

The following images can be presented in class. The instructor should not lecture but rather identify the pieces and ask the students questions for discussion.

With noted exceptions, the images and objects presented here are from the Tang dynasty during Yang Guifei's lifetime. This distinguishes them from the written materials by Bai Juyi, Chen Hong, and Murasaki, which were written after Yang's death. A key question is to what extent the visual representations conflict with the written sources. The statues in Dunhuang were created by Buddhists, living in an area far from the capital city, in a similar cultural area to the ones where An Lushan (and "the whirl") came from.

Students can use evidence from the visual representations of Yang Guifei in the essay assignment described in the Student Activities section below, using the same care as treating the written sources.

Click on thumbnails for larger images.



Photo: Fay
Beauchamp

1. Statue of Yang Guifei sold in a San Francisco shop in 2000, given here to allow students to contrast westernized conventions of female beauty and sensuality with the Tang dynasty statue.



Photo: © Xiang
Gang Lianhe
Chubanshe

2. Standing woman (traditionally identified as similar to Yang Guifei), Tang dynasty, excavated 1959, Shaanxi Province.

Tricolor-glazed pottery figures have been dated to the period 712-756 because of coins in the same tomb near Xi'an. Ask students to list words that give their impression of the woman, then to describe details that substantiate their adjectives. The discussion leads to discussion of "cultural relativism" of such words as beautiful or sensual, and may also lead to "reading" her gesture and position of her head compared to Buddhist statues of the time where hand gestures (mudras) have coded meanings. Students will contradict one another with their interpretations but some

answers will be better supported with attentive description of details of her dress, hair arrangement, facial expression, feet, etc.



3. Tang dynasty mural from Dunhuang, illustrating court ladies with the heavy style attributed to the fashion set by Yang Guifei.

4. Bodhisattva, Cave 45, High Tang (705-780).



Photo: © Xiang
Gang Lianhe
Chubanshe

This statue is described as having “the full figure and graceful posture of a woman. Moreover, the hair is tied high in a bun, with hairpins and decorations typical of the palace ladies.” (Duan, Wenjie. *Dunhuang Art: through the eyes of Duan Wenjie* . Ed. Chung Tan. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1994. Page 150. Also available online: http://www.ignca.nic.in/ks_19.htm) Ask students to compare the face, pose, and stance depicted here with that of the statue of the standing woman identified as Yang Guifei (image #2). Why would Buddhists in Western China admire court ladies at this time? Dunhuang is the site of caves created for Buddhist worship along the Silk Roads and is in western China. Bodhisattvas are semi-divine beings that defer the state of Nirvana in order to help others.



Photo: © Xiang
Gang Lianhe
Chubanshe

5. Bodhisattva in Dunhuang from the Northern Wei Period (386-534).

Note: This image is from before the Tang dynasty and is included so that students realize that Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were not always depicted as plump. Body type changes from place to place and over time.



Photo: © Xiang
Gang Lianhe
Chubanshe

6. Second Bodhisattva from Cave 45 in Dunhuang High Tang (705-780).

The Second Bodhisattva shows that the heavier face appears in more than one statue in Cave 45 and reinforces the difference with # 5.



Photo: Fay
Beauchamp

7. Photo of a modern sculpture of Genji showing plumpness and similar hairstyle to the Dunhuang Bodhisattvas. Almost any illustration of Genji from any period will show similar characteristics, including those in the Tyler and Seidensticker editions. (For more illustrations of Genji, see Community College of Philadelphia Professor Diane Freedman's website:

<http://faculty.ccp.cc.pa.us/faculty/dfreedman/genji/genji.htm>

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Photo: Freer
Gallery of Art,
Smithsonian
Institution,
Washington,
D.C., Purchase,
F1957.14 (detail)

8. Painting by Qian Xuan (1235-1307) of the Yuan dynasty, *Yang Guifei Mounting a Horse*, owned by the Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C. (Click on thumbnail for larger image.)

What is different about how Yang Guifei is depicted here?
How have the centuries between her lifetime and 1300
changed how she is viewed?