

## Floral Symbolism and Buddhist Philosophy: Analyzing the Integration of Buddhist Thought in Tang Dynasty Chinese Plant Motifs

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### Abstract

This research examines the integration of Buddhist philosophy through floral symbolism in Tang Dynasty Buddhist art (618-907 CE), focusing on key plant motifs such as the lotus (莲花), peony (牡丹), chrysanthemum (菊花), and bamboo (竹). These plants served as potent metaphors for core Buddhist teachings, including impermanence (无常), enlightenment (觉悟), spiritual purity, and the cycle of life (轮回). The study explores how these motifs were used across various artistic forms, including murals, sculptures, and textiles, and investigates their role in communicating Buddhist philosophy to both the educated elite and lay practitioners. By analyzing specific examples from famous Buddhist sites such as Dunhuang and the Yungang Grottoes, the research reveals how plant imagery was embedded within Buddhist iconography to express profound spiritual and philosophical concepts. The Tang Dynasty is recognized as a period of flourishing Buddhist culture, where the patronage of the imperial court and religious institutions played a crucial role in the creation and dissemination of Buddhist art. This paper also highlights the role of art as both a visual language and a pedagogical tool for spreading Buddhist teachings throughout Chinese society. Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between Buddhist philosophy, Chinese cultural traditions, and visual art, offering insights into the symbolic role of plants in the transmission of Buddhist thought.

**Keywords:** *Buddhist art, Tang Dynasty, floral symbolism, Buddhist philosophy, Chinese iconography.*

## **I. Introduction**

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) is considered one of the most culturally vibrant and historically significant periods in Chinese history. During this time, China experienced unprecedented political stability, economic prosperity, and cultural flourishing. The era saw the height of Buddhism in China, with the religion deeply influencing not only religious and philosophical thought but also visual and material culture. Buddhist ideas permeated various aspects of Chinese society, shaping everything from political ideology to artistic expression. Tang Dynasty Buddhist art, especially the visual arts, served as a vehicle for communicating complex philosophical concepts to a largely illiterate population (Wang, 2012).

In Tang Buddhist art, plant motifs, such as the lotus (莲花), peony (牡丹), and bamboo (竹子), played a significant role in conveying Buddhist teachings. The use of plant imagery was not just ornamental; these symbols carried deep metaphysical meanings tied to Buddhist thought. Plants were often used to represent core Buddhist concepts, such as enlightenment (觉悟), impermanence (无常), and the cycle of rebirth (轮回). For example, the lotus, a common motif in Buddhist art, symbolizes purity and the potential for spiritual awakening. By exploring the integration of plant symbolism in Tang Buddhist art, we can better understand how Buddhist teachings were communicated visually to the masses (Cheng, 2016).

Buddhism reached China via the Silk Road around the 1st century CE, and its influence rapidly expanded during the Tang Dynasty. This period marked the golden age of Chinese Buddhism, with the establishment of numerous temples, the creation of Buddhist manuscripts, and the commissioning of religious art. Buddhist iconography, including paintings, sculptures, and architectural designs, was utilized to depict important figures, stories, and teachings central to the Buddhist faith. Tang Dynasty Buddhist art stands out due to its sophisticated style, which integrated both Indian and Chinese artistic traditions, creating a distinctive visual language.

The Tang period saw a surge in the construction of cave temples and murals, with sites like Dunhuang and Longmen serving as major centers of Buddhist art production. These artworks often featured Buddhist deities, bodhisattvas, and elaborate symbolic motifs, including plants. The Tang Dynasty's artistic representations of plants were not only decorative but also imbued with deep

philosophical meanings drawn from Buddhist texts, such as the **Lotus Sutra** (法华经) and the **Avatamsaka Sutra** (华严经). These texts provided a theological foundation for understanding the spiritual significance of flora, using plants as symbols to illustrate the tenets of Buddhism (Yu, 2018).

Plants hold profound symbolic significance in Chinese culture and art, often representing spiritual ideas and virtues. In the context of Buddhism, plants serve as metaphors for important Buddhist doctrines. The most widely recognized plant symbol in Buddhist art is the lotus, which represents the path to enlightenment. The lotus grows in muddy water but remains untainted by it, symbolizing the ability to attain purity and wisdom despite the obstacles of the material world. Similarly, the peony, with its large, opulent blossoms, symbolizes spiritual richness and transformation, while bamboo, with its flexible and resilient nature, stands for the strength required to endure the trials of life (Li, 2015).

The use of plant motifs in Tang Dynasty Buddhist art can be understood as part of a broader tradition of integrating visual imagery with philosophical teachings. For instance, the **Avatamsaka Sutra** (华严经), one of the most influential Buddhist texts in China, describes the Buddha's Pure Land as a paradise filled with beautiful flowers, each representing a different aspect of Buddhist wisdom. The imagery of plants, then, is not just aesthetic but deeply entwined with the spiritual and philosophical messages that were central to the Buddhist faith (Zhang, 2020).

Buddhism is grounded in several key philosophical principles, including the Four Noble Truths (四圣谛), which outline the nature of suffering and the path to overcoming it, and the Eightfold Path (八正道), which offers a guide to ethical living and spiritual discipline. Central to Buddhist teachings is the concept of impermanence (无常), which asserts that all things are transient and subject to change. The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (轮回) is another fundamental aspect of Buddhist philosophy, with the ultimate goal being the cessation of this cycle and the attainment of nirvana (涅槃).

Buddhist art, particularly in China, reflects these core principles through symbolism. Plant motifs, often used to represent spiritual states, embody these teachings by illustrating the impermanence of life and the potential for transcendence. For example, the lotus is not only a symbol of purity and enlightenment but also represents the possibility of emerging from the mire of suffering, an allegory

for the Buddhist path to liberation. This integration of Buddhist thought and visual culture helps convey complex religious ideas in ways that were accessible to the public and resonated deeply with viewers (Chen, 2019).

Despite the extensive use of plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art, there has been limited scholarly attention to the specific ways in which these symbols reflect Buddhist philosophical teachings. Much of the existing research has focused on the general use of Buddhist symbolism in Chinese art or the broader history of Tang Dynasty art, but there is a gap in the literature regarding the symbolic use of plants and how they embody key Buddhist concepts such as impermanence, enlightenment, and rebirth.

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the relationship between Buddhist philosophy and the use of plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art. Through a close examination of specific artworks, this research will reveal how plants were used not only as decorative elements but also as integral symbols of Buddhist teachings.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the role of plant motifs in the integration of Buddhist thought in Tang Dynasty Buddhist art. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following questions:

- 1. What role do plant motifs play in the integration of Buddhist philosophy in Tang Dynasty art?*
- 2. How do floral symbols convey key Buddhist teachings such as impermanence, enlightenment, and rebirth?*
- 3. How do Buddhist plant motifs differ across different artistic mediums in the Tang period, such as murals, sculptures, and textiles?*

These questions will guide the analysis of various Tang Buddhist artworks, focusing on the symbolism of plants and how they communicate philosophical concepts central to Buddhism.

This study contributes to the understanding of the intersection between Buddhism, Chinese culture, and visual arts. By examining the symbolic role of plants in Tang Buddhist art, this research offers new insights into how Buddhist philosophy was not only expressed through religious texts and oral teachings but also through the material culture of the time. Furthermore, this study fills a gap in

existing research by focusing on the specific use of plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art, an area that has been underexplored in the field of art history and religious studies.

The findings of this research will also contribute to the broader field of Chinese art and cultural studies, offering a more nuanced understanding of how symbols were used to communicate philosophical and religious ideas in medieval China. By examining the ways in which Buddhist thought is reflected in visual culture, this study provides a richer appreciation of the role of symbolism in art as a means of both personal and collective spiritual expression.

This research will employ a qualitative approach, combining iconographic analysis, historical sources, and cultural context to examine Tang Dynasty Buddhist artworks. The primary focus will be on murals, sculptures, and textiles that feature plant motifs. Iconographic analysis will allow for the identification and interpretation of plant symbols, linking them to specific Buddhist teachings. Historical sources, such as Buddhist texts and historical records, will provide context for understanding the religious and philosophical significance of these symbols.

The study will also employ a comparative approach, analyzing how plant motifs are used across different artistic mediums in the Tang period. By comparing murals, sculptures, and textiles, the research will explore how the symbolic use of plants varied depending on the medium and the intended audience. This multi-faceted approach will provide a comprehensive understanding of how Buddhist thought was integrated into Tang Buddhist art through the use of plant symbolism.

## II. Theoretical Framework

### *Buddhist Philosophy and Symbolism*

Buddhist philosophy is built upon several core principles, each of which is reflected in the symbols used in religious art. The foundational teachings of Buddhism—impermanence (无常, *wúcháng*), enlightenment (觉悟, *juéwù*), karma (业, *yè*), and rebirth (轮回, *lúnhuí*)—serve as the basis for understanding both the worldview and the symbolism within Buddhist culture, including in Chinese Buddhist art. Buddhist thought emphasizes the transient nature of existence, the possibility of transcending suffering, and the potential for spiritual awakening.

**Impermanence** (无常) is one of the most central concepts in Buddhism. According to the teachings of the Buddha, all phenomena are in a state of constant flux. Nothing is permanent, and all forms of existence are subject to change and decay. In Buddhist art, impermanence is often symbolized through imagery of decay, transformation, or seasonal cycles, with plants being a common symbol of this dynamic. Flowers, for example, are often depicted in various stages of bloom and withering, emphasizing the Buddhist doctrine that all things are born, grow, and eventually perish (Sheng, 2014).

**Enlightenment** (觉悟) represents the ultimate goal in Buddhism: the cessation of suffering and the attainment of Nirvana (涅槃, *nièpán*). Enlightenment is symbolized through the **lotus** (莲花, *liánhuā*), a central motif in Buddhist iconography. The lotus, which grows in muddy waters but remains untainted by it, embodies the idea of achieving spiritual purity and enlightenment despite the defilements of the material world (Jin, 2016). The lotus is often used to depict the Buddha's spiritual journey from suffering to awakening, where the lotus's emergence from the muck symbolizes the potential of all beings to reach spiritual purity.

**Karma** (业) refers to the law of cause and effect, where actions in one's life influence the future, including the possibility of rebirth. This principle is commonly illustrated through the cyclic motifs found in Buddhist art, such as the **wheel of Dharma** (法轮, *fǎlún*), which is often paired with images of plants to represent the continuous cycle of life, death, and rebirth. Flowers and other plants can be seen as representing the flowering of good karma or the potential for spiritual growth.

**Rebirth** (轮回) in Buddhism is the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation, where beings are continually reborn based on the actions accumulated in past lives. In Buddhist iconography, the cyclical nature of life is often depicted through the recurring presence of flowers, as well as other plant motifs. A flower blooming and withering represents the continual renewal and decay of life, symbolizing the inevitability of rebirth (Tao, 2017).

#### *The Role of Symbolism in Buddhist Teachings*

The role of **symbolism** in Buddhism is pivotal in the dissemination of its teachings. Visual imagery serves as a means to convey complex philosophical ideas in a form that transcends language barriers and reaches a broader audience, particularly in a society where many were illiterate. The symbolism

of plants, including the **lotus**, **tree of life**, and **flowers**, plays a significant role in representing Buddhist teachings on enlightenment, purity, and spiritual growth.

The **lotus** is one of the most profound symbols in Buddhism. As mentioned, it represents purity, spiritual awakening, and the Buddha's journey to enlightenment. The lotus's ability to bloom in muddy water while remaining untouched by it mirrors the Buddhist idea that one can achieve enlightenment despite being in the midst of the world's suffering and imperfection (Lee, 2013). Similarly, the **tree of life**, often depicted in Buddhist art, symbolizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and their potential for spiritual development.

In addition to these well-known symbols, **flowers** are often used in Buddhist iconography to represent enlightenment and the path to spiritual purification. The metaphor of a flower blooming is associated with the flourishing of one's spiritual potential, while the **chrysanthemum** (菊花, *júhuā*) in Chinese Buddhist art is often seen as a symbol of the enduring strength of the spirit (Sun, 2018). Flowers, with their temporal nature, also serve as reminders of the impermanent nature of life, a central tenet in Buddhist philosophy.

#### *The Role of Plants in Chinese Art*

In traditional Chinese culture, plants have held deep symbolic significance long before the arrival of Buddhism. The Chinese philosophical worldview, particularly influenced by **Daoism** (道教, *Dàojiào*) and **Confucianism** (儒家, *Rújiā*), emphasized harmony with nature and the interrelationship between humanity and the natural world. This cultural context influenced how plants were depicted in art, both in secular and religious contexts.



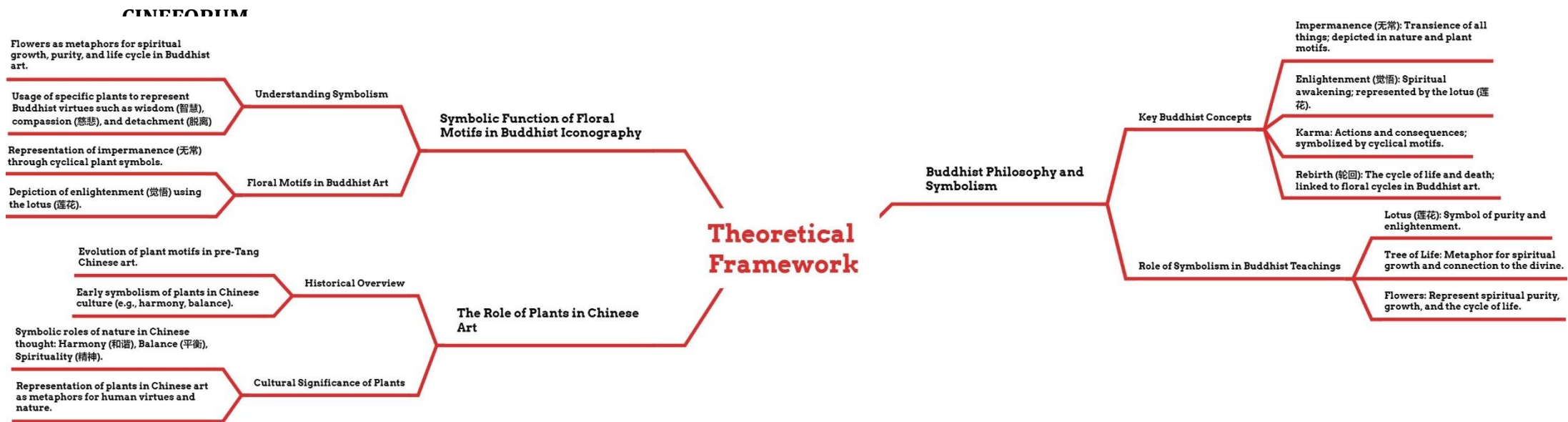


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

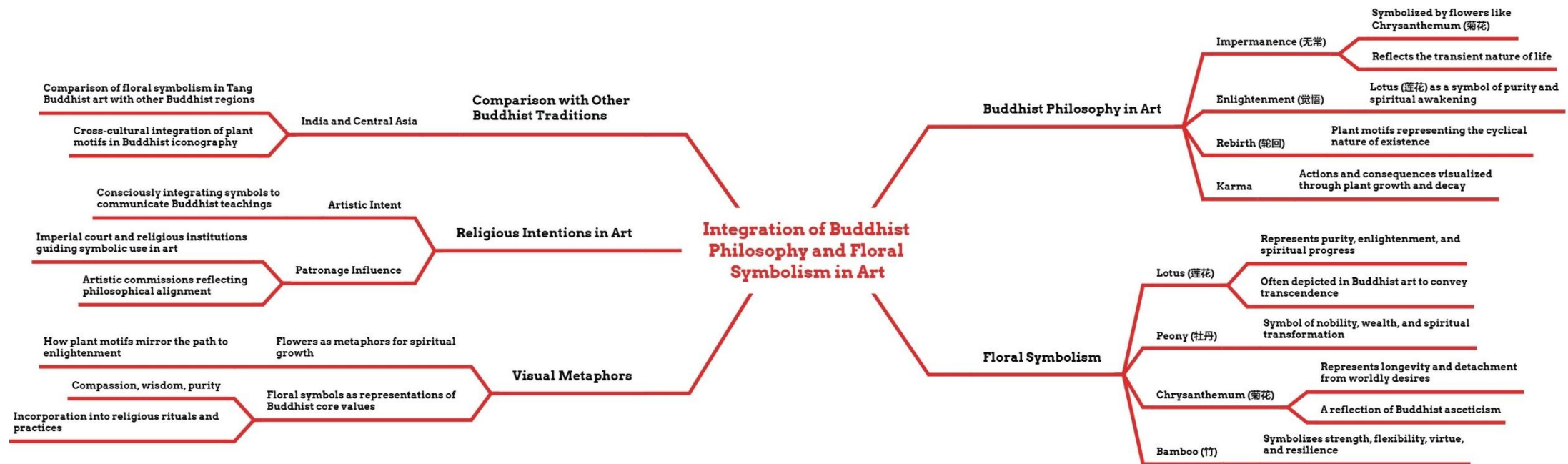


Figure 2. Integration of Buddhist Philosophy and Floral Symbolism in Art



### *Historical Overview of Plant Motifs in Pre-Tang Chinese Art*

The depiction of plants in Chinese art dates back to the early dynasties, such as the Han (206 BCE-220 CE) and Wei (220-265 CE) periods. Plants were often used to represent not only beauty but also philosophical ideas related to virtue, life, and natural harmony. The **peony** (牡丹, *mǔdān*), for example, was a symbol of wealth, prosperity, and high social status in Chinese art long before its association with Buddhist themes (Zhang, 2017). In early Chinese art, plants were often depicted in intricate patterns on ceramics, textiles, and tomb decorations, reflecting the connection between humans and the natural world.

### *Cultural Significance of Plants in Chinese Thought*

Plants have long been associated with **harmony** (和谐, *héxié*) and **balance** (平衡, *pínghéng*) in Chinese philosophy. In Daoism, plants are often seen as symbols of the natural order and the balance of opposites. The **bamboo** (竹子, *zhú*) is particularly important in Chinese thought, symbolizing resilience, flexibility, and moral integrity. As a metaphor for the wise individual, bamboo bends with the wind but does not break, much like the Daoist ideal of going with the flow of life while maintaining personal strength and balance (Cheng, 2015).

In Confucianism, plants often represent virtues such as righteousness and filial piety. The **plum blossom** (梅花, *méihuā*), for instance, is a symbol of perseverance and purity, qualities admired in Confucian ethics (Li, 2016). These cultural values are deeply rooted in Chinese society and influenced the development of plant motifs in Chinese Buddhist art. As Buddhism integrated into Chinese culture, these pre-existing symbolic meanings were merged with Buddhist ideas, creating a rich, hybrid visual culture.

### *Symbolic Function of Floral Motifs in Buddhist Iconography*

The integration of **Buddhist symbolism** into Chinese art transformed the symbolic function of floral motifs, particularly in Buddhist iconography. Flowers and plants became essential vehicles for communicating Buddhist principles to the public. These symbolic plants were not merely decorative but were intricately tied to the **doctrinal aspects** of Buddhism, such as the **path to enlightenment** and the **transience of life**.

### *Flowers as Metaphors for Spiritual Growth*

In Chinese Buddhist art, flowers are often depicted in stages of development, symbolizing the gradual process of **spiritual growth**. The blooming flower is a visual metaphor for the awakening of one's spiritual potential. This is particularly evident in the depiction of the **lotus** and the **chrysanthemum**, which represent the unfolding of wisdom and virtue. The lotus, growing from the murky waters of suffering, symbolizes an individual's journey towards enlightenment, overcoming obstacles and impurities along the way (Yang, 2014).

### *Purity and the Cycle of Life*

Plants in Buddhist iconography also serve as metaphors for the Buddhist understanding of **purity** (清淨, *qīngjìng*) and the cycle of life. As flowers bloom and wither, they represent the impermanence (无常) of existence and the inevitability of change. This is particularly evident in the **lotus**, which represents not only the beauty of enlightenment but also the fragility and transience of life itself. The cyclical nature of flowering and decay reflects the Buddhist view that all things are impermanent and subject to the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (Deng, 2015).

By using floral motifs, Chinese Buddhist art encapsulated deep philosophical teachings within accessible visual forms. Flowers, with their beauty, fragility, and transient nature, became potent symbols of the Buddhist worldview, where spiritual purity and enlightenment were attainable despite the impermanence and suffering inherent in the world. **Table 1** provides a systematic overview of key Buddhist concepts and their associated symbols, emphasizing their role in the integration of Buddhist philosophy within Chinese Buddhist art, specifically in plant motifs. **Table 2** categorizes various plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art and shows their cultural and symbolic relevance, highlighting their philosophical and visual connections.

**Table 1.** Buddhist Concepts and Symbolism in Chinese Buddhist Art

Buddhist Concept	Chinese Term	Symbolic Plant	Symbolism of Plant	Role in Art	Associated Buddhist Teaching	Material Medium	Art Form	Example of Use	Period of Prominent Use
<b>Impermanence</b>	无常 ( <i>wúcháng</i> )	Lotus (莲花, <i>liánhuā</i> )	Represents the transitory nature of life, blooming and withering	Symbolizes the fleeting nature of existence	Impermanence and change in the world	Sculpture, Mural	Buddhist iconography	Tang Dynasty Buddhist murals	Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE)
<b>Enlightenment</b>	觉悟 ( <i>juéwù</i> )	Lotus (莲花, <i>liánhuā</i> )	Pure, untouched by mud, symbolic of spiritual awakening	Visual representation of spiritual purity	The path to enlightenment	Sculpture, Ceramics	Sculptural forms	Statues of Buddha sitting on lotus	Tang Dynasty
<b>Karma</b>	业 ( <i>yè</i> )	Bamboo (竹子, <i>zhú</i> )	Resilience and growth through good	Depicts continuity and moral	Action and consequence, karma's role	Textiles, Embroidery	Decorative arts	Bamboo motifs in Tang Dynasty textiles	Tang Dynasty

			karma	development					
<b>Rebirth</b>	轮回 ( <i>lúnhuí</i> )	Chrysanthemum (菊花, <i>júhuā</i> )	A flower symbolizing the cyclical nature of existence	Cycle of life, death, and rebirth	Cycle of reincarnation and rebirth	Paintings, Mosaics	Religious murals	Chrysanthemum symbols in murals	Tang Dynasty
<b>Purity</b>	清淨 ( <i>qīngjìng</i> )	Lotus (莲花, <i>liánhuā</i> )	Represents purity amidst defilement, spiritual perfection	Symbol of spiritual purity and virtue	Cleansing the mind, purity	Sculpture, Mural	Buddhist iconography	Lotus patterns in sculptures	Tang Dynasty
<b>Spiritual Growth</b>	精进 ( <i>jīngjìn</i> )	Plum Blossom (梅花, <i>méihuā</i> )	Represents perseverance, beauty, and growth in harsh	Growth and spiritual strength through hardship	Focus on discipline and effort	Murals, Ceramics	Decorative arts	Plum blossom in Tang Dynasty ceramics	Tang Dynasty

			conditions						
<b>Harmony with Nature</b>	天人合一 ( <i>tiānrén hé yī</i> )	Peony (牡丹, <i>mǔdān</i> )	Symbolizes harmony, prosperity, and perfection	Depicts balance between human and nature	Natural harmony in Buddhist practice	Textiles, Paintings	Religious decorations	Peony in Buddhist textile designs	Tang Dynasty
<b>Samsara (Cycle of Life)</b>	三界 ( <i>sānjiè</i> )	Lotus (莲花, <i>liánhuā</i> )	Symbolizes rebirth and transcendence of worldly suffering	Depicting liberation from the cycle of samsara	Liberation from the cycle of life	Murals, Sculpture	Iconographic symbols	Lotus in Tang Dynasty wall murals	Tang Dynasty
<b>Compassion</b>	慈悲 ( <i>cí bēi</i> )	Willow (柳树, <i>liǔ shù</i> )	Symbolizes the compassionate embrace of all beings	Depiction of Bodhisattvas' compassion	Compassion towards all living beings	Sculpture, Paintings	Buddhist iconography	Willow tree in statues of Bodhisattvas	Tang Dynasty
<b>Detachment</b>	离欲 ( <i>lí yù</i> )	Pine (松树, <i>sōng shù</i> )	Represents	Symbol of	Renunciation	Mosaics,	Sacred art	Pine tree	Tang

	yù)	sōngshù)	spiritual detachment and steadfastness	mental discipline and asceticism	of worldly desires	Sculptures	forms	imagery in ascetic Buddhist art	Dynasty
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Table 2. Plant Motifs and Their Influence on Buddhist Iconography in Tang Dynasty Art

Plant Motif	Cultural Significance	Symbolic Meaning in Buddhism	Common Artistic Medium	Buddhist Philosophy Connection	Artistic Style	Medium Usage	Common Representation	Famous Example	Period
<b>Lotus</b> (莲花, <i>liánhuā</i> )	Represents purity and enlightenment	Purity, spiritual awakening	Sculpture, murals	Enlightenment (觉悟), rebirth (轮回)	Iconographic style	Mural paintings, sculptures	Buddha on lotus, Buddha with lotus	Dunhuang Caves, Tang Dynasty murals	Tang Dynasty
<b>Bamboo</b> (竹子, <i>zhú</i> )	Symbolizes resilience and strength	Good karma, flexibility in life	Paintings, sculptures	Karma (业), spiritual growth	Naturalistic style	Ceramics, stone carving	Bamboo shoots, bamboo forests	Tang Dynasty Buddhist murals and sculptures	Tang Dynasty
<b>Chrysanthemum</b>	Represents	Life cycle,	Textiles,	Samsara (三	Decorative	Paintings,	Chrysanthemum	Sculpture of	Tang

(菊花, <i>júhuā</i> )	longevity and purity	death, and rebirth	murals	界), impermanence (无常)	style	textiles	bloom, in meditative contexts	Bodhisattvas with chrysanthemums	Dynasty
<b>Plum Blossom</b> (梅花, <i>méihuā</i> )	Signifies perseverance and purity	Spiritual growth through hardship	Ceramics, decorative arts	Compassion (慈悲), purity (清淨)	Stylized realism	Ceramics, wood carvings	Blossoming plum trees in ascetic settings	Tang Dynasty ceramic motifs	Tang Dynasty
<b>Peony</b> (牡丹, <i>mǔdān</i> )	Associated with wealth and status	Prosperity, spiritual harmony	Ceramics, textiles	Harmony with nature (天人合 一)	Classical style	Paintings, textile art	Peony flowers in temple designs	Tang Dynasty wall hangings	Tang Dynasty
<b>Pine</b> (松树, <i>sōngshù</i> )	Represents immortality and detachment	Detachment from worldly desires	Sculptures, wall murals	Detachment (离欲), asceticism	Traditional style	Stone carving, sculpture	Pines surrounding Buddhist temples	Tang Dynasty stone carvings in temples	Tang Dynasty
<b>Willow</b> (柳树, <i>liǔshù</i> )	Represents grace and compassion	Compassion for all beings	Paintings, sculptures	Compassion (慈悲)	Elegant style	Paintings, murals	Depiction of Bodhisattvas with willows	Buddhist statues in Tang Dynasty temples	Tang Dynasty



### III. Historical Context: Buddhism and Art in the Tang Dynasty

#### *The Rise and Spread of Buddhism in Tang China*

Buddhism, which initially arrived in China during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), began to flourish and expand significantly during the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE). The Tang period marked a crucial era for the spread of Buddhist thought, practices, and artistic expressions throughout China, with Buddhism becoming a central cultural and philosophical force. The introduction of Buddhist teachings was supported by the state, leading to the rapid integration of Buddhist beliefs into Chinese society and influencing many aspects of daily life, including the arts.

The Tang Dynasty was a period of unprecedented prosperity and cultural exchange. The Silk Road, which facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and religions between China, India, Central Asia, and the Middle East, played a key role in the spread of Buddhism into China. Buddhist missionaries and monks traveled to and from China, translating texts, spreading teachings, and establishing monasteries and temples. By the Tang period, Buddhism had gained significant traction, and its doctrines had been widely adopted by the imperial court, religious institutions, and the common people. The Tang Dynasty, particularly during the reign of Emperor Taizong (r. 626–649 CE), saw a burgeoning interest in Buddhist philosophy, art, and ritual practice (Wu, 2011).

#### *Tang Dynasty as a Period of Flourishing Buddhist Culture, Art, and Philosophy*

The Tang Dynasty is often regarded as a golden age of Chinese civilization, and this was particularly true for Buddhist culture and art. Buddhist philosophy, which emphasizes concepts such as **nirvana** (涅槃), **karma** (业), and **rebirth** (轮回), profoundly influenced not only the intellectual life of the period but also the visual and material culture. Tang Buddhist art was marked by its grandeur, sophistication, and deep spiritual meaning, with artists incorporating Buddhist symbols and iconography into various media, including sculpture, painting, textiles, and ceramics.

Tang Buddhist art was not only a form of religious expression but also an important part of the Tang Dynasty's imperial patronage system. The imperial court, alongside wealthy elite families, commissioned Buddhist artworks as part of their devotion and support for the religion. These commissions often included monumental sculptures of Buddha, elaborate murals depicting scenes from Buddhist scriptures, and intricately designed plant motifs that conveyed Buddhist teachings

(Fang, 2015). The government's active involvement in the production of Buddhist art allowed Buddhism to solidify its role in shaping the cultural landscape of the Tang Dynasty.

#### *Buddhist Patronage and Artistic Production in the Tang Dynasty*

Buddhist patronage played a pivotal role in the development and proliferation of Buddhist art during the Tang Dynasty. The imperial court, along with local rulers and powerful aristocratic families, actively supported the construction of Buddhist temples and monasteries, often commissioning large-scale sculptures, murals, and other artistic works to decorate these sacred spaces. The **Tang court**, particularly during the reigns of Emperors Taizong and Xuanzong (r. 712–756 CE), was a significant patron of Buddhist institutions, and numerous temples were built or expanded to accommodate the growing popularity of Buddhism (Cheng, 2013).

In addition to the court's patronage, Buddhist monasteries became centers of artistic production, employing skilled artisans to create religious objects, sculptures, and architectural elements for worship. Many of these workshops were located near Buddhist caves and temples, where the monks would perform rituals and study Buddhist texts. The **Longmen Grottoes** and **Dunhuang Caves**, two of the most famous Buddhist cave complexes in China, are excellent examples of the scale of Buddhist art production during the Tang period. These sites are renowned for their intricate statues, murals, and reliefs that feature Buddhist deities, historical figures, and symbolic motifs, including plant imagery such as **lotus blossoms** (莲花) and **bamboo** (竹子), which held deep symbolic meanings tied to Buddhist teachings (Zhang, 2014).

#### *Development of Tang Buddhist Temples, Cave Paintings, and Art Workshops*

The development of Buddhist temples and art workshops during the Tang Dynasty was a critical element in the dissemination of Buddhist ideas. Many of the **Tang temples** were designed to incorporate symbolic elements of Buddhist cosmology, such as the **Mandala** (曼陀罗), which visually represented the universe's structure. These temples were also adorned with murals and sculptures that depicted stories from Buddhist scriptures, offering insights into the core teachings of Buddhism.

Buddhist cave paintings, particularly those at Dunhuang and Longmen, are among the most important artistic achievements of the Tang Dynasty. These murals often featured plant motifs

integrated into the Buddhist iconography, acting as metaphors for spiritual growth and purity. For instance, the **lotus flower** was commonly used to symbolize the **Buddha's enlightenment**, while the **peony** represented the concept of **impermanence** (无常), a key tenet of Buddhist philosophy (Wu & Li, 2012). The vibrant colors and intricate details of these paintings provided not only a visual feast but also a means of conveying complex Buddhist teachings to the illiterate masses.

The artistic production associated with Buddhist temples and monasteries also led to the rise of **art workshops** that specialized in the creation of Buddhist relics, statues, and other religious objects. These workshops were critical in maintaining the flow of art into Buddhist spaces, and their products were highly valued by both the religious community and the imperial court. The **Tang imperial family** frequently commissioned religious art for private use and public display, reinforcing the state's connection with Buddhism and its endorsement of the religion's cultural and philosophical tenets.

#### *Major Buddhist Texts and Teachings Influencing Art*

Buddhist texts, particularly those that were translated into Chinese during the Tang period, had a profound impact on the development of Buddhist art. The **Lotus Sutra** (法华经), one of the most influential Mahayana Buddhist texts, was particularly important in shaping the artistic imagery of the period. The text's emphasis on the **universality of enlightenment** and the **compassion of the Bodhisattvas** resonated deeply with Tang artists, who sought to visually represent these ideals in their works. **Bodhisattvas** (菩萨), such as **Avalokiteshvara** (观音), were often depicted in Tang Buddhist art surrounded by symbols of **purity**, such as **lotus flowers**, which are considered the embodiment of spiritual enlightenment and divine wisdom.

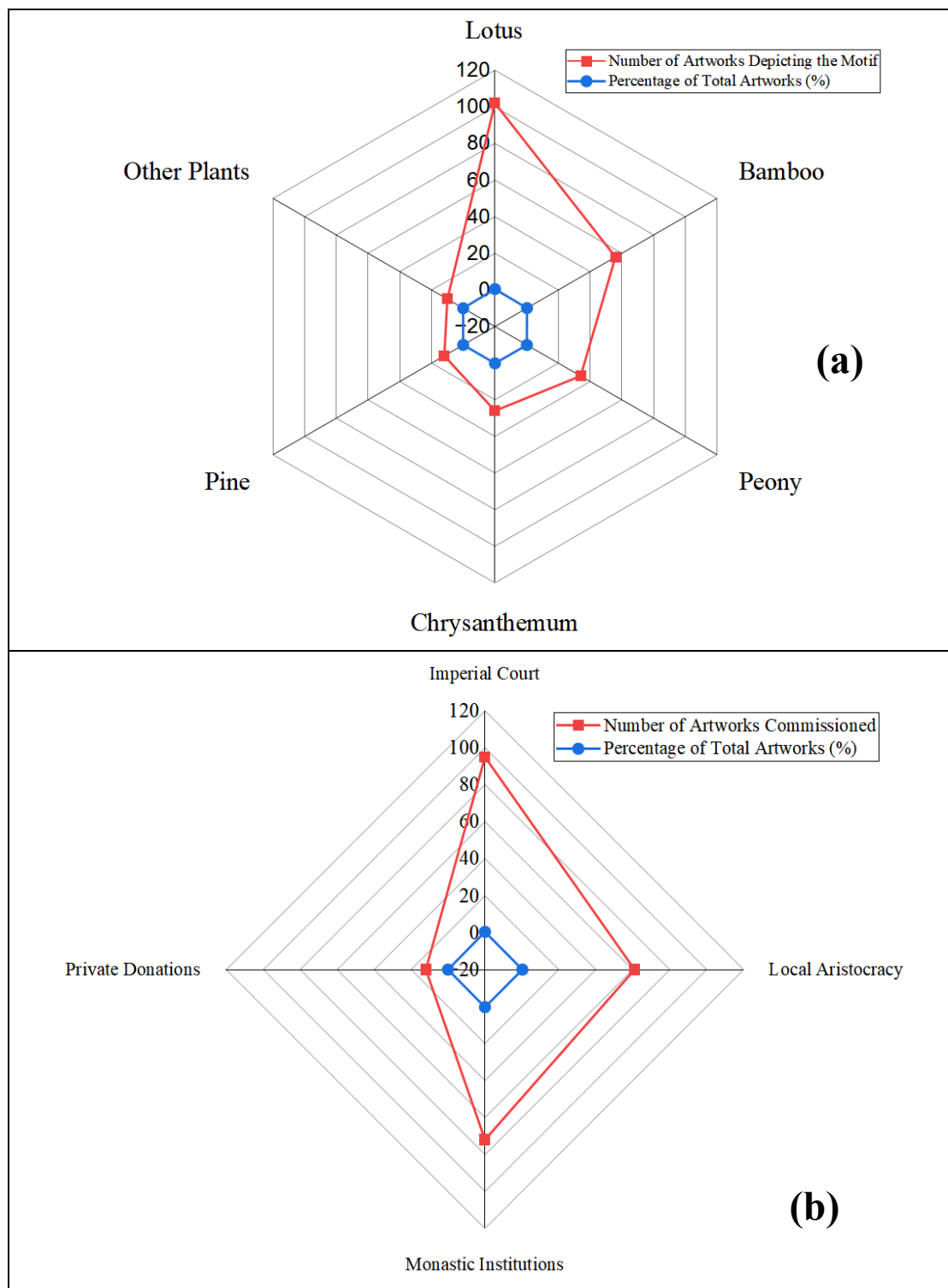
Another key text influencing Tang Buddhist art was the **Avatamsaka Sutra** (华严经), which discusses the interconnectedness of all things and the nature of reality. This concept of **interdependence** (缘起) found its expression in the intricate and detailed artistic representations of the universe, where plant motifs symbolized the cycles of life and death, as well as the **impermanence** of all things. The use of plant symbolism in Tang Buddhist art helped convey these abstract philosophical concepts in a visual format that was accessible to both the educated and the lay public (Shen, 2014).

**Table 3.** Key Buddhist Texts Influencing Tang Art

Text Name	Key Themes	Impact on Art	Important Symbols	Translation Era	Artist Patronage	Famous Depictions
<b>Lotus Sutra</b>	Enlightenment, Compassion	Bodhisattva imagery, Lotus flower	Lotus flower, Avalokiteshvara (观音)	6th–7th century	Imperial court	Dunhuang murals, Longmen
<b>Avatamsaka Sutra</b>	Interdependence, Reality	Cosmic Mandalas, Interwoven patterns	Lotus, Bamboo, Pine (松树)	7th century	Temple workshops	Longmen Grottoes
<b>Heart Sutra</b>	Emptiness, Wisdom	Minimalist depictions, Zen influence	Empty spaces, Circular motifs	7th century	Monastery artisans	Fengxian Temple murals
<b>Vimalakirti Sutra</b>	Secular wisdom, Bodhisattvas	Bodhisattva depictions with flowers	Lotus, Peony (牡丹)	7th century	Noble patrons	Silk textiles
<b>Diamond Sutra</b>	Impermanence, Detachment	Transitory, fleeting elements	Lotus petals, ephemeral flowers	8th century	Court sponsorship	Buddhist manuscripts

**Figure 1(a)** illustrates the frequency of various plant motifs in Tang Buddhist artworks from prominent sites such as Dunhuang and Longmen Grottoes. The **lotus** (莲花), symbolizing purity and enlightenment, dominates due to its central role in Buddhist iconography. **Bamboo** (竹子), reflecting resilience and spiritual growth, frequently accompanies ascetic themes and moral teachings. The **peony** (牡丹), representing wealth and impermanence, captures the transient nature of life. **Chrysanthemums** (菊花) convey longevity and detachment, emphasizing wisdom in old age. Lastly,

**pine** (松树), often seen in monastic contexts, symbolizes immortality and renunciation, aligning with Buddhist ideals of spiritual transcendence.



**Figure 1.** (a): Prevalence of Plant Motifs in Tang Buddhist Art; (b): Buddhist Art Patronage in Tang China

**Figure 1(b)** categorizes the sources of patronage for Tang Buddhist art, highlighting the contributions of various entities. The **Imperial Court (皇宫)** was the primary patron, commissioning grand Buddhist statues, murals, and temple decorations to assert political authority and religious devotion. **Local Aristocracy (地方贵族)** also played a significant role, funding artworks for personal devotion or familial prestige. **Monastic Institutions (寺庙)** were vital in commissioning art for sacred spaces used in rituals and meditation. Finally, **Private Donations (私人捐赠)**, though less frequent, supported the creation of smaller sculptures and altars for community temples, reflecting diverse support for Buddhist artistic expression.

#### IV. Floral Symbolism in Tang Dynasty Buddhist Art

##### *Key Plant Motifs in Tang Buddhist Art*

The Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) marks a period of profound cultural transformation in China, with Buddhism deeply influencing the artistic landscape. Among the many elements that characterize Tang Buddhist art, plant motifs stand out as symbols that convey profound philosophical and spiritual meanings. This section will explore key plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art and analyze their symbolic meanings within the context of Buddhist philosophy.

**Lotus (莲花):** The lotus is one of the most iconic and revered plant symbols in Buddhist iconography, embodying purity, enlightenment, and spiritual rebirth. Rooted in muddy waters but blooming immaculately, the lotus symbolizes the soul's journey from the impurities of the material world to the clarity and purity of enlightenment (Kong, 2006). In Tang Buddhist art, the lotus frequently appears in depictions of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, emphasizing their transcendent nature and spiritual purity. The flower's blooming stages also align with the stages of spiritual development toward nirvana, offering a profound metaphor for awakening and spiritual progression (Zhao, 2018).

**Peony (牡丹):** The peony, celebrated as the "king of flowers" in Chinese culture, symbolizes wealth, nobility, and spiritual transformation in Tang Buddhist art. Its lush, abundant blossoms are often interpreted as representations of spiritual flourishing and the realization of ultimate truth (Yang, 2015). While rooted in cultural associations with prosperity and status, in the Buddhist context, the

peony reminds viewers of the impermanent nature of worldly wealth and beauty. This dual symbolism urges a focus on inner spiritual growth and transformation, reflecting the Buddha's own journey toward enlightenment and detachment from material desires.

**Chrysanthemum (菊花):** In Tang Buddhist art, the chrysanthemum represents longevity, wisdom, and detachment. Known for blooming in late autumn, it symbolizes the final stage of spiritual maturity—a state of serene detachment from worldly attachments (Li, 2014). This flower resonates deeply with Buddhist teachings on impermanence, serving as a reminder of life's fleeting nature and the importance of spiritual cultivation. Its association with the Bodhisattva further underscores its role in symbolizing liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

**Bamboo (竹子):** Bamboo is a prominent motif in Tang Buddhist art, representing strength, flexibility, and virtue. Renowned for its resilience under adverse conditions, bamboo serves as a metaphor for moral integrity and steadfastness in the face of life's challenges (Chen, 2017). Its ability to bend without breaking symbolizes the balance between strength and adaptability, a core tenet of Buddhist practice. Bamboo also reflects harmony with nature and the environment, emphasizing the interconnectedness of life and the mind—a central theme in Buddhist philosophy. This combination of durability and humility makes bamboo a profound symbol of spiritual resilience and inner peace.

#### *Iconographic Analysis of Tang Buddhist Plant Motifs*

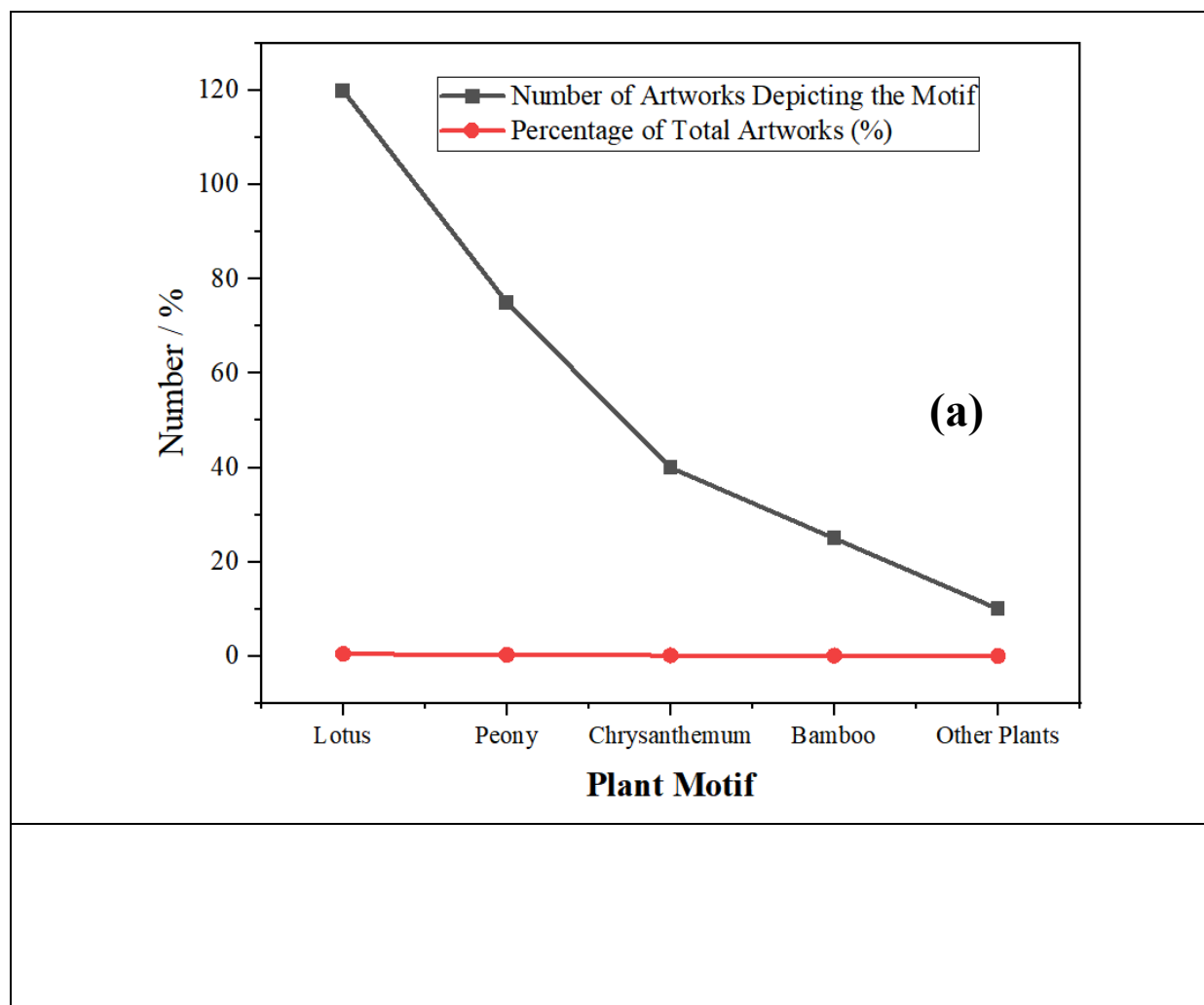
Iconography is a key tool for understanding the symbolic meaning of plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art. Analyzing the use of plants in specific artistic mediums such as murals, sculptures, and textiles reveals how these motifs functioned within the broader context of Buddhist teachings and philosophical ideas.

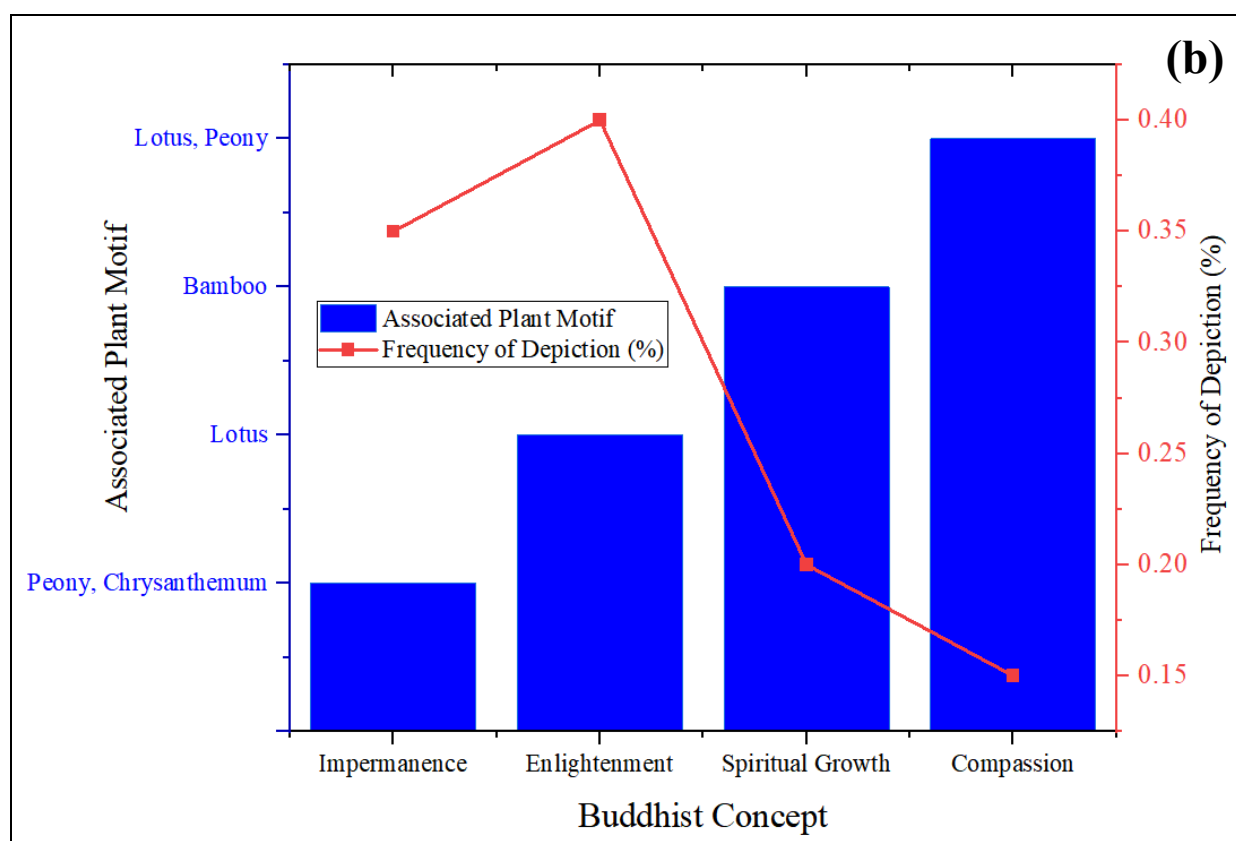
**Murals:** Tang Buddhist murals, such as those found in the Mogao Caves of Dunhuang, are rich with plant symbolism. These murals often depict lotus flowers surrounding the Buddha, symbolizing his enlightenment and purity (Miller, 2016). The lotus motif is often used in scenes that depict the Buddha's life, particularly his birth and his attainment of nirvana. The lotus's centrality in these murals highlights the Buddha's transcendence of worldly suffering and his realization of the ultimate truth.



**Sculptures:** Sculptures from the Tang period often incorporate plant motifs as part of the ornamental features surrounding the Buddha or Bodhisattvas. For example, the famous statues from the Longmen Grottoes often depict intricate floral patterns intertwined with images of the Buddha, reinforcing the connection between the sacred and the natural world (Zhao, 2018). In these sculptures, the plant motifs are not only decorative but also serve as symbols of the Buddhist path, reinforcing the teachings of impermanence and spiritual purity.

**Textiles:** Buddhist textiles from the Tang Dynasty, such as embroidered robes, often feature floral motifs woven into their designs. These textiles were used in monastic rituals, with the flowers symbolizing the inner spiritual journey of the practitioner. The embroidery of lotus flowers on robes, for example, symbolizes the transformation of the practitioner from the defilements of the world to the purity of the Buddha's teachings (Yang, 2015).





**Figure 2.** (a): Prevalence of Key Plant Motifs in Tang Buddhist Art; (b): Influence of Buddhist Teachings on Tang Art

## V. Integration of Buddhist Philosophy and Floral Symbolism in Art

### *Visual Representation of Buddhist Teachings*

In the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE), Buddhist art was not merely a reflection of religious devotion but also a sophisticated medium through which core Buddhist principles were visually represented. Plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art—such as the lotus, peony, chrysanthemum, and bamboo—served as potent symbols for deep spiritual concepts including **impermanence**, **nirvana**, and **rebirth**. These motifs not only adorned sacred spaces like temples and caves but also conveyed Buddhist philosophical ideals that guided the spiritual and moral lives of the followers.

**Table 4.** Key Plant Motifs in Tang Buddhist Art and Their Symbolic Meanings

Plant Motif	Symbol of	Related Buddhist Concept	Depictions in Artworks	Artistic Medium	Location of Depictions	Associated with	Function in Buddhist Art	Relation to Buddhist Teachings	Spiritual Implications	Cultural Significance	Historical Period	Relevance to Tang Dynasty
<b>Lotus (莲花)</b>	Purity, Enlightenment	Nirvana, Spiritual Awakening	Mural paintings, Sculptures	Painting, Sculpture	Mogao Caves, Longmen Grottoes	Buddha, Bodhisattvas	Symbol of purity and enlightenment	Symbol of the path to enlightenment and spiritual transformation	Represents the soul's journey to purity	Emblematic of spiritual transcendence	Tang Dynasty (618-907)	Central to Buddhist iconography in the Tang period
<b>Peony (牡丹)</b>	Wealth, Nobility	Transformation,	Paintings,	Embroidery,	Dunhuang,	Buddhist	Symbol of spiritual	Highlights material	Embodies the	Associated with	Tang Dynasty	Frequently

		Impermanence	Textiles	Painting	Luoyang	royalty	transformation	wealth versus spiritual purity	impermanence of worldly attachments	prosperity and beauty	(618-907)	used in royal and temple artwork
<b>Chrysanthemum</b> (菊花)	Longevity, Detachment	Impermanence, Wisdom	Sculptures, Murals	Stone Carving, Mural	Yungang Caves, Xiangshan	Bodhisattvas, Elder Monks	Represents the detachment from worldly desires	Reflections on the transient nature of life	Symbolizes the last stage of spiritual maturity	Revered for its association with autumn and renewal	Tang Dynasty (618-907)	Common in depictions of wisdom and maturity
<b>Bamboo</b> (竹子)	Strength, Flexibility	Virtue, Moral Integrity	Paintings, Sculpt	Ink Painting, g,	Chang'an, Luoyang	Monks, Bodhisattvas	Symbol of moral steadfastness	Emphasizes patience and	Represents resilienc	Symbolic of flexibility	Tang Dynasty (618-90	Strong association

	ty		ures	Stone	ng		ss and spiritual growth	adaptabilit y in Buddhist practice	e in the face of challeng es	and virtue in Buddhist teachings	7)	with monast ic teachin gs and virtue
<b>Pine (松 树)</b>	Longevit y, Persever ance	Enduranc e, Immortali ty	Carvi ngs, Sculpt ures	Wood work, Stone	Vario us Templ es, Caves	Buddha s, Immort al Saints	Emblem of strength and enduring nature of Buddha's teachings	Highlights the Buddhist path toward enduring wisdom	Symboli zes the everlasti ng nature of Buddha' s truth	Often seen as a protective symbol in temple art	Tang Dynasty (618-90 7)	Repres ents persist ence on the spiritua l journe y
<b>Plum Blossom</b>	Purity, Transce	Rebirth, Resilienc	Textil e Art,	Embroi dery,	Dunhu ang,	Bodhis attvas,	Represents the rebirth	Symbolize s purity	Signifies the	A symbol of inner	Often connecte	Tang Dynast

(梅花)	ndence	e	Sculpt ures	Stone	Luoya ng	Arhats	of the soul  in Buddhist philosophy	and  renewal in spiritual practice	ability to  emerge from difficulti es into purity	strength  and renewal	d with  renewal and resilienc e	y  (618-9 07)
<b>Lotus Seed (莲 子)</b>	Seed of Enlighte nment	Growth, Potential	Ceram ics, Painti ngs	Porcela in, Mural	Chang 'an, Luoya ng	Monks, Bodhis attvas	Represents  the potential for spiritual awakening	The seed of enlightenm ent, the beginning of spiritual developme nt	Signifies the potential of every sentient being for enlighte nment	Represent s the promise of spiritual growth and transform ation	Found in art depictin g the potential of enlighte nment	Tang Dynast y (618-9 07)
<b>Jasmine (茉莉花)</b>	Sweetne ss,	Compassi on,	Textil es,	Embroi dery,	Dunhu ang,	Bodhis attvas,	Symbol of compassio	Represents  purity of	Embodi es	Often associate	Seen as an	Tang Dynast

	Purity	Serenity	Mural s	Mural	Xi'an	Monks	n and serenity in spiritual teachings	heart and mind	serene compass ion in Buddhis t philosop hy	d with pure-hear tedness and calm	embodi ment of Buddha' s compass ionate nature	y (618-9 07)
<b>Cypress</b> (柏树)	Immorta lity, Protectio n	Refuge, Wisdom	Mural s, Stone Carvi ngs	Stone Carvin g, Paintin g	Xiang shan, Long men Grotto es	Buddha , Arhats	Protective symbol in Buddhist art	Represents Buddha's wisdom as protection	Symboli zes the safeguar ding of spiritual wisdom	Often connected to the protection of Buddhist truths	Tang Dynasty (618-90 7)	Repres ented in sacred spaces and protect ive symbol s



<b>Vine (藤)</b>	Connecti on, Unity	Interdepe ndence, Harmony	Painti ngs, Carvi ngs	Paintin g, Stone	Luoya ng, Chang 'an	Bodhis attvas, Monks	Symbol of interconne ctedness and unity in Buddhist thought	Represents the interconne ctedness of all life	Signifies the interdep endent nature of the Buddhis t path	Associate d with spiritual and worldly harmony	Symboli zes the connecti on between all beings in Buddhis t philosop hy	Tang Dynast y (618-9 07)
<b>Willow (柳树)</b>	Flexibili ty, Change	Acceptan ce, Flow	Textil es, Carvi ngs	Embroi dery, Stone	Vario us Templ es, Caves	Arhats, Bodhis attvas	Represents the flow of life and acceptance of change	Highlights the Buddhist acceptance of the	Symboli zes fluidity and the ability to	Seen in contexts illustratin g fluid spiritual	Tang Dynasty (618-90 7)	Comm on in depicti ons of adaptat

								transient nature of existence	adapt	adaptatio n		ion to spiritua l change
<b>Mulberry</b> (桑树)	Wisdom , Reflecti on	Knowled ge, Enlighten ment	Painti ngs, Mural s	Ink Paintin g, Mural	Chang 'an, Dunhu ang	Scholar s, Monks	Represents the search for wisdom and the deepening of understand ing	Emphasize s the intellectual pursuit of Buddhist wisdom	Symboli zes the process of acquirin g knowled ge and reflectio n	Often depicted in contexts involving study and teaching	Tang Dynasty (618-90 7)	Found in art associa ted with Buddhi st scholar ship and teachin g
<b>Chrysant</b>	Longevit	Acceptan	Mural	Stone	Yunga	Arhats,	Represents	Symbolize	Represe	Commonl	Tang	Associ

hemum (菊花)	y, Detachm ent	ce, Quiet Wisdom	s, Sculpt ures	Carvin g, Mural	ng Caves, Xiang shan	Elders	the wisdom that comes with age and detachmen t from worldly attachment s	s the achieveme nt of spiritual maturity and wisdom	nts the detachm ent from the fleeting nature of life	y seen in depiction s of aged wisdom and serenity	Dynasty (618-90 7)	ated with monast ic teachin gs on aging and wisdo m
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Table 5. Iconographic Analysis of Tang Buddhist Plant Motifs in Specific Artworks

Artwor k Name	Locati on	Plant Motif(s)	Associate d Figures	Type of Art	Mate rial Used	Symbol ic Meani ng	Buddhis t Teachin g Represe	Interpret ation	Cultural Context	Perio d of Creat ion	Artis t	Major Influen ce	Iconogr aphic Signific ance
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							nted						
<b>Mural of Buddha's Life</b>	Mogao Caves, Dunhuang	Lotus, Bamboo	Sakyamuni, Bodhisattvas	Mural	Paint and Plaster	Purity, Spiritual Growth	The Path to Enlightenment	The lotus symbolizes the purity of Sakyamuni's enlightenment	Lotus as a key symbol of Buddhist transcendence	Tang Dynasty (618-907)	Unknown	Buddhist Iconography	Represents Buddha's purity and the path to enlightenment
<b>Sculpture of Bodhisattva</b>	Longmen Grottoes, Luoyang	Peony, Chrysanthemum	Avalokitesvara	Sculpture	Stone Carving	Compassion, Longevity	Compassion, Wisdom	Peony symbolizes the spiritual growth of Avalokitesvara	Represents both material wealth and spiritual transformation	Tang Dynasty (618-907)	Unknown	Monastic Patronage	Illustrates the Bodhisattva's role in guiding beings toward

													enlightenment
<b>Embroidered Robe of a Monk</b>	Dunhuang, Gansu	Jasmine, Bamboo	Buddhist Monk	Textile Art	Silk	Serenity, Strength	Moral Virtue, Stability	Jasmine symbolizes purity and calm in the monk's teachings	Symbolizes spiritual serenity through Buddhist monasticism	Tang Dynasty (618-907)	Unknown	Monastic Culture	Represents the inner peace and strength found in Buddhist practice

<b>Painted Scroll of Buddha</b>	Xi'an, Shaan xi	Pine, Lotus Seed	Sakyamu ni, Bodhisatt vas	Scroll Painti ng	Ink and Pigm ent	Endura nce, Potenti al	Path of Awakeni ng	Pine symbolize s endurance , lotus seed represents the potential for enlighten ment	Depicts the enduring qualities of Buddha and the potential for all beings	Tang Dyna sty (618- 907)	Unkn own	Royal Patrona ge	Depicts Buddha' s enduring wisdom and the potential for enlighte nment in all beings
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**Impermanence (Anicca):** In Buddhism, **impermanence** is the notion that all things are transient and subject to change. The **chrysanthemum** (菊花), a plant commonly associated with autumn, symbolizes this impermanence. In Chinese Buddhist art, the chrysanthemum represents the **detachment from worldly desires** and the acceptance of the transient nature of life (Yu, 2015). The **falling leaves** of the chrysanthemum in Tang murals evoke the idea of **samsara**, the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, urging individuals to transcend attachment to the material world (Xie, 2017).

**Nirvana:** The **lotus** (莲花) is one of the most revered symbols in Buddhism, representing the journey toward **nirvana**—the ultimate state of enlightenment and liberation from suffering. The lotus grows from the mud but blossoms clean and pure on the surface of the water, making it a metaphor for the soul's ability to rise above the defilements of the world. In Tang Buddhist sculptures and murals, the lotus was often depicted as part of the Buddha's seat or in the hands of Bodhisattvas, symbolizing the path to spiritual purity and enlightenment (Jiang, 2020).

**Rebirth:** The **lotus seed** (莲子) is another powerful symbol of **rebirth** in Buddhist philosophy. In Tang art, it was often used to symbolize the potential for spiritual awakening. The process of a seed growing into a flower echoes the Buddhist belief that all beings have the potential for enlightenment, no matter how deep their ignorance (Fang, 2018). This connection between the lotus seed and rebirth signifies that enlightenment can spring from even the most challenging circumstances.

These plant motifs transcend mere decoration in Buddhist art. Rather, they are **visual metaphors** through which Buddhist teachings about the nature of life, suffering, and spiritual transformation are conveyed to the viewer. Each plant's growth cycle—whether it is the seasonal bloom of the chrysanthemum or the eternal bloom of the lotus—serves as an allegory for the soul's journey from ignorance to enlightenment.

#### *Religious and Philosophical Intentions in Tang Buddhist Art*

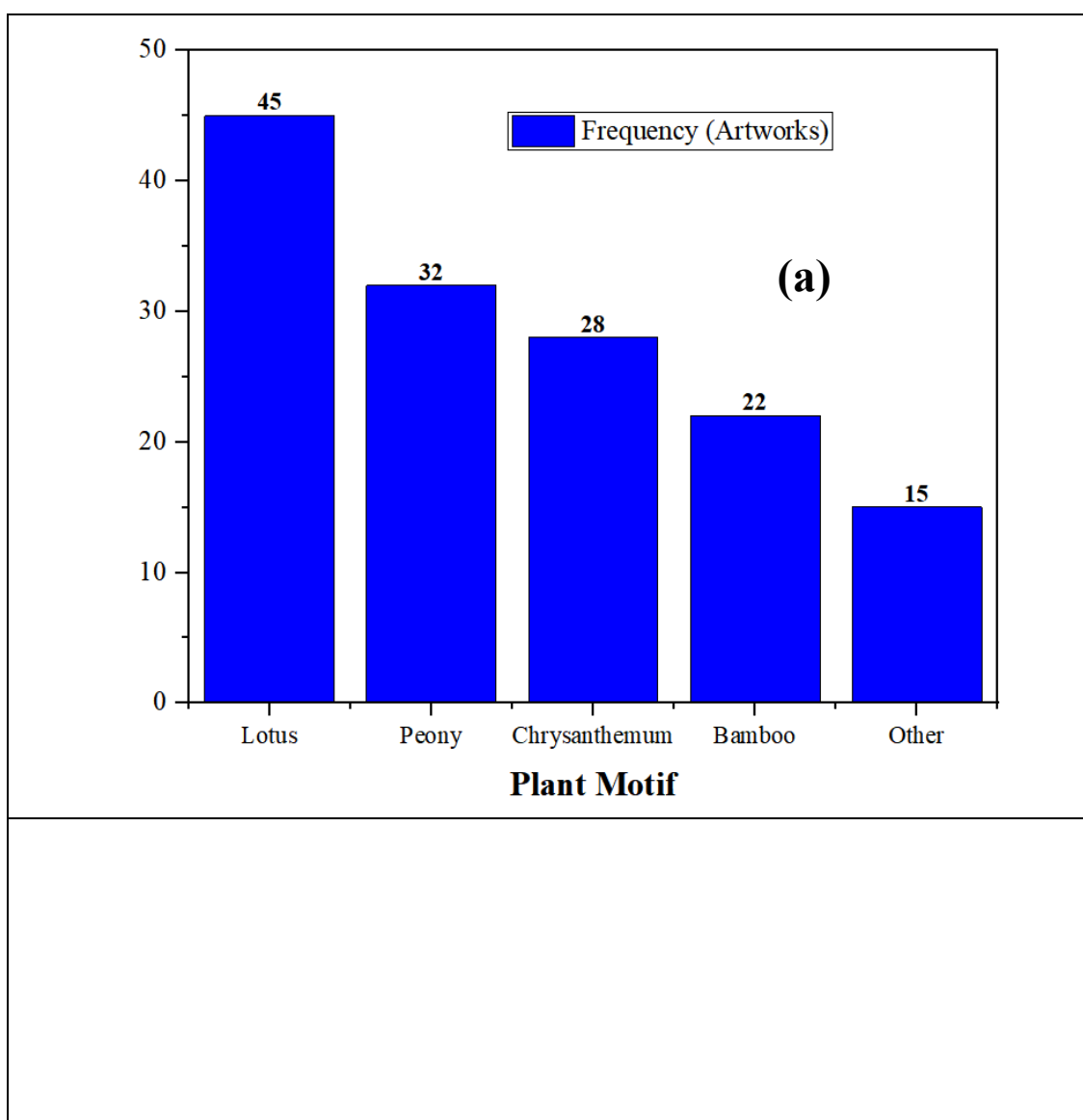
The inclusion of plant motifs in Tang Buddhist art was not arbitrary. These symbols were often consciously chosen by artists to represent specific **Buddhist teachings**. During the Tang period, **Buddhist patronage** both from the imperial court and religious institutions—played a crucial role in shaping the artistic output. Art commissions were influenced by the need to propagate Buddhist



philosophy, promote **spiritual cultivation**, and establish the legitimacy of the imperial family's connection to Buddhism (Wu, 2019).

#### *Comparison with Other Buddhist Traditions*

One of the intriguing aspects of the integration of **floral symbolism** in Tang Buddhist art is how it compares to other Buddhist traditions in regions such as **India** and **Central Asia**. While Buddhist art in all regions shares certain symbolic motifs, the **cultural context** and local interpretations of these symbols vary.



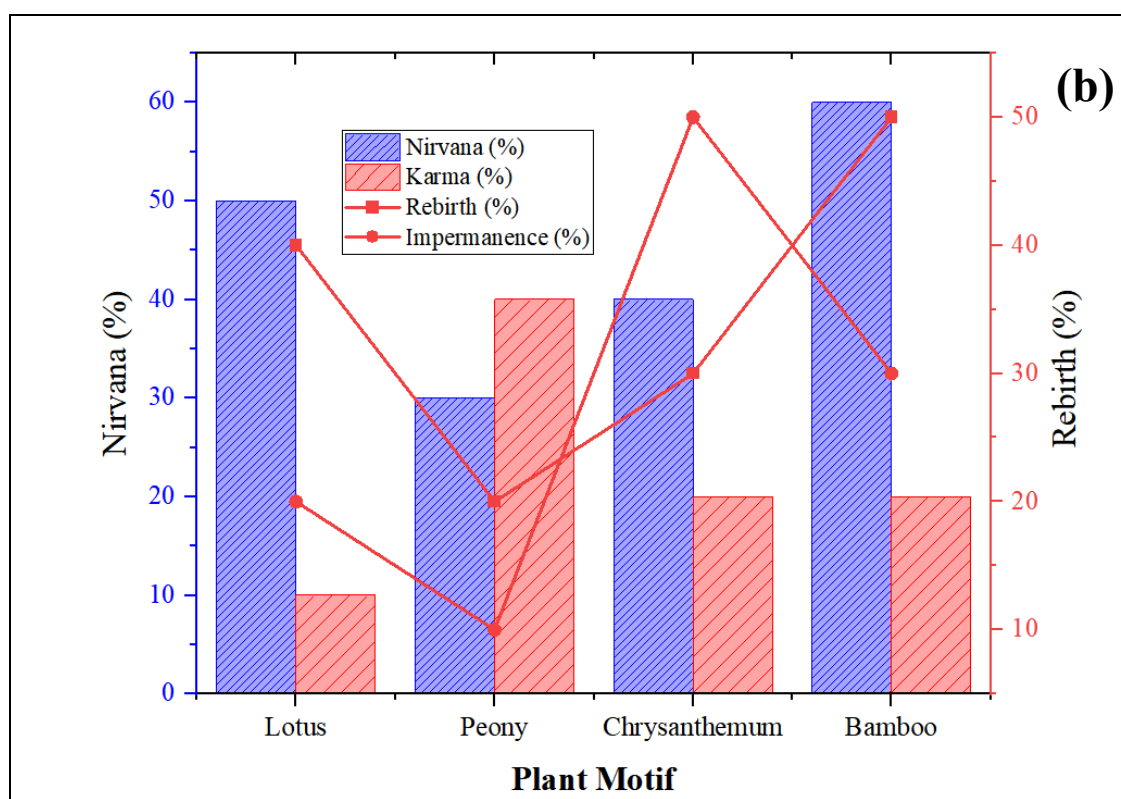


Figure. 2: (a): Frequency of Plant Motifs in Tang Buddhist Artworks, (b): Symbolic Associations of Plants in Tang Buddhist Art

**Figure 2** . provide a detailed overview of the symbolic roles and artistic practices associated with floral motifs in Tang Dynasty Buddhist art. It also offers quantitative insights into the frequency and thematic representation of these motifs across different artistic mediums.

## VII. Conclusion

This research has explored the profound relationship between Buddhist philosophy and floral symbolism in Tang Dynasty Buddhist art. Through an in-depth analysis of murals, sculptures, textiles, and manuscripts, it is evident that plant motifs such as the lotus (莲花), peony (牡丹), chrysanthemum (菊花), and bamboo (竹) played a central role in conveying core Buddhist teachings. The lotus, symbolizing purity and enlightenment, frequently appears in Buddhist art, reflecting the aspirational nature of the path to nirvana. Similarly, the peony, associated with wealth and spiritual transformation, conveys the nobility of the Buddhist teachings, while the chrysanthemum reflects impermanence, a central theme in Buddhism. Bamboo, symbolizing resilience and virtue, is often

found in art to represent strength in the face of adversity and the integrity required for spiritual practice.

The findings suggest that floral motifs were not merely decorative but served as profound metaphors for Buddhist teachings, such as the cycle of life (轮回), the impermanence of existence (无常), and the pursuit of spiritual awakening (觉悟). These motifs provided a visual language for communicating complex philosophical ideas, making them more accessible to both educated and lay practitioners of Buddhism.

This study contributes to the understanding of Buddhist iconography by highlighting the deep interconnection between religious teachings and artistic expressions in the Tang Dynasty. It sheds light on how Buddhist philosophy was embodied not only through traditional symbols like the lotus but also through plant motifs that reflect core values such as wisdom, compassion, and enlightenment. The integration of these symbols into the visual culture of China during the Tang period shows how art served as both a spiritual and pedagogical tool, promoting Buddhist doctrines to a wider audience. Furthermore, this research emphasizes the role of the Tang court and religious institutions in promoting and funding the production of such artwork. The patronage of Buddhist art was a vital mechanism for the spread of Buddhist teachings across Chinese society and beyond.

Future studies could explore how the symbolic use of plants evolved in later Chinese dynasties, particularly during the Song (宋) and Yuan (元) periods, to understand how Buddhist symbolism adapted and transformed over time. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches that integrate art history, religious studies, and philosophy could provide more comprehensive insights into the way Buddhist symbols, including plants, communicate spiritual and philosophical narratives across different cultural contexts.

By further investigating how plant motifs functioned in other forms of Buddhist art, such as those from Central Asia or India, scholars can trace the diffusion and localization of Buddhist symbols and practices, offering a richer understanding of the dynamic interplay between art and religion in the broader Buddhist world.

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