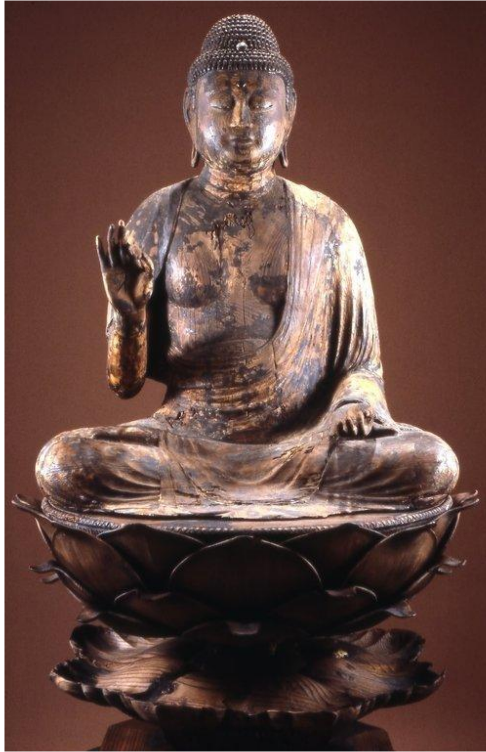
"Amida Buddha," Artist Unknown, Japan, 12th century (Kamakura period), #78.20 – G220



Questions/Activities:

1. Imagine walking past the fearsome Nio Guardian figures into a Buddhist temple to see this statue, its shimmering gold reflected in candle light. How would that make you feel? [Unfortunately, this was damaged in a fire. It had been black lacquer, covered with gold leaf. Fragments of gold can be seen.]
2. Starting at the head and working down to the base, describe this Buddha. How are his physical attributes, dress and posture different from our own?
3. Shine a light on his **inlaid crystal eyes,** which previously seemed closed and see they come to life.
4. Amida Buddha promised salvation to all who said his name in true belief. What is it about this figure that would be comforting, especially to women and children?

Key Points:

1. This Amida Buddha represents Pure Land Buddhism. Before, Esoteric Buddhism had been only for the elite who could dedicate their lives to its study, practice and strictures. But ordinary worshippers only had to say the Amida Buddha's name to be assured they would be taken into the Pure Land of paradise. This was a comforting religious, especially for women and children. Esoteric Buddhism taught that women had to be reborn as men to be saved. Pure Land was the first form of Buddhism in Japan to actively

engage and proselytize the lower classes. Preachers travelled to remote areas teaching Amidist doctrine and holding mass revival meetings, that included dancing and chanting. The simplicity of Pure Land rites made salvation available to everyone. This, at a time of war, famine and natural disasters when most people believed the world was about to end.

2. This wooden statue features many of the traditional attributes of the Buddha: long ears, ushnisha and mudra. The raised hand with circled fingers is the "have no fear" mudra, signifying the infinite condition of the universe. The open palm mudra represents "wish granting."

3. The story of Buddha centered on an Indian prince named Siddhartha, who had a wife and probably children as well. His parents sheltered him from all worldly cares – suffering, poverty, age, sickness and death. At age 29, he resolved to see the world and snuck outside away from the palace and his own privilege. He saw people who were old, sick, dying, in pain and suffering. He meditated six years in the wilderness until he came to enlightenment. He was not a god, but a great teacher.

4. Buddha is sits in a lotus position on a lotus flower. It grows up the fetid muck at the bottom of a pond, but rises to a pure white blossom a few inches above the water. The lotus represents purity.

Current Gallery Label:

Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light, is one of the most popularly worshipped deities in the Far East. According to sacred scripture, Amida created a paradise, known as the Pure Land (Jo_do), where the souls of sentient beings could strive toward enlightenment without the pain and suffering associated with life on earth. In Japan, the worship of Amida became widespread during the Fujiwara period (894-1185), and high ranking aristocrats constructed temple buildings and commissioned paintings that represented Amida's glorious paradise.

The famous sculptor Jo_cho_ created an image of Amida (still remaining at Byo_do_in temple in Uji, Japan) of unprecedented elegance and grace. With a round, youthful face, drowsy eyes and shallowly carved drapery, the sculpture conveyed meditative serenity and reassuring calm. The Institute's Amida closely follows Jo_cho_'s prototype. Its surface, now damaged by fire, would have shimmered with a layer of gold. His hands are held in symbolic gestures (mudra): the raised right hand disperses fear and the lowered left hand is open in the gesture of giving or "wish granting."

Docent Manual:

INTRODUCTION

The *Amida Nyorai* was made for the Pure Land Buddhist sect during the late Heian, early Kamakura period. As an idealized and compassionate figure, its classic proportions and refinement appealed to all classes of people. Belief in the Amida Nyorai promised a chance of salvation to all worshippers in a time when most believed the world would end.

RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND: Pure Land Buddhism

The Buddhist universe is populated by innumerable Buddhas, ruling over all times and all space. Each directional Buddha presides over a "pure land." The most famous and beloved of these is the gentle and merciful Amida, who rules the Western Paradise. Amida Buddha vowed through his endless merit and compassion to create a land into which all who accepted his saving power would be reborn. There, his devotees could accumulate enough merit to reach *nirvana* (extinction of the self).

Pure Land Buddhism is a simple, direct form of Buddhism. It rejects elaborate rituals and chants, propounding instead that the way to Amida's paradise lies in the fervent belief in Amida. All one has to do is chant the name of Amida *("namu Amida butsu"*) just once in true faith. Even said on one's deathbed (and even after a sinful life), these words will cause Amida and his attendants to swoop down and transport one up to paradise on a lotus throne (*Amida Raigo*). The lotus then opens up releasing the soul into a sumptuous world populated by gentle, celestial beings. Amida's mercy even allows doubters in, though they have to wait five hundred years for their lotus blossom to open.

Pure Land Buddhism in Japan

"Pure realms" were first described in Indian texts in the 3rd century B.C., but it was not until the 6th century A.D. that a distinct religion coalesced around this belief. In China during the T'ang dynasty (618-908) it became the national religion. During the mid-7th century Pure Land Buddhism was introduced into Japan. It was adopted on a vast scale during the late Heian period (late 10th to 12th centuries). Previously Esoteric Buddhism held sway, especially over the nobility. Its esteemed position rapidly faded in the rush towards Pure Land Buddhism spurred on by the notion of *mappo*.

MAPPO

Mappo (Chinese: *mo-fa*) is the term for a time when the understanding of Buddha's law ends, heralding in an age of degeneration and suffering. An ancient prophecy foretold that mappo was to occur beginning in the year 1052. This precise date was calculated in reference to the date of Buddha's birth, 949 B.C. (Current scholars date Buddha's life to 563-483 B.C.). The first 100 years following Buddha's death was thought to be a golden age when his law was still understood. The next 1,000 years were a period of "copied" law, where Buddha's precepts would only be understood partially. The final period was that of mappo, a period lasting 10,000

years. Mappo would finally end with the coming of *Miroku* (Chinese: *Maitreya*), the future Buddha who would save the world.

To the people of late Heian Japan, it seemed as if *mappo* had arrived. Successive uprisings ended the domination of the Fujiwara family, and a brutal civil war broke out. This was compounded by a series of natural disasters including famine, drought, pestilence, and disease. As the numbers of innocent victims rose in the tremendous unrest, *mappo* was evident in the eyes of believers. Literature of the period reveals a world view of all-encompassing human suffering and misery.

The secretive, scholarly nature of Esoteric Buddhism offered little hope. As people could not "understand" Buddha's law, Pure Land Buddhism offered the simplest and fastest way to salvation. Since people could not be saved by their own efforts, they surrendered to the grace of Amida.

Pure Land Buddhism as a Mass Religion

Pure Land Buddhism appealed to all classes and types of people. The nobility learned about it through a book published by the monk Genshin (942-1017), entitled *A Collection of Essentials for Birth in the Pure Land*. In this book Genshin graphically described the ghastly hells and the lofty Buddhist paradises that one could be reborn into. Artists were commissioned to produce artwork that emulated his descriptions. The most famous of these is the delicate Chinese style buildings of the *Byodo-in* (phoenix hall) in Uji, Japan. The gardens were planted so that flowers would bloom through every season, and the trees were bedecked with colorful crystals emulating the jeweled trees of the Western Paradise.

Women, particularly noble women, were drawn to Pure Land Buddhism. Previous forms of Buddhism stated that because women were at a lower level of existence, they needed to be reborn as men before they could become enlightened. In contrast, Pure Land Buddhism welcomed women, rich or poor. In the end all one needed was faith in Amida.

Pure Land was the first form of Buddhism in Japan to actively engage and proselytize the lower classes. Preachers travelled to remote areas preaching Amidist doctrine and holding mass revival meetings, that included dancing and chanting. The simplicity of Pure Land rites made salvation available to everyone.

THE MIA'S *AMIDA NYORAI*: Context/Setting

The MIA's *Amida Nyorai* probably once composed the central element of an Amida Raigo scene. Accompanied by figures of bodhisattvas and backed by an elaborate halo, it would originally have been placed on a temple altar. *Amida Raigo* scenes visualized the moment when Amida flanked by the bodhisattvas Kannon and Seichi would swoop down holding a lotus throne upon which the devotee would be brought to the Western Paradise. The lotus dias upon which the Amida sits is not original to the sculpture, but is like those of the period. The lotus not only serves as a throne for celestial beings, it is also used to transport souls to the Western Paradise where they will be reborn. The lotus serves as a basic symbol of Buddhism. It grows up

through the mud into a lovely, pure blossom. To rise above the fetid muck of the material world and remain pure in one's spirit is the goal of the Buddhist.

Iconography
Amida (Chinese: *Amitabha*; Sanskirt: *Amitayus*) means "immeasurable light" and "immeasurable lifespan." Nyorai is a Sanskrit honorific title for the Buddha, meaning "thus come," or indicating that the Buddha comes from a place which is not here.

Mudras
There are eight principal and six secondary symbolic ritual hand gestures or mudras. Mudras of the Amida combine two separate meanings. The first is that of the right hand raised in *An-i-in* or a mudra of appeasement or fear not. It both expounds the law and reassures the viewer. "The hand (right generally) is raised, palm outward, the fingers straight, with the exception of the thumb, which touches the end of the inflected index or of the middle finger..." (Saunders 67) The MIA Amida performs the mudra with both hands, forming a circle by touching single fingers to the thumb. The circle reflects the perfect form of Buddha's law, with no beginning and no end. The second mudra is that of wish granting (*segan-semui-in*), with the open palm lying in the lap turned toward the outside. The combination of both mudras identifies this sculpture as an Amida or Sakyamuni Buddha.

Style
The notion of Amida's grace and compassion meshed perfectly with the luxurious court aesthetic of the late Heian period. As major patrons, the nobility's elegant taste formed the basis for the well-proportioned and lighter forms found in Pure Land Buddhist art. As cult objects Pure Land images were meant to inspire rather than frighten. Thus Buddhist art in Japan moved from austerity to intimacy and from power to delicacy. Compositional power was easily sacrificed for refinement of execution and understated color effects.

The MIA's harmonious Amida Nyorai was influenced by a colossal image of Amida carved by Jocho in 1053 for the Byodo-in. Jocho and the MIA's artist created a figure of strict geometric simplicity and classic proportions.

Media and Carving Technique
The *Amida Nyorai* is carved out of cypress wood. From the beginning of the Heian period, Japanese sculptors preferred wood over all other media. The ease of carving allowed for subtle variations in style. Earlier Esoteric Buddhist images were hewn from a single tree trunk. This lent a heavy massiveness used by artisans to create a vision of power and spiritual brooding. They deeply chiseled into the wood to add a sense of vigor to the unpainted surface.

Pure Land artists approached wood sculpture from a radically different viewpoint, beginning with the carving technique—that of *joined woodblock carving*.

Artists who carved images from single blocks of wood had to contend with many limitations. For instance, a single block sculpture could never be wider than the

diameter of the tree from which it was carved. In contrast, the joined woodblock technique allowed artists to create as large or complex an image as desired.

This technique involved the following steps:

1. the lead sculptor visualized and designed the completed figure constructed of many parts
2. the sculpture was carved in many separate pieces, leaving the interior hollow. Relics, sutras, and other objects could be placed in this hollow, adding to the importance of the sculpture
3. the pieces were pegged together (can see the separate portions where the wood splits on the *Amida Nyorai*)
4. seams and cracks were covered over with fabric or paper
5. the surface was then covered with gesso (baked seashells and water) or lacquer (the Amida Nyorai is covered with lacquer)
6. gesso or lacquer was burnished to a smooth finish
7. figure was covered with gold leaf and details were painted on

Like all works in the joined woodblock technique, the statue is made of many pieces pegged together. These consist of:

- the torso, from the shoulders down
- the left shoulder and arm
- the right shoulder and arm
- the left hand
- the right forearm and hand
- the lap
- the tip of the garment hem
- the left hip
- the right hip
- the head

Gilding
The luxurious court aesthetic encouraged the lavish use of gold coverings on Pure Land Buddhist statues. Genshin's description of the blinding radiance of Buddha's skin also pushed artists away from the use of plain wood. Traces of sparkling gold that once covered the MIA's *Amida* remain on the surface and in crevices.

Workshop Production
The complex process of joined woodblock technique and the popular demand for sculptures such as the *Amida Nyorai*, led to a large scale workshop production. The head artist would be basically a designer, doing only important bits of sculpting, while his assistants would do a majority of the carving under his direction. This workshop process was efficient and economical, leading to a somewhat homogeneous style in the late Heian period. Artisans were no longer bound by the size and shape of the tree trunk. This let artists create the precisely balanced figure of the MIA's *Amida*.

Condition
The MIA's *Amida Nyorai* is in a remarkable state of preservation, considering its age. The hands, for instance, are original and intact; the hair curls are in good condition and the face exquisite. The sculpture has survived a temple fire during which the gold leaf surface was extensively damaged and its pedestal and halo lost. (Kanya Tsujimoto of the Nara National Museum, an expert on ancient wood, confirmed a late 12th-century date. He believed it to be one of the finest seated Amidas in the United States.)

TOUR TIPS

*Use on the following tours:

- Asian Art
- Japanese Art
- Religion and Art
- Heroes and Heroines
- Highlights of the Collection
- Visual Elements

- **Style**
  The Amida is a mild, easily approachable figure with a downcast mediative expression. The figure has harmonious proportions characteristic of the late Heian period. The composition is a stable triangle and the sense of volume is restrained. It is an idealized and compassionate figure.

- **Iconography**
  The Buddha is represented as a young, ideally proportioned male figure, dressed in simple monk's robes. The Buddha has 32 sacred identifying marks, some of those represented on the MIA's *Amida* are:
- Hair done in tight, regular rows
  curling to the right
- Sharper carving of eyes, nose, brows
- Puffy face
- Eyes downcast, meditative
  Crystal eyes embedded from inside the head
- Joyous benevolent face,
  overall tranquil expression
- Shallow carving of the surface
  Smooth surface modeling
- Round sloping shoulders
- Chest, neck, stomach,
  arms lack muscle definition
- Graceful gestures
- Sense of volume is restrained
- Slender torso
- Slender, tubular arms

- Perfect body proportions, posture is relaxed; stable triangular composition
- Low, flat horizontally placed legs
- Very soft, thin drapery falls into lovely parallel pleats
- Snailshell curls: the Buddha cut his long hair when he renounced his luxurious life as a prince.
- *Ushnisha*: a cranial extension which is a symbol of Buddha's omniscience
- Elongated earlobes: these are the result of heavy earrings the Buddha wore as a prince. They symbolize his renunciation of materialism.
- *Urna*: a mark of the Buddha placed between his eyebrows. It symbolizes his power to illuminate the world with the light that radiates from this spot.
- *Mudra*: hand gesture of "fear not" or appeasement
- idealized body
- *Mudra*: gesture of wish granting
- seated lotus position

Historic Background:

While enjoying a lifestyle of material wealth and cultural elegance in the capital Heian-kyo, the imperial court's political authority enters a period of decline. provincial governors gradually amass greater military and economic strength. In the second half of the twelfth century, several devastating wars hasten the transfer of hegemony from the aristocracy to two rival military clans, the Taira and the Minamoto. When Minamoto Yoritomo (1147–1199) succeeds in defeating his Taira rivals in 1185, he establishes a military regime at Kamakura, his clan's provincial power base.

Ironically, the Minamoto shoguns suffer a fate similar to that of the Heian emperors—within a few generations they are weakened by the growing power of ally clans, in particular their relatives through marriage, the Hojo. Eventually the Minamoto are supplanted by another military dynasty, the Ashikaga, who establish their base in Kyoto in 1336.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, the meditative Zen school of Buddhism takes root in Japan, brought to the country in part by Chinese monks fleeing the Mongol invasion. Enthusiastically received in Japan, Zen becomes the most prominent form of Buddhism in the country between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. [Heilbrunn]

The Buddha:

According to tradition, the historical Buddha lived from 563 to 483 B.C., although scholars postulate that he may have lived as much as a century later. He was born to the rulers of the Shakya clan, hence his appellation Shakyamuni, which means "sage of the Shakya clan." The legends that grew up around him hold that both his conception and birth were miraculous. His mother, Maya, conceived him when she dreamed that a white elephant entered her right side. She gave birth to him in a standing position while grasping a tree in a garden. The child emerged from Maya's right side fully formed and proceeded to take seven steps. Once back in the palace, he was presented to an astrologer who predicted that he would become either a great king or a great religious teacher and he was given the name Siddhartha ("He who achieves His Goal"). His father, evidently thinking that any contact with unpleasantness might prompt Siddhartha to seek a life of renunciation as a religious teacher, and not wanting to lose his son to such a future, protected him from the realities of life.

The ravages of poverty, disease, and even old age were therefore unknown to Siddhartha, who grew up surrounded by every comfort in a sumptuous palace. At age twenty-nine, he made three successive chariot rides outside the palace grounds and saw an old person, a sick person, and a corpse, all for the first time. On the fourth trip, he saw a wandering holy man whose asceticism inspired Siddhartha to follow a similar path in search of freedom from the suffering caused by the infinite cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. Because he knew his father would try to stop him, Siddhartha secretly left the palace in the middle of the night and sent all his belongings and jewelry back with his servant and horse. Completely abandoning his luxurious existence, he spent six years as an ascetic, attempting to conquer the innate appetites for food, sex, and comfort by engaging in various yogic disciplines. Eventually near death from his vigilant fasting, he accepted a bowl of rice from a young girl. Once he had eaten, he had a realization that physical austerities were not the means to achieve spiritual liberation. At a place now known as Bodh Gaya ("enlightenment place"), he sat and meditated all night beneath a pipal tree. After defeating the forces of the demon Mara, Siddhartha reached enlightenment and became a Buddha ("enlightened one") at the age of thirty-five.

The Buddha continued to sit after his enlightenment, meditating beneath the tree and then standing beside it for a number of weeks. During the fifth or sixth week, he was beset by heavy rains while meditating but was protected by the hood of the serpent king Muchilinda. Seven weeks after his enlightenment, he left his seat under the tree and decided to teach others what he had learned, encouraging people to follow a path he called "The Middle Way," which is one of balance rather than extremism. He gave his first sermon in a deer park in Sarnath, on the outskirts of the city of Benares. He soon had many disciples and spent the next forty-five years walking around northeastern India spreading his teachings. Although the Buddha presented himself only as a teacher and not as a god or object of worship, he is said to have performed many miracles during his lifetime. Traditional accounts relate that he died at the age of eighty in Kushinagara, after ingesting a tainted piece of either mushroom or pork. His body was cremated and

the remains distributed among groups of his followers. These holy relics were enshrined in large hemispherical burial mounds, a number of which became important pilgrimage sites.

In India, by the Pala period (ca. 700–1200), the Buddha's life was codified into a series of "Eight Great Events." These eight events are, in order of their occurrence in the Buddha's life: his birth, his defeat over Mara and consequent enlightenment, his first sermon at Sarnath, the miracles he performed at Shravasti, his descent from the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods, his taming of a wild elephant, the monkey's gift of honey, and his death.

Buddhism and its imagery

The Buddhist Religion

Buddhism is a religion that is still widely practiced across Asia. It offers a spiritual path for transcending the suffering of existence. The endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*), to which all living beings are subject, renews the suffering incurred by one's karma, the sum of good and bad actions that accumulates over many lives. Release from this endless cycle is achieved only by attaining enlightenment, the goal for which Buddhists strive. A buddha ("awakened one") is an all-knowing being who has reached a perfect state of transcendent knowledge in which the fires of greed, hate, and delusion are quenched; passing into nirvana ("blowing out, to become extinguished"), a buddha is never subject to rebirth again.

Scenes from the life of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, are a popular subject in Buddhist art. According to tradition, Siddhartha ("he who achieves his goal"), the founder of Buddhism, was born a prince of the Shakya clan in 563 B.C.E. in what is now southern Nepal. Confined by his father to the palace grounds so that he would not become exposed to anything that might deter him from becoming the next ruler, Siddhartha first visited the outside world at the age of twenty-nine. Moved by the suffering he saw, he abandoned his luxurious existence for a life of ascetic practice and sought to understand why we should be born to a life of physical decay, sickness, and death. He spent six years as an ascetic, attempting to conquer the innate appetites for food, sex, and comfort. Near death from vigilant fasting, he was offered a bowl of rice from a young girl. After accepting it, he had a revelation that physical austerities were not the means to achieve spiritual liberation. He then sat and meditated beneath a pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) and reached enlightenment in one night. That tree became known as the "enlightenment" (*bodhi*) tree. He set about teaching others what he had learned, encouraging people to follow a path he called "The Middle Way," a path of balance rather than extremism. Shakyamuni Buddha ("sage of the Shakya clan") presented himself only as a teacher and not as a god or object of worship. Traditional accounts say that he died at the age of eighty, in 483 B.C.E.

Three main types of Buddhism have developed over its long history, each with its own characteristics and spiritual ideals. "Foundational Buddhism," often known by the pejorative term Hinayana ("Lesser Vehicle"), is the earliest of the three and emphasizes the attainment of salvation for oneself alone and the necessity of monastic life in order to attain spiritual release. The Mahayana ("Greater Vehicle"), whose members coined the word "Hinayana" and believed its adherents pursued a path that could not be followed by the majority of ordinary people, teaches the salvation of all. Practitioners of the Vajrayana ("Diamond Vehicle"), or Esoteric Buddhism, believe that one can achieve enlightenment in a single lifetime, as opposed to the other two types, which postulate that it takes many eons to accrue the necessary good karma. These three types were not mutually exclusive, but their emphasis on different practices affected Buddhist art. For example, whereas foundational Buddhism teaches that only a few devotees are able to reach enlightenment and that they do so through their own efforts, Mahayana and its later offshoot, Vajrayana, teach that buddhahood is attainable by everyone with help from beings known as bodhisattvas. As a result, images of bodhisattvas proliferated in Mahayana and Vajrayana art and are often depicted flanking buddhas.

Images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Buddhist images resonate at many levels as every element and gesture is symbolic. An image's appearance reflects long-established models and prescribed patterns that were developed in India and retained over the centuries and across vast distances.

Representations of buddhas, for example, are easily identifiable. As figures who have abandoned the material world, they are attired as monks in simple garments and usually do not wear jewelry. Shakyamuni Buddha cut off his long hair and removed his heavy earrings when he left the palace. As a result, buddhas are depicted with short hair that often forms snail-shell-shaped curls. Their earlobes have elongated holes where the earrings once hung. A buddha also has thirty-two marks (*lakshanas*) that indicate his transcendent and supranormal nature. These include an idealized physique, a bump on the top of his head (*ushnisha*), a round dot in the center of his forehead (*urna*), and webbed hands and feet. However, these special marks were not codified in texts until roughly the fourth century C.E., and even afterward do not appear on all buddha images. In addition, not every depiction of a buddha represents the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni. As Buddhism evolved, many buddhas were postulated to exist in the past, present, and future, and it is often difficult to identify an image as a specific buddha since the characteristics just listed typify most artistic renderings.

Bodhisattvas are beings whose realization is advanced enough to enable them to escape the cycle of rebirth but who choose to remain active in the world in order to help others along the path to enlightenment. Unlike buddhas, who wear monastic garments, bodhisattvas are often arrayed as kings. They wear crowns, tiaras, or other headdresses as well as armbands and necklaces, and their hair is usually dressed in a tall and elaborate coiffure. Bodhisattvas generally can be identified by

the objects they hold or by a small image in their headdress, such as the seated Amitabha Buddha, which identifies Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

India: Origins of Buddhist Art

Until roughly the first century C.E., the Buddha was represented in art only by symbols and was not depicted in human form. It is not known exactly when or where the first image of the Buddha was produced, although it is thought to have been either in the area around Mathura, a city in north central India, or in Gandhara, a region in the Peshawar Valley in present-day northern Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although both areas were ruled at the time by the powerful Kushan empire (ca. late 1st – 3rd century C.E.), they are 1,600 miles apart, and their distinct ethnic and cultural histories explain the contrasting appearance of images produced in each place.

The Mathuran style developed out of the indigenous Indic sculptural tradition. Mathuran sculptures usually have hefty, minimally articulated bodies clothed in transparent fabric and a direct, robust quality; this is in contrast to the more contemplative and naturalistic images created by Gandharan artists. The standing Buddha in the Gandharan style has half-closed eyes and a muscular body discernible under the folds of drapery. The Gandharan tradition melded a variety of artistic sources but was dominated by Greco-Roman artistic elements, as demonstrated by the toga-like robe, bent-leg stance, and wavy hair of this figure.

Because no one knows what Shakyamuni Buddha looked like, his image was created to convey certain ideas about his life and to indicate his transcendent and supranormal powers. By the fourth century C.E., the hallmarks reflecting these ideals were codified in Indian texts, and they appear, to a certain extent, on all buddha images, regardless of where they were produced. As can be seen in a head of the Buddha from Gandhara, identifying marks include a bump on the top of the head, signifying his

advanced spiritual knowledge; elongated earlobes and shortly cropped hair, the result of Siddhartha removing his earrings and cutting off his long hair when he renounced palace life; and a dot representing a tuft of hair between the eyebrows. Many buddhas also have wheels symbolizing the Buddhist doctrine (*dharma*) on the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet. Buddhas are attired as monks and usually do not wear any jewelry, although by the eighth century some are depicted crowned and jeweled.

The Buddha spent most of his life teaching in the eastern Ganges region of India. This area later became dotted with pilgrimage sites associated with his life and home, and some developed into monasteries and universities. These centers attracted devotees from the far corners of Asia; they came to India for religious instruction and pilgrimage and returned home with memories and images of Indian Buddhism. Two of the empires that ruled this region had a particularly strong influence on Buddhist imagery both in India and abroad: the Gupta empire (ca. 4th – 6th century) and the Pala empire (ca. 8th – 12th century).

The Gupta empire unified a large portion of northern India, from coast to coast, and the political stability that ensued encouraged a cultural florescence. The Gupta style, which idealized the body according to literary metaphors (lips like lotus petals, a nose like a parrot's beak, a chin like a mango stone, etc.), was transmitted abroad by images. The figure's graceful and relaxed posture, downward-looking eyes, and diaphanous robes that reveal the body underneath can be seen on images spread widely throughout Asia. The Gupta stylistic idiom was particularly strong in Southeast Asian regions that had been influenced by Indian statecraft, language, and religion, for example Thailand.

During the Pala period, pilgrims, monks, and students from all over Asia flocked to the prominent religious centers in eastern India, which had greatly expanded since the Gupta period. The brick temples from this time were decorated with steles, carved, for example, with a form of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, which were set into wall niches as part of a program of decoration. The graceful posture, clothing, and jewelry of this richly carved image can be seen on other sculptures in this essay from regions such as the Himalayas and Shrivijaya that had extensive religious and mercantile exchanges with the Pala empire.

The Pala-ruled areas of northeastern India were the last

stronghold of Buddhism in India. In southern India, the popularity of Buddhism had waned by the fifth century C.E., when Hinduism became the dominant religion; the few Buddhist communities and monasteries that survived until the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, was due, in part, to their location near port cities on the maritime trade routes. Their continuous contact with Southeast Asian nations is evident from inscriptions; like Buddhist monuments and institutions in eastern India, those in the south benefited from money sent by distant foreign monarchs eager to prove their piousness and improve their karma. The Asia Society Museum has an impressive eleventh-century southern Indian bronze standing Buddha, whose flame-shaped symbol of the Buddha's expanded knowledge (*ushnisha*) atop the head is a distinctive southern Indian feature that spread from India to Sri Lanka, Burma (Myanmar), and Thailand. This type of *ushnisha* is said to represent the true knowledge that hovers like a flame above the Buddha's head.

[Asia Society]

Spread of Buddhism:

The ancient trade routes running through Asia were the main arteries of communication and transport for international travelers. Along these routes, Buddhism and Buddhist artistic influences from various areas of India, the homeland of Buddhism, spread to the Himalayas, Southeast Asia, and East Asia at different times and in varying degrees of intensity. Each wave of influence had its own specific elements that underwent a process of adaptation, adjustment, and reinterpretation by the genius of a particular area, resulting in images with pronounced ethnic and stylistic variations. Yet the commonalities among the works of Buddhist art in the Asia Society's collection, particularly their shared recognizable features and visible expressions of spiritual accomplishment, highlight the unifying role played by this Indian religion. [*Kathryn Selig Brown, Asian Society]*

Trade routes, both maritime and overland, were the primary means by which Buddhist thought and imagery were conveyed from India, the birthplace of Buddhism, to other Asian countries. These ancient connecting routes provided an avenue for the religious, cultural, and artistic influences of Buddhism to reach the distant corners of the continent and beyond. This essay, illustrated by objects from the Asia Society Museum's permanent collection, the Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd collection, provides a base for exploring the development of Indian Buddhist imagery and its interpretation and adaptation by other cultures along the trade routes. An examination of the works illustrated here will reveal some

connections as well as distinctions between Indian Buddhist sculptures and their counterparts across Asia.

Buddhist images are remarkably recognizable, regardless of their country or period of origin. They are usually made according to descriptions found in Indian texts intended to help the practitioner mentally invoke the form of the deity. These texts provide the artist with the basic schema of the image, detailing what an image should look like, from the posture, gesture, and color of the deity, to the attributes (objects he or she holds that symbolize specific powers or knowledge). Further similarities that can be seen among the Buddhist objects in the Asia Society's collection stem from the tendency of artists working elsewhere to emulate Indian models. Coming from the homeland of Shakyamuni Buddha and his teachings, such models held religious authority. The most prominent differences of period or culture of origin are usually seen in the images' details of costume, hairstyle, jewelry, body type, and facial characteristics. However, as is evidenced by the array of styles represented by the objects in the collection, artists working outside India did not simply copy Indian models-they created their own distinctive works. The artistic result of a religion that spread thousands of miles across a multiethnic landscape is a corpus of images based on a similar set of beliefs but marked by regional personalities. [Asia Society]

Trade Routes

The far-flung regions of Asia have been linked by trade routes for millennia. Buddhism spanned the Indian and Chinese cultural realms of Asia by moving along these trade routes—across deserts, mountains, and oceans. Contributing to this dispersion was the fact that Buddhism, unlike Hinduism, did not view commercial activity negatively, and many Indian merchants became Buddhists. By the first century C.E., trading ships and caravans from India were transporting Buddhist missionaries along with their primary cargos of goods such as textiles, ivory, sandalwood, and spices. Itinerant monks and teachers traveled from India to promote the religion, or to India to seek instruction from a learned master. Later, numerous pilgrims made the perilous voyage to India as well. Material Buddhist culture, in the form of manuscripts, images, and other portable icons, also traveled along the trade routes, carried abroad by those who needed religious objects for protection, veneration, or for proselytizing purposes. Travelers were often forced to spend extended periods of time in a port or an oasis, waiting until the following season's weather permitted a journey on to the next stop or back home. In the case of long-distance maritime traders, these stops could easily last three to five months. Cultural influences, religious ideas, and arts were readily exchanged in market towns, and new ideas were then disseminated to other regions of Asia.

Overland routes

The trade conducted along the ancient overland roads connecting East and West, known popularly as the Silk Road (a term coined by the nineteenth-century German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen), ran from Xi'an in China to the Mediterranean port cities of Antioch and Tyre. The latter ports linked the Near East with Rome and the West. An extensive network of roads connected India with

various points on these trading routes and to other overland trails leading to Burma (Myanmar) and mainland Southeast Asia. Routes also went east from Xi'an, connecting China with the Korean peninsula. Some routes were well developed and relatively free from bandits, and while others might have been quicker, they were not as safe and had fewer oasis towns to offer shelter from the harsh elements. However, very few merchants traversed the full length of the various trails that make up the Silk Road; most covered a section, selling their wares and then returning home. Goods that moved great distances therefore changed hands as in a relay, and the transportation of items from one end to the other may have taken as long as one year.

Despite the name, much more than silk was transported along these great connecting routes. For example, paper, furs, tea, lacquered goods, and ceramics traveled from China east, while products such as ivory, glass, and spices such as frankincense and myrrh went from west to east. All went overland by way of caravans consisting of anywhere from one hundred to one thousand camels, each animal loaded with as much as five hundred pounds of goods. Sometimes, troops of archers were hired as escorts to defend the caravans from bandits.

Although very few Roman coins have been found in Pakistan, Roman sources suggest that the main path of the western Silk Road during the first two centuries C.E. passed through central Asia to the Indus Valley. Going directly to the seacoast along the Indus River or detouring through the city of Mathura, it connected with the Roman world by sea. Indian Buddhist missionaries, both those practicing "foundational Buddhism" and Mahayana Buddhism, were traveling with the caravans by the first century C.E.; they were responsible for taking Buddhism to China during the first century and for the religion becoming predominant in the central Asian states until the tenth century, when Islam prevailed.

Although established networks have linked Asia since prehistory, archeological and written evidence extends back only to the first centuries of the common era. Recent finds include shards of pottery belonging to a Vietnamese tradition dating from about 750 – 200 B.C.E. in Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia; shards of Indo-Roman pottery from the first century C.E. on the north coast of Java; an Indian ivory comb dating from the first to third century C.E. in central Thailand; and Indian beads and "Indianizing" coins from the first to fifth century C.E. in central Burma. It should also be pointed out that although commerce was one of the most important activities performed along these routes, the concomitant spread of religions demonstrates that other types of transactions were also important. Studies by anthropologists have shown that ritual, religious, and social considerations often overshadowed material motives in the exchange of goods.

Maritime routes

It is impossible to identify exactly when, but sometime in the first millennium B.C.E. Malays became intrepid sailors and traveled long distances to ports as far away as the east coast of Africa and Madagascar. They carried plants such as bananas and coconuts as well as the precious cinnamon, which originally came from southern China. Malay sailors also discovered how to ride the monsoon, a technique later adopted by all merchant seamen. The winds governing the sea routes are moderate and fairly predictable. From May to August, the monsoon blows from the west or south; from December to March, it blows from the northwest or northeast. Taking advantage of the seasonal winds' likely patterns, the Malays learned to sail for thousands of miles with the winds at their backs (Africa is more than 3,000 miles to the west), wait until the winds changed directions, and sail home with the winds again at their backs.

By the first century C.E., regular maritime traffic connected India to the Malay Peninsula and points east and was noted by westerners who reached India. At that time, goods were transported from India by ship across the Bay of Bengal and portaged over the 35-mile-wide Isthmus of Kra to the Gulf of Thailand. Everything was then reloaded on boats and taken along the coast to ports in the Mekong Delta such as Oc-éo, near the present-day Vietnamese-Cambodian border—where a Roman coin dated 152 C.E. has been found—and farther up the coast to China. Passage through Southeast Asia became especially important to international traders during the second and third centuries C.E., when the overland routes, previously the preferred commercial networks, were disrupted by political turmoil in China and predatory bandits in central Asia. By the late fourth and early fifth centuries, the awkward portage over the Isthmus of Kra was no longer necessary as the maritime route between India and points east made regular use of the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea. From the mid-fifth century on, this water-only route became well defined, and commercial intercourse between East and West was concentrated on it. Maritime traffic also linked Japan with the Korean peninsula and with the Chinese mainland.

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- ***Kay Miller, August, 2011 OOM***