



## Seated Buddha

This statue was based on Japanese representations of Buddha but doesn't depict any particular regional stylistic traditions. Buddha statues generally vary in appearance depending on the region of Asia they are made in, the school of Buddhism, and any symbolism the artist is trying to convey.

This Buddha sits in a yogic asana (pose) called Dhyana Mudra, which is the traditional meditation pose and indicates calm and peace. The seated Buddha is often depicted sitting under the bodhi tree where he achieved enlightenment. Other Buddhas might be depicted as standing or reclining.

In a literal sense, the elongated ears serve as a reminder that Buddha was once a wealthy Hindu prince (then called Siddhartha Gautama) who would have worn heavy earrings, along with other jewelry. Symbolically, the ears represent wisdom and enlightenment, which he achieved after giving up his wealth. The "wisdom bump" on top of his head, known as the *ushnisha*, also symbolizes enlightenment and superhuman status. The closed eyes and the hands, right over left with palms facing upward, signify meditation. The *urna*, or curl of hair between his eyes, is considered to be the source of light that reveals the universe. Various Buddha sculptures can be seen in Gallery 200.

### Power and Beauty Connections - Room 6

#### Standing Buddha - Room

The short-lived Northern Qi dynasty (550–70) came between two dynasties—the Northern Wei (386–535) and Tang (618–907)—long celebrated as high points in the history of Chinese Buddhist art. But the Northern Qi dynasty was a time of fundamental changes to Buddhist imagery; newly developed sculptural styles, like those seen in this sculpture, laid the groundwork for artistic achievements to come.

This sculpture of Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, is characterized by a solemn expression, smooth planes, and an exceedingly thin garment that falls in shallow folds. Below the thin outer garment, the hem of an underrobe falls in a series of stylized pleats above the figure's feet—a common tendency of Northern Qi sculptors. Perhaps surprisingly, after this limestone sculpture was carved, an artisan would have then painted the entire surface in bright pigments like red, green, blue, and gold. After painting, the sculpture was consecrated, which granted it the ability to receive the spirit of the Buddha and grant salvation to worshippers.

**Standing Buddha Northern Qi dynasty, late 6<sup>th</sup> century, Limestone, 2000.207**

<https://collections.artsmia.org/art/12948/standing-shakyamuni-buddha-china>

### **Collection Connections**

#### **Buddha**

The Buddha can be recognized by several marks, most prominently the *ushnisha*, a protrusion on the head that in this sculpture appears as a bun hairstyle, and the *urna*, a tuft of hair between his eyes from which he emits a ray of light that reveals the whole universe. On the pedestal a meditating Buddha is flanked by Brahma and Indra, two Hindu gods who were incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon as guardian deities. -

[Buddha, 3rd century](#), Unknown artist, Pakistan (G211)

#### **Walking Shakyamuni Buddha**

The historical *Buddha*, born Gautama Siddhartha but more commonly known in Buddhism as Shakyamuni (Sage of the Shakya Clan), renounced his princely life at age 29 after becoming aware of the suffering inherent in human life—disease, aging, and death. Several years later he attained enlightenment and devoted his life to teaching people throughout northern India about a means of escaping from forms of suffering. This was the beginning of what we now know as Buddhism. This sculpture highlights the *Buddha* as a teacher of the people, walking peacefully with his eyes lowered. It is a distinctly human presentation of Shakyamuni, in contrast to more iconic forms. This sculptural type, closely associated with the Sukhothai Kingdom of Thailand, flourished in the 1300s and 1400s. - [Walking Shakyamuni Buddha, 15th century](#), Unknown artist, Thailand

#### **Amitabha Buddha**

Amitābha is the central figure of the Pure Land schools of Buddhism. According to these teachings, Amitābha lives in a paradise called the Western Pure Land, in which all believers strive to be reborn. Amitābha's Pure Land, described in scripture as a place of

boundless beauty, provides respite from the cycle of rebirth. Today one of the most widely practiced of the Buddhist faiths in the countries of East Asia, Pure Land Buddhism emerged in India and spread to China in the 100s CE and Japan by the early 800s. This sculpture would have originally served as the principal object of worship at a Japanese Pure Land temple, and would have been flanked by sculptures of his attendant bodhisattvas: Avalokiteshvara (J: Kannon) and Mahāsthāmaprāpta (J: Seishi). - [Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light, 12th century, Unknown Japanese \(G200\)](#)

### **Shakyamuni Buddha Calling the Earth to Witness**

With his right hand touching the ground and his left hand held palm up in his lap, this figure shows the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, performing the “calling the earth to witness” gesture (*bhumisparsha-mudra*). It is a depiction of the moment immediately after his enlightenment. While meditating, the Buddha was bombarded by an army of demons and other fiends sent by the demoness Mara. The steadfast Buddha nevertheless overcame her distractions and achieved enlightenment. Mara tried to claim the Buddha’s enlightenment as her own, with the demon hoards as her witnesses, but the Buddha, reaching out his right hand to touch the ground before him, called upon the earth itself to bear witness to this achievement. - [Shakyamuni Buddha Calling the Earth to Witness, late 18th century, Unknown artist, Burma \(Myanmar\) \(G200\)](#)