

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

BURMA

1. *Buddha on an Elephant Throne Performing Bhūmisparśa Mudra*, 18th-19th century, wood and gold lacquer, 17 ¼ in. (45.1 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lloyd Gamble Cole, 1965.1.19.
2. *Buddha*, 18th century, wood and paint, 41 ½ x 19 x 5 ½ in. (105.4 x 48.3 x 14.9 cm). Gift of Dr. David C. Rilling, 1984.5.1.

CHINA

3. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin)*, style of the 6th century, wood and paint, 36 ½ in. (92.7 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lloyd Gamble Cole, 1966.2.1.
4. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin)*, 14th-18th century, ivory and wood, 11 x 5 ¼ x 5 ¼ in. (27.9 x 13.3 x 13.3 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lloyd Gamble Cole, 1966.2.5.

GANDHARA

5. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara*, 2nd century, schist, 6 x 4 ½ x 3 in. (15.2 x 11.4 x 7.6 cm). Estate of Milton E. Flower, 1996.4.1.

JAPAN

6. *Amida Buddha*, 19th century, wood and lacquer, 13 x 6 in. (33 x 15.24 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lloyd Gamble Cole, 1967.1.4.a-c.
7. *Kubira Taisho: One of the Juni Shinsho (12 Divine Generals), Guardians of Yakushi Nyorai, the Healing Buddha*, 13th-16th c., wood and paint, 20 ¾ x 8 ¾ x 8 ¾ in. (52.4 x 21.3 x 21.3 cm). 2005.4.

KOREA

8. *Seated Buddha (Bhaisajyaguru)*, 9th-12th century, bronze and iron, 13 in. (33 cm). Gift of Miss Mildred Sawyer, 1958.27.2.

THAILAND

9. Head and Shoulders of a *Buddha*, 16th c, bronze, 10 ¾ x 7 in. (27.3 x 17.8 cm). Estate of Milton E. Flower, 1996.4.12.a-b.
10. Hand from a *Seated Buddha*, 13th-14th century, bronze with gilding, 4 ½ x 13 x 3 in. (11.4 x 33 x 7.6 cm). Gift of Joseph Ellis, 1985.8.5.
11. *Seated Buddha*, 14th-16th century, bronze, 11 ¼ in. (28.6 cm). Gift of Mrs. Lloyd Gamble Cole, 1967.1.1.

FURTHER READING

Bautista, Julius, ed. *The Spirit of Things: Materiality and Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia*. New York: Cornell University, 2012.

Gethin, Rupert. *The Foundation of Buddhism*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Stratton, Carol, and Miriam McNair Scott. *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand*. Chicago: Serindia, 2004.



Fig. 6. China, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin)*, style of the 6th century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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THE TROUT GALLERY

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Manifestation and Adaptation

Variations in Buddhist Sculpture Across Asia



THE TROUT GALLERY
THE ART MUSEUM OF DICKINSON COLLEGE

THE SPREAD OF BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a religion that originated in India in the late 3rd century BCE. From India, the faith spread to Gandhara (present day Pakistan and Afghanistan), Burma, Thailand, China, Korea, and Japan. As Buddhism moved across Asia, different sects of the religion arose and the faith adapted to changing contexts and conditions. An early divergence within the religion was the distinction of Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. Hinayana Buddhism spread from India to places like Burma and Thailand. Mahayana Buddhism, on the other hand was more prevalent in East Asia, specifically China, Japan, and Korea. *Manifestations and Adaptations: Buddhist Sculpture Across Asia* displays sculptures related to Hinayana and Mahayana Buddhism. While the works illustrate certain aspects of continuity across Asia in iconography and material, they also reveal regional differences that illustrate Buddhism's adaptation throughout a continent with varying traditions and customs.



Fig 1. Burmese, *Buddha on an Elephant Throne Performing Bhumisparśa Mudra*, 18th-19th century.



Fig 2. Thai, *Buddha*, 16th century.

THE BUDDHA

A key figure in both the Hinayana and Mahayana sects of Buddhism is Siddhartha Guatama, Shakyamuni, known as the historical Buddha. Shakyamuni was a son of a chieftain in an area known today as the Indian-Nepalese border.¹ Born into a wealthy family, Shakyamuni grew up in a privileged lifestyle. However, upon discovering that others were less fortunate and that all were subject to suffering and eternal reincarnation, he abandoned his life of ease to embark on a spiritual quest. This initial journey involved Shakyamuni studying under many teachers and practicing asceticism. This proved unsatisfying, so he decided to meditate under a tree.² Here he reached enlightenment and eventually became the Buddha. *Buddha on an Elephant Throne Performing Bhumisparśa Mudra* (fig. 1) represents the awakening of Shakyamuni under the Bodhi tree. He appears in this sculpture seated on a pair of elephants, which signifies the Buddha's triumph over temptation.

The historical Buddha's teachings traveled across Asia in many formats. As scriptures from India were translated from Sanskrit to Chinese, there circulated the belief called upaya-kausalya (skill in means). The "skill in means" ideology embodies the concept that Buddha adapted his teachings according to the ability of his listeners to comprehend. This belief allowed for different branches of Buddhism within the Mahayana sect to form, especially in China, Korea, and Japan.³



Fig 3. Japanese, *Amida Buddha*, 19th century.

the bronze Buddha from Thailand (fig. 2).⁴ Other references to the Buddha's enlightenment include a cranial bump on the crown of the Buddha's head, the ushnisha.⁵ In some works we find only the ushnisha, as represented in *Amida Buddha* (fig. 3), while certain statues represent a flame-like finial, such as the example from Thailand (fig. 2). These flames represent Buddha's fiery spiritual energy.⁶ Variations on the ushnisha appear on *Buddha on an Elephant* (fig. 1). In this work, what could be seen as a simple flame, is actually a lotus bud, a Buddhist symbol of rebirth and meditation.

Apart from the Buddha himself, there are other Buddhist beings—Bodhisattvas—who have reached enlightenment, but rejected paradise in order to help others reach ultimate wisdom and escape the cycle of rebirth. The role of the Bodhisattvas is suggested in some works by strands of hair pulled up into a crown-like headpiece, as shown in a statue of Guanyin from Thailand (fig. 4). Bodhisattvas represent the importance of compassion and empathy in Mahayana belief, and therefore are represented in a human-like manner.⁷ Hinayana Buddhism does not have Bodhisattvas, which is why statues made for Hinayana Buddhism feature only the Buddha himself.



Fig 4. Thai, *Buddha*, 14th-16th century.

The skill in means ideology provides a lens for examining the Mahayana sculptures and understanding how different forms of Buddha could be more accessible to different audiences.

VISUALIZING FAITH

Images of the Buddha feature a range of symbolic elements and attributes that relate to specific concepts and aspects of Buddhism. For example, images of the Buddha frequently show curls of hair on the head of the Buddha. Such curls reference the moment when he shaved his head, which he did upon achieving enlightenment. They represent wisdom and can be seen in

the bronze Buddha from Thailand (fig. 2).⁴ Other references to the Buddha's enlightenment include a cranial bump on the crown of the Buddha's head, the ushnisha.⁵ In some works we find only the ushnisha, as represented in *Amida Buddha* (fig. 3), while certain statues represent a flame-like finial, such as the example from Thailand (fig. 2). These flames represent Buddha's fiery spiritual energy.⁶ Variations on the ushnisha appear on *Buddha on an Elephant* (fig. 1). In this work, what could be seen as a simple flame, is actually a lotus bud, a Buddhist symbol of rebirth and meditation.

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SYMBOLIC GESTURES

Mudras, hand gestures, are an important element in Buddhist imagery; they refer to a specific ritual, story, or ideal within the faith. The *Seated Buddha* (fig. 4) features the Dhyana mudra, which is represented by the figure placing both hands in his lap, palms up, with the right hand on top of the left. This gesture is connected to meditation and can be interpreted as the right hand representing the world of enlightenment, which overpowers the left hand, representing the world of appearance. The right hand can also be read as a reference to Nirvana (paradise), while the left represents Samsara (earth/cycle of rebirth).⁸

While the Dhyana mudra represents a religious concept, other mudras recall a specific story within Buddhism. The Bhumisparśa mudra is connected to Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, who is shown with his right hand touching the ground while his left hand rests in his lap (fig. 1). This mudra references the story of Mara, a malice force, who tried to unseat the future Buddha from his place under the Bodhi Tree. In response, Shakyamuni touched the earth to call the goddess of the earth, Sthavara, to observe his practice of virtue over many lifetimes. The goddess caused the earth to quake in response, and Mara vanished forever. Shakyamuni achieved Buddhahood that evening.⁹



Fig 5. Chinese, *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Guanyin)*, 14th-18th century.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The works featured in *Manifestations and Adaptation* vary in material, from cast bronze to hand-carved ivory. The bronzes from Thailand (fig. 2) were cast according to the lost-wax process, a complex technique in which a carved wax model serves as the basis for a ceramic mold. This process relies on an additive approach to build up the wax model, while objects made from wood, stone, and ivory are made by carving away material to reveal the final form (fig. 5). Since Buddhism often arrived long after casting and carving traditions were already well established in the various regions, Buddhist imagery, like aspects of Buddhist beliefs, was often shaped according to the nature of pre-existing regional artistic materials, practices, and style.

Bizz Fretty '20

- 1 Rupert Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 14.
- 2 Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism*, 15.
- 3 Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism*, 228.
- 4 Carol Stratton and Miriam McNair Scott, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand* (Chicago: Serindia, 2004), 49.
- 5 Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand*, 130.
- 6 Stratton, *Buddhist Sculpture of Northern Thailand*, 47–48.
- 7 Gethin, *The Foundation of Buddhism*, 229.
- 8 Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr., eds., "dhyānamudra," in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 257.
- 9 Buswell and Lopez, bhumisparśamudrā, in *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 551.