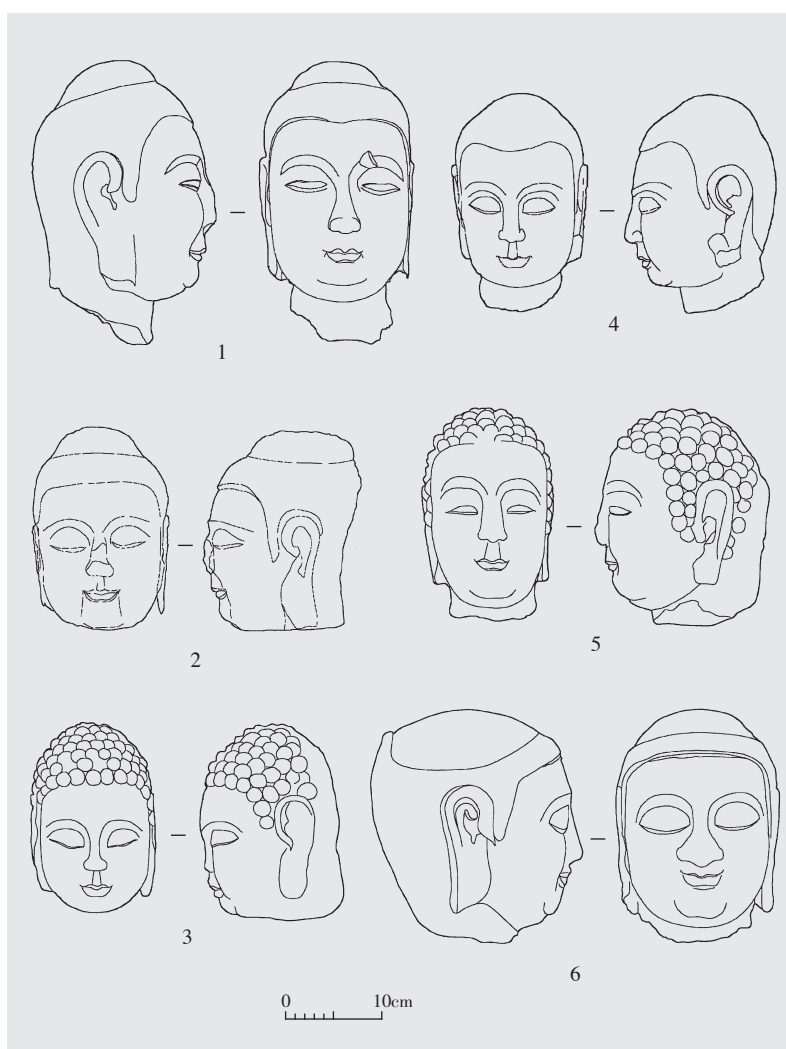


Figure 16 Buddha heads of the Northern Qi Dynasty unearthed from the Giant Buddha Pavilion.

1. STT06T10:3 2. STT06T10:2 3. STT06T10:6 4. STT06T10:4 5. STT06T10:5 6. STT06T10:1



Figure 17 Stone Buddha head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:1).



Figure 20 Stone Buddha head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:4).



Figure 18 Stone Buddha head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:2).



Figure 21 Stone Buddha head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:5).



Figure 19 Stone Buddha head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:3).



Figure 22 Stone Buddha head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:6).

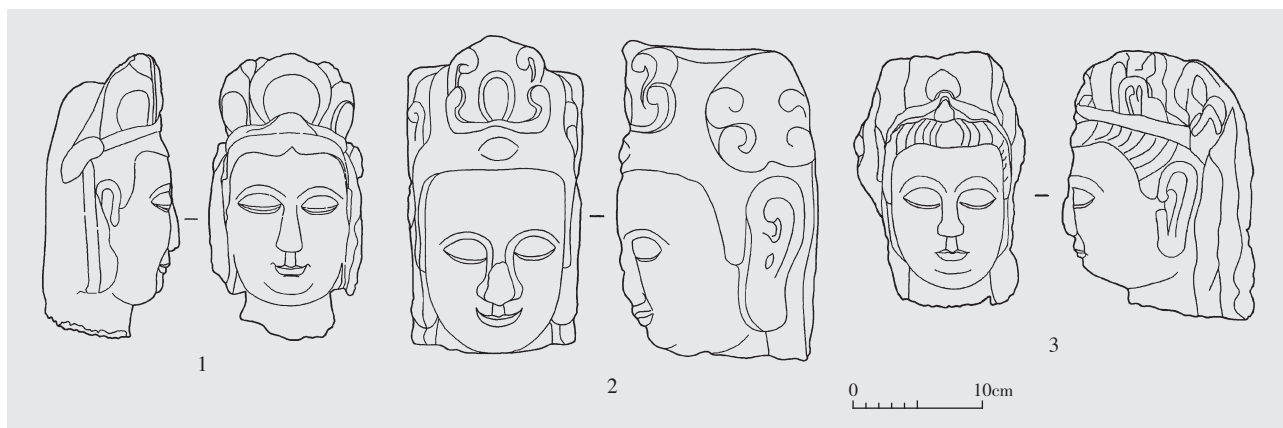


Figure 23 Stone bodhisattva heads of the Northern Qi Dynasty unearthed from the Giant Buddha Pavilion.
1. STT06T10:8 2. STT06T10:7 3. STT06T10:9



Figure 24 Stone bodhisattva head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:7).



Figure 25 Stone bodhisattva head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:8).



Figure 26 Stone bodhisattva head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:9).

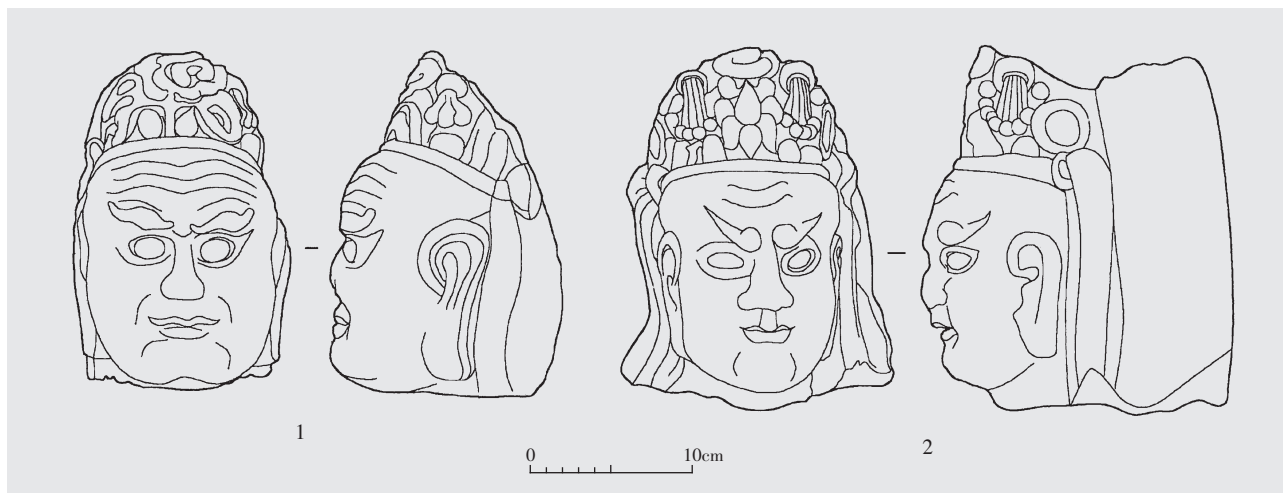


Figure 27 Stone guardian heads of the Northern Qi Dynasty unearthed from the Giant Buddha Pavilion.
1. STT06T10:10 2. STT06T10:11



Figure 28 Stone guardian head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:10).



Figure 29 Stone guardian head of the Northern Qi (STT06T10:11).



Figure 30 Stone Buddha hand (STT06T10:24).



Figure 31 Stone bodhisattva hand (STT06T10:49).



Figure 32 Stone bodhisattva hand (STT06T10:50).

remaining height of the statue is 31cm (Figure 35).

The left ear of a Buddha statue (STT06T10:56) measures 1.8m in length and 1.4m in width.

Three coils of hair from the head of Buddha were found. Two of them were originally joined, but they have been split apart. They were part of the *usnisa* of the giant Buddha sculpture. One fragment of them (STT06T10:27) measures 18cm in diameter and is 8cm high.

2. Architectural materials

The most important pieces include eave tile ends decorated with lotus flower design, animal faces, and roundels outlined with strings of pearls. There are also flat tiles, semi-cylindrical tiles, and broken pieces

of *chiwei* (lit. “owl tail”; pottery ridge end ornaments supposed to protect against fire). The eave tile ends with lotus flower design are classified into six types.

Type A is represented by very few examples. STT02T8:1 has a diameter of 13.6cm (Figure 36), and T19:1 has a diameter of 16cm (Figure 37). Two intact tile ends are classified as Type B, STT04T7:1 and STT04T7:2. Both have a diameter of 15cm (Figures 38 and 39). Type C (STT06T10:1) has a diameter of 14cm (Figure 40), and Type D (STT04T7:3) has a diameter of 15.5cm (Figure 41). Type E (STT05T19:2) has a diameter of 15cm (Figure 42). There is no intact sample of Type F. A restored Type F tile end (STT05T19:4) has a diameter of 15cm, and the



Figure 33 Stone bodhisattva hand (STT06T10:19).



Figure 34 Stone bodhisattva hand (STT06T10:14).



Figure 35 Statue of Ananda (STT06T10:51).
left. front right. back



spaces between the lotus petals resemble the letters “V” and “Y” (Figure 43).

Two types of tile ends with animal face are recognized on the basis of their size. There are ten intact examples of Type A, which features a mold-made animal face with two horns and an open mouth with its tongue sticking out. Its diameter measures 17.5cm (STT05T19:6, Figure 44). One fragment of Type B (STT04T7:5) shows the same design but is smaller; it has a diameter of 14.5cm (Figure 45).

One type of tile end is decorated with a bead-string

roundel (STT04T7:4). The diameter of this piece is 14.5cm (Figure 46).

Three complete semi-cylindrical roof tiles were found. In each case, the exterior of the tile was smooth and the interior had textile impressions. The diameter of a sample, STT04T7:8, is 18cm.

All the flat roof tiles were broken upon excavation. Their restored length was 44cm, and the width was 31cm.

There were many broken drip tiles. STT05T19:8 has two incised lines along the edge that were made by hand. The length is 30cm, and the remaining width of the piece



Figure 36 Lotus flower tile end of Type A (STT02T8:1).



Figure 37 Lotus flower tile end of Type A (STT02T19:1).



Figure 38 Lotus flower tile end of Type B (STT04T7:1).



Figure 39 Lotus flower tile end of Type B (STT04T7:2).



Figure 40 Lotus flower tile end of Type C (STT06T10:1).



Figure 41 Lotus flower tile end of Type D (STT04T7:3).



Figure 42 Lotus flower tile end of Type E (STT05T19:2).



Figure 43 Lotus flower tile end of Type F (STT05T19:4).



Figure 44 Animal face tile end of Type A (STT05T19:6).



Figure 45 Animal face tile end of Type B (STT04T7:5).



Figure 46 Tile end with bead-string roundel (STT04T7:4).



Figure 47 Drip tile (STT05T19:8).

is 18cm (Figure 47).

There are ten broken pieces of *chiwei*. The tail part of sample STT04T7:26 is 30cm long, 18cm wide and 6cm thick. A broken piece of tile representing the part opposite the tail is 24cm long and 16cm wide (T7:35).

Conclusion

1. The dates of the construction, restoration, and completion of the Tongzi Temple

The Thousand-Buddha carvings on the east interior wall of the pavilion show strong characteristics of Northern Qi Buddhist art, indicating that the pavilion was constructed during the Northern Qi Dynasty. Historical documents record that the Tongzi Temple was established by Hongli, a Chan master, in 556 CE, who ordered the carving of three Buddhist statues portraying Amitabha, Avalokitesvara and Mahasthamaprapta. In 559 CE, the Northern Qi Emperor Wenxuan visited the temple, probably at the completion of the statues. Thus, the pavilion was likely completed in that year.

The temple underwent two subsequent repairs. The first term was a major one, adding the retaining wall next to the pavilion in order to strengthen the existing wall. The eave pillars, platform, paved floor, and retaining wall were all parts of that term. The second term was somewhat smaller than the first one. It renovated the existing platform, and laid a new brick floor in the central bay. The Buddhist statues were also repaired at this time. Based on analysis of the Tang tile ends, we believe that the first repair took place in the late 7th to early 8th century CE, and the second repair happened during the 8th to the late 9th century.

The charred wooden pillars along with a large quantity of burnt clay clods found inside the pavilion indicate that the temple was destroyed by fire. This was likely the result of a war in 1117 recorded in a Qing stele, entitled "Renovation of the Tongzi Temple," that dates to the Jiaqing Era (1796-1820).

Inscriptions and artifacts found at the site indicate that the extant temple remains came from a temple rebuilt on the same site in the early Zhengde Era of the Ming Dynasty (1506). During the Qing, two renovations took place. As the terrain was limited, there was no extra space for expansion. The only architectural parts left from the Northern Qi are the two column bases in the shape of inverted lotus blossoms. Since the temple and the pavilion have the same orientation, the renovation in the 16th century probably used the original foundation of the earlier building.

2. Special features of the arrangement of the original temple

The pavilion and the temple were built next to the mountain. The Buddha on the north was carved out of the cliff; in front were the pavilion and the lantern. This area was used as the main place for worship. The southern part of the cave temple was a monastery, including dorms for the monks and a meditation area. The cave temple and the

monastery were connected, as is characteristic of mountain temples. Alone among excavated temple sites, this pavilion is the sole surviving example of such a building in China. It provides new material for researches on the Buddhist architectures of the Northern and Tang Dynasties.

3. The Northern Qi style in Buddhist sculpture

The major Buddhist statues unearthed at the site were from the Northern Qi Dynasty. Examples of art similar to the two Northern Qi styles present in the works found at the Tongzi Temple can be found in the Northern Qi Buddhist cave temples at Tianlongshan near Taiyuan, showing the influences from the Southern Dynasties; the other resembles the tomb figurines and murals found at other sites in the Taiyuan region, with their elongated faces, with the features of the Northern Dynasties. These provide significant new materials for the study of Northern Qi Buddhist sculptures.

The eave tile ends with lotus designs were mainly manufactured during the Tang Dynasty. Such building materials are important for the study of Taiyuan architecture during the Tang Dynasty, as well as for the researches on the relationship of the architecture of Taiyuan to that found in the two capitals Chang'an and Luoyang at the same time.

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Postscript

The original report published in *Kaogu* 考古 (Archaeology) 2010. 7: 43–56 with 13 illustrations and seven plates was written by Li Yuqun 李裕群 and Yan Yuejin 阎跃进. This abridged version is prepared by Li Yuqun and translated into English by Suzanne Cahill and Ye Wa 叶娃.