

**Embodying  
Compassion  
in Buddhist Art:  
Image, Pilgrimage,  
Practice**

**Karen Lucic**



**The Frances Lehman Loeb  
Art Center**

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Karen Lucic

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Back cover illustration: *Kannon (Avalokiteshvara)*, (detail), Japanese, Edo period (1615–1868); hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; image: 61 7/8 x 33 in., mount: 87 7/8 x 39 1/2 in.; Gift of Daniele Selby '13, The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, 2014.20.1.

Frontispiece: *Avalokiteshvara, One of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas* (detail), Eastern Tibet, 18th century; pigment on cloth with silk mount; 39 3/8 x 20 3/4 x 1/2 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2008.9.

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## Note To The Reader

In order to make this publication as accessible as possible to all readers, foreign terms are transcribed in the Roman alphabet, without diacritical marks or silent letters, with the exception of some transliterations that appear in bibliographic entries and direct quotations. In those cases, the original author's usage has been preserved (with the exception of diacritics below the baseline). Similarly, although this catalogue uses Pinyin conventions to render Chinese terms into English, it retains Wade-Giles transliterations that appear in quotations and names of publications. Japanese words ending in -ji, -in, and -dera indicate names of religious complexes. Foreign terms—glossed when first used—are italicized for common nouns and titles of scriptures, except in the case of words that have entered regular usage in English, such as bodhisattva, mantra, mandala, yoga, etc. The following abbreviations are used to gloss foreign terms: C=Chinese; J=Japanese; S=Sanskrit; T=Tibetan. The reader may refer to the glossary at the back of this publication for a comprehensive list of foreign terms and concepts used in this catalogue. The inside covers display maps and a timeline of relevant historical periods and style categories.

For more information on the objects in this exhibition, plus many interactive features, visit the *Embodying Compassion in Buddhist Art* website at: <http://pages.vassar.edu/embodyingcompassion/>

There the user can download a free smartphone application for remote use or while visiting the exhibition at The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Gallery from April 23 to June 28, 2015.



## Many Faces, Many Names: Avalokiteshvara, Bodhisattva of Compassion

### Introduction

I will describe him in outline for you—  
Listen to his name, observe his body,  
Bear him in mind, not passing the time vainly,  
For he can wipe out the pains of existence.  
*Lotus Sutra*<sup>1</sup>

### The Exhibition

For two thousand years, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara has embodied the quality of compassion in Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> Arising in tandem with Mahayana (Great Vehicle) precepts, bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara are great beings who continually manifest the aspiration to achieve enlightenment—or complete liberation from suffering—and constantly endeavor for the sake of all. Therefore, he (or for some followers, she) is a supremely important figure in the Buddhist pantheon.<sup>3</sup> And yet until now, no American museum has staged a transcultural exhibition solely devoted to Avalokiteshvara.<sup>4</sup> *Embodying Compassion in Buddhist Art: Image, Pilgrimage, Practice* begins to fill this gap by examining his many manifestations across Asia.

Fundamentally multidisciplinary and informed by both Buddhist studies and art historical methods, this exhibition includes thirty outstanding examples of Indian, Nepalese, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese art, from institutions such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Princeton University Art Museum, The Rubin Museum of Art, Asia Society, Jacques Marchais Museum, and The Newark Museum. Important works from the permanent collection of The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center are also included. This assembly of paintings, sculptures, texts, and ritual objects provides a rare opportunity to see how Avalokiteshvara took on many different faces and names over time, becoming Guanyin in China, Kannon in Japan, Karunamaya in Nepal, and Chenrezig in Tibet.<sup>5</sup> Attendant to the historical Buddha, focus of esoteric practices, mythic progenitor of the Tibetan people, he has played myriad roles throughout the history of Asian Buddhism. Displaying a wide variety of postures, gestures, attributes, and attendant figures, his multilayered iconography suggests many meanings. In fact, Avalokiteshvara's kaleidoscopic forms and many names serve as an index to his popularity. These variants evolved in the context of widespread worship and ritual activities.<sup>6</sup> Within the confines of this exhibition, we cannot present the full range of his manifestations.<sup>7</sup> Instead, *Embodying Compassion in Buddhist Art* features highly selective examples drawn from collections in the northeastern United States. Each work displayed here contributes to an enriched understanding of this bodhisattva's multiple facets and dimensions.

*Nyoirin Kannon (Chintamanichakra Avalokiteshvara)*, (detail), Japan, Edo period, ca. 1693; wood with gold paint, gold leaf, lacquer, and crystal inlays; 16 9/16 x 12 1/8 x 10 1/4 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund 1956, 56.39.

Above all other considerations, the exhibition focuses on how Avalokiteshvara's diverse artistic manifestations exemplify limitless compassion. Of course, compassion is a widely shared religious and humanist value, expressed in Neo-Confucian benevolence and Christian brotherly love, in the life work of Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Theresa. In the context of Mahayana Buddhism, compassion has a very precise meaning. Stemming from empathy and an understanding of the universal desire for happiness, compassion is the strong wish that all beings—without exception—be free from suffering. Furthermore, Mahayana Buddhists make a personal commitment to put that wish into action.<sup>8</sup> This essay traces the many ways that artists and their patrons have sought to convey this quality in Avalokiteshvara's myriad forms, and how such altruistic ideals infuse the veneration and emulation of this bodhisattva.

Despite Avalokiteshvara's diverse manifestations, the exhibition installation and wall labels weave together a coherent narrative about his place in Buddhism throughout Asia. In this essay, the discussion proceeds chronologically as it investigates Avalokiteshvara's development in those Asian countries included in the exhibition. But the works in the show are grouped thematically, rather than by country of origin, into three sections: "Image," "Pilgrimage," and "Practice." These categories provide insight into how this bodhisattva rose to prominence in India, how his significance evolved over time and space, and how practitioners evoke and make contact with him. As we shall see, many of his devotees hold Avalokiteshvara's extraordinary kindness to be inseparable from ultimate wisdom—the recognition that all appearances are interdependent. The bodhisattva thus instantiates the important principle of nonduality, a central tenet in many Buddhist schools. The exhibition presents the artworks as concrete embodiments of this intangible but potent unity; it aims to lead the visitor beyond the differing stylistic presentations to an understanding of the widely shared beliefs that underlie Avalokiteshvara's complex iconography.

The works in this show arose from a complex matrix of religious, social and spiritual factors. Of course, their makers and users did not intend these objects to be seen in museum galleries, set off in isolation. Instead, most appeared on home or temple altars, with a dense array of related objects surrounding them (fig. 1). Some hung on the walls of religious buildings; others were cradled in the hand or even worn by practitioners. The kinds of objects displayed here are still made today and continue to function as religious icons. Yet the works in *Embodying Compassion* come for the most part from museum vaults, so by necessity, our exhibition conforms to standard practices of conservation and display. For the duration of this exhibition, the objects stand in hermetically sealed Plexiglas cases, removed from original contexts. Nevertheless, this catalogue, the exhibition wall



Fig. 1: Unidentified Chapel, Tibet, 1940s; Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 2012i2187.

labels, and the *Embodying Compassion* digital resources aim to recreate as vividly as possible how these objects arose from lived experience, and how their makers evolved effective ways to embody the virtue of compassion in concrete material forms.

Avalokiteshvara's distinctive iconography encodes an intricate web of philosophical and spiritual beliefs. From his origins in ancient India up until the present moment, followers bring him to life daily through venerating icons, journeying to his sacred sites, and engaging in associated spiritual practices. Today, many Buddhist practitioners around the world visualize his form and chant his famous mantra, *om mani padme hum*. *Embodying Compassion* presents works from several countries and multiple contexts as a collective case study in the imaginative ways that spiritual values can take shape in artful forms.

### Indra's Net: Avalokiteshvara in the Buddhist World

Avalokiteshvara is but one bodhisattva in a vast pantheon of deities who inhabit the Mahayana Buddhist universe. Yet, as just mentioned, this figure has throughout the centuries embodied a foundational Mahayana Buddhist belief: the utterly complete, indivisible union of wisdom and compassion. Following the metaphor of Indra's Net that originated in the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism, all phenomena in the universe give rise to—and in turn mutually arise from—all other phenomena. In other words, the universe is like a boundless, interdependent, cosmic web. In every node, a crystal jewel with an infinite number of facets reflects every other faceted jewel. Everything is defined by its connection with other things, while still maintaining its own identity.<sup>9</sup> Indra's Net is therefore a potent metaphor for the Buddhist notion of interdependence. Gazing at the node that embodies Avalokiteshvara, we see Mahayana Buddhism made manifest in concrete form, continually reflecting and refracting compassionate wisdom.

Two important Indian sutras (ancient religious and philosophical texts) give scriptural support to this claim. Mahayana

adherents believe that the *Heart Sutra* (cat. 21) and the *Lotus Sutra* (cat. 22) record key aspects of the Buddha's teachings. The *Heart Sutra* (S: *Hridaya sutra*) is a brief but crucially important section of the *Prajnaparamita* (*Perfection of Wisdom*) *Sutra*, an early compilation of Mahayana scriptures. In this text, the historical Buddha Shakyamuni sits silently in meditation while Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara concisely articulates a core Mahayana Buddhist insight: that nothing exists of itself or by itself. Forms (objects, sensations, notions of personal identity, etc.) continually arise, but only relationally, in dependence on a vast web (like Indra's) of causes and conditions. Significantly, in the *Heart Sutra*, it is Avalokiteshvara who conveys the truth of the Buddha's realization of *shunyata*, a Sanskrit term sometimes rendered in English as "non-dualism."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the *Heart Sutra* effectively demonstrates Avalokiteshvara's wisdom aspect.

In the *Lotus Sutra* (S: *Saddharmapundarika Sutra*), another important early Mahayana text, the twenty-fifth chapter recounts that Avalokiteshvara adopts many forms—man, woman, child, monk, layperson—or performs various services—granting children, dispelling bandits, quelling storms, or eradicating wild beasts—in order to benefit those who petition him.<sup>11</sup> The *Lotus Sutra* therefore powerfully demonstrates his compassionate aspect. Avalokiteshvara's protean abilities in the *Lotus Sutra* indicate a remarkable fluidity not only in his physical appearance and social status, but also in his (or her) gender identity. Significantly, in East Asia, Avalokiteshvara is as likely to be considered female as male.

Together, these two scriptures suggest the broad range of Avalokiteshvara's reach. He is both a seer who recognizes interdependence and a compassionate refuge for suffering beings. Avalokiteshvara's popularity throughout Asia no doubt derives from the fact that he can take on so many physical forms and adopt so many helpful roles in order to satisfy both seekers of ultimate truth as well as those who want to alleviate their worldly travails.

Avalokiteshvara's spiritual efficacy may also derive from the fact that he has inspired some of the most compelling images in the history of Buddhist art. Mahayana Buddhism is by nature profoundly visual—as well as visionary—and for centuries, sculptors and painters have crafted works that embody Avalokiteshvara's qualities in exquisite aesthetic forms. For an informed audience, such works are not only beautiful, but every detail of composition, iconography, and ornament resonates with meaning.

A small copper sculpture, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, dated 1543 and created by the Nepalese artist Apha Jyoti for a Tibetan patron (fig. 2), gives concrete form to Mahayana Buddhism's ideals.<sup>12</sup> The youthful, idealized figure sits on a double lotus (S: *padma*) pedestal in a position known as the relaxed posture (S: *lalitasana*),<sup>13</sup> the right hand outstretched toward the viewer, the left holding a lotus stalk that blooms beside his shoulder. Avalokiteshvara's lotus conveys the ability to rise untouched by the muck of worldly existence, likened to a pond's muddy bottom, from which the perfect and pure flower grows.<sup>14</sup> In

addition, a small lotus ascends from the base to support the right foot, indicating a readiness to rise from his balanced equilibrium on the throne. His elaborate coiffure resembles a royal crown; a tiny buddha sits above the forehead. The long earlobes (habituated to heavy earrings), finely incised garments, and regal yet relaxed bearing indicate princely status. At the same time, a band secures the placement of his right leg in proper meditation posture, a sign that he is also a spiritual adept engaged in advanced meditative practices. His downcast gaze in fact indicates that he is absorbed in contemplation, while his outstretched palm (S: *varada mudra*) is an active gesture of beneficence directed toward those in front of him. With almost miraculous equipoise, he is simultaneously inwardly and outwardly directed; he embodies both otherworldly perfection and a willingness to be engaged with those who venerate him. On many levels, the image suggests Avalokiteshvara's ability to resolve seemingly incompatible poles: prince and ascetic, human embodiment and spiritual transcendence. His smiling countenance reassures us of happiness; the boon he offers us with his outstretched hand is liberation from suffering.

Clearly, a work like this is no casual production. Its skillful fashioning and exquisite form arose from many factors, but especially an attitude that the sculpture is not just a representation, but a revelation of the deity itself. This Tibetan/Nepalese



Fig. 2: *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, Western Tibet, 15th–16th century; copper alloy; H. 7 1/2 in.; Asia Society, New York, Gift from The Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Fund, 1994.4.

work suggests its Indian lineage (compare cat. 2) not only in its composition but also in how the viewer is expected to perceive it. Apprehending such a sculpture in its original context involves the Indian practice of auspicious viewing (S: *darshana*). As Wingfield writes about such spiritually charismatic objects, "*darshan* involves presenting oneself to be seen by religious images as a form of religious practice.... The experience of *darshan* is not one of seeing a religious statue, but of being seen by it, and as a result being touched and affected by this contact."<sup>15</sup> To approach an image in this way is to consider it as partaking of the deity's substance. For the Buddhist faithful, a consecrated sculpture or painting of Avalokiteshvara does not merely symbolize or represent the bodhisattva. Rather, it is an icon inseparable from what it embodies. Standing before it, the Buddhist believer encounters Avalokiteshvara himself, who activates and inspires her own inherent capacity for wisdom and compassion.

From the Buddhist perspective, the maker of such objects, in conjunction with the ritual specialist who consecrates them,<sup>16</sup> brings living presence to inanimate creations. As Buddhism developed, it came to place extraordinary emphasis on images. Mahayana Buddhism in particular exalts art, as did other important religions in India, especially Brahmanism and Jainism. Susan Huntington explains that "the emphasis on *darshana* ... in the Indic culture ... has lent the visual arts an importance never exceeded elsewhere in the world."<sup>17</sup> Behrendt elaborates on the role of art in Buddhist communities: "Seeing the perfected form of the Buddha, it was believed, would be equivalent to apprehending the *dharm*a [the Buddha's teaching] itself and hence would provide the devotee with immediate access to enlightenment."<sup>18</sup> Paintings and sculptures depicting not only the founder of the religion but also other figures in the pantheon played an important role in Buddhism's acceptance as it spread across Asia.

For their users, such icons have potent spiritual and practical efficacy; some devotees therefore supplicate, adorn, wash, feed, and otherwise venerate them. Commissioning such works gains "merit," a way of creating positive momentum in the present life of the donor and ensuring a fortunate rebirth in the future. The enormous number of sculptures and paintings depicting Avalokiteshvara throughout Asia attests to how often his followers fervently turned to him throughout the centuries. In fact, this multiplicity presents a daunting challenge to those looking for a comprehensive way to characterize his art historical and religious significance.

### The Well Has No Bottom

At a recent Buddhist Studies seminar,<sup>19</sup> an elderly participant offered a personal anecdote that illuminated the complexity of finding any fixed certainties in Buddhism. He recounted how, as a boy, he entered a monastic community in China. His teacher's first instruction was to find a pole and go to a nearby well, probing until he found the bottom. Trying ever longer poles, he never succeeded, and when he returned to his teacher to report his failure, his teacher observed: "In the search for the Buddha, the well has no bottom."

Indeed, many Buddhist schools refrain from speculating on the origins of phenomena and eschew philosophical notions of fixed essences and unchanging realities. Instead, as we have seen, several strains of Buddhism hold that nothing exists independently and inherently, nor are there any permanent phenomena. So it is not surprising that Buddhist studies as an academic field is filled with unresolved debates. In fact, because of the religion's many philosophical and analytical schools and its complex social transformations from one context to another, it is even difficult to say definitively what exactly Buddhism is. Like Avalokiteshvara, Buddhism has many faces, always shifting, adapting, and assimilating as it encounters foreign conditions. Harrison writes, "Even to talk about Buddhism is to generalize, since there are so many different varieties and styles of the religion that pass under that name."<sup>20</sup>

Specialists do tend to agree that Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the "founder" of the religion, was born into the Shakya clan in the Northern Indian kingdom of Magadha—an area now governed by Nepal. According to tradition, his life dates are approximately 566 to 485 BCE, but recently, some scholars have contested this and think that he actually lived many years later.<sup>21</sup> Although we can reasonably assume that Mahayana sutras were circulating in the first several centuries of the Common Era, its status as a religious movement in India during this time is controversial.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, art historians debate when, where, and why the depiction of the Buddha in bodily form began.<sup>23</sup> In addition, where and when the first images of bodhisattvas appeared, and the identity of early Buddhist figural representations is shifting terrain.<sup>24</sup> Controversy also exists regarding the relationship of Buddhist iconography to contemporaneous artistic developments in Brahmanism—the religion that evolved from ancient Vedic traditions in India. Some Indologists assume that the Brahmanical traditions had primacy, with Buddhist forms and practices largely dependent on them.<sup>25</sup> Others, such as Bhattacharyya and Behrendt, see influence occasionally going in the opposite direction, from Buddhist to Brahmanical depictions of gods. Still others identify a pan-Indian substratum from which both Buddhist and Brahmanical beliefs and iconography emerged, in an atmosphere of mutual interaction and exchange.<sup>26</sup> These are only a handful of the many unresolved questions in the field of Buddhist studies today.

Given his importance in the Buddhist world, it is not surprising that Avalokiteshvara has also engendered competing interpretations. For example, scholars differ as to when he first appeared as an important focus of worship in India.<sup>27</sup> Interpretations of his name also vary. It is usually translated from Sanskrit into English as the Lord Who Looks Down, with the implication he is a supreme being (S: *ishvara*) who gazes down (S: *avalokita*) with compassion on all suffering beings. Yet, Mallmann recounts numerous widely differing interpretations of Avalokiteshvara's name, and other theories have emerged since her publication.<sup>28</sup> Slight orthographic inconsistencies in early Buddhist texts apparently account for the fact that in East Asia the bodhisattva became the Lord Who Perceives the Sounds of the World.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, various interpretations exist of Avalokiteshvara's renowned mantra, *om mani padme hum*. The mantra refers to two of his important attributes, the jewel (S: *mani*) and the lotus or *padma*. Much ink has been spilled in discussing these attributes. Some build a doctrinal interpretation upon the idea that the jewel is *in* the lotus; others claim that the lotus is made of jewels; still others see *mani padme* as a compound word that functions as another name for Avalokiteshvara: the Jewel-Lotus One.<sup>30</sup>

The present essay clearly will not put any of these debates to rest. In this ever-shifting context, the researcher's pole inevitably fails to reach the bottom of the well, and any attempt to explain Avalokiteshvara comprehensively will no doubt fall short of the goal. And yet, this study will attempt—as accurately and sympathetically as possible—to chart the ways in which makers of images have sought to express Avalokiteshvara's wise and compassionate nature. Furthermore, it will discuss, to the extent I can determine them, the actions, motivations, and aspirations of those who revere Avalokiteshvara as a model of enlightened activity. The goal is to investigate how art meets the spiritual aspirations of its makers and users—to see how belief finds expression in form. The bodhisattva's story begins in India, where both Buddhism and Avalokiteshvara were born.

## Avalokiteshvara In India

### The Bodhisattva Ideal

Avalokiteshvara as a recognizable entity appeared several centuries after Buddhism emerged in India,<sup>31</sup> yet his significance rests in the foundational ideals of the religion. Both Buddhism and this bodhisattva arose from a distinctively Indian spiritual milieu. From the Indic perspective, deluded ways of thinking give rise to suffering; the individual has the capacity to overcome these delusions by employing various mental and physical practices to achieve yoga (literally yoking), or union, with the mind's awakened nature. Seals from the Harappan period (ca. 2100–ca. 1750 BCE) of the Indus civilization show figures apparently adopting yogic postures (S: *asanas*), suggesting that these techniques might be very ancient.<sup>32</sup> Thus early developments in the region provided a common heritage for the important religions that grew on its soil: Brahmanism (19th-century British colonists named Brahmanism's later offshoots "Hinduism"), Jainism (founded by a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha, Mahavira), and the focus of our concern, Buddhism.<sup>33</sup>

As these three religions continued to develop throughout the first millennium of the Common Era, pan-Indian art came to share important iconographic features. These related traditions show cross-legged deities sitting in yogic postures, such as the lotus position (S: *padmasana*), and with similar costumes, ornaments, hand gestures (S: *mudras*) and attributes (objects that identify figures). Needless to say, the visual forms of these distinct religious traditions also diverged in many important iconographic features.

To reconstruct Avalokiteshvara's emergence from this Indic



Fig. 3: *Buddha Shakyamuni*, India, Bihar, Pala period, late 9th–early 10th century; schist, 28 1/4 x 17 3/4 x 7 1/4 in.; Asia Society, New York, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.37.

milieu, we must briefly recount the Buddha's life story and the early history of the religion practiced in his name. His spiritual journey took him from a privileged life as Prince Siddhartha Gautama to extreme renunciation. He left his palace to follow the austere path of the spiritual seeker, eventually meditating single-mindedly under the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya. His followers believe that as a result of this experience, he completely woke up to the way things truly are (fig. 3). "Buddha" in fact means "awakened one" in Sanskrit, and Buddhist tradition holds that awakening freed him from the ignorance and afflictive emotions tying all sentient beings to endless wandering (S: *samsara*)—the cycle of rebirths in the realms of worldly existence.

According to Buddhist accounts, Siddhartha—through intensive meditative concentration and self-examination—recognized that suffering comes from grasping at material things, other beings, or a false sense of the self as fixed, stable, and concrete. Furthermore, he realized that our thoughts fundamentally shape our experience of the world. Therefore, the potential for liberation lives within the individual seeker. These realizations led to his *enlightenment*; in fact, according to tradition, radiant light accompanied the Buddha's awakening as he sat under the Bodhi Tree.<sup>34</sup>

Over the centuries, painters and sculptors evolved various means to depict the Buddha's enlightenment; in time, the event took canonical form, as in fig. 3. In this work, the Buddha sits under the Bodhi Tree, while two attendants stand to the left and right. He wears a monk's robes and sits in lotus posture, indicat-

ing his yogic attainments and the stability of his mind. His right hand makes an earth-touching gesture, which confirms his profound realization. His inwardly directed gaze denotes the unwavering quality of his mind. The lotus seat reveals that he has attained a state beyond suffering.

Upon his enlightenment, Siddhartha Gautama became Shakyamuni (Sage of the Shakyas). Motivated by a compassionate desire to help others liberate themselves as well, he taught Buddhist precepts (S: *dharma*) for forty-five years to large numbers of monks, nuns, and laypeople. A pilgrimage trail in



Fig. 4: Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, Bihar, India, 2013.

the Buddhist homeland preserves the sites of his birth, death, important teachings, and miraculous feats. Mahabodhi Temple, which commemorates his awakening in Bodhgaya, is the paramount destination. Millions of pilgrims come each year to circumambulate (meditatively traverse the perimeter of a sacred site), prostrate, pray, and make offerings at the place where Buddhism's founder achieved liberation (fig. 4).<sup>35</sup>

After Shakyamuni's death, Buddhism evolved in myriad ways; over time, it gave rise to various schools as his teachings spread. His early followers established monastic communities and promoted the Buddha's foundational insights.<sup>36</sup> These are principally the Four Noble Truths, which comprise what is known as the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, the Buddha's initial teachings at Sarnath.<sup>37</sup>

A new strain—Mahayana Buddhism—arose with the Common Era;<sup>38</sup> it promoted the bodhisattva ideal. Earlier Buddhist texts had already established how Shakyamuni in many previous lives followed the path of the bodhisattva: literally a being (S: *sattva*) who seeks enlightenment (S: *bodhi*), and does so for the sake of all sentient beings.<sup>39</sup> Mahayana Buddhism—the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma—expanded these altruistic impulses. To this end, aspirants generate the mind of enlightenment (S: *bodhicitta*) and take a vow to achieve awakening not only for themselves but also to assist others. This aspiration



is a particularly potent form of compassion (S: *karuna*), and the bodhisattva vow strengthens the goal to realize universal awakening. Needless to say, this vast goal exceeds ordinary human capacities; nevertheless, the bodhisattva ideal remains to this day Mahayana Buddhism's foundational principle.

To embody these altruistic goals, Mahayana Buddhism engendered an array of bodhisattvas who assist suffering beings. All followers of Mahayana precepts are bodhisattvas—buddhas-in-the-making—but figures like Avalokiteshvara have the status of a “great being,” a *mahasattva*. One way to understand a *mahasattva* is as a distinctive facet of the Buddha's enlightened qualities. Superlative exemplars, *mahasattva* bodhisattvas instantiate potentialities that all beings possess but only fully enlightened buddhas completely realize. Therefore, Maitreya (Benevolent One) embodies the Buddha's loving-kindness; Manjushri (Gentle Glory) conveys his supreme wisdom; and Avalokiteshvara, his infinite compassion. As Kamata and Shaw write, “Mahasattva Bodhisattvas inhabit the upper reaches of the path to enlightenment, including full awakening. The role of a Buddha is to manifest enlightenment itself, while the ministry of a Bodhisattva is to personify a given virtue or enlightened quality and engage in a more specialized mission to liberate beings in a selected way and elected environments. Because the types and needs of sentient beings are infinite, there is no end to the forms and ministrations that Bodhisattvas might adopt in order to empty the realms of Samsara.”<sup>40</sup> Although they concretize the Buddha's specific qualities, bodhisattvas nevertheless differ from the Buddha in appearance and attributes. Dressed austerely as wandering ascetics, or more commonly, in the style of Indian royalty, bodhisattvas' garments set them apart from the Buddha's monastic mien.

With the appearance of Mahayana Buddhism, the number of “awakened ones” also increased exponentially. In addition to Shakyamuni (often termed the “historical Buddha”), Mahayana sutras describe a multitude of celestial or transcendent buddhas, as they are often called in buddhological literature. Despite their otherworldly designation, all these buddhas started as ordinary beings and traversed the same arduous path of self-cultivation



Fig. 5: Green Tara, Leaf from a Dispersed Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom) Manuscript, India, Bengal or Bangladesh, Pala period, early 12th century; opaque watercolor on palm leaf; page: 2 3/4 x 16 1/2 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2001, 2001.445e.

that Shakyamuni undertook. In an Indian Buddhist conception of parallel universes, each of these beings presides over a world system, or buddha-field. Through altruistic vows and extraordinary deeds, they purify—or prepare—an ideal environment for their followers' spiritual development.<sup>41</sup> Every buddha has a retinue of bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara to help in this effort.

In turn, bodhisattvas gathered their own celestial attendants. Green Tara (fig. 5), along with another female deity, Bhrikuti, accompanies Avalokiteshvara in many triadic and multifigural compositions that date from the Pala period (ca. 750–1200) (cat. 2). These two figures are female manifestations of Avalokiteshvara's compassion (Tara) and wisdom (Bhrikuti). Tara (cat. 29) eventually became an extremely important deity in her own right; like Avalokiteshvara, she dispenses compassion and serves as a meditational deity.<sup>42</sup> The Indian Buddhist pantheon is a web of such familial relationships.

Amitabha (Infinite Light) is one of the most important celestial buddhas. Alternatively called Amitayus (Infinite Life), Amitabha has been extremely popular in East Asia since the sixth century (see fig. 20 and cat. 28); Tibetans venerate him as well (compare cat. 1), but his role in Buddhist India is obscure. Red in color, he wears a monk's saffron robes and usually sits with his hands in the gesture of meditation. Often he holds a renunciant's begging bowl. A text concerning Amitabha, the *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra* (*Land of Bliss Sutra*), emerged from the northwest borderlands of India sometime before 200 CE.<sup>43</sup> It suggests, as Fujita writes, that “Amitayus is the aspect of the timeless life of Shakyamuni, and Amitabha is the aspect of his universal life; together they symbolize the transcendental dimensions of the historical Buddha in temporal and spatial terms.”<sup>44</sup>

This text describes Amitabha's perfected world, called the Land of Bliss (S: *Sukhavati*). The sutra mentions Avalokiteshvara as an important disciple in this buddha-field, although he appears only in passing. At one point, the bodhisattva questions why Amitabha Buddha is smiling and receives this reply: “The miracle of my smile is due to the vow I made in former times—that living beings who heard my name, no matter how, should come to my field without fail.”<sup>45</sup> In this sutra, both Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara are loving, compassionate, and meritorious beings. They can transfer the positive results of their virtuous actions to others, bringing suffering beings into their field of influence and thereby assisting them in their spiritual evolution.<sup>46</sup> Harrison believes that Mahayana Buddhism's initial message was that “people should not worship bodhisattvas, they should become bodhisattvas themselves,”<sup>47</sup> but such sutras fostered a fervent devotional attitude within this school toward figures like Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara.

The *Larger Sukhavativyuha Sutra* associates both Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara with light; it calls the latter a superior *mahasattva* bodhisattva who emits a halo that fills “the whole world system with eternal splendor.”<sup>48</sup> Avalokiteshvara's radiance in fact recalls descriptions of Shakyamuni's awakening, with light miraculously emanating throughout infinite space.<sup>49</sup> No wonder then that the bodhisattva's image is often adorned with gilding, emanating halos, mandorlas (full-body halos), and other photic displays.



Fig. 6: The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Lokanatha), India, Jammu and Kashmir, Kashmir region, ca. 4th–5th century; copper alloy; 10 1/2 x 3 1/2 x 3 1/4 in.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Nasli and Alice Heeramaneck Collection, Museum Associates Purchase, M.69.15.2.

The objects in *Embodying Compassion* demonstrate how painters and sculptors developed such visual devices to convey Avalokiteshvara's magnificence and spiritual attainments.

In addition to light symbolism, depictions of Avalokiteshvara and other bodhisattvas came to display standardized iconographic features. Their bodies are perfect, and they wear or carry objects that suggest enlightened qualities. According to doctrine, the great bodhisattvas in the Buddhist pantheon transcend gender distinctions, but nevertheless, they appear as recognizably male or female. In general, bodhisattvas wear light garments appropriate for the hot Indian climate, which reveal and complement their youthful, idealized bodies and pleasing features.<sup>50</sup> In 3rd–5th century Gandhara (present-day Pakistan), artists portrayed bodhisattvas as princes, with elaborate robes and heavy jewelry. In other regions, such as Kashmir, early depictions of bodhisattvas are more austere, suggesting the role of spiritual seeker (fig. 6).<sup>51</sup>

In artistic depictions, bodhisattvas were initially merely the Buddha's attendants. In early works, they often appear rather generically as members of Shakyamuni's retinue and are indistinguishable by attributes, ornaments, or garments. Early Buddhist sculptures in fact pose a challenge to art historians seeking to identify specific bodhisattvas—or even to establish a figure as a bodhisattva. Not until the Gupta period (320–600) did Indian painters and sculptors develop a codified iconography for each important bodhisattva, making them easier to identify. For example, the *Buddha Shakyamuni* triad illustrated here (fig. 3) includes standard post-Gupta iconography for the two at-

tendant bodhisattvas. To the left, we recognize Avalokiteshvara by his dislike white lotus, while to the right, Maitreya holds his typical paintbrush-shaped blue lotus (S: *utpala*).

In time, devotees began to worship bodhisattvas in their own right, and sculptors and painters—no doubt in response to their patrons—started to depict them as independent entities. Indian Buddhists apparently first singled out Maitreya for special veneration; they believed this bodhisattva to be Shakyamuni's successor as the next buddha of this world. They also revered Maitreya as a model renunciant and spiritual adept, and his iconography developed in accord with these qualities. In early works, he often carries a long-necked vessel with a spout (S: *kundika*), a type a water bottle used to rinse the mouth and perform ritual ceremonies.<sup>52</sup> This attribute identifies a figure as a spiritual aspirant, and in early depictions, Avalokiteshvara sometimes carries this jar as well.<sup>53</sup>

Based on this attribute, John Huntington identifies an early Kashmiri sculpture of a jar-holding bodhisattva (fig. 6) as the Protector of the World (Avalokiteshvara Lokanatha). Typical of early Buddhist art, the bodhisattva raises his right hand in a gesture of reassurance (S: *abhaya mudra*) and holds a small spouted jar in his left.<sup>54</sup> Huntington associates the figure's *kundika* with ancient Indian mendicants, who carried such water vessels as they wandered from one holy site to another. The jar indicates a seeker who has renounced worldly life in order to gain spiritual liberation. Furthermore, as a vessel for water, the *kundika* indicates purity, and in fact, in the Indian context, devotees regularly bathe statues of buddhas and bodhisattvas and offer them consecrated water (see cat. 23). In addition, the figure has a black antelope (S: *krishnasara*) skin draped over his left shoulder, which associates him with spiritual practice. Indian yogis often sit on such antelope skins to meditate, and this legendary antelope species especially embodies extreme gentleness and compassion.<sup>55</sup> Because of the jar, some scholars have identified this image as Maitreya, but Huntington argues that the antelope skin establishes it as depicting Avalokiteshvara, who evokes, in his words, “a figural type associated with ... asceticism in order to elicit Buddhist ideals of renunciation and spiritual purity, as well as the sanctity and self-sacrificing dimension of the Bodhisattva ideal.”<sup>56</sup>

The lotus is a similarly tricky attribute to pin down. In one of Avalokiteshvara's earliest forms, Padmapani (Lotus Bearer) (fig. 7), the bodhisattva grasps a lotus stalk, usually in his left hand, and the flower unfurls over his shoulder. As we have seen, the lotus symbolizes spiritual purity because it grows from the mud, yet blossoms unstained. But this attribute is shared within a larger Indian iconographic context,<sup>57</sup> and several other bodhisattvas, including Tara, Maitreya and Manjushri, typically hold lotuses. They carry different varieties of aquatic flowers, however, and careful inspection can usually distinguish the blue *utpala* that these bodhisattvas hold from Avalokiteshvara's white lotus.<sup>58</sup> Additional iconographic features, such as a miniature reliquary structure (S: *stupa*) on Maitreya's crown, or a manuscript resting on Manjushri's lotus, can assist in sorting out questions of identification. But without a definitive inscription, a bodhisattva's identity sometimes remains a mystery.



Fig. 7: *Avalokiteshvara Padmapani*, Pakistan, Swat Valley, 7th century; bronze inlaid with silver and copper; 8 3/4 x 5 3/4 x 4 1/8 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick and Fletcher Funds, 1974, 1974.273.

Of course, attributes and ornaments are not merely identifying features; they also reveal a bodhisattva's characteristic spiritual qualities. As Susan Huntington writes, "The ornaments represent the spiritual perfections of a Bodhisattva and the abundant resources and liberative techniques (*upaya*) that a Bodhisattva commands in order to liberate sentient beings."<sup>59</sup> Some attributes derive from Buddhist texts, which often (but not always) provide the basis for iconography.<sup>60</sup> Many Mahayana sutras in fact specify bodhisattva activities, demeanor and attributes. For example, in the *Lotus Sutra*, a bodhisattva gives Avalokiteshvara a necklace, which he at first humbly refuses, then divides and gives away as a religious offering. His attribute of prayer beads (*S: mala*), as seen in cat. 23, may come from this event in the sutra.<sup>61</sup> In such works, the *mala* signifies embodied spiritual practice.

Later scriptures, such as the *Sadbanamala Tantra* (compiled in 1165) codified bodhisattva attributes, mudras, and postures, while the *Manjushrimulakalpa Tantra* (ca. late 6th–early 7th century) and other texts provided precise iconometric proportions for portraying the Buddhist pantheon. From such textual sources, and from borrowed or shared iconographic traditions, came the Buddhist visual canon; at the same time, regional and individual variations persisted. Avalokiteshvara's Indian iconography usually specifies that he holds a white lotus, smiles benevolently, wears lavish ornaments and silk garments, and often displays the attributes of vase and antelope skin. By the 5th century, another easily recognized iconographic feature began to appear on the bodhisattva's crown: a buddha seated in meditation posture.<sup>62</sup>

A depiction of Avalokiteshvara from the Gupta period shows such a buddha, probably Amitabha, in the bodhisattva's upswept matted hair (*S: jatamukuta*) (fig. 8).<sup>63</sup> Although Avalokiteshvara's hair looks like a crown, his long locks are actually pulled up and secured with a ring. This hairstyle is another indication of a wandering ascetic, therefore suggesting renunciation of worldly desires. The figure stands in the classic Indian triple-bend (*S: tribhanga*) posture and wears only minimal ornaments. He exemplifies one pole of Avalokiteshvara's Indic iconography—that of the spiritual adept. Conversely, a contemporaneous cave mural at Ajanta shows Avalokiteshvara crowned with an elaborately bejeweled headdress, thereby displaying his princely status.<sup>64</sup> By the Indian medieval period, Avalokiteshvara consistently appears in highly ornamented, royal garb (cat. 2).<sup>65</sup> These variations and permutations demonstrate the fluidity of the bodhisattva's iconography throughout the many centuries of his evolution in India. As a particularly dazzling jewel in Indra's net, his reflection seems to refract infinitely into a wide range of depictions.

To summarize, buddhas wear monastic robes, while bodhisattvas resemble royalty or ascetics in dress and bearing.<sup>66</sup> Yet all buddhas and bodhisattvas embody the same ideal of compassion, a key attribute of the awakened mind. At the same time,



Fig. 8: *Avalokiteshvara, Bodhisattva of Compassion*, India, Uttar Pradesh, Sarnath, Gupta dynasty, ca. third quarter of the 5th century; sandstone; H. 48 1/2 in.; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Stella Kramrisch Collection, 1994, 1994-148-1.

each figure in the Buddhist pantheon has different functions or "jobs" to do, such as embodying different aspects of dharma and assisting devotees in achieving specific goals. As an expression of compassion, Avalokiteshvara has no equal. One of his Sanskrit epithets is Mahakarunika, Supreme Compassion, a quality that transforms the mere wish for others to be free from suffering into a personal commitment to do whatever it takes to achieve that end.

### Avalokiteshvara in the Mandala

Up until the middle of the first millennium, Avalokiteshvara consistently appeared in a magnificent, idealized body, yet one in accord with human norms. But sometime around the 6th century, an iconographic revolution occurred in Indian art, and he—along with many other figures—began to acquire additional arms, heads, and eyes. These new forms are associated with yet another Buddhist school. Designated by several names—esoteric, tantric, or the Vajrayana (Diamond or Adamantine Vehicle)—this tradition either evolved from, or became incorporated into, Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>67</sup> Tantric texts describe rituals and practices for rapid spiritual development, such as visualizations, the creation of mandalas, the recitation of mantra and other sacred utterances (*S: dharani*),<sup>68</sup> yogic postures, symbolic gestures, and techniques for utilizing the body's energies.

Scholars have struggled to characterize terms like "*tantra*" and "esoteric"; when trying to pin them down, we truly gaze into a "bottomless well." Some feel that these techniques and practices reflect secret oral traditions that predate the earliest tantric Buddhist texts, which began to appear around the 7th century.<sup>69</sup> Members of Vajrayana Buddhist communities consider tantric scriptures to be the historical Buddha's Third [and Ultimate] Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. Originally, tantric teachers initiated only the most accomplished adepts into this esoteric body of knowledge. Yet its distinctive practices still fall within essential Mahayana precepts. Vajrayana practitioners take the bodhisattva vow and strive to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all.

By the medieval period, tantric practitioners performed ceremonies within the great Indian Buddhist monastic communities, such as Nalanda and Vikramashila. This indicates that the Vajrayana had moved out of a secretive sphere, becoming established at Buddhism's most important centers of learning.<sup>70</sup> Concurrently, artists were creating a distinctive tantric iconography—including mandalas, multilimbed and multiheaded figures, and fierce protective deities.<sup>71</sup> In the process, tantric art expanded the functions—and amplified the impact—of images in Indian Buddhism and its later offshoots, especially those that flourished in Tibet. As Brauen writes, "To impart the most profound religious truths, Tantric Buddhism employs pictorial representations with an intensity found in no other form of Buddhism, and scarcely in any other religion."<sup>72</sup>

Tantric scriptures systematized the already existing concept of buddha-fields (an awakened being's transcendent realm) into complex arrangements of three, or more commonly, five

families. Each is headed by a Wisdom or Victor (*S: Jina*) Buddha with a directional orientation, an extensive array of physical attributes, and different realms of influence. An emblem, such as a jewel or lotus, characterizes each family and gives it its name. These symbols convey each group's characteristic qualities. From the beginning of the evolution of buddha-families, Avalokiteshvara belonged to the Padma group, not surprisingly, since the lotus, as we have already seen, is one of Avalokiteshvara's most important attributes.

In this system, Amitabha presides over Avalokiteshvara's family. While maintaining an independent identity within Indian Buddhism, Amitabha entered the tantric buddha-family system by the early 8th century.<sup>73</sup> Such systems manifest visually in mandalas, which are cosmic maps of the universe. These striking designs apparently derive from Indian altars that served as gathering places for the deities.

Only a few examples of Indic Buddhist mandalas survive, such as the spectacular 11th-century wall murals at Alchi, Ladakh.<sup>74</sup> These murals, perhaps executed by Kashmiri painters, display the characteristic intricacy of Indian mandalas. Contained within a circular perimeter, a deity's palace is rendered as a two-dimensional architectural plan; inside the palace precinct, an assembly of tantric figures radiate from the center, where the presiding buddha or bodhisattva resides. In Snellgrove's words, this type of mandala is "an enclosure, not necessarily circular, which separates a sacred area from the everyday profane world. Thus it represents the special domain of any particular divinity."<sup>75</sup>

A much later Tibetan work (fig. 9) shows a resemblance to Indic mandalas, not surprisingly, since practitioners in that country have used Indian-inspired cosmological diagrams for centuries.



Fig. 9: *Mandala of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion*, Tibet, 18th century; pigment on cloth; 16 x 15 3/4 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2006.66.224.

Shadakshari Lokeshvara, Six-Syllable Lord of the World, occupies the center of the mandala. He appears as the four-armed tantric form of Avalokiteshvara associated with the renowned six-syllable mantra *om mani padme hum*.<sup>76</sup> His presence signals one of the mandala's many applications: deity practice. This requires imagining oneself as an altruistic being, such as Avalokiteshvara, whose perfected realm takes the form of a mandala. The *Sadbanamala Tantra*—a key text in the Tibetan Buddhist canon<sup>77</sup>—gives the practitioner explicit directions for this kind of visualization: “The worshipper should think himself as [Shadakṣari] Lokeśvara who is decked in all sorts of ornaments, white in colour, and four-armed, carrying the lotus in the left hand and the rosary in the right. The other two hands are joined in forming the mudra of clasped hand[s] against the chest.”<sup>78</sup> Thus the mandala—in conjunction with visualization practice—both vivifies its particular deity and also places him or her within a specific sacred context.

At this point, a question may arise: who exactly are these tantric deities contained within the mandala? For the trained tantric practitioner, such Buddhist deities are not in fact concrete, independent entities. Rather, they arise from the enlightened potentialities of one's own mind. When practiced successfully, tantric techniques activate these enlightened impulses. As Brauen writes, “The mandala as a mirror of the cosmos—not just the outer cosmos but also the microcosm, the person—is based on the assumption of close relations between world, mandala and person.”<sup>79</sup>

Tantric practice is demanding, but its adherents consider it a quick path, ideally leading to full realization in one lifetime. Motivated by the Mahayana notion of compassion, every practice, visualization, and mantra recitation is dedicated to the benefit of other suffering beings. Not surprisingly, then, Avalokiteshvara became a supremely important meditational deity in the tantric system.

### Avalokiteshvara's Limitless Gaze and Infinite Reach

As the Vajrayana developed in India, a complex iconography evolved with numerous deities manifesting in a wide array of forms. Perhaps the most recognizable—and most misunderstood—are the fearsome tantric deities with bared fangs, horrific weapons, and bone ornaments, sometimes locked in sexual embrace with a consort. Avalokiteshvara in fact has several fierce manifestations, such as Mahakala (Great Black One) and Hayagriva (Horse-Necked One).<sup>80</sup> At first glance, it is hard to detect Avalokiteshvara's compassion in such fierce figures. But the bodhisattva's wrathful forms complement his gentler manifestations; Mahakala in particular possesses the dramatic but sometimes requisite means to eradicate deeply entrenched self-destructive tendencies.

Each tantric deity, whether Shadakshari Lokeshvara or Mahakala, relates to a textual tradition and has his own set of spiritual disciplines (S: *sadhanas*) designed to activate prescribed benefits. As tantric Buddhism developed in India,



Fig. 10: Shadakshari Lokeshvara, Folio from a Manuscript of the *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita (Perfection of Wisdom)*, India, West Bengal or Bangladesh, Pala period, early 12th century; opaque watercolor on palm leaf; page: 2 3/4 x 16 7/16 in., image: 2 1/2 x 1 15/16 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2001, 2001.445a.

its adepts recorded and practiced many different *sadhanas*. The *Sadbanamala Tantra* contains 312 Vajrayana practices, and thirty-eight are devoted to Avalokiteshvara. According to Bhattacharyya, these encompass fifteen distinct forms.<sup>81</sup> In these texts, Avalokiteshvara's complex iconography includes multiple arms, eyes, and heads. In his additional hands, he carries a variety of attributes. *Sadhanas* devoted to him give explicit instructions on visualizing his many forms, aiding the practitioner in managing such complexity.<sup>82</sup>

Interestingly, multiarmed deities, mantras, and mudras appeared in Buddhist sutras hundreds of years before the “official” 7th-century emergence of tantric texts.<sup>83</sup> For example, the *Karandavyuha (Jewel-Casket Array) Sutra* from the late 4th or early 5th century includes descriptions of Avalokiteshvara as having an inconceivably vast body and up to 100,000 arms. As in the *Lotus Sutra*, he has the ability to take any form in order to benefit beings, but in this text, his manifestations are even more extraordinary.<sup>84</sup> It appears that, over the centuries, tantric Buddhism gradually subsumed and expanded supernormal elements from earlier Mahayana literature.

We can trace a similar evolution in tantric iconography. Although the earliest multilimbed and multiheaded figures in India may not have been tied to complex tantric practices, these forms do indicate, among other things, that the deities have supramundane status and possess extraordinary powers. In Brahmanical imagery, four-armed figures emerged in India at the beginning of the Common Era and increased during the Gupta period.<sup>85</sup> Four-armed forms of Avalokiteshvara and other bodhisattvas developed in India at least by the early 7th century.<sup>86</sup> This iconography spread widely throughout the Buddhist world and found its way as far as Southeast Asia only a few decades later.<sup>87</sup>

As we have seen in the Tibetan mandala (fig. 9), one of Avalokiteshvara's four-armed forms has played a particularly vibrant and long-lived role in tantric Buddhist practice. In this Indian depiction, Shadakshari Lokeshvara (fig. 10) also appears as a white, youthful figure sitting in lotus position with an ascetic's matted locks. The bodhisattva's two front hands are in



Fig. 11: Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara, Western Tibet, Dungkar, mid-10th–12th century; wall painting.

salutation or supplication (S: *anjali mudra*); he also holds a wish-fulfilling jewel (S: *chintamani*) between his cupped palms. His uplifted left hand holds a white lotus, whereas the right grasps prayer beads. As in all of Avalokiteshvara's peaceful manifestations, his smiling countenance radiates benevolence, and he sits on a lotus throne, with his adoring attendants flanking him. They model the proper attitude for contemplating this embodiment of compassion and realization.<sup>88</sup>

As mentioned earlier, this form of Avalokiteshvara personifies the famous *om mani padme hum* mantra, certainly one of the most important sacred utterances in the Buddhist world. Shadakshari's *mala* is a particularly salient attribute, since for centuries, practitioners have used such strings of beads while saying the six-syllable mantra, moving one bead for every repetition (compare a later Tibetan example in cat. 27.) The jewel is wish-fulfilling in a specific way: that all beings be free from suffering, the Mahayana aspiration that one maintains while doing the practice.

Diverse manifestations of Avalokiteshvara proliferated in India as the first millennium progressed, indicating his growing importance as a focus of veneration. Each distinct textual and visual form suggests the kaleidoscopic ways in which Avalokiteshvara can benefit beings. In addition to having multiple arms, the bodhisattva manifested many-headed forms. According to Susan Huntington, only one example remains in India: a relief sculpture depicting the Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara (S: *Ekadashamukha*) at Kanheri, Maharashtra, which she dates to the late 5th or early 6th century.<sup>89</sup>

Caves in far western Tibet, such as Dungkar, preserve Indic-

inspired paintings of the bodhisattva's eleven-headed form that date from the mid-10th–early 12th century. These murals closely follow Kashmiri precedents in the lithe, expertly modeled bodies (fig. 11).<sup>90</sup> The ten additional heads look in every direction for those who need help; Amitabha rests on top. Following the Indian manner, the muralist arranged the heads in an extremely vertical format consisting of five tiers. The shape recalls Avalokiteshvara's characteristic upswept matted hair. In East Asia, the multiple faces encircle the head like a diadem (compare cat. 13). Although this form has variants—sometimes ten, sometimes twelve heads—eleven is the most common number. Scholars posit numerous theories about what they symbolize, ranging from the stages that each bodhisattva traverses on the path to full enlightenment to the ten directions of the universe.<sup>91</sup>

Avalokiteshvara's most spectacular form is the Thousand-armed Lord of the World (S: *Sahasrabhujalokeshvara*). As mentioned, the *Karandavyuha Sutra* describes Avalokiteshvara with a thousand or more arms; however, no archeological evidence for this form survives in India. Nevertheless, most scholars surmise that it—along with all the other types examined so far—originated there. However, we can only glean evidence of what the Indian form may have looked like from examples that appeared in other countries. Chinese versions date as early as the 7th century,<sup>92</sup> and this manifestation of Avalokiteshvara continues to be very



Fig. 12: Eleven-Headed Arya Avalokiteshvara, Western Tibet, early 14th century; copper alloy with silver and copper colored inlay, coral, turquoise, lapis lazuli, and multiple layers of applied cold gold; 20 1/2 x 13 x 4 1/2 in., base: 3 5/8 x 7 13/16 x 5 5/8 in.; Philadelphia Museum of Art, 125th Anniversary Acquisition, Purchased with the Stella Kramrisch Fund, 2001, 2001-90-1.

popular in East Asia. Tibetan examples of the thousand-armed form also abound (see fig. 12 and cat. 6). Sculptors sometimes render each of the thousand arms individually; alternately, they fuse the arms into a single mandorla.<sup>93</sup> Usually the hands have eyes inscribed on the palm, which explains the often-used nomenclature “thousand-eyed.” This signifies greatly expanded sight as well as enhanced capacity for action. An astonishing array of eyes and hands surrounding the standing bodhisattva suggests a limitless gaze and infinite reach, encompassing the entire universe.

Such visually arresting forms invite many doctrinal and iconographic interpretations. The question also arises as to why such a proliferation of limbs, eyes, heads, and attributes appeared in Avalokiteshvara’s later tantric forms. Scholars have proposed several reasons for the development of what Srinivasan calls the “multiplicity convention” in Indian depictions of deities. Doniger thinks that deities with many arms and heads “signify the multiplicities of powers and possibilities of divine action.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, since beings absorb knowledge through the sense organs (eyes, in particular) and express agency through bodily actions (especially with hands), the multiplication of arms and heads enhances the deity’s efficacy. But Srinivasan does not think that multiplicity is so much about endowing a deity with increased power but instead evokes an image of a cosmic creator, which goes back to the mythic figure of Purusha in the ancient Sanskrit scripture, the *Rig Veda*. In that text, a thousand-headed, thousand-eyed, and thousand-footed male gives birth from within himself to the entire universe.<sup>95</sup> This iconography reemerges in the Brahmanical epic *Mahabharata*, completed ca. 400 CE. In the famous chapter known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna—Vishnu’s most revered avatar—appears in his Universal Form (S: *Vishvarupa*) to Prince Arjuna on the battlefield. Krishna’s body grows to fill the entire sky and displays an overwhelming array of heads and hands, showing Arjuna the infinite structure of the cosmos and its incomprehensible forces of creation and destruction. This terrifies the prince, who begs the god to return to his more accessible humanlike form.

Scholars such as Mallmann, Studholme, and Chandra feel that the Vedic Purusha in fact gave rise to the thousand-armed form of Avalokiteshvara. There may be valid iconographical and philosophical comparisons to make with these scriptural traditions, but, as Studholme points out, the Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, while visually impressive, consistently appears as benign and compassionate in Buddhist texts, never a source of terror, as Krishna was for Arjuna.<sup>96</sup> To most Buddhist adherents, the Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara’s origins are probably less significant than what his many hands suggest: his apparently boundless ability to serve their needs. One thousand is a mere physical suggestion of limitless compassion, an unparalleled ability to benefit beings.

In the 7th century, the renowned Chinese scholar and pilgrim Xuanzang (600/602–664) visited Mahabodhi Temple. Perhaps he, like many of his 6th-century predecessors, recalled the Buddha’s dire predictions about a future degenerate age. In Bodhgaya, Xuanzang heard a local legend about two statues of

Avalokiteshvara in the temple precinct near the Bodhi Tree. It was foretold that when these two sculptures sank out of sight, Buddhist dharma would come to an end. When Xuanzang came upon the southernmost statue of Avalokiteshvara, he found that it had already sunk up to its chest.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, Buddhist influence was contracting on the Indian subcontinent at the time of Xuanzang’s visit. By the Pala period, Buddhism mostly survived only in the northeastern territories of present-day Bengal and its original heartland, Bihar. Yet within this smaller arena, it reached an apogee in the 8th to 12th centuries, with huge monastic communities attracting pilgrims like Xuanzang from many lands. This area produced highly accomplished art that stimulated regional developments throughout Asia. But in the late 12th century, iconoclastic Muslim invaders sacked Nalanda, one of Indian Buddhism’s principal artistic and scholarly centers. By the 13th century, they completely expelled Buddhism from the region where it originated. During this period, many Buddhists fled to neighboring countries where the religion still remained viable.<sup>98</sup> The refugees of course did not leave without Avalokiteshvara, one of their main sources of refuge, and we too shall presently follow his tracks north to Nepal and Tibet. But first we will move east, where he had already come to be known as Guanyin.

## Avalokiteshvara in the East

### China

On reaching China, Avalokiteshvara became the One Who Perceives the Sounds of the World, Guanyin or Guanshiyin. His Chinese name suggests the ability to actually “see” sounds, thereby transcending sensory boundaries.<sup>99</sup> *Guan* can also refer to “meditative discernment ... the ‘seeing’ of the true nature of existence.”<sup>100</sup> The Chinese bestowed many other names on Avalokiteshvara that highlight both his kindness and wisdom, such as Great Compassion (C: Dabei) and Master Perceiver (C: Guanzizai). In China, he was reconceived in fundamental ways, embraced by both elite and folk cultures, given a female identity, and took on new forms in a long process of sinification.<sup>101</sup>

Buddhism itself underwent profound transformations as the religion moved east and reached the geographical regions ruled by the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE) at least as early as the first century of the Common Era. Its entrance into China was a protracted development that involved intermediaries from many different regions. Once in China—as in India—Buddhism both accommodated and transformed existing religious and iconographic traditions.<sup>102</sup> But there, Buddhism was a foreign transplant with no indigenous roots, in a region that fundamentally differed in terms of climate, geography, ethnicity, and social norms. Yet, as Yu points out, this transplant nonetheless grew in fertile ground. As in the Indian Buddhist tradition, the Chinese had no creator god, viewed the universe as continually transforming, saw humans and nature as interdependent, and—if they followed the influential Confucian philosopher Mencius (ca. 372–289 BCE)—believed in humanity’s basic goodness. Mencius felt that this innate quality could be cultivated through a spiritual force called “utmost sincerity” (C: *zhicheng*) to achieve

self-transformation and realization,<sup>103</sup> a process reminiscent of following the Buddhist dharma. Another feature that China and India shared was a long history of written language and a reverence for ancient texts. In addition, both were sophisticated, multiethnic societies that based their identities in their respective cultural patrimonies.

Nevertheless, the introduction of Buddhism into China was initially diffuse and rather haphazard, without imperial or elite patronage. Eventually some of China’s rulers lavishly supported it, while other imperial leaders vigorously suppressed the religion. Given these factors, it is remarkable that this foreign faith eventually joined indigenous Daoism and Confucianism to become a third major Chinese religion.<sup>104</sup>

With the support of a literate elite, and intermittent imperial patronage, ambitious Chinese translation projects of imported texts encouraged the diffusion of Buddhism. The Chinese Buddhist canon is enormous, and translations began as early as the 2nd century. The Mahayana vehicle dominated from the beginning, and the Chinese may have first learned about Avalokiteshvara through a 3rd-century translation of the *Lotus Sutra*, although the 5th-century redaction by Kumarajiva (344–409/414) became the most widely known and influential in China. The *Lotus Sutra* (C: *Miaofa lianhua jing*) is one of the most popular Buddhist texts in East Asia; millions there still read and chant it daily. The twenty-fifth chapter, called “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds,” became a revered section of this text; an excerpted, stand-alone scripture called the *Guanyin Sutra* (C: *Guanshiyin jing*) (compare cat. 22) attests to its popularity.<sup>105</sup> From the 4th to 14th centuries, Dunhuang was an important Buddhist center on the Silk Road, and in the early 20th century almost two hundred copies of the *Guanyin Sutra* were found there; also discovered were illustrated manuscripts and paintings on silk scrolls related to Avalokiteshvara. Famous cave paintings depicting scenes from the *Guanyin Sutra* survive at Dunhuang as well, notably a Tang period (618–907) mural in Cave 45 at Mogao.<sup>106</sup>

As we have seen, the Universal Gateway chapter describes the many ways that Avalokiteshvara saves beings from peril when death seems certain or grants boons that seem otherwise unobtainable. Invoking his name with sincerity brings Guanyin to the rescue, and numerous “miracle tales” testify to the efficacy of this practice.<sup>107</sup> Scholars often characterize this approach to venerating Avalokiteshvara as an easy path, in that the devotee “needed no special gifts or vision to invoke him; one did not have to be a monk, a male, or a literate person to receive his help,” according to Campany. Yet this same author also describes how the believer’s calls for intercession are more effective when accompanied by elaborate embodied actions: making or commissioning images, presenting offerings (such as perfumed water, burnt incense, flowers, light, and food), and prostrating before the bodhisattva while continuously reciting his name. All this must be done with “extreme concentration of mind, utmost sincerity of will, and sustained or repeated exertion of body and indeed of one’s total being.”<sup>108</sup> Seen in this light, invoking Guanyin actually appears to be a very demanding spiritual practice.

The Universal Gateway chapter is especially vivid and conducive to pictorial representation, as seen in a banner found at Dunhuang (fig. 13). The painting depicts four-armed Avalokiteshvara sitting on a lotus throne, dressed in Indic garments and ornaments, an ambrosial vessel in the lower left hand while the lower right displays the gesture of fearlessness. Underscoring his cosmic status, the two upper hands hold the sun and moon. Appearing in a male body, the bodhisattva sports a moustache. Representations of perils recounted in the *Lotus Sutra* appear on both borders. For example, to the right of Avalokiteshvara is a vignette that corresponds to the lines: “Suppose someone should conceive a wish to harm you, should push you into a great pit of fire. Think on the power of that Perceiver of Sounds and the pit of fire will change into a pond!”<sup>109</sup> The vignette shows both the peril of the fire and the pond that will relieve its threat. Inscribed by the donor (the smaller man to the bottom right), the work is dedicated to his deceased parents, the larger kneeling figures.<sup>110</sup> The mother piously joins her hands in a gesture of veneration, while the father offers incense. Through donating this banner, the son not only gained merit, but also displayed filial piety, an important Confucian virtue established long before Buddhism came to China. Such works demonstrate the popularity of both the *Lotus Sutra* and Avalokiteshvara in China, and they also reveal the embodied practices associated with the scripture. As the millennium progressed, Avalokiteshvara’s Chinese followers increasingly came to rely on him as a protector and guide.



Fig. 13: *Painting of Avalokiteshvara*, China, Gansu, Dunhuang, Qian Fo Dong, Five Dynasties, ca. 926–75; ink and colors on silk; 33 15/16 x 21 5/16 in. (painted area); British Museum, collected by Sir Marc Aurel Stein, 1919, 1919,0101,0.28.

According to Sen, Buddhist images from the west arrived even before missionaries and translators; therefore, art enhanced the acceptance of this exotic foreign religion, as did the creation of Buddhist pilgrimage centers within China. Imported Buddhist icons attracted followers, and the dependence on paintings and sculptures to spread its fundamental ideals was so novel that Buddhism came to be known as a “religion of images.”<sup>111</sup> As Naquin and Yu write, “Some images were understood to have been miraculously produced, self-manifested, or created by the deity; others were capable of miracles. Shrines built to house them became temples and, if miracles occurred, pilgrimage sites.”<sup>112</sup> As in India, the Chinese ritually consecrated images of buddhas and bodhisattvas, viewing them as embodiments of living deities. Sharf contends that icons played an elevated and sophisticated role in the evolution of the religion: “Indeed, one common goal of Buddhist ascetic and meditative discipline in China was to ‘see the Buddha’ (*jianfo*), and the wide variety of Buddhist icons found throughout the continent rendered service to this goal.”<sup>113</sup>

As we have seen in fig. 13, worshippers offered flowers, food, money, and other valuables to icons of Avalokiteshvara. Incense was perhaps the most important offering, since pre-Buddhist Chinese rites included burning aromatic substances in homage to departed ancestors. Therefore, when Indian Buddhist missionaries brought incense to China, the converts easily adapted the practice. A 10th-century text explains “that incense serves as an envoy for [conveying] the sincerity of one’s faith to the Buddha.”<sup>114</sup> Incense fragrance is said to have transformative power, purifying both the sacred space and the pilgrim’s body. In temples and sacred sites, devotees still offer incense to Guanyin, one of the most important acts of veneration performed during pilgrimage.

Once Buddhist works began to be produced on Chinese soil, indigenous aesthetic transformations began. Gilt bronzes are the earliest Buddhist images to survive, appearing in northern China around 300 CE. During the Northern Wei dynasty (386–535), which unified North China and fostered Buddhism’s development, imported Gandharan art from India provided models for attributes and other aspects of iconography. *Bodhisattva Padmapani* in figure 14 exemplifies the Northern Wei style. Approximately ten inches high, it served no doubt as an object of personal devotion or as an icon in a small temple. The figure stands on a lotus pedestal with characteristic Indic attributes: lotus bud over his right shoulder, bodhisattva ornaments, and upswept hair. His garments mimic Indian styles of male dress, and the facial features are South Asian. However, in contrast to Indian visual conventions, such as in cat. 23, the body is not full and fleshy, little of the chest is revealed and the drapery does not cling to the limbs and torso. This is a rather otherworldly depiction compared with the embodied naturalism of the South Asian example, especially in the flamelike lotus bud and pointed mandorla behind the figure. The animated and calligraphic scarves defy gravity and take on a life of their own. The Indian Avalokiteshvara is becoming the Chinese Guanyin.

As the first millennium progressed, a complex interplay developed between Indian styles and Chinese adaptations; the results were a continually evolving, sophisticated synthesis. International Buddhist styles, particularly the serene, naturalistic

Gupta mode (fig. 8), spread from India and influenced art across East Asia. During the Sui dynasty (581–618), artists rendered Guanyin’s form with convincing realism, in part because of this influence from India.<sup>115</sup> Fig. 15 is an elaborate, three-dimensional stone depiction of the bodhisattva, carved in the round. Standing over three feet tall, this appealing work probably once resided in a temple. The columnar body stands, fully modeled and naturalistic, on a lotus pedestal. The characteristically Chinese oval face has recognizably East Asian features, and in contrast to the minimally rendered jewelry in fig. 14, the ornaments here include a magnificent array of necklaces and an extremely elaborate headdress. A heavy ankle-length robe replaces the shorter Indian skirt. Unsurprisingly—given the traditional Chinese concern for longevity—Guanyin holds the vessel of immortality. In addition to ambrosial elixir, the vase now contains the bodhisattva’s other traditional attribute, the lotus. During the Tang period, the vase became an enduring symbol of Guanyin.<sup>116</sup>

The Tang dynasty brought about further transformations in Guanyin’s image, as seen in cat. 7. Identified by the seated Amitabha (C: Amituo; J: Amida) in the headdress and the vase in the left hand, this depiction references Indian prototypes in the triple-bend posture, the typical bodhisattva ornaments, and the fully revealed chest. But this Chinese sculpture is more



Fig. 14: *Figure of Padmapani, Lotus-bearing Manifestation of the Bodhisattva Guanyin*, China, Northern Wei dynasty, 471; gilded and engraved cast bronze; H. 9 13/16 in.; British Museum, donated by P.T. Brooke Sewell, esq., 1958, 1958,0428.1.



Fig. 15: *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin)*, China, probably Sui dynasty, late 6th–early 7th century; limestone with traces of pigment; H. 39 2/3 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929, 29.100.32a,b.

buoyant and weightless than related examples from South Asia. Intriguingly, the vase has no spout, only an elongated neck. Instead of holding a spouted *kundika*, this figure in fact carries a Chinese vessel called—significantly—a Guanyin vase (C: *ping*). Also distinctively East Asian is the extremely long willow branch held in the right hand, used by Guanyin to sprinkle supplicants with water or *amrita*, called “sweet dew” in Chinese texts. Associated with healing, the willow often appears as Guanyin’s attribute from the Tang period on.<sup>117</sup>

As Buddhism matured in China, numerous strains developed that departed from Indian traditions; novel forms of Guanyin emerged in tandem with them. Although Chinese Buddhism generally lacks strict sectarian divisions, it does have distinct doctrines and spiritual practices. The following discussion focuses on selected Chinese Buddhist iconographic and scriptural traditions in which Guanyin plays a major role: Pure Land, esoteric, and Chan. Given space limitations, this discussion necessarily will be brief, with only as much information as required to highlight Guanyin’s place in those traditions.

Pure Land Buddhism came to prominence in China during the early 6th century and spread to Korea and Japan shortly thereafter; its devotional focus is Amitabha. In art, Avalokiteshvara and another bodhisattva associated with power, Mahasthamaprapta (C: Dashizhi; J: Daiseishi), often join Amitabha in the iconic Pure Land Triad.<sup>118</sup> These three figures also appear together in Tibetan art (see cat. 1; compare fig. 16). As already mentioned, Amitabha first appeared as a celestial buddha in Sanskrit scriptures, such as the *Larger Sukhavativyūha Sutra*, which entered China perhaps as early

as the 2nd century. In addition, another Pure Land scripture, *Amitayurdhyana Sutra (Sutra on the Visualization of Amitayus)*, played an important role in East Asian iconography. Sometimes referred to as the *Visualization Sutra*, this scripture is probably an indigenous Chinese composition. The designation Pure Land (C: Jingtū; J: Jodo) is also thought to be of Chinese origin, and the chanting of Amituo’s name, *namo Amituo fo* (Praise of Amitabha Buddha), most likely evolved there as well. A devotee chants Amituo’s name in a practice called Mindfulness of the Buddha (C: *nianfo*). Successful practitioners will see Amituo at the moment of death and be reborn in his Pure Land (S: Sukhavati; C: Jile Jingtū; J: Gokuraku). Once there, they can rapidly progress to full buddhahood.<sup>119</sup>

Pure Land Buddhism arose against the backdrop of war, social turmoil, and environmental disasters in 6th-century China. In addition, fears about the Buddhist doctrine’s degeneration (C: *mofa*; J: *mappo*) convinced many Chinese that they were living in a period of irreversible spiritual decline. One of the great patriarchs of this tradition, Daochuo (562–645), lamented, “As for me, I live in a world aflame, and bear a sense of dread within.”<sup>120</sup> Claiming that the “path of the sages,” which involves renunciation and strenuous concentration practices, was too arduous for Buddhists in the present degenerate age, Daochuo advocated putting one’s entire faith in the saving power of Amituo, who offered relief from suffering through a devotional path.<sup>121</sup>



Fig. 16: *Taima Mandala*, Japan, Edo period, 1750; hanging scroll, ink, color, and gold on silk; 41 13/16 x 37 1/16 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Charles Stewart Smith Collection, Gift of Mrs. Charles Stewart Smith, Charles Stewart Smith Jr., and Howard Caswell Smith, in memory of Charles Stewart Smith, 1914, 14.76.54.

Many followed the Pure Land approach to salvation, and the practice of Mindful Chanting spread throughout the East Asian Buddhist world.

Avalokiteshvara had specific roles to play in Pure Land Buddhism: as an impressive icon in Amitabha's triad, as a focus of meditative practice, as the leader of the Welcoming Descent (the cohort of bodhisattvas who accompany Amitabha in a descent from Sukhavati to gather up dying devotees, leading them back to the Pure Land), as a teacher of dharma, and as the next buddha to preside over the Land of Bliss.<sup>122</sup> Avalokiteshvara appears in some of these guises in the famous Taima Mandala, originally a Chinese creation (see fig. 16 for a Japanese copy). In this canonical work, Avalokiteshvara appears in the central triad to Amitabha's left; he also manifests in other places throughout the depiction. On the lower register of the Outer Courts, we see Avalokiteshvara participating in the Welcoming Descent for some of the nine levels of beings who will be reborn in Amitabha's Pure Land. Those at the lowest level cannot immediately benefit but must spend eons in tightly sealed lotuses because of their accumulated negative karma. When they finally emerge into Sukhavati, Avalokiteshvara and Mahasthamaprapta are the first to teach them dharma so that they can accelerate their evolution to buddhahood.<sup>123</sup>

In part because of his association with Amitabha, Guanyin worship greatly increased in China beginning in the 6th century. Programs of Buddhist iconography at the Longmen caves, begun during the Northern Wei dynasty and continuing into the Tang period, chart how both Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara's popularity expanded in tandem. In the earliest period, Shakyamuni and Maitreya dominated as subjects at Longmen, but by the 7th and early 8th century, the number of Amitabha and Avalokiteshvara depictions far surpassed those of other figures, a shift that Chen credits to the spread of Pure Land Buddhism in China. By the early 9th century, Pure Land beliefs ceased to be an independent strand of Buddhism in China, but its practices continued in other traditions.<sup>124</sup>

Esoteric Buddhism assigned Avalokiteshvara an even greater role than the one he plays in the Pure Land tradition. In fact, according to Sorensen, "Avalokitesvara stands out among the numerous bodhisattvas inhabiting the Esoteric Buddhist pantheon in East Asia as the single most important divinity, eclipsing even Vairocana in popularity and influence."<sup>125</sup> The Thousand-armed (C: Dabei; J: Senju) Avalokiteshvara, personification of Great Compassion, entered the pantheon of esoteric deities at the end of the 7th century, quickly gaining popularity as the centuries passed. Portrayed in China—as in other Asian countries—as an active figure with the ability to see throughout the universe, Dabei is able to undertake any action to benefit beings. This manifestation remains popular throughout East Asia today (see the many images of Senju Kannon in the 19th-century Japanese scroll, cat. 19).<sup>126</sup>

As esoteric Buddhism developed in China, many indigenous texts were written to accompany associated rituals and meditative practices, including several focusing on Guanyin. These provided an impetus for image-making. The Thousand-armed

Avalokiteshvara plays a role in one of the most important esoteric practices in China, the *Great Compassion Dharani* (*Dabei Zhou*), also known as *Qianshou* (Thousand-armed) *Zhou*. Recounting events set in the bodhisattva's paradise, Potalaka, a related sutra known as *Qianshou jing* details how Avalokiteshvara made ten vows to benefit all sentient beings, and as a result, was endowed with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes in order to bring about this goal. In this scripture, Avalokiteshvara reveals his sacred verbal formula and instructs practitioners how to visualize him. This esoteric practice includes not only the recitation of the *dharani* but also involves instructions on performing mudras and making proper images of Dabei. It remains popular in China, often chanted at daily services in Chan monasteries and—because the sutra offers power over death—at funeral ceremonies.<sup>127</sup>

Chan Buddhism adopted other manifestations of Avalokiteshvara, especially the Water-Moon (C: Shuiyue; J: Suigetsu) and White-robed (S: Pandaravasini; C: Baiyi; J: Byakue) forms of Guanyin (cat. 8). The Chan tradition, better known by its Japanese name Zen, "claimed to represent a special, unbroken transmission of the Buddha's dharma," according to Lippit. "Whereas most other Buddhist sects attempt to access the dharma through sutras ... Chan/Zen adherents emphasize more instinctive or somatic forms of practice, such as meditation, one-on-one encounters and training sessions with religious masters, or the study of kōan [a paradoxical statement or question].... It was through these daily activities that Chan/Zen Buddhists eventually achieved awakening (C: *wu*; J: *satori*), one of the main goals of religious practice."<sup>128</sup>

Much favored by Chan painters during the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), the Water-Moon form probably emerged during the earlier Tang era. A 10th-century indigenous text called the "Moonlight in Water Guanyin Bodhisattva Sutra Spoken by the Buddha" was found at Dunhuang, as were depictions that show the figure sitting in a relaxed posture at the water's edge, often in a rocky setting identified as Potalaka, with a vase and willow (compare cat. 16). A large full-moon nimbus envelops the bodhisattva; Guanyin meditates on the moon's reflection. Although Guanyin's pose descends from Indian precedents, the fully developed landscape setting is distinctive and unprecedented, according to Yu. This iconography, establishing Guanyin as an accomplished contemplative, provides an alternative to his role as savior.<sup>129</sup>

Metaphors of water and moon entranced Tang poets, and Chinese painters had long depicted reclusive and contemplative sages in landscape settings, especially near grottoes and caves. Yu writes that although the reflection of the moon in water was a familiar Buddhist metaphor "for the transitory and insubstantial nature of things in the world, there is no scriptural basis for linking Kuan-yin with these metaphors. It is here that we can see the bold creativity of Chinese artists, for they took these Buddhist ideas and expressed them through the traditional medium of Chinese painting."<sup>130</sup>

Chan artists and patrons also revered the White-robed Guanyin (cat. 8).<sup>131</sup> This form shares important iconographic features

with the Water-Moon Guanyin—relaxed posture (often with chin resting on right hand), idyllic landscape setting, contemplative gaze—and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish the two from each other. But the White-robed form usually lacks the full-body nimbus, and the garments are typically less elaborate and colorful. Instead, voluminous white drapery envelops the bodhisattva—often forming a hood over the head—and ornaments are minimal. A vase containing a willow branch often sits nearby. The White-robed Guanyin's austerity nicely complements Chan asceticism, making the subject appropriate for the monk/painter Muqi Fachang (active mid-13th century), who created a well-known early White-robed Guanyin. The painting came to Japan by the 14th century, and eventually was housed at Daitokuji in Kyoto.<sup>132</sup>

Chan monks and artists were not the only ones to appreciate the White-robed Guanyin. The form enjoyed widespread popularity in China, which continues into the modern era.<sup>133</sup> Ubiquitous porcelain images of the White-robed Guanyin demonstrate the bodhisattva's enduring appeal. They also display decidedly delicate, feminine characteristics (fig. 17), indicating a shift in gender. Such figurines were produced at Dehua, Fujian Province, in southeastern China beginning in the Ming period (1368–1644); the artists there invented a new kind of porcelain (so-called *blanc de chine*) with a translucent, jadelike appearance, exceptionally well suited to making delicate forms. In the late Ming, the region specialized in Buddhist and Daoist deities. Merchants imported White-robed Guanyin figurines to Europe, where—removed from a Buddhist context—they served as decorations.<sup>134</sup> In contrast, these porcelain statues were religious icons in Ming China, placed on home altars and venerated as objects of personal devotion. Fig. 17 shows Guanyin holding a sutra scroll, an attribute that emphasizes the wise bodhisattva's ability to bestow dharma.

By the Ming period, many Chinese, including members of literati circles and their wives, prayed to a feminine Guanyin for heirs, giving rise to yet another related manifestation, Avalokiteshvara, the Bestower of Children (C: Songzi Guanyin) (cat. 11). According to Yu, the bodhisattva's unsurpassed popularity in China was in part "due to a group of indigenous scriptures which promote her as a goddess capable of granting children."<sup>135</sup> The *Lotus Sutra* also recounts the bodhisattva's power to answer the prayers of eager parents. Although millions have studied and recited the *Lotus Sutra* throughout the Buddhist world, only in East Asia did the bodhisattva become female.

Perhaps an explanation for this lies in Yu's assertion that a feminized Guanyin filled a particular void in Chinese spiritual as well as worldly life. "Kuan-yin—a compassionate universal savior who responds to anyone's cry for help regardless of class, gender, or even moral qualifications—was an idea unfamiliar to the Chinese." In addition, before Guanyin, the Chinese lacked a long-standing tradition of goddess worship. Over time, a transformed foreign bodhisattva filled this gap; this gender flexibility underscores the way Sino-Japanese Buddhism evolved to accommodate its followers in East Asia.<sup>136</sup>

Guanyin's gender transformation was complicated, however, because—as Yu observes—orthodox Chinese Buddhist clerics



Fig. 17: *White-robed Guanyin*, China, Fujian, Dehua, Qing dynasty, 17th century; porcelain with ivory-white glaze; 9 1/2 x 5 7/8 in.; Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Dr. Yale Kneeland, Jr., B.A. 1922, 1956.42.12.

continued to conceive of the bodhisattva as masculine. As a result, Chinese temples consistently house male images of Guanyin. Even in late imperial works, Guanyin often has a moustache.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, many of the Chinese and Japanese images in this exhibition seem androgynous or gender neutral rather than unambiguously feminine (see cats. 8, 9, 12, 13).<sup>138</sup> From one perspective, however, uncertainty about Guanyin's gender is appropriate because protean transformations characterize his/her identity. In addition, as an instantiation of Mahayana nondualism, Avalokiteshvara always seems to evade fixed categorizations.

As mentioned above, the settings—as well as the bodhisattva's shifting gender identity—are an important aspect of Avalokiteshvara's Chinese iconography. The last chapter of *Avatamsaka* (*Flower Garland*) *Sutra*, translated into Chinese in the 8th century, is known as the *Gandavyuha* (*Entering the Dharma World*). This text describes a young pilgrim named Sudhana (C: Shancai; J: Zenzai Doji) in search of realization; Avalokiteshvara is the 28th sage he encounters on his quest. The youth finds the bodhisattva on Mount Potalaka, his special paradise. Avalokiteshvara's island is: "a pure abode of the valiant, made of jewels, covered with trees, scattered with flowers, complete with gardens, ponds, and streams. On the mountain the steady, wise Avalokiteshvara dwells for the benefit of the world."<sup>139</sup> In works such as cat. 16, Sudhana's presence in the picture—as well as the rocky cliffs and ocean waves—marks the setting as the bodhisattva's divine realm.



Fig. 18: *Guanyin of the Southern Sea*, China, Liao (907–1125) or Jin dynasty (1115–1234); wood with polychromy; 95 x 65 in.; The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri, Purchase, William Rockwell Nelson Trust, 34-10.

Originally thought to be off the coast of Southern India, Potalaka was replicated in many regions throughout the Buddhist world: Lhasa in Tibet, Nachi in Japan, and a small island in the South China Sea. Known as Mount Putuo—or Putuoshan—the island became a pilgrimage site sacred to Guanyin (cat. 17). Located on an important naval route, this spot enhanced Avalokiteshvara's reputation as the protector of travelers, especially for those who undertook ocean journeys. Traders and Buddhist monks customarily invoked the bodhisattva before starting a trip. In a gradual process that began in the 10th century and reached its height in the 18th, Avalokiteshvara's island became a destination for all kinds of pilgrims who came there for a visionary experience of the bodhisattva, especially at the Cave of Tidal Sound, where the deity was said to appear in a blaze of golden light.<sup>140</sup>

The desire to experience buddhas and bodhisattvas as literally present before the devotee encouraged the faithful to undertake such arduous pilgrimages. It also transformed Chinese Buddhist art. Lively sculptures from the 10th through 12th centuries seem to bring the viewer face-to-face with the deity's actual physical presence. This demand for embodied divine forms was a great challenge to Chinese artists. On the one hand, they had to portray celestial beings as vividly and magnificently as possible. On the other hand, they had to suggest that the Buddhist icons offered access to transcendent states. So how could artists and their audiences reconcile the opulent materiality of devotional images with the Buddhist view of life's insubstantiality?

According to Berger, they conceived of sensuous beauty as skillful means—an aesthetic snare to capture devotees. Once viewers and supplicants were roped in, Avalokiteshvara could then lead them out of samsara.<sup>141</sup>

*Guanyin of the Southern Sea* is a magnificent response to such complex demands (fig. 18). Descending from the Water-Moon Guanyin, the work belongs to a group of wooden sculptural forms that became popular after the Tang dynasty. Slim, elegant, with refined facial features, extraordinary ornaments, and sumptuous garments, Guanyin nevertheless appears masculine in this depiction, with a flat, exposed breast.<sup>142</sup> Seated on a rocky pedestal that evokes Potalaka, Guanyin adopts the pose of royal ease (*S: rajalilasana*), right arm poised on the raised knee while the lower foot rests on a lotus pedestal. The work seems to woo us with its sheer beauty, opulent decoration, and rich surfaces.<sup>143</sup>

Both palpably real and accessible to supplicants, the bodhisattva lowers his foot, indicating a readiness to rise and meet the viewer at any time. Yet the sculpture also shows Guanyin as a model adept; the inward-turning gaze indicates his meditative absorption and inner tranquility.<sup>144</sup> As in the Tibetan work discussed at the beginning of this essay (fig. 2), the bodhisattva's form effectively embodies the two qualities of realization: outwardly flowing compassion based on inwardly established wisdom. Despite the significant regional transformations Avalokiteshvara underwent in the journey from India to China, the bodhisattva's deepest significance remains intact in this compelling sculpture. Such beautiful Chinese works transmitted Avalokiteshvara's profound meanings throughout East Asia.

### Japan

As in other countries, the Japanese Avalokiteshvara has multiple forms and names. Kanzeon, like Guanshiyin, observes (*J: kan*) the world (*J: ze*) for the sound (*J: on*) of suffering. The Japanese commonly shorten Avalokiteshvara's name to Kannon.<sup>145</sup> Indic and Sinicized forms of Avalokiteshvara made their way to the Japanese archipelago in a mediated fashion; the first contact with the bodhisattva came through Korea. The Chinese officially transmitted Buddhism to the Korean peninsula in the 4th century, but the religion was not sanctioned there until the 6th century.<sup>146</sup> According to a legend in the later text, *Chronicles of Japan* (ca. 720), a royal envoy from the Kingdom of Paekche introduced Buddhism to Japan in 538 (or 552), and a few decades later, members of the royal family enthusiastically embraced it. From that point on, Buddhism's spread was swift, although not uncontested, mostly instigated by those at the top of the Japanese social order. Enjoying imperial patronage in the 7th and 8th centuries, Buddhism became a state religion, a remarkable development compared to its rather gradual and haphazard introduction into China. Early on, the Japanese imperial court built elaborate temple complexes and sponsored Buddhist rituals for the benefit of the state and the well-being of the population.<sup>147</sup> According to Foard, one of the most spectacular is the Water Drawing Ritual (*J: Omizutori*), which has been conducted in Nara since 753. It lasts for several nights, when by the light of enormous torches, officiants draw water from a well and offer it to Kannon.<sup>148</sup>

According to the legendary account found in the *Chronicles of Japan*, the country lacked a written language before the envoy from Paekche carried Buddhist scriptures to Japan.<sup>149</sup> Japanese scribes and scholars adopted Chinese ideographs when they began to reproduce scriptures themselves, such as the rare and beautiful 8th-century *Sumidera Heart Sutra* in this exhibition (cat. 21). Transcribers rendered such canonical works in the elegant clerical script that the Chinese developed for copying sutras. Commissioning and executing such texts constituted meritorious acts of devotion. As in the Buddhist homeland, the scriptures themselves were sacred objects worthy of veneration. Taking them to be the words of Shakyamuni (in the case of the *Heart Sutra*, transmitted through Avalokiteshvara), Japanese worshippers treated them with the same reverence accorded to Buddhist relics and icons elsewhere. In addition, Buddhist adherents regularly intoned the *Heart Sutra* and other scriptures in temple settings, largely for sonorous effect rather than semantic meaning. As Foard explains: "Through the chanting of sutras in front of images, Japanese Buddhist rituals connect words and images to evoke the presence of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.... When Japanese Buddhists chant the sutras before an image, then, this is not prayer, but an act that complements the image in evoking divine presence."<sup>150</sup>

In addition to scriptures, the 6th-century Korean envoy purportedly brought Buddhist works of art as gifts to the Japanese ruling family. As described in the *Chronicles of Japan*, these sculptures amazed the emperor. At that time, the Japanese did not make images of their indigenous deities, so the three-dimensional gilt-bronze Buddhist icons may well have been extraordinarily impressive.<sup>151</sup> Soon native and immigrant sculptors were producing Buddhist works on Japanese soil. Sharf describes "the cardinal role allotted to the veneration of images" in Japanese Buddhism. "Virtually all services are performed in front of an image—known in Japanese as the *honzon* ... or 'principal deity'—that serves as the recipient of offerings and as a source of the rite's efficacy."<sup>152</sup>

Several icons in 7th-century Horyuji, the oldest surviving Japanese Buddhist temple complex, are early evidence of Avalokiteshvara's veneration in Japan. The Kudara Kannon and Yumedono Kannon at Horyuji date from the Asuka period (538/552–645). Carved from wood, both are tall with elongated proportions. Their attributes, ornaments, and pointed lotus-petal halos relate to 5th-century Chinese Northern Wei styles, as in fig. 14, and also to Korean models (the name "Kudara" in fact refers to the Kingdom of Paekche). Sculptors used wood for these painted and gilded works, a material that would come to dominate Japanese icons in the 9th century.<sup>153</sup> Many later Japanese works also followed the slim, columnar shape of these two Horyuji Kannon images.<sup>154</sup>

Such features can also be found in sculptures of the Heian period (794–1185), for example, a 12th-century depiction of Sho Kannon (*S: Arya Avalokiteshvara*) in fig. 19. This work is an example of a frequently represented form, Sacred or Noble Kannon. Only traces remain of the gilding and multicolored pigments that originally adorned this carved wooden figure with its simple, direct bearing. On the one hand, the work's appearance



Fig. 19: *Sho Kannon*, Japan, late Heian period, 12th century; wood with traces of gilding and color; 17 3/4 x 6 x 5 3/4 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dr. and Mrs. Roger G. Gerry Collection, Bequest of Dr. and Mrs. Roger G. Gerry, 2000, 2002.447.2.

departs dramatically from the stylistic features that characterize Avalokiteshvara's original Indic manifestations and shows how far the bodhisattva has traveled from the plains of Bihar. Compared with sinuous, naturalistic depictions from India (such as fig. 8), and Himalayan works that closely followed Indic conventions (for example, fig. 2), this Japanese Avalokiteshvara clearly evolved from a different aesthetic milieu. Nevertheless, the figure's gestures and attributes suggest a family resemblance to the original Avalokiteshvara. For example, the sculpture once likely carried the bodhisattva's common attribute, the lotus, in the upraised left hand, while the lowered right makes the characteristic Indian *varada mudra* of generosity. This elongated arm is an ingenious and expressive gesture that underscores Kannon's legendary willingness to help those in distress. (Compare cat. 22 for a related presentation of the bodhisattva's elongated arm.) Even in its weathered condition, this depiction of Sho Kannon effectively conveys Avalokiteshvara's compassionate nature, thereby establishing continuity with the Indic deity.

Other presentations of Kannon utilize context and repetition to suggest an infinite spiritual arena in which the deity's influence extends without limit. As Fowler observes, "Repetition is a fundamental expression in Buddhist piety, whether through chanting, ritual, or image making. The idea of grouping multiple images of the same deity is very familiar in Japanese religion."<sup>155</sup> The *Lotus Sutra* gives thirty-three manifestations of Avalokiteshvara, and this number serves an important

numerological function in Japanese Buddhism, for example, in the number of stations in various Kannon pilgrimage circuits. Such impulses also take other forms, sometimes in monumental arrangements and sometimes in small, intimate presentations. A Japanese print, *One Hundred Images of Amida Buddha* (fig. 20), displays serial printed images of the buddha most closely associated with Avalokiteshvara. The repeated imagery, which alludes to the popular thousand-buddha iconography developed in China,<sup>156</sup> transforms the sheet into a miniature buddha-field. The print might have been rolled up and inserted into a hollowed-out Japanese icon; such repetitive imagery served as consecratory material thought to enhance the spiritual potency of the icon.<sup>157</sup>

Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara is similarly replicated at Sanjusangendo, the Hall of Thirty-three Bays (fig. 21), but on a monumental scale; in that famous image hall, a thousand and one life-sized images of Senju Kannon instantiate this bodhisattva's boundless presence. In the late Heian period, many multiple-image halls were established, most often dedicated to Amida and Kannon. Begun in 1164 at Rengeoin in Kyoto, Sanjusangendo displays the sculptures on a densely packed, 350-foot long tiered platform; they surround an eleven-foot tall statue of the same deity seated in the center of the hall.<sup>158</sup> As in the small Amida print, multiplication amplifies and extends spiritual power; each of Senju's many arms is repeated one



Fig. 20: *One Hundred Images of Amida Buddha*, Japan, Heian period, 12th century; print, ink stamps on paper; sheet: 18 x 13 1/2 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Purchase Fund, 2009.3.



Fig. 21: Hall of Thirty-Three Bays, Sanjusangendo, Kyoto, Japan, begun 1164; *Japanese Temples and Their Treasures*, 1915.

thousand times, suggesting his cosmic reach into infinity.

Such extravagant displays of Avalokiteshvara and other deities at the end of Heian and into the Kamakura period (1185–1333) arose when the Chinese concept of a degenerate age (J: *mappo*) took on intense urgency for Japanese Buddhists. Many felt that Buddhism was declining into its last stage; creating awe-inspiring arrays of deities was one response to a sense of crisis. Because commissioning Buddhist art was a way to accrue spiritual merit, donors may have wished not only to preserve the nation but also to circumvent an unfortunate rebirth for themselves.<sup>159</sup> Certainly the choice of Kannon for Sanjusangendo could not have been random; in the face of overwhelming natural and human-made disasters, it must have seemed that the Japanese people needed the deity's redemptive compassion more than ever.

Japanese responses to *mappo* may have also encouraged developments in the country's various Buddhist schools. By the 9th century, the Pure Land, esoteric, and Chan traditions had all found a home in Northeast Asia, and Kannon worship infused each of these—as well as many other manifestations of Buddhist beliefs. The religious reformer Kukai (774–835) brought Shingon (C: Zhenyan)—or True Word—Buddhism to Japan, an important esoteric tradition. Unable to find essential texts in Japan, Kukai made a pilgrimage to Tang China, where he studied under Huiguo (746–805) in the lineage of Amoghavajra (705–774). The latter had brought esoteric Buddhism from India to China, which Kukai mastered; he returned to his native Japan to promulgate its practices. As we have seen in Indian Vajrayana, esoteric Buddhism involved specialized expressions, like mantra, mandala, and visualizations. Kukai brought back mandalas that exemplify one of Japanese Buddhism's most intriguing expressions of esoteric iconography: the Mandala of the Two Worlds. These consist of the paired Diamond and Womb Worlds, and Kannon plays an important role in the latter.<sup>160</sup>

According to adherents, esoteric techniques offer relief from the travails of a degenerate age, even total freedom from the samsaric world of endless rebirths. As in India, esoteric Buddhism

greatly expanded the Japanese pantheon of deities and increased their supernormal powers. Sho and Senju Kannon, along with Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara (S: Ekadashamukha; J: Juichimen), are Japanese adaptations of Indian tantric deities.<sup>161</sup> In the Late Heian period, the Fujiwara aristocratic clan especially favored these forms of Kannon.<sup>162</sup> These three expressions of the deity also belong to what was once a common image set in Japan known as the Six Kannon. This configuration first appeared in Chinese texts in the 6th century and flourished in Japan from the 10th to the 18th century. The Shingon school of esoteric Buddhism venerated the Six Kannon, and the Daihoonji treasure hall in Kyoto preserves a rare intact example of this iconography, which also includes Bato (S: Hayagriva; Horse-headed Avalokiteshvara); Juntei (S: Cundi; Buddha-Mother); and Nyoirin (S: Chintamanichakra Avalokiteshvara; Jewel-holding Wheel-turning Lord of the World) (cat. 12).<sup>163</sup>

In the Six Kannon set, each of the manifestations ministers to a different category of suffering beings in samsara. Sho offers succor to beings in hell,<sup>164</sup> Senju rescues hungry ghosts, Juichimen saves the jealous demigods, Bato looks after animals, Juntei cares for humans, and Nyoirin liberates the gods. These six manifestations also correlate with Avalokiteshvara's six-syllable Sanskrit mantra, *om mani padme hum*. Each syllable, when uttered, sends liberating power to beings in each of samsara's six realms.<sup>165</sup>

A gilt-bronze statue of Sho Kannon shows the importance of Sanskrit syllables in esoteric art (fig. 22). A product of the revival of cast metal sculpture in the Kamakura period, it is dated 1270 and inscribed with the artist's name, Saichi. This sculpture depicts Sho Kannon seated in lotus posture, absorbed in meditation. The bodhisattva firmly holds a lotus in the left hand, while raising the right in a variation of the teaching gesture (S: *vitarka mudra*). The style of this sculpture follows medieval Chinese precedents in the extremely tall topknot, rounded body, and exquisite craftsmanship. In the figure's clothing, naturalistic forms, and self-contained serenity, the work also reveals the influence of international Buddhist styles that had circulated in East Asia for many centuries.

Clues to Sho Kannon's esoteric significance reside in the exquisite reticulated mandorla behind the figure. This full-body, pierced halo contains suspended discs—as if floating in mid-air—with the repeated Sanskrit letter “sa.” This “seed syllable” (S: *bija*; J: *shittan*) contains the entirety of Sho Kannon's identity, according to Shingon precepts.<sup>166</sup> The sacred syllables seem to radiate from Sho Kannon, reminding us that Japanese sculptors made astonishingly beautiful works like this for spiritual contemplation and practice. We might easily overlook their original function when viewing them within the bare white walls of a museum.

Pure Land Buddhism, perhaps even more than esotericism, was a response to the sense of crisis in the late Heian period. Although Japanese Zen is more famous in the West, Pure Land Buddhism dominated medieval Japan and remains to this day one of the strongest strains of the religion in that country. Amitabha (J: Amida) worship in fact succeeded in transforming Buddhism from an elite to popular religion in Japan.<sup>167</sup>



Fig. 22: *Sho Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion*, Saichi (dates unknown), Japan, Kamakura period, dated 1269; gilt bronze, cast from piece molds; overall (height of figure): 19 13/16 in., overall (height to hairline): 15 1/16 in.; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, William Sturgis Bigelow Collection, 11.11447.



Fig. 23: Phoenix Hall, Byodoin, Uji, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan, 1053.

Honen (1133–1212) and his disciple Shinran (1173–1263) were founders of the most popular branches of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan (J: Jodoshu and Jodoshinshu); they prescribed invoking Amida's name (C: *nianfo*; J: *nenbutsu*) as the primary—indeed the only effective—Buddhist practice in degenerate times. As mentioned above, *nenbutsu* offered salvation in Amida's Pure Land. This belief took concrete form at the Phoenix Hall, Byodoin, in the city of Uji, Kyoto Prefecture. Built in 1053 as a re-creation of Amida's Western Paradise, Byodoin houses the sculptor Jocho's monumental sculpture of Amida sitting in meditation posture on a high platform; the visitor can see his serene head from the outside through a round window (fig. 23). Paintings and sculptures that depict the Welcoming Descent (J: Raigo) decorate the Phoenix Hall.





Fig. 24: *Kannon Holding a Lotus Seat*, Japan, Edo period, traditionally attributed to the 13th century but probably 17th century; wood with gilt lacquer; object: H. 11 1/4 in., base: 1 15/16 x 4 15/16 x 4 15/16 in.; Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. William B. Jaffe, 1968.104.3.

Although Chinese artists conceived of the Welcoming Descent theme—evident in the lower register of the *Taima Mandala* (fig. 16)—independent depictions of the Raigo represent an important Japanese contribution to Pure Land imagery. According to ten Grotenhuis, the Raigo is one of the most popular themes in Japanese Buddhist art.<sup>168</sup> Amida's retinue consists of a joyous multitude of bodhisattvas playing music and dancing as they come to greet dying devotees who aspire to rebirth in this buddha's Land of Bliss.

Such imagery appeared in a variety of settings. Seckel describes how a Raigo picture or screen “was placed near the death-bed of a believer, so that he could turn to it in faith during his last moments. Long threads were [sometimes] attached to the hands of the Buddha figure and were held by the dying individual. This put him in direct magical contact with the saving power of the Buddha.” Ritualized descents were also staged and are still performed today in Japan. “Masked priests and laymen ... acted as Bodhisattvas, while Amitabha ... was represented by a cult image carried in the procession.”<sup>169</sup>

In this tradition, Kannon is the lead bodhisattva who offers the expired devotee a lotus pedestal to escort him or her to Sukhavati. Kannon, along with the bodhisattva Daiseishi (S: Mahastamaprapta), appears as attendant to Amida in sculptural triads, graciously bowing to present the lotus pedestal to a worthy deceased (fig. 24).<sup>170</sup> Kannon became so important as a Raigo figure that the bodhisattva sometimes appears alone, as in the scroll in cat. 13. This iconography demonstrates a faith

that death is not a dolorous end, but a glorious beginning, and that Kannon is a guide for the faithful to the Pure Land.

As in the Chinese Chan tradition, Avalokiteshvara also plays a part in Japanese Zen, which firmly established itself in Japan during the 13th and 14th centuries. Hundreds of works associated with this school, both imported Chinese paintings as well as those executed in Japan, survive from this period, many of them depicting Kannon.<sup>171</sup>

As in China, the Japanese adopted the Water-Moon form of Avalokiteshvara as a symbol of meditative absorption. As early as the 9th century, this manifestation of Guanyin attracted the interest of Japanese monks traveling in China, and they brought back examples to their country.<sup>172</sup> The Water-Moon form persisted longer in Korea and Japan than in China; Korean painters produced especially beautiful examples, such as the 14th-century work in fig. 25. An Edo-period scroll depicting Kannon in this exhibition (cat. 16) reveals that such elegant Korean paintings provided long-lasting, influential models for Japanese painters.

The White-robed Kannon, however, was the form of the bodhisattva most closely associated with the Zen tradition. According to some scholars, Japanese works of this type were ubiquitous, often hanging in Zen monastic dormitories.<sup>173</sup> With Chinese works like Muqi's famous White-robed Guanyin in Kyoto, artists of the Zen school had excellent continental models for firsthand study. They adopted the Chinese approach



Fig. 25: *Water-Moon Avalokiteshvara*, Korea, Goryeo dynasty, first half of the 14th century; hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; image: 45 1/16 x 21 7/8 in., mount: 79 3/8 x 28 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Charles Stewart Smith Collection, Gift of Mrs. Charles Stewart Smith, Charles Stewart Smith Jr., and Howard Caswell Smith, in memory of Charles Stewart Smith, 1914, 14.76.6.

to rendering Avalokiteshvara in monochrome ink painting rather than using opaque colored pigments; they applied the ink fluidly with a flexible brush. This endows many Japanese paintings of the White-robed Kannon with a sense of spontaneity and calligraphic flourish. Gestural application of ink was by no means limited to the Chan/Zen school, however. As Shimizu points out, “The rise of ink painting of Kuan-yin ... was greatly influenced by the art of ink landscape painting in China, which, by Mu-ch'i's time, had undergone nearly 300 years of vigorous development.”<sup>174</sup>

Japanese works often boldly incorporate these preexisting Chinese traditions. Artists sometimes leave large areas of the scroll unpainted, as if to portray the expansive quality of Kannon's contemplation while sitting on Potakala's rocky cliffs. The White-robed Kannon of the Muromachi period (1336–1573) attributed to Shugen (fl. 1469–1521) demonstrates the evocative use of negative space in such imagery (cat. 10).

Despite the appearance of spontaneity, artists like Shugen were actually following a well-developed Chinese tradition, which is evident by comparing cats. 8 and 10. And not all presentations of this iconography were so spare and abbreviated; cat. 9 shows a much more elaborated and fully realized figure and setting, executed in disciplined, finely rendered brushstrokes. Despite differences in style and composition, however, the characteristic features of the white-robed form remain the same: Guanyin/Kannon in a paradisaical environment—Potalaka—engaged in deep contemplation, the model sage absorbed in meditation.

In Japan, as in China, Buddhists reproduced the bodhisattva's special realm of Potalaka in numerous local settings. Called Fudarakusan in Japan, Kannon's legendary island became associated with several important pilgrimage destinations on the archipelago. One of the most famous is the Nachi Shrine in Wakayama Prefecture on the southern tip of Kii Peninsula (cat. 18). Although many features of the site evoke Kannon's paradise, Nachi is not Potalaka per se but the eastern gateway to a mythical island that lies beyond its shores; literary sources describe boats leaving for Fudarakusan at the hour of death.<sup>175</sup>

Nachi also drew pilgrims with “this-worldly” aspirations, especially women who sought Kannon's help in marriage and childbearing. Some pilgrimage sites in Japan in fact would forbid women from entering the sacred precincts. *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* (cat. 18) shows many women, however, revealing that it was unusually female-friendly in the 16th–17th century.<sup>176</sup>

Nachi is the first stop on the thirty-three station Western Provinces pilgrimage route (J: Saigoku junrei) (cat. 19). It also culminates the older and much shorter Kumano pilgrimage route that combines indigenous and Buddhist worship. At Nachi, temple names, such as Fudarakusanji, explicitly evoke the place where the pilgrim Zenzai Doji (S: Sudhana) of the *Gandaravyuha Sutra* encounters the wise bodhisattva. Seigantoji—officially the first station of the Saigoku pilgrimage—houses an icon of Nyoirin Kannon (compare cat. 12). But the site's most dramatic feature is part of the natural setting: the almost 450 feet tall Nachi Falls, sacred in and of

itself. For hundreds of years, visitors have perceived deities in the falls—both indigenous and Buddhist (specifically the Thousand-armed Kannon). Increasingly popular from the Edo period (1615–1868) onward, the Saigoku pilgrimage still inspires thousands of Japanese—and now foreign—pilgrims to follow the route that Kannon's devotees have traversed for centuries.<sup>177</sup>

Moerman sums up the importance of this pilgrimage destination: “As a primary site for the historical interaction of Buddhist and local traditions, for redefining the place of death and its conquest, for expressing the relationship between religious and political authority, and for articulating the religious position of women, [this location] represented a landscape that, although at the geographic margins of society, was very much at its cultural center.”<sup>178</sup> By locating and venerating Kannon in awe-inspiring landscape settings already sanctified by indigenous religious traditions, the Japanese people truly made the bodhisattva their own.

## Avalokiteshvara in the North

### Nepal

During the 12th and 13th centuries, many Buddhist refugees fled their devastated communities in Northern India and settled in Nepal. But Buddhism had flourished there long before the Indian Buddhist diaspora.<sup>179</sup> An interface region between the Indic subcontinent and the Tibetan plateau, Nepal occupied only the small region of the Kathmandu Valley up until the eighteenth century. Yet its artists have exercised an influence far greater than its physical size would lead us to expect. Protected by rugged mountains, but located at an important intermediary point between the centers of Indian Buddhism and Tibet, Nepal has for centuries produced exquisitely beautiful paintings and sculptures, notably those in cast metal (cat. 3). Nepalese artists, especially those from the native Newar population, were in high demand from at least the 7th century and traveled widely to execute commissions throughout the greater Himalayan region. The impact of Nepalese artistry, as we have seen in fig. 2, was crucially important in Tibet, and many traders from Nepal established permanent establishments in the capital Lhasa.<sup>180</sup> Nepalese artists also traveled far beyond the Himalayan region. The renowned Anige (ca. 1245–1306) produced works for Kublai Khan, the founder of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) in China.<sup>181</sup> To this day, Nepalese artists make some of the highest quality Buddhist sculptures and paintings in the Himalayan region.

Several foundational legends assert long-standing Nepalese connections to Indian Buddhism. Although Shakyamuni's birthplace in Lumbini was not considered part of Nepal during his lifetime, his predecessor buddhas were thought to have visited the site of Svayambhu in the Kathmandu Valley. As a result, it is said that a monumental stupa (reliquary mound) miraculously arose. Stupas not only mark a site of a buddha's relics but also symbolize his enlightened mind; the name Svayambhu in fact conjures the “self-existent, self-created”



Fig. 26: Throwing Saffron-infused Water on Swayambhu Stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2006.

primordial buddha.<sup>182</sup> Swayambhu Stupa remains a significant pilgrimage site, not only for the Nepalese and Tibetans, but also for Buddhists from around the world. Fig. 26 shows a dramatic form of veneration at Swayambhu; the worshipper applies saffron-infused water to create honorific golden garlands on the stupa's dome.<sup>183</sup> Such bodily engagement with the architecture represents a potent form of ritual and devotional practice.

Nepal has long been a multi-ethnic and religiously diverse country. Buddhism and Brahmanism have coexisted there for over two thousand years. Judging by the vast quantity of surviving Buddhist manuscripts, the religion reached its zenith during the Transitional Period (ca. 879–1200). This period coincides with the flourishing of Pala art in neighboring Bihar and Bengal, and Nepalese monks and scholars traveled to—and maintained close ties with—the renowned Buddhist monasteries there. However, a hereditary caste of married priests presides in Nepal rather than the celibate clergy who governed Buddhist monasteries in India. Nepalese Buddhist priests officiate at rights of passage and important life events and also provide religious instruction and initiations into Vajrayana meditations and techniques.<sup>184</sup>

In addition to religious traditions, artistic developments from Bengal, Bihar, and Kashmir influenced the painters and sculptors in Nepal. Not surprisingly, given his popularity in these nearby regions, Avalokiteshvara has been a favorite Nepalese subject from the time of the Licchavi rulers (ca. 300–879), particularly in his form as Padmapani Lokeshvara (cat. 3). Another important emanation in Nepal is the multi-armed Amoghapasha Lokeshvara (Lord of the Unfailing Noose) (fig. 27). Amoghapasha's iconography includes the same figures who attend Khasarpana Lokeshvara (cat. 2)—Tara, Bhrikuti, Sudhanakumara, and Hayagriva. In this Nepalese painting, however, he holds many attributes in addition to the familiar lotus: prayer beads, vase, manuscript, and trident. He also carries the rope (*S: pasha*) that gives this form of Avalokiteshvara his name. Compassionately “lassoing” his followers, who are wandering helplessly in samsara, he leads them to enlightenment. The *Ashtamivrata* is a popular form of Amoghapasha worship in Nepal, which involves venerating images of this deity.<sup>185</sup>

Indian subjects, styles, and techniques strongly impacted Nepalese paintings, such as the depiction of Amoghaphasa in fig. 27. This type of work is called a *paubha* and descends from Indian paintings on cloth (*S: pata*). According to Pal, “A great variety of tantric images ... [have] been preserved in Nepali art. The *paubhas* are certainly the only surviving examples of a type of religious art that was once much more prevalent in India than the present evidence indicates. Although there is much textual evidence that ... Buddhists in India employed paintings on cloth ... only in Nepal and Tibet have examples of sufficient antiquity survived to demonstrate what the Indian paintings must have looked like.”<sup>186</sup> These Himalayan painting traditions, despite stylistic differences from one period or context to another, exhibit certain features in common: an emphasis on symbolic rather than naturalistic form; thrones and shrines that enhance the majesty of the depicted deities; flat picture planes and crisply outlined figures with little shading or shadows; deities wearing sumptuous garments and ornate jewelry; and bold patches of color that form a rhythmic and harmonious—yet vivid—composition.<sup>187</sup> In both sculpture and painting, Nepalese artistic traditions are lavishly ornamental.

The Nepalese *paubha* in fig. 27 exemplifies these characteristics. It shows the multi-armed tantric Amoghaphasa framed by a decorative arch. The flat, densely packed composition includes a dazzling array of finely painted figures in small niches. As we have seen in Pala sculpture (cat. 2), small subsidiary figures accompany the hierarchically scaled main deity. Similar to Indian manuscript painting (figs. 5, 10; cat. 20), the work has a vibrant



Fig. 27: *The Savior Amoghapasha Avalokiteshvara*, Nepal, Malla dynasty, late 13th–early 14th century; colors on cloth; 26 5/8 x 22 1/4 in.; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of Stella Kramrisch, 1977, 1977-253-1.

Fig. 28: *Bodhisattva Lokeshvara*, Nepal, 9th century; copper alloy; 9 5/16 x 2 in.; The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Promised gift of John and Berthe Ford, F.165.

and exquisitely detailed style, with a limited but intensely saturated palette. The painter applied rich reds and golds, juxtaposed against a deep blue background. Amoghaphasa's elegant, swaying stance and the slender, elongated body suggest a distinctively Nepalese inflection, as does the scattering of flowers against in the background. With his multiple arms, he is clearly an esoteric manifestation of Avalokiteshvara who commands the center of his mandala. All the other actors in his symbolic universe emanate from his dominant presence.



Like Newar painters, sculptors looked to India, absorbing many Gupta conventions (compare fig. 8) and Pala styles (cat. 2), as well as Kashmiri influences. They favored copper alloy as a material, which gives their works a soft reddish patina, and they expertly fire gilded their icons. Unlike their Indian counterparts, however, Newar artists encrusted their sculptures



Fig. 29: Mani Stone and Prayer Wheels, Tibet, 2006.

with semiprecious stones. In addition, the “Nepali penchant for slender proportions, restrained sensuousness in modeling, clean silhouettes, and youthful faces with gentle expressions” subtly distinguishes this art from Indian models, according to Pal.<sup>188</sup>

Highpoints of Nepalese Buddhist art are standing bodhisattvas with long, languid bodies that exude preternatural poise and balance. These works share Indian features in attributes, dress, and the triple-bend pose. Not surprisingly, Newar sculptors often portrayed Avalokiteshvara—especially in his manifestation as Padmapani—and commonly employed two main iconographic traditions involving the placement of the bodhisattva's right hand. It either extends in *varada mudra*, for example in fig. 28, which as we have seen, symbolically bestows blessings, or rises in *vitarka mudra* (cat. 3), which establishes the figure as a teacher of dharma.<sup>189</sup> Here, as in India and elsewhere, these iconographic variants clearly signal Avalokiteshvara's ability to embody both wisdom and compassion.

Nepalese features in both works include the thick, low-slung diagonal sash, the elongated “sacred thread”—or consecrated cord—that loops over it, and the prominent cascade of drapery folds that end in sharp points between the legs. Both sculptures have lost the ubiquitous lotus stalk that would have risen from the lowered hand to blossom over the left shoulder. The earlier 9th-century sculpture has a rather stiff bearing, but cat. 3 expresses a perfect equipoise in the bodhisattva's image, with his full and fleshy figure, convincingly three-dimensional drapery, and animated stance. In addition, the lavish inlay of gems (one of the earliest examples of this kind of surface treatment in Himalayan art) and the chased flower designs on the lower garment establish this as a masterpiece of Nepalese sculpture, a fully realized work that expresses Avalokiteshvara's inner and outer perfection.<sup>190</sup>

After the destruction of important monasteries and artistic centers in Bihar and Bengal, Nepalese artists could no longer turn to India for inspiration. Instead, the country's main artistic currents increasingly circulated within the Himalayan region, especially in a symbiotic relationship with its neighbor Tibet. As previously mentioned, the two countries had closely interacted from the time Buddhism first came to the Himalayan region. Newari artists went to Tibet as early as the 7th century to execute commissions, bringing Nepalese traditions to that country. Yet from ca. 1100 to ca. 1300, Tibet often imported both religious and artistic ideas directly from India. After its Indian sources disappeared, however, it again turned to nearby Nepal for living models of Buddhist art and practices. Newari painting styles influenced Tibetan visual traditions for many centuries (compare cats. 6 and 24 with fig. 27). But eventually, Tibet came into its own as a fountainhead of Buddhism for its neighbors, and Nepalese pilgrims then often traveled north instead of south to visit important monasteries and other sites. When they returned, they carried Tibetan-style works along with them, which in turn influenced Nepalese artists.<sup>191</sup> Among the many deep affinities the two Himalayan cultures shared was a deep and abiding reverence for Avalokiteshvara.



Fig. 30: *The Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje* (1555–1603), Tibet, 16<sup>th</sup>–17<sup>th</sup> century; pigment on cloth; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2005.20.2.

## Tibet

No country has a greater alliance with Avalokiteshvara than Tibet; the bodhisattva informs the very identity of Tibetan people, serving as a “patron saint” for a widely scattered population who has long inhabited the “roof of the world.” Legends, pilgrimage sites, revered images, carved stones, prayer wheels, and recitation practices all underscore his role as a supremely important focus of veneration (fig. 29). Important Tibetan religious leaders, such as the Dalai Lamas and the successive heads of the Karma Kagyu lineage, the Gyalwang Karmapas, are considered his emanations (fig. 30).<sup>192</sup>

Tibetans invoke Avalokiteshvara as Supreme Compassion (T: Thukje Chenpo, S: Mahakarunika), or Chenrezig. The latter preserves the Indic notion of one who primarily *sees*, rather than *hears*, the sufferings of the world. The word Chenrezig in fact suggests intensified temporal duration in his act of compassionate seeing. According to the Tibetan teacher Bokar Rinpoche, “his name expresses his nature; each syllable that composes it in Tibetan has a meaning: *chen* means eye; *re* gives the idea of continuity; *zig* means to look. Therefore *Chenrezig* is the one who ‘continually looks upon all beings with the eye of compassion.’”<sup>193</sup> His very name assures his followers that he will never turn his gaze away from their sufferings; therefore, they can

supplicate him at any time and in any situation. Tibetans have been doing so for 1400 years.

According to a Tibetan legend recorded in the *Mani Kabum*, Shakyamuni Buddha himself gave Avalokiteshvara the task of teaching dharma in that country. But since no humans lived in the “snowy domain to the north” during Shakyamuni’s time, Avalokiteshvara had to first generate people to train in Buddhist doctrine. In the form of a divine monkey, he mated with an ogress (identified as the deity Tara). From this union came the Tibetans.<sup>194</sup> Despite Buddhism’s lack of a creator god, in this legend, Avalokiteshvara generates the Tibetan people, a potent illustration of his overwhelming importance to them.

Other Tibetan legends abound concerning Avalokiteshvara. According to the text just mentioned, Amitabha Buddha gave birth to Avalokiteshvara in a burst of light. Therefore, their relationship resembles that of father and son. This same tradition credits Avalokiteshvara with engendering other bodhisattva offspring. As recounted by Bokar Rinpoche, when Avalokiteshvara “later looked at beings with compassion, he saw that ... their sufferings were innumerable ... and a tear dropped from each of his eyes.” From the bodhisattva’s tears, two female deities were born: Green Tara from the right eye (fig. 5); White Tara from the left (cat. 29).<sup>195</sup>

Tibetan tradition holds that Buddhism came to the country as early as the 4th century and gained greater prominence during the imperial era of King Songtsen Gampo (ca. 617–49). He apparently began patronizing the religion as the result of his marriages to two Buddhist princesses, one from China, Wencheng (d. 680), and the other, Bhrikuti, from Nepal. These strategic marital alliances resulted in the establishment of important Buddhist religious buildings, such as the Great Temple of Lhasa (T: Jokhang). Because of the predominant role of scripture in the Buddhist faith, Songtsen Gampo also is said to have commissioned a system of writing based on Indian models. Previously, the Tibetans, like the Japanese, did not have a written language. As with their Chinese counterparts, Tibetan scholars avidly collected Indian Buddhist teachings and translated them into their own language before and after the dharma’s disappearance from India. By the 11th century, tantric Buddhism had become a



Fig. 31: Pilgrims Prostrating at the Jokhang, Lhasa, Tibet, 2006.

predominant mode of religious practice in Tibet, a situation that persists to this day.<sup>196</sup>

As with Avalokiteshvara’s appearance in India, scholars debate the issue of when the bodhisattva gained importance in Tibet. Snellgrove posits that in that country, as elsewhere in Asia, “his missionary value was certainly considerable.” He notes that the *Karandavyuha Sutra* entered the Tibetan canon at an early date and feels that this encouraged Avalokiteshvara’s veneration during the imperial period (ca. 620–842); others, such as Kapstein, assert that the bodhisattva did not have much impact in Tibet until the 11th century.<sup>197</sup> Legendary accounts, such as those recorded in the *Mani Kabum*, hold that Songtsen Gampo adopted Avalokiteshvara as a tutelary deity and was even considered an emanation of the bodhisattva himself. Antagonistic forces suppressed Buddhism for several centuries, but during its second transmission, Atisha (982–1054), an important Indian teacher who came to Tibet in 1042, promulgated the veneration of Avalokiteshvara. He especially encouraged the practice of the four-armed Avalokiteshvara and the repetition of *om mani padme hum* (see cats. 5 and 24–27). Perfectly expressing Mahayana Buddhism’s emphasis on compassion—and the tantric use of visualization and mantra—this is still the most commonly performed spiritual practice in that country today.<sup>198</sup> It persists, no doubt, because Tibetans view Avalokiteshvara as an especially potent embodiment of wisdom and compassion. According to Kapstein, “Atiśa’s teaching of Avalokiteśvara directed Tibetans to find the bodhisattva of Supreme Compassion within themselves and in all others as well.... Avalokiteśvara ... is regarded as the basis for love, kindness, and nurturing among all creatures, but at the same time he is none other than the creative power of mind, whose infinite potentialities for self-actualization constitute the very basis for creation itself.”<sup>199</sup> Again, as we have seen in other parts of the Asian Buddhist world, Tibetans view Avalokiteshvara as exemplifying the core values of Mahayana Buddhism.

In keeping with Avalokiteshvara’s elevated position, many of his early depictions in Tibet have legendary status. Among the most renowned are in the capital, Lhasa: the Eleven-headed Mahakarunika in the Jokhang, and Phagpa Lokeshvara (Noble Lord of the World) in the Potala Palace. The most sacred site in Lhasa—and an intense focus of Tibetan pilgrimage—the Jokhang (fig. 31) houses an immensely important object, a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha called Jowo, purportedly brought as part of Wencheng’s dowry. In the north wing near Jowo is the Chapel of Mahakarunika, covered by one of the temple’s four golden roofs. Inside, a large statue of Mahakarunika with eleven brightly painted heads and a mandorla of a thousand arms is said to have self-manifested during the lifetime of Songtsen Gampo (see cat. 15).<sup>200</sup> According to a miracle tale, Songtsen Gampo and his two foreign queens, on approaching the image, were transformed into light and absorbed into it. Although the icon was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, Tibetans still venerate the modern replica now in the Jokhang because a nun secretly preserved a fragment of the original statue, which was later inserted into the reconstructed image.<sup>201</sup>

Across the city, the Potala Palace towers over Lhasa (fig. 32). Its

name links the building with the bodhisattva’s sacred abode on the island of Mount Potalaka. As with Mount Putuo in China and Fudarakusanji in Japan, this name transfers the spiritual potency of a faraway, mythic pilgrimage spot to a locally accessible site. Such transformations not only make pilgrimage more convenient but also transmit the authority of a legendary place to another significant location. Here, the bodhisattva’s connection to this important building is especially apt, because the Potala once housed two of Tibet’s most important rulers, both thought to be Avalokiteshvara’s emanations: King Songtsen Gampo and the 5th Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617–82). The Potala’s genesis goes back to the king’s imperial reign, although the 5th Dalai Lama’s 17th-century expansion largely defines its current form. From Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso’s time until the Chinese government’s annexation of Tibet in the 1950s, it was the successive Dalai Lamas’ center of religious and administrative authority; many chapels and sacred precincts exist within its massive domain.

The Phagpa Lokeshvara chapel is in the oldest and most revered section of the Potala Palace, thought to date back to Songtsen Gampo’s time. This chapel contains a carved red sandalwood image of Arya (Noble) Avalokiteshvara, believed to be one of four discovered in Nepal during the 7th century, when a sandalwood



Fig. 32: Potala Palace, Lhasa, Tibet, 1940s; Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 2012i2212.

tree split open and four “brother” statues of the deity miraculously appeared. Two of them stayed in Nepal and are among the most important icons of Avalokiteshvara in the Kathmandu valley. Phagpa Lokeshvara found his way to the Potala, where the approximately three-foot tall sculpture now wears heavy brocades and ornate jewelry. Tibetans consider this icon one of the most sacred in the Potala, indeed in all of Lhasa. This august lineage accounts for the small ivory statue’s unusual iconography in cat. 14.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to these legendary objects associated with Songtsen Gampo’s royal patronage, countless lay and monastic Tibetan Buddhists have commissioned images of Avalokiteshvara in many iconographic forms throughout the centuries. Those who produce such works—generally not monks but pious laymen—usually learn their trade as a hereditary occupation. However, a

few great Tibetan religious leaders, such as the Tenth Karmapa Choying Dorje (1604–74) and the Eighth Situ Panchen Chokyi Jungne (1700–74), were extraordinary artists. Significantly, Choying Dorje specialized in depictions of Avalokiteshvara. Situ Panchen commissioned a set of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas; this iconography inspired the painting in cat. 4.<sup>203</sup>

Tibetan makers render Avalokiteshvara's image in diverse formats and many media. They execute elaborate paintings (T: *thangkas*) in mineral pigments on cloth supports. Mounted on silk brocades, these works hang in homes or temples (cats. 4, 6, and 24). Sculptors also etch designs on living rock at sacred sites (fig. 29). David and Janice Jackson describe the impetus for creating such works:

Painting (along with sculpture) was crucial to the religious life of Tibet because it was a medium through which the highest ideals of Buddhism were evoked and brought alive. A sacred painting was for the Tibetan a "physical support"—in other words an embodiment—of enlightenment.... [But] the sacred image was not meant to be the object of simple idolatry. For knowledgeable Buddhists the image of an Enlightened One embodied the realization of potentialities that lay latent in every sentient creature. The ultimate responsibility for gaining that realization rested on the shoulders of each individual.<sup>204</sup>

Patrons commission paintings and sculptures depicting Avalokiteshvara to accrue merit, inspire religious activities,



Fig. 33: *Shadakshari Triad and Other Deities*, Tibet, early 12th century; pigment on cotton; 34 x 29 3/8 in.; The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Promised gift of John and Berthe Ford, F.120.



Fig. 34: Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, Main Temple, Pelkhor Chode Monastery, Gyantse, Tibet, 2013.

and clarify tantric visualizations. Tibetan teachers (T: lamas) also use such art to educate audiences about the buddhas and bodhisattvas.<sup>205</sup>

*Thangkas* are painted on cotton, linen, or hemp, often giving the work a rough texture. After preparing the support, the painter sketches a detailed drawing based on canonical diagrams specific to each deity, derived from medieval Indian texts. Traditionally, pigments are almost entirely of mineral extraction; black comes from carbonized wood or graphite. Not completed until the "opening of the eyes," the *thangka* undergoes a consecration ritual in which the painter's final strokes fill in the pupils of the deity, while ritual specialists recite invocations and prayers. This activates the icon's blessings, and the *thangka* becomes a proper object of contemplation and veneration.<sup>206</sup>

As we have seen, Tibetan painters first turned for inspiration to India and Nepal—and to a lesser extent, neighboring Buddhist lands to the north and east. Scholars believe that early Tibetan *thangkas*, such as the magnificent *Shadakshari Lokeshvara* in the Walters Art Museum (fig. 33), show Indic—and specifically Pala—influences in the monumental central figure and the two symmetrical attendants flanking him, with smaller buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other subsidiary figures in rows above and below (compare cat. 2). White in color, adorned with typical bodhisattva ornaments and attributes, Avalokiteshvara here prominently displays his Indian heritage in a Tibetan context. Later, when Nepalese painting exerted a greater influence on Tibetan styles, smaller figures in niches replaced the more monumental Indian forms (compare fig. 27 with cats. 6 and 24).

A stylistic revolution began in Tibetan painting during the 15th century. The Yongle emperor (1360–1424) of Ming China—a practitioner and patron of Tibetan Buddhism—commissioned many masterpieces of Chinese Buddhist art, which he gave as gifts to his Tibetan teachers.<sup>207</sup> The superb quality of these Chinese works astonished the recipients and the artists they patronized, and within a few generations, Tibetan makers absorbed many Chinese influences, which transformed their paintings. Instead of Indic reds and oranges, a blue and green palette derived from the Chinese landscape painting tradition began to predominate. In these later Tibetan works, such as cat. 4, painters rendered Avalokiteshvara more naturalistically and placed him within an idealized yet believable setting. As Rhie writes, "The resulting compatibly integrated deity and landscape readily draw the viewer into their world, into a sublime and uplifting unity with what seems to be the perfected universe—the Pure Land of the Buddhist vision—of which we become a welcome and intimate part."<sup>208</sup> Of course, these changes were not monolithic; as Tibetan painting evolved, distinctive regional styles developed, especially in areas far from centralized authority in Lhasa.<sup>209</sup>

Tibetan sculpture's stylistic and iconographic development follows a similar trajectory to that of painting: initial reliance on Indic models and then later, more diverse syntheses.<sup>210</sup> Tibet sculptors use many materials: cast metals, carved wood and ivory, or molded clay. Lost wax casting predominates for works executed in metal, a technique used for the Tibetan sculptures in this exhibition. Since the 16th century, sculptors often ornament their statues in a process called "cold gold." In contrast to "fire gilding," they apply gold pigment to the figures' faces without the use of heat. In addition, they typically paint the deities' hair blue or red. The resulting surfaces are fragile and require periodic repainting; this sometimes obscures the work's original appearance. But renewing the paint surface gives artists and donors an opportunity to make a devotional offering. Before consecration, a lama typically fills the hollow statues with rolled mantras, gems, sacred ash, and other sanctified materials to increase the icon's efficacy.<sup>211</sup> Smaller sacred figures appear on home altars (cats. 28–30); dense arrays of buddhas and bodhisattvas in all sizes and diverse media are assembled in grand temple settings (fig. 1).

Some of these works are truly monumental, usually painted, gilded, and adorned with rich fabrics. Temple icons serve as intense foci for worship and offerings, which consist of silk scarves, lamps, flowers, bowls of water, and of course, money. In a 15th-century temple at Pelkhor Chode monastery in Gyantse,<sup>212</sup> the visitor encounters powerful icons, such as a huge Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, accompanied by his wrathful counterpart, the fierce protector Mahakala (fig. 34). Towering over the visitor, this cast metal Mahakarunika evokes the bodhisattva as Supreme Compassion; the array of arms, golden countenance, and composed, serene gaze all suggest overwhelming, but benign, power.

The predominant form of Avalokiteshvara in Tibet is the four-armed *Shadakshari Lokeshvara* (cats. 5, 24, and 30). As we have seen, this form personifies the bodhisattva's six-syllable mantra,



Fig. 35: *The Wheel of Becoming*, Tibet, 19th century; pigment on cloth; 31 1/4 x 22 3/4; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2004.21.1.

*om mani padme hum* (often referred to as the *mani* mantra). Although many scholars have tried to parse the meaning of this utterance, Tibetans generally are more interested in what it does rather than what it means.<sup>213</sup> They have established a functional correspondence between the six syllables and purification of the six realms of samsara. Seated in a temple or in front of a home shrine, practitioners chant a Tibetan liturgy while visualizing as clearly as possible the distinct iconographic features of Avalokiteshvara's posture, clothing, ornaments, and attributes. At a key point in the practice, they recite *om mani padme hum*. Using prayer beads (cat. 27), adepts keep track of their mantra accumulations, which for especially ambitious aspirants, can number into the millions. During mantra recitation, the meditator ideally maintains the bodhisattva aspiration to purify all beings without exception in each realm: those of hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and gods.<sup>214</sup>

Tibetans imagine these six realms of samsara as a Wheel of Life, or Wheel of Becoming (fig. 35). Such compositions typically appear as large murals outside the entrance to a Tibetan temple. There the fierce, three-eyed God of Death holds the Wheel of Life and confronts the viewer with a key fact of cyclic existence: that unvirtuous actions condemn beings to transmigrate endlessly from one rebirth to the next. Depending on their past actions (S: karma), they are born into one of the six realms, each

with its own characteristic torments, such as broiling fires or unquenchable thirst.<sup>215</sup> But the situation is not hopeless, because in each realm, a buddha appears whose special mission is to teach the methods to liberate that particular class of beings. In the Shadakshari Lokeshvara practice, each of the six syllables of the *mani* mantra corresponds to one of these domains. It is therefore a special sonic vehicle for liberating all beings—including the practitioner—wherever they are on samsara’s wheel. As Kapstein writes, such a practice “affirms that, in the final analysis, Avalokitesvara, the embodiment of consummate spirituality and the creative ground of the universe, might be found within each and every individual and is none other than the mind itself.”<sup>216</sup>

Such compassion practices can also occur outside the context of formal seated meditation, in the midst of an active life. While engaging in daily tasks, many Tibetans use their prayer beads with one hand (while as modern, globalized citizens, they may be holding a cell phone in the other!). They recite Chenrezig’s mantra throughout the day, and—expert at multitasking—still manage to move a bead with each repetition. Mantra recitation accompanies pilgrimage, circumambulation, and prostration (fig. 31) while the practitioner imagines moving through a landscape transformed into Avalokitesvara’s spiritual domain. As people living in the 21st century, Tibetans no doubt increasingly feel the effects of modernization, which often brings materialism and secularization in its wake. Yet, a visitor to this country cannot help but notice that even urban Tibetans still often use their prayer beads during daily activities.



Fig. 36: Chenrezig, Norbulingka, Sidhbari, India, 2007.

The prayer wheel is an ingenious device that intensifies the impact of reciting the *mani* mantra. These instruments range from single large wheels housed in special buildings, to medium-sized cylinders installed in rows along the sides of a temple and turned while circumambulating its perimeter (fig. 29), to small hand-held devices used while walking or engaging in other activities (fig. 41, cat. 26). Made of metal, wood, or hide, and decorated with the *mani* mantra and other significant symbols, these objects play a unique role for Avalokitesvara’s Tibetan followers.

One of Buddhism’s powerful metaphors is the idea of turning the wheel of dharma, as Shakyamuni did when he delivered his teaching on the Four Noble Truths at Sarnath. The prayer wheel allows the practitioner to engage physically in this turning, with the ultimate aim of gaining a buddha’s realization. The prayer wheel has a legendary lineage in the annals of Buddhism, which date its appearance to the time of the Indian scholar, philosopher, and yogi Nagarjuna (ca. 2nd century).<sup>217</sup> There is also historical evidence that the prayer wheel may have evolved from revolving bookcases in medieval Indian or Chinese monastic centers. These storage units housed the *Prajnaparamita* (cat. 20) and other sutras; ritually turning them was a form of worship and veneration.<sup>218</sup>

Not only do these devices involve bodily engagement with the mental and verbal process of mantra recitation, but from practitioner’s point of view, they magnify the mantra’s effects. This is because around the central shaft—or “life-tree”—of the wheel, are many iterations of the *mani* mantra inscribed on tightly wound rolls of paper. Each wheel therefore can contain thousands of mantras; today, technological miniaturization expands that number into the millions.<sup>219</sup> Every time the practitioner spins the wheel, he generates the total number of mantras it contains. Theoretically, this multiplies the benefits exponentially. As stated in a Tibetan text, *The Benefits of the Mani Wheel*, “Turning it one hundred thousand times, one is reborn in the retinue of Avalokitesvara.”<sup>220</sup> The use of prayer wheels in the veneration of Avalokitesvara underscores the crucial role that objects play on the bodhisattva path to full awakening.

Although some outsiders have looked askance at the technological enhancement of mantra accumulation,<sup>221</sup> Tibetans themselves welcome such skillful innovations in order to realize more efficiently the ultimate goal of the practice: to recognize one’s inherent potential for buddhahood, and to use that recognition to help others attain the same state. As Ladner explains: “What is important to understand here is that a mantra is not like a prayer to a divine being. Rather, the mantra—whether recited, written, or spun—is the deity, is enlightenment, immediately manifest. As the renowned Tibetan teacher Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says, ‘there is no difference between the deity himself and the mantra which is his essence.’”<sup>222</sup> Reciting Avalokitesvara’s mantra therefore actualizes the bodhisattva’s qualities, inherent in every being.

To this end, Tibetans endow their landscapes with reminders of Avalokitesvara’s mantra, and in the process, sanctify



Fig. 37: Padmapani in Niche, Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, Bihar, India, 2013.

their environment. Especially near temples or sacred sites, they construct walls of *mani* stones, bringing the mantra into view for themselves and everyone passing by (fig. 29). In diaspora, hundreds of thousands of exiled Tibetans have carried Avalokitesvara’s traditions to new lands, first to India, and then throughout the world. This is certainly true in the most significant Tibetan expatriate community, Dharamsala, India, the seat of the Tibetan government in exile and home to the Dalai Lama’s Namgyal Monastery. Pilgrims and local residents, who believe that the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people embodies Avalokitesvara himself, circumambulate this complex in a prescribed route lined with *mani* stones, prayer wheels, and prayer flags. Wherever there are Tibetans, so too Chenrezig appears (fig. 36).



Fig. 38: Chenrezig “Sand” Mandala, Houses of Commons, London, 2008.

## Avalokitesvara Today

Three things in human life are important.  
The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind.  
And the third is to be kind. —Henry James<sup>223</sup>

My religion is kindness.  
—Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

The values of compassion and kindness do not belong to Mahayana Buddhism alone; the quote above from Henry James—an Anglo-American novelist with no Buddhist affiliations—demonstrates that fact. Throughout the two thousand years of its history, Mahayana Buddhism has taken root in soil already prepared by indigenous cultures and traditions. Today, the bodhisattva path extends far beyond Asia; its reach is truly global in our own time. Buddhism’s wise compassion now resonates with well-established altruistic impulses around the world.

As we have seen, where Mahayana Buddhism goes, so goes Avalokitesvara. Many who have left East Asia to settle elsewhere continue to venerate the bodhisattva in their immigrant communities. Back in China, Guanyin’s miracles continue. Yu tells a moving story about her grandmother’s strong faith in the bodhisattva. Daily, she would offer incense to a white porcelain statue of Songzi (Child-bearing) Guanyin, while chanting the *Great Compassion Dharani*. Once, a vision of Guanyin came to Yu’s grandmother, warning her not to take a boat about to depart on the Yangtze River. Yu’s skeptical mother reluctantly obeyed the grandmother’s command not to board, letting the vessel leave without the family. The boat sank shortly after leaving port.<sup>224</sup> Guanyin’s sacred site, Mount Putuo, lost all of its temples and shrines during the Cultural Revolution. Today, reconstructed buildings contain newly made icons that draw millions of pilgrims to the island each year. On the ferry from Shanghai to Putuoshan, a video instructs 21st-century visitors about temple etiquette, how to bow properly and offer incense to the many reincarnated depictions of Avalokitesvara on the island.

Similarly in Japan, the Saigoku pilgrimage draws increasing numbers.<sup>225</sup> Different forms of Kannon have arisen to serve modern needs, such as Bokefuji Kannon, who prevents dementia in the elderly, and Dobutsu Kannon, the protector of pets.<sup>226</sup> The bodhisattva even entered the Japanese commercial sphere in the 1930s when the Canon Corporation announced a new product called *Kwanon*, Japan’s first 35mm camera. An image of the Thousand-armed Kannon originally served as the company logo.<sup>227</sup>

Efforts to reestablish Buddhism in India began in 1950s; today, pilgrimage sites sacred to Shakyamuni brim with activity, especially at Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya. From a sleepy backwater in the mid-20th century, Bodhgaya has become a hub of international Buddhism. Numerous temples line its street, and millions of devotees visit each year. Avalokitesvara’s

presence manifests there as well, in statuary (figs. 37, 39) and in the numerous *mani* stones distributed throughout the temple precinct.

At the end of the 19th century—and increasingly throughout the 20th—Avalokiteshvara's values and practices made inroads into Western culture. The Japanese scholar and Zen practitioner D. T. Suzuki moved to New York City in 1951 and taught seminars at Columbia University; through Suzuki's teachings and writings, Zen Buddhism influenced many poets, artists, and musicians in America and Europe. Novelist, nature writer, and Zen practitioner Peter Matthiessen (1927–2014) published *The Snow Leopard* in 1978, a compelling account of his journey to the Himalayas after his wife's death. Avalokiteshvara pervades this deeply personal book; each section begins with one of the Sanskrit characters that make up the mantra *om mani padme hum*. In the course of his arduous trek through the forbidding Nepalese range, Matthiessen recalled his time at a weekend Zen retreat when he first realized that his wife would never recover from cancer. The program involved chanting the *Kannon Sutra*, which the group repeated many times in Japanese, ending in a mighty shout. “And on that morning, in the near darkness—the altar candle was the only light in the long room—in the dead hush, like the hush in these snow mountains, the silence swelled with the intake of my breath into a Presence of vast benevolence of which *I was a part*.... Wounds, ragged edges, hollow places were all gone, all had been healed; my heart lay at the heart of all Creation.” Matthiessen credits the realization that arose from intoning the *Kannon Sutra* with establishing an inner calmness. This peace sustained him throughout the process of his wife's death.<sup>228</sup>

In the 21st century, Westerners are most likely to learn of Mahayana Buddhist principles of compassion through the Dalai Lama's teachings and life story, especially since 1989, when

he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Today, he and other important lamas, such as the head of the Karma Kagyu branch of Tibetan Buddhism, the Gyalwang Karmapa, give public talks on environmentalism, animal welfare, and human rights, as well as the fine points of Buddhist doctrine. Part of their international appeal no doubt stems from this emphasis on compassion in action. They voice humane ideals that are held dear in both the East and the West, invoking compassion as a way to address the world's current problems. But they also have introduced the wider world to powerful Tibetan Buddhist rituals associated with Avalokiteshvara, previously little known outside of Asia. One example is the kinetic art of the Tibetan “sand” mandala, which trained lamas make with powdered mineral substances.<sup>229</sup> Public demonstrations have gained worldwide attention and often accompany auspicious events, such as a special teaching by the Dalai Lama. A Chenrezig mandala was created at the British House of Commons during one of the Tibetan leader's visits to England in 2008 (fig. 38). With meticulous care, the mandala makers build up symbols of the deity and his domain, only to brush them away upon completion. This is a potent demonstration of the Buddhist insight that all things, however sacred and sublime, are impermanent. At the same time, Tibetan Buddhists believe that Avalokiteshvara's compassion profoundly benefits those fortunate enough to watch as the mandala is being made, and the scattered materials extend those blessings throughout the universe.

The Buddha is now familiar to most Westerners; his teachings have permeated Occidental culture. Yet, leaving aside a relatively small number of Western Buddhist practitioners and scholars, most people outside of Asia still do not recognize Avalokiteshvara's many names, manifold forms, and what this bodhisattva means to his followers. May this publication—and the exhibition that accompanies it—expand awareness of this important figure and illuminate all that his image embodies.

## Notes to Essay

- Burton Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 303.
- See below for a discussion of Mahayana Buddhism's genesis in India and its later history and significance as it spread throughout Asia.
- One of the most interesting of this bodhisattva's qualities is gender fluidity. To avoid unwieldy phrasing, this essay will refer to the bodhisattva as male unless one of the forms he/she takes is unambiguously feminine, at least as determined by the present author. As will be discussed below, gender indeterminacy is completely appropriate to this protean figure.
- Of course, given Avalokiteshvara's importance, many scholars have published important and illuminating studies on this bodhisattva. The most comprehensive review of Indian scriptures and images remains Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, *Introduction à l'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara* (Paris: Civilisations du Sud, 1948). Chun-fang Yu, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteśvara* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), is an in-depth discussion of Guanyin's history and development, with special attention to the feminization of this bodhisattva. There have also been lavish exhibitions abroad, such as Yu-min Lee, *Visions of Compassion: Images of Kuan-yin in Chinese Art* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2000) and Katharina Epprecht, ed., *Kannon: Divine Compassion, Early Buddhist Art from Japan* (Zurich: Museum Rietberg, 2007). But these books and exhibition catalogues have featured artworks from only a single national tradition. See “Sources Cited” for a plethora of other publications.
- It goes without saying that the boundaries of these national entities and what defined them as countries fluctuated substantially over the course of their histories. Referring to their premodern status as “nations” admittedly involves imprecision and generalization but—given the broad historical range of this exhibition—seems, to the present author, unavoidable.
- Susan L. Huntington and John C. Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pala India (8th–12th Centuries) and Its International Legacy* (Dayton: Dayton Art Institute; Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1990), 106.
- Based on murals adorning the walls of a temple in Kathmandu, Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Calcutta: Firma K. L. Mukhopadhyay, 1968), 6, states that Avalokiteshvara's distinct iconographic forms number at least 108.
- In the words of the Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, “According to Buddhism, compassion is an aspiration, a state of mind, wanting others to be free from suffering. . . . Genuine compassion must have both wisdom and lovingkindness. That is to say, one must understand the nature of suffering from which we wish to free others (this is wisdom), and one must experience deep intimacy and empathy with other sentient beings (this is lovingkindness).” *Essence of the Heart Sutra*, trans. Geshe Thupten Jinpa (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2002), 49.
- Kenneth Chen, *Buddhism in China: A Historical Survey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 318–19; Robert E. Buswell, Jr., and Donald S. Lopez, Jr., eds., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), q.v. “Indrajala,” 372. Indra, a god from the ancient Indian Vedic scriptures, was incorporated into the Buddhist pantheon and is believed to reign in an exalted heavenly realm.
- Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, xv. *Shunyata* is a difficult word to translate and is often misunderstood. In fact, even within Buddhism, there are many competing interpretations, but in general, it is a term that points to the nature of things as interdependent and nondual.
- Recent scholarship traces the origins of this sutra to Central Asia instead of India, and its dating is controversial. Depending on the redaction, “Universal Gateway” is either the twenty-fourth or twenty-fifth chapter, and may have been a later addition to the original compilation of the *Lotus Sutra*. See Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 8, n7.
- The inscription names the artist and the Tibetan lama honored by the commission. Inscription trans. Amy Heller, *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, 1994.004, Asia Society Museum: The Collection in Context, [http://asiasocietymuseum.org/region\\_object.asp?RegionID=2&CountryID=6&ChapterID=14&ObjectID=499](http://asiasocietymuseum.org/region_object.asp?RegionID=2&CountryID=6&ChapterID=14&ObjectID=499), accessed March 11, 2013.
- The names of postures can vary, according to context. Art historians often refer to this position as royal ease (S: *rajalilasana*)—compare cat. 12—but this essay follows John C. Huntington and Dina Bangdel, *The Circle of Bliss: Buddhist Meditational Art* (Columbus, Ohio: Columbus Museum of Art; Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2003), 511, which names the posture *lalitasana*.
- Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. “*padma*,” 606–07.
- Christopher Wingfield, “Touching the Buddha: Encounters with a Charismatic Object,” in *Museum Materialities: Objects, Engagements, Interpretations*, ed. Sandra H. Dudley (New York: Routledge, 2010), 65. Thanks to Francesca Consagra for this reference. See also Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 152–53. Of course, this does not deny that Buddhists have complex systems of meaning associated with an artwork's iconography.
- In Tibetan culture, for example, the ritual specialist fills the sculptures with rolls of mantras wrapped around a wooden dowel, called the “life stick” or “life tree,” that runs from crown to base. Incense and other sacred substances are added as well. The sculpture is sealed at the bottom, marked with a double thunderbolt (S: *vajra*). Paintings are consecrated with mantras inscribed on the back. Consecration ceremonies cause the deity to enter into and animate the image. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, 151–52; David P. Jackson and Janice A. Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials* (London: Serindia Publications, 1984), 143.
- Susan L. Huntington, with contributions by John C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (Boston: Weatherhill, 2001), xxvii.
- Kurt Behrendt, *Tibet and India: Buddhist Traditions and Transformations* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 11.
- Marcus Bingenheimer, “A Landscape of Texts—On the Use of Temple Gazetteers for the Study of Chinese Buddhist History” (lecture, Columbia University, New York, December 13, 2013).
- Paul Harrison, “Searching for the Origins of the Mahāyāna,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 28 (1995): 53.
- One discussion of this issue is in Charles S. Prebish, “Cooking the Books: The Implications of the New Dating of the Buddha for the History of Early Indian Buddhism,” *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 15 (2008): 1–21.
- Gregory Schopen argues that Mahayana Buddhism was marginal in India until the fifth century. He bases his position on the apparent lack of art and donative inscriptions that could be associated with Mahayana beliefs before that period. Schopen, “The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period in Indian Buddhism: Through a Chinese Looking Glass,” in *Figments and Fragments of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 3–24. In contrast to this epigraphic approach, Nandana Chutiwongs finds abundant examples of bodhisattva iconography—specifically, depictions of Avalokiteshvara—in the earliest years of the Mahayana. Chutiwongs, “The Iconography of Avalokiteśvara in Mainland South East Asia” (PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit, Leiden, 1984), 16–31.
- Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 123–24, argues for an early emergence of such imagery. She cites an extensive literature that debates the topic, 129, n4.
- For example, ambiguity exists regarding the identity of many of the earliest Buddhist sculptures from Gandhara and Mathura. See, for example, Prudence R. Myer, “Bodhisattvas and Buddhas: Early Buddhist Images from Mathura,” *Artibus Asiae* 47 (1986): 107–42; Denise Patry Leidy, *The Art of Buddhism: An Introduction to Its History and Meaning* (Boston: Shambhala, 2008), 35; and Schopen, “The Inscription on the Kuśan Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India,” in *Figments and Fragments*, 263.
- Studholme claims that many of Avalokiteshvara's characteristic features derive from one of the three major Brahmanical gods,

- Shiva; further, he believes Avalokitesvara's six-syllable mantra is an adaptation of a Shaivite sacred utterance, *namo shivaya*. Alexander Studholme, *The Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm: A Study of the Kārandavyūha Sūtra* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 4–5. My thanks to Kurt Behrendt for this reference.
- 26 Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 1; Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, 28–29; Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 83.
- 27 Mallmann puts the date in the 5th century; Chutiwongs argues that he was worshipped in Northern India no later than the 2nd century. As summarized in Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 7.
- 28 Mallmann, *l'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 59–82; Lokesh Chandra, *The Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara* (New Delhi: IGNC/A/Abhinav, 1988), 18–23; Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 52–58.
- 29 In this debate, much depends on how one interprets the fine points of Sanskrit grammar.
- 30 Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, 114–34; Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 116; Matthew T. Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 58.
- 31 Most scholars feel the Avalokitesvara appeared, along with other important bodhisattvas, at the beginning of the Common Era, but Bhattacharyya dates the “concept” of Avalokitesvara to the 3rd century BCE. *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 143. By the time the *Karandavyūha Sūtra*—a text totally devoted to Avalokitesvara—was translated into Chinese, it appears that this bodhisattva was an important and independent focus of veneration. David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and Their Tibetan Successors* (Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2004), 60, dates this sūtra to the 3rd century. Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 17, reckons the date as late as the 4th or 5th century. From the evidence of inscriptions, Schopen assigns the rise of Avalokitesvara's popularity to no earlier than the beginning of the 5th century. “Inscription on the Kuśan Image,” 264.
- 32 See Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 20, fig. 2.12, for an illustration.
- 33 Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 37.
- 34 Matthew T. Kapstein, ed., *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), ix.
- 35 See Janice Leoshko, *Bodhgaya: The Site of Enlightenment* (Bombay: Marg Publications, 1988) and Kurt Behrendt, “Traces of Buddhist Pilgrimage in Ancient India,” in *Pilgrimage: Sacred Landscapes and Self-Organized Complexity*, ed. John McKim Malville and Baidyanath Saraswati (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2009), 142–62.
- 36 These early schools, dubbed by later (sectarian) Mahayanists as “Hinayana,” or “Lesser Vehicle,” in Sanskrit, are now without a universally accepted name. Several terms have emerged to replace Hinayana because of its pejorative connotations. Recently, scholars have referred to this early vehicle as comprising “the mainstream Buddhist schools.” Another popular term is “Theravada” (“Way of the Elders” in Pali—an ancient Indian language that preserves many of the earliest Buddhist texts); this commonly describes the school of Buddhism long practiced in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. But Theravada represents only one of the eighteen or more schools that existed during Buddhism's early years. Another often used alternative for Hinayana is “Nikaya,” (“group” or “collection” in Sanskrit and Pali), which can refer to the early Buddhist sects. For clarification of this problematic terminology, see relevant entries in Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*.
- 37 Briefly, they are the truth of suffering; the truth of its origination; the truth of its cessation; and the truth of the path to its cessation.
- 38 Although Harrison states, “I doubt that I or anyone else can say anything definite about the origins of the Mahayana,” he does note that one of the earliest Mahayana texts, the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, was translated into Chinese about 150 CE, giving strong evidence that such ideas were circulating in India before that time. “Searching for the Origins,” 55. But Schopen asserts that “the history of Mahayana literature and the history of the religious movement that bears the same name are not necessarily the same thing.” “Inscription on the Kuśan Image,” 269.
- 39 Some define a bodhisattva as one who postpones full liberation until everyone reaches the same state. Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 11, finds evidence for Avalokitesvara's postponement of enlightenment in the *Kavandavyūha Sūtra*. Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. “bodhisattva,” 134, contradict this view, claiming that “the bodhisattva postpones nothing, instead striving to achieve buddhahood as quickly as possible.”
- 40 Mayumi Kamata and Miranda E. Shaw, “A New Identity: The Vow of a Being Destined for Enlightenment,” in Huntington and Bangdel, *Circle of Bliss*, 176.
- 41 Luis O. Gomez, *The Land of Bliss: The Paradise of the Buddha of Measureless Light* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 8–11.
- 42 Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 276; Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, 34–36.
- 43 Fujita Kotatsu, “Pure Land Buddhism in India,” trans. Taitetsu Unno, in *The Pure Land Tradition: History and Development*, ed. James Foard, Michael Solomon, and Richard K. Payne (Berkeley: Berkeley Buddhist Studies Series, 1996), 9–10; Gomez, *Land of Bliss*, xii. Western scholars in earlier periods theorized that Amitabha's worship originated in Persia and subsequently traveled along the Silk Road to India; today, many find it plausible that he evolved from indigenous Indian conceptions. Gomez, *Land of Bliss*, 35–36. Another recent view is that a synthesis of Indian, Persian and Hellenistic beliefs in the first century CE gave rise to Amitabha. Venerable Yifa and P.M. Romaskiewicz, “Sutra Introduction,” *Amitabha Sutra: Translated from the Chinese Version of Kumarajiva* (Rosemead, Calif.: Buddha's Light Publishing and Center for Sutra Translation and Research at University of the West, 2007), 31–33.
- 44 “It should be added, however, that [Amitabha] thus seen as an integral religious expression of the historical Buddha is different from regarding [him] as identical with the concept of Buddhahood developed among the followers of early and sectarian Buddhism. For them there was only one buddha, the historical Shakyamuni, present here and now.” Fujita, “Pure Land Buddhism in India,” 14–15.
- 45 Translation from Sanskrit, Gomez, *Land of Bliss*, 95.
- 46 According to Gomez, the emergence of a notion of buddhas and bodhisattvas as savior figures is one in which the “general presuppositions of Buddhism are redefined to include the possibility of spiritual progress by reliance on the spiritual power of the buddhas who have already attained perfection and have created a place where one can attain perfection with their assistance.” Gomez, *Land of Bliss*, 13.
- 47 Harrison, “Searching for the Origins,” 61.
- 48 Gomez, *Land of Bliss*, 97.
- 49 Fujita, “Pure Land Buddhism in India,” 14.
- 50 Exceptions are the bodhisattvas dressed in heavy robes from the Gandhara region; see, for example, *Standing Bodhisattva Maitreya*, ca. 3rd century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1991.75. Alexander the Great's forces conquered this region in 327 BCE, and Grecian-influenced sculpture was produced there well into the Common Era. However, considerable debate swirls around the identification of these figures. Kurt A. Behrendt, *The Art of Gandhara in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 55, n13.
- 51 If Harrison is right about the origins of the Mahayana, this may in fact capture something of the movement's early aspirations to emulate Shakyamuni's renunciation and asceticism as the best path to enlightenment. “Searching for the Origins,” 63–69.
- 52 Some scholars call this form a *kamandalu* or *amrita kalasha*; the latter contains the celestial ambrosia of immortality known as *amrita*. In contrast to the *kundika*, these types of ritual vessels lack a spout. See Huntington and Bangdel, “Crystal Kundika,” in *Circle of Bliss*, 344–45.
- 53 Mallmann, *l'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 119. See also Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 7, n6, for a detailed discussion of these and related attributes, based on Chutiwongs's research. Dorothy C. Wong, “Guanyin Images in Medieval China, 5th–8th Centuries,” in *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) and Modern Society: Proceedings of the Fifth Chung-Hwa International Conference on Buddhism*, ed. William Magee and Yi-hsun Huang (Taipei: Dharma Drum Publishing, 2007), 262–63, discusses the similarity between these two bodhisattvas in early Chinese art and concludes that Avalokitesvara's iconography is modeled on that of Maitreya.
- 54 Chutiwongs, “Iconography of Avalokiteśvara,” 26.
- 55 Mallmann *l'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 219.
- 56 Huntington, q.v. “Avalokitesvara (Lokanatha),” in Huntington and Bangdel, *Circle of Bliss*, 180. Jars and antelope skins remain difficult to assign to specific bodhisattvas, however, during the early years of Buddhist art. For example, Maitreya—because of his association with asceticism—not only habitually carried a jar but also sometimes appeared with an antelope skin draped over his shoulder, further complicating the task of identification. See Leidy, *Art of Buddhism*, 286, fig. 14.6; Pratapaditya Pal, *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2003), 26; and Mallmann, *l'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 219.
- 57 The Brahmanical creator god Brahma, for example, carries the lotus, as does Surya, the sun god.
- 58 Avalokitesvara's *padma* is usually seen frontally, appearing as a disk-shaped form, while the *utpala* typically appears in profile, sometimes as a cluster of small flowers. Chutiwongs posits that the Padmapani form evolved from the Buddha's flower-carrying attendants in the art of the early Kushan period (ca. 2nd century BCE–3rd century CE). “Iconography of Avalokiteśvara,” 28–30.
- 59 Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 106.
- 60 As Wong notes in the context of Chinese art, “one ... needs to address the role played by the bodhisattva in the broader developments of the Buddhist doctrine rather than merely as a direct representation of a particular Buddhist text.” “Guanyin Images in Medieval China,” 258.
- 61 Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. “Avalokiteśvara,” 82–83.
- 62 However, Maitreya and other bodhisattvas sometimes appear with buddhas in their crowns. And the buddha can be standing, especially in Pure Land imagery (see below).
- 63 Although Mallmann claims that we cannot be sure such early depictions do in fact portray Amitabha, the figure displays this buddha's characteristic posture and meditative mudra. Mallmann thinks that by the 9th century, textual sources consistently identify the buddha on Avalokitesvara's crown as Amitabha. *l'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 309.
- 64 For an illustration, see Leidy, *Art of Buddhism*, 62, fig. 3.5.
- 65 According to Ronald M. Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism: A Social History of the Tantric Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 113–14, Buddhism in the medieval era came to reflect the increasing feudalization of Indian society. A “sacralization of the sociopolitical environment” elevated regional rulers to the status of a universal monarch. This may have stimulated bodhisattva iconography to become more regal and ornate.
- 66 Curiously, crowned and bejeweled buddhas also emerged during the Pala period in India, a puzzling development that has elicited several explanations. See a recent discussion of this phenomenon in Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, 18–20.
- 67 Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 117–18; Alex Wayman, *The Buddhist Tantras: Light on Indo-Tibetan Esotericism* (New York: Kegan Paul, 1995), 3. Not surprisingly, much controversy swirls around these designations; even the use of capitalization is debated. See Charles D. Orzech, Richard K. Payne, and Henrik H. Sorensen, “Introduction: Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia, Some Methodological Considerations,” in *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, ed. Charles D. Orzech, Henrik H. Sorensen and Richard K. Payne (Boston: Brill, 2011), 3–18, for a recent discussion of these issues. My thanks to Patricia Karetzky for this source.
- 68 A *dharani* is a mnemonic device, or verbal formula, that encapsulates the meaning of an entire scripture. Practitioners repeat it in the same fashion as a mantra.
- 69 The tantric Buddhist and Brahmanical texts that began to appear in the 7th century codified the largely unrecorded practices of “yoga, medicine, folk magic, and local goddess cults,” according to Richard H. Davis. “The word tantra does not admit to a single unequivocal definition,” but derives from the vocabulary of weaving threads on a loom; it also recalls things threaded together, like palm leaf manuscripts (see cat. 20). Davis, “Introduction,” in *Religions of India in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 41.
- 70 Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, 21–24.
- 71 Cathleen A. Cummings dates the beginning of such developments to the 6th century in the caves of the Western Deccan. Cummings, “Tantra in India,” in Huntington and Bangdel, *Circle of Bliss*, 27.
- 72 Martin Brauen, *The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*, trans. Martin Willson (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 9.
- 73 Fujita, “Pure Land Buddhism in India,” 36.
- 74 Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 379. See plate 15 for illustration.
- 75 Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 198. See also Brauen, *Mandala*, 64.
- 76 “A mantra ... both evokes and vivifies the divinity being propitiated.” Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 394.
- 77 Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. “*Sadbanamala*,” 732.
- 78 Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 125–26.
- 79 Brauen, *Mandala*, 21.
- 80 For an example of one of Avalokitesvara's emanations as a fierce protector, see *Mahakala*, India, Pala period, 11th–12th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996.465.
- 81 Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 2, 124–25. But the *Sadbanamala Tantra* by no means encompasses all of Avalokitesvara's iconographic manifestations.
- 82 However, sometimes the textual descriptions that have survived diverge from the existing visual evidence. Since invaders destroyed most of the original Sanskrit texts during the expulsion of Buddhism from India, along with the vast majority of Buddhist artworks, scholars must piece together evidence from translated texts that have survived in China, Tibet, and other Buddhist countries; the record is therefore far from complete. Buddhism was also persecuted in China and Tibet during the 9th century; consequently, many early texts and artifacts were lost there as well.
- 83 Narendra Nath Bhattacharyya, *History of the Tantric Religion: An Historical, Ritualistic, and Philosophical Study* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999), 212.
- 84 The *Karandavyūha Sūtra* also has elements of mantra and mandala, and, as such, is a “proto-tantric” text. Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 40–41, 44; Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. “*Karandavyūha*,” 418.
- 85 Doris Meth Srinivasan dates the emergence of four-armed figures to the 2nd century BCE in Mathura. Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes: Origin, Meaning and Form of Multiplicity in Indian Art* (New York: Brill, 1997), 3. The caves at Udayagiri, ca. 401, contain multilimbed Brahmanical deities, such as a four-armed form of Vishnu and a twelve-armed Durga. See Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 190–91.
- 86 A 7th-century statue of the four-armed Avalokitesvara from the Swat Valley of present-day Pakistan is in the collection of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2012.247.
- 87 John Guy, *Lost Kingdoms: Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Early Southeast Asia* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2014), 228–30. See in particular cat. 134, 229–30. The four-armed form persisted in that region for several centuries, as evidenced by *Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, 8th–early 9th century, from Southern Thailand or Sumatra, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982.64. In the second millennium, Mahayana Buddhism gradually fell out of favor in this region, overtaken by the Theravada school, which traces its roots back to early Buddhism. Consequently, bodhisattva imagery diminished in the region. Chutiwongs, “Iconography of Avalokiteśvara,” 489–90.
- 88 This exquisitely preserved manuscript illumination, like those seen in cat. 20, adorns a copy of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in Eight Thousand Lines*. For an iconographically similar sculpture, see *Shadakshari Lokeshvara*, India, Pala period, 12th century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1982.457.

- 89 See Huntington, *Art of Ancient India*, 265, fig. 12.27, for illustration. Contrary to Huntington, Chutiwongs feels that other Indian depictions of the Ekadashamukha form survive. "Iconography of Avalokiteśvara," 49. Some scholars refer to this form as "eleven-faced" instead of "eleven-headed."
- 90 Thomas J. Pritzker, "A Preliminary Report on Early Cave Paintings of Western Tibet," *Orientalists* 27 (June 1996): 26–47.
- 91 Tove E. Neville, "11-Headed Avalokiteśvara, Kuan-yin, Kwan Eum and Kannon: Its Origin and Iconography in India, South-East Asia, Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea and Japan" (master's thesis, University of Hawaii, 1980), 8–13, 58, 62.
- 92 Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 41; Chandra, *Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara*, 48. In the scholarly literature, this form is sometimes named "thousand-handed" instead of "thousand-armed."
- 93 The sculpture in fig. 12 is in fact incomplete. It once had a separately cast mandorla, no doubt bringing the total number of arms to 1000. *Eleven-headed Arya Avalokitesvara*, Western Tibet, early 14th century, 2001-90-1, Philadelphia Museum of Art, <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/105992.html?mulR=9710652561>, accessed June 13, 2014.
- 94 Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 376; quoted in Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes*, 11.
- 95 Srinivasan, *Many Heads, Arms and Eyes*, 5.
- 96 Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 38–41, 100. See also Mallmann, *L'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 105. Chandra also identifies Brahma (who has multiple heads) and Shiva/Rudra (who takes a thousand-eyed form) as progenitors of Sahasrabhujalokeshvara. In fact, he sees Avalokiteshvara as the most important agent for bringing the many Brahmanical forms of Lokeshvara/Lokanatha into the Buddhist pantheon. Chandra, *Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara*, 11, 31–33, 48–49. Mallmann, *L'Étude d'Avalokiteśvara*, 82, discusses Brahmanical influence in relation to Avalokiteshvara's general significance as universal savior.
- 97 Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 115.
- 98 Huntington, *Ancient Indian Art*, 387–89.
- 99 Patricia Berger, "Later Buddhist Arts," Part 1, Docent Lecture Series, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, March 19, 1999, iTunes University.
- 100 Paul Copp, "Visualization and Contemplation," in Orzech, et al., *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 142.
- 101 Miyeko Murase, "Kuan-Yin as Savior of Men: Illustration of the Twenty-Fifth Chapter of the Lotus Sūtra in Chinese Painting," *Artibus Asiae* 33 (1971): 40–41; Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 39. Yu has undertaken the most thoroughgoing study of Avalokiteshvara's sinicization.
- 102 Erik Zürcher, "Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 2 (1982): 173.
- 103 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 153–56.
- 104 Susan Naquin and Chun-Fang Yu, eds., "Introduction: Pilgrimage in China," *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 10.
- 105 Zürcher, "Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism," 162; Schopen, "The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period," 5; Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, ix, xxiv; Murase, "Kuan-yin as Savior of Men," 39–41; Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 75, 91.
- 106 A replica of this cave was recently installed at China Institute, New York; see Fan Jinshi and Willow Weilan Hai, eds., *Dunhuang: Buddhist Art at the Gateway of the Silk Road* (New York: Dunhuang Academy and China Institute Gallery, 2013), 95–99; see also Fan Jinshi, *The Caves of Dunhuang* (Hong Kong: Dunhuang Academy, 2010), 226–37.
- 107 For examples, see Robert Ford Campany, "The Earliest Tales of the Bodhisattva Guanshiyin," in *Religions of China in Practice*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 82–96; Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 24, 151–94.
- 108 Campany, "Bodhisattva Guanshiyin," 84.
- 109 Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 303–4.
- 110 *Painting of Avalokiteshvara*, 1919,0101,0.28, British Museum, [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=6573&partId=1&searchText=1919,0101,0.28&page=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=6573&partId=1&searchText=1919,0101,0.28&page=1), accessed July 25, 2014.
- 111 Tansen Sen, "The Spread of Buddhism to China: A Re-examination of the Buddhist Interactions between Ancient India and China," *China Report* 48 (2012): 12, 16–17; Robert H. Sharf, "Prolegomenon to the Study of Japanese Buddhist Icons," in *Living Images: Japanese Buddhist Icons in Context*, ed. Robert H. Sharf and Elizabeth Horton Sharf (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 3.
- 112 Naquin and Yu, "Introduction," 16.
- 113 Robert H. Sharf, "The Scripture on the Production of Buddha Images," in Lopez, *Religions of China in Practice*, 261.
- 114 Albert Welter, "Buddhist Ritual and the State," in Lopez, *Religions of China in Practice*, 390–93.
- 115 Denise Patry Leidy and Donna Strahan, *Wisdom Embodied: Chinese Buddhist and Daoist Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2010), 75.
- 116 Wong, "Guanyin Images in Medieval China," 262, following Tucci, notes the eventual fusion of vase and lotus symbolism. In Tucci's words, "It is quite understandable that little by little the *kamandalu* became a lotus; the symbolism of the two is the same; the vase, in the liturgy of India, from the times of the rituals expounded in the *Brahmanas* up to the *ghatasdthapana* of the *puja* as it is practised even to-day, is the symbol of the magic universe where the priest operates ...; the lotus is equally the universe though its symbolism is twofold, cosmic and spiritual." Giuseppe Tucci, "Buddhist Notes, I: Apropos Avalokiteśvara," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 9 (1948): 178.
- 117 Tantric sutras mention the willow branch as a cure for disease. Annette L. Juliano, *Buddhist Sculpture From China: Selections from the Xi'an Beilin Museum, Fifth through Ninth Centuries* (New York: China Institute Gallery, 2007), 87, n6; Neville, "11-Headed Avalokiteśvara," 172. See also entry for cat. 7 in this publication. Interestingly, when thrown over the shoulder, the willow branch recalls the fly whisks that attendant figures hold in early Indian art to keep their lords free of pests. See, for example, *Naga Attendant Holding a Fly Whisk*, India, 3rd century, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 33.25. This similarity is noted in "Chih-p'ing: Water-moon Kuan-yin," *Kaikodo Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 174. For an example of a 6th-century Chinese *Guanyin ping*, see The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002.290.
- 118 According to Yu, the one of the earliest of these was made in China around 420. *Kuan-yin*, 35.
- 119 Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. "jingtu bian," "jingtu sansheng," and "Pure Land," 390–91, 683.
- 120 Quoted in David W. Chappell, "The Formation of the Pure Land Movement in China: Tao-ch'o and Shan-tao," in Foard, et al., *Pure Land Tradition*, 146.
- 121 Stanley Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 66; Zürcher, "Perspectives in the Study of Chinese Buddhism," 170.
- 122 Wong, "Guanyin Images in Medieval China," 257. In the *Visualization Sutra*, the meditator imagines Avalokiteshvara as hundreds of thousands of miles high, his head radiating "eighty-four thousand rays each one emanating a bodhisattva, the tip of each finger has eighty-four thousand pictures, each of which has eighty-four thousand colors, each of which has eighty-four thousand rays." Quoted in John C. Huntington, "Rebirth in Amitābha's Sukhāvati," in Foard, et al., *Pure Land Tradition*, 78.
- 123 Based on a Chinese tapestry that came to Japan in the 8th or 9th century, this subject became popular in the 13th century, and numerous Japanese paintings, prints, and textile versions exist. The Chinese tapestry has hung for centuries at the Taimadera in Nara Prefecture; pictures based on it are therefore also known as Taima Mandalas. Although this type of image is traditionally called a mandala, Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis feels that so-called Taima Mandalas more properly belong to the genre of the Pure Land transformation tableau, "a visual presentation of doctrinal or literary themes." Ten Grotenhuis, "Visions of a Transcendent Realm: Pure Land Images in the Cleveland Museum of Art," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* 78 (November 1991): 274. See also Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representations of Sacred Geography* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 13–23.
- 124 Wong, "Guanyin Images in Medieval China," 271; Chen, *Buddhism in China*, 172; Weinstein, *Buddhism under the T'ang*, 72; ten Grotenhuis, "Visions of a Transcendent Realm," 292.
- 125 Henrik H. Sorensen, "Central Divinities in the Esoteric Buddhist Pantheon in China," in Orzech, et al., *Esoteric Buddhism and the Tantras in East Asia*, 94. Vairochana (Resplendent One) is often the central buddha in esoteric iconography.
- 126 Berger, "Later Buddhist Art in China." Even though support for esoteric Buddhism reached its peak in China during the 8th and first half of the 9th century, Leidy speculates that its roots in that country go back to the 5th century. She also feels that its influence—contrary to some scholarly assessments—continued in China well beyond the time of its transmission to Japan in the 8th century. Leidy in Denise Patry Leidy and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment* (New York: Asia Society Galleries; Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 24.
- 127 Buswell and Lopez, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, q.v. "qianshou jing," 689. Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 59–72, describes this and related sutras in great detail. See also Chapter 7, 263–91, for a discussion of a related practice, the "Great Compassion Repentance."
- 128 Yukio Lippit, "Awakenings: The Development of the Zen Figural Pantheon," in Gregory Levine and Yukio Lippit, *Awakenings: Zen Figure Painting in Medieval Japan* (New York: Japan Society, 2007), 35. As noted above, some strains of the Chan tradition eventually became more eclectic and institutional, absorbing esoteric practices such as *Dabei Zhou* and the Pure Land *nianfo*.
- 129 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 235–39. For a representative Chinese example of this iconography, see the hanging scroll in the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, *Water and Moon Guanyin*, late 13th-early 14th century, 49–60. Yoshiaki Shimizu and Carolyn Wheelwright, eds., *Japanese Ink Paintings From American Collections: The Muromachi Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Art Museum, 1976), 48, identify the Potalaka Avalokiteshvara, developed in China during the Tang period, as the prototype for this imagery.
- 130 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 238.
- 131 Wen C. Fong dates the emergence of this form of Guanyin to the 1080s, when the artist Li Gonglin (ca. 1041–1106) "transformed the Indian icon into the Chinese image." Fong, *Beyond Representation: Chinese Painting and Calligraphy, 8th–14th Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 362; Helmut Brinker and Hiroshi Kanazawa cite textual evidence of an 8th-century depiction of the white-robed form by Xin Cheng. Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen: Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings*, trans. Andreas Leisinger (Zurich: Artibus Asiae, 1996), 136.
- 132 Brinker and Kanazawa, *Zen*, 136. For a reproduction, see Leidy, *Art of Buddhism*, 201, fig. 9.9. This iconographic tradition continued well into the Qing period (1644–1912). James Cahill writes that later Chan painters created "simple votive images of Kuan-yin ... painted in multiples as a devotional act, to be given to believers by the monk-artist, perhaps in return for temple offerings." He documents a case in which one artist painted five thousand pictures of Guanyin as a long-life offering. Cahill, "Continuations of Ch'an Ink Painting into Ming-Ch'ing and the Prevalence of Type Images," *Archives of Asian Art* 50 (1997/1998): 19–20.
- 133 Some scholars trace the bodhisattva's white hood to women's clothing worn during the Southern Song period (1127–1279), which may suggest not only the bodhisattva's feminization but also his/her accessibility to all. Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 251–53.
- 134 Julie Emerson, Jennifer Chen, and Mimi Gardner Gates, *Porcelain Stories: From China to Europe* (Seattle: Seattle Art Museum, 2000), 154.
- 135 Yu does not feel that the feminization of Guanyin resulted primarily from the introduction of tantric texts into China, as some other scholars, such as Chen, have argued. See Chen's *Buddhism in China*, 341–42. Yu finds little evidence that the Indian tantric deity Pandaravasi, a form of White Tara, was the model for the White-robed and Child-giving Guanyin. *Kuan-yin*, 248–51, 257.
- 136 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 5.
- 137 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 6.
- 138 According to Patricia Eichenbaum Karetzky, *Guanyin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21, "applying a sexual identity to a Buddhist deity is somewhat misdirected, for such divine beings transcend gender distinctions and sexual passion." In a similar vein, Dietrich Seckel writes, "A Bodhisattva is suspended between male and female in a way which affirms as well as negates (in that characteristically Buddhist sense) both natures, and yet manages at the same time to neither affirm nor negate them." Seckel, *Buddhist Art of East Asia*, trans. Ulrich Mammitzsch (Bellingham, Wash.: Western Washington University, 1989), 28.
- 139 Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra* (Boston: Shambhala, 1993), 1274–75.
- 140 Neville, "11-Headed Avalokiteśvara," 43; Chun-fang Yu, "P'u-t'o Shan: Pilgrimage and the Creation of the Chinese Potalaka," in Naquin and Yu, *Pilgrims and Sacred Sites in China*, 190–245.
- 141 Berger, "Later Buddhist Arts in China."
- 142 There were longstanding Confucian strictures against nudity in Chinese art, especially for female subjects. According to Karetzky, a woman's breast would never have been uncovered in Chinese art. *Guanyin*, 22.
- 143 The empty circular indentation in the forehead is the characteristic auspicious mark (*S: urna*) of buddhas and bodhisattvas. It probably once held a crystal (compare cat. 12).
- 144 Berger, "Later Buddhist Art in China."
- 145 Epprecht, "Perceiver of the World's Sounds," in *Kannon: Divine Compassion*, 13–14.
- 146 Unfortunately, the limited scope of this exhibition makes it impossible to consider Korean examples in depth. For useful sources, see Soyong Lee and Denise Patry Leidy, *Silla: Korea's Golden Kingdom* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013) and Washizuka Hiromitsu, Park Youngbok, and Kang Woo-bang, eds., *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity: Early Buddhist Art from Korea and Japan* (New York: Japan Society, 2003).
- 147 Michael Cunningham, "The Path of Kannon's Compassion and Appearance in Early Japan," in Epprecht, *Kannon: Divine Compassion*, 24–25; Jonathan W. Best, "The Transmission and Transformation of Early Buddhist Culture in Korea and Japan," in Washizuka, et al., *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity*, 25–28.
- 148 James H. Foard, "Ritual in the Buddhist Temples of Japan," in *Object as Insight: Japanese Buddhist Art & Ritual*, ed. Anne Nishimura Morse and Samuel Crowell Morse (Katonah, N.Y.: Katonah Museum of Art, 1995), 13. My thanks to Sherry Fowler for this source.
- 149 Best, "Transmission and Transformation," 25–26.
- 150 Foard, "Ritual in the Buddhist Temples of Japan," 12.
- 151 Best, "Transmission and Transformation," 25–26.
- 152 Sharf, "Prolegomenon," 3.
- 153 This is true in both in sculpture and architecture. The Horyuji complex has some of the oldest wooden buildings in the world, and wood as a material accounts for ninety percent of early Japanese sculptures. In the 7th and 8th centuries, camphor was the wood of choice. Indian scriptures prescribe sandalwood for Buddhist sculptures, but this species does not grow in Japan, so fragrant camphor was the closest indigenous approximation. In the late 8th century, cypress and nutmeg were used as substitutes. Washizuka, "Techniques of Early Buddhist Sculpture in Japan," in Washizuka, et al., *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity*, 136–37.
- 154 The Yumedono Kannon was a "secret" icon, kept in a closed tabernacle at Horyuji until the 19th century. The statue's hands hold a jewel at waist level, a gesture that apparently originated in Korean Buddhist art. Chari Pradel, "Early Buddhist Sculpture in Japan," Docent Series Lecture, Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, October 15, 2013, iTunes University. The Kudara Kannon holds a vase in the left hand, with the right outstretched in a variation of the *varada mudra*, and in the same manner as the Buddha in the famous Horyuji Shaka Triad. Tanabe Suburotsuke, "From the Stone Buddhas of Longxingsi to Buddhist Images of Three Kingdoms Korea and Asuka-Hakuho Japan," 47–48, 51–52; and Kim Lena, "Early Korean Buddhist Sculptures and Related Japanese Examples," 77, both in Washizuka, et al., *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity*. See fig. 4, in Tanabe, for a reproduction of the Kudara Kannon.



- 155 Sherry Fowler, "Travels of the Daihōonji Six Kannon Sculptures," *Ars Orientalis* 36 (2009): 185.
- 156 As Leidy writes, the thousand-buddha motif found in early Chinese Buddhist art, as in Cave 16 at Yungang, symbolizes "the existence of innumerable buddhas inhabiting myriad universes." *Mandala*, 22.
- 157 My thanks to Andrew Watsky for this information.
- 158 Morse and Morse, *Object as Insight*, 99.
- 159 Barbara Brennan Ford and Oliver R. Impey, *Japanese Art from the Gerry Collection in The Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 17–20; John M. Rosenfield, "Standing Images of Shō Kannon," in Christine Starkman, Miyeko Murase, and John M. Rosenfield, *Unrivalled Splendor: The Kimiko and John Powers Collection of Japanese Art* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2012), 42.
- 160 He appears in the circle of buddhas and bodhisattvas surrounding Dainichi (S: Vairochana) in the Court (or Hall) of the Central Dais of Eight Petals, and also on the left side in the center of the Court of Kannon. Ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas*, 3, 60–62. Sharf claims that the configuration of these two mandalas evolved in China rather than India. "Visualization and Mandala in Shingon Buddhism," in Sharf and Sharf, *Living Images*, 197. For an example, see *Mandala of the Womb World (Taizōkai Mandara)*, 13th–14th century, 21.240.2, Brooklyn Museum of Art.
- 161 The Juichimen form was introduced into Japan very early. *Standing Juichimen Kannon (Eleven-headed Avalokitesvara)*, 7th century, Tokyo National Museum, was unearthed in a sutra mound at Nachi. Amitabha rests on the crown; the figure holds a water vase and is made of gilt bronze. See cat. 34, in Washizuka, et al., *Transmitting the Forms of Divinity*, 258–59.
- 162 Ford and Impey, *Japanese Art*, 20.
- 163 Sherry Fowler, "Nyoirin Kannon: Stylistic Evolution of Sculptural Images," *Orientalism* 20 (1989): 58–59. Some scholars claim that the latter two forms are examples of the feminization of the bodhisattva, which occurred between the 9th to the 15th centuries. Cunningham, "Path of Kannon's Compassion," 30. Nyoirin's moustache in cat. 12 complicates an interpretation of this form as invariably feminine, however.
- 164 Buddhist hells (there are many of them) are states of mind endured by those who have committed heinous actions, and who experience the realms as truly existing, horrific places. Unlike the Christian concept of hell, those in Buddhist hells stay there only as long as their bad karma requires, which for most individuals, is a very long time.
- 165 Fowler examines this image set at Daihōonji comprehensively in "Travels of the Daihōonji," 178–214. See Fowler's article for illustrations of the works.
- 166 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *Selected Masterpieces of Asian Art* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1992), 24. In mandalas and other visual forms, *shittan* syllables often stand in for the deities. Fabio Rambelli, "Secrecy in Japanese Esoteric Buddhism," in *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion*, ed. Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen (New York: Routledge, 2006), 122. My thanks to Sherry Fowler for the reference.
- 167 Pure Land Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the mid–6th century. But this branch did not become an independent force until the 10th century. Ten Grotenhuis, "Visions of a Transcendent Realm," 288; Chappell, "Formation of the Pure Land Movement," 139; Kyotaro Nishikawa and Emily J. Sano, *The Great Age of Japanese Buddhist Sculpture: AD 600–1300* (Fort Worth: Kimbell Art Museum, 1982), 35.
- 168 Ten Grotenhuis, "Visions of a Transcendent Realm," 288.
- 169 Seckel, *Buddhist Art of East Asia*, 122.
- 170 Those with extremely negative karma, although admitted into the Pure Land because of Amida's grace, are not offered this honorific mode of transport.
- 171 Lippit, "Awakenings," 35.
- 172 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 241.
- 173 The paintings "were designed to be hung in the dormitories where lived the novices newly accepted for Buddhist training. These young people were still laymen and thus wore not the black robes of ordained priest but the white robes of initiates, a similarity of dress that must have encouraged them to identify with the image before them. Such paintings ... thus functioned as visual exemplars, enjoining the adepts to achieve comparable serenity and purity within themselves." "Isshi: Byaku-e White-Robed Kannon," *Kaikodo Journal* 15 (Spring to May 2000): 132, 279.
- 174 Yoshiaki Shimizu, "Zen Art?," in *Zen in China, Japan, East Asian Art*, ed. H. Brinker, R. P. Kramers, and C. Ouwehand (New York: Peter Lang, 1982), 86. Thanks to Andrew Watsky for this source.
- 175 Joji Okazaki, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting*, trans. Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis (New York: Kodansha International, 1977), 76–77, 80–82.
- 176 The temple of Myoshinji drew many female pilgrims and nuns. According to D. Max Moerman, no other temple-shrine complex in pre-modern Japan had a higher percentage of female pilgrims. Moerman, *Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Premodern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 181–85. My thanks to Andrew Watsky for this reference.
- 177 Michael R. Cunningham, *Buddhist Treasures from Nara* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1998), 145; Elizabeth ten Grotenhuis, "Saikoku Pilgrimage: Japanese Devotees Search for Kannon," in Virginia C. Raguin, Dina Bangdel, and F. E. Peters, eds., *Pilgrimage and Faith: Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam* (Chicago: Serindia Publications, 2010), 126–39.
- 178 Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 4.
- 179 Bangdel, "Tantra in Nepal," in Huntington and Bangdel, *Circle of Bliss*, 29.
- 180 Ulrich von Schroeder catalogues numerous Nepalese as well as Indian statues in Lhasa's Potala Palace collection. *Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet*, vols. 1–2 (Hong Kong: Visual Dharma Publications, 2001).
- 181 Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 253–54, 256; Bangdel, "Tantra in Nepal," 31–32.
- 182 Bangdel, "Tantra in Nepal," 30–31; Bangdel, "Pilgrimage Traditions in Nepal," in Raguin, et al., *Pilgrimage and Faith*, 63–64; Mary Shepherd Slusser, "Serpents, Sages, and Sorcerers in Cleveland," in *Art and Culture of Nepal: Selected Papers* (Kathmandu: Mandala Publications, 2005), 263–64.
- 183 Saffron mixed with water is considered to be *amrita* and is used for ritual purposes in Buddhist rites.
- 184 Pratapaditya Pal, *Art of Nepal: A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1985), 16, 18–19; Bangdel, "Tantra in Nepal," 29–30.
- 185 John K. Locke, *Karunamaya: The Cult of Avalokitesvara—Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal* (Kathmandu: Sahayogi Prakashan for Research Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 1980), 413; Pratapaditya Pal, "The Iconography of Amogaphaśa Lokeśvara," pt. 1: *Oriental Art* 7 (Winter 1966): 234–39; pt. 2: *Oriental Art* 8 (Spring 1967): 20–28; Bangdel, "Pilgrimage in Nepal," 82.
- 186 Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 38.
- 187 Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 188.
- 188 Pal, *Himalayas*, 23.
- 189 Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 31; Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 273.
- 190 Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 274.
- 191 Pal, *Art of Nepal*, 38; Mary Shepherd Slusser, "A Document on Himalayan Painting," in *Art and Culture of Nepal*, 397.
- 192 Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 58.
- 193 Bokar Rinpoche, *Chenrezig, Lord of Love: Principles and Methods of Deity Meditation*, trans. Christiane Buchet (San Francisco: ClearPoint Press, 1991), 15.
- 194 Matthew T. Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Mani bKa'-bum* and the Cult of Avalokitesvara in Tibet," in *Tibetan Buddhism: Realism and Revelation*, ed. Steven D. Goodman and Ronald M. Davidson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 85–86; Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 59.
- 195 From the *Mani Kabum*, as cited by Bokar Rinpoche, *Chenrezig*, 30–32.
- 196 Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 386–87; Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 12–13, 31–32.
- 197 Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 369, 454–55. Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Mani bKa'-bum*," 85, argues that while "ancient Tibet had some familiarity with the Bodhisattva, the cult of Avalokitesvara ... is a product of ... the 'later spread of the doctrine' beginning in the 11th century."
- 198 Notably the practice formulated by the 14th–15th century adept Thangtong Gyalpo, "Sadhana of Chenrezik: For the Benefit of All Beings as Vast as the Skies," in Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, *Chenrezik: For the Benefit of All Beings* (Woodstock, N.Y.: KTD Publications, 2014), 1–15.
- 199 Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism*, 58–60.
- 200 According to a 14th-century Tibetan text, *The Clear Mirror of the Royal Geneologies*, as cited by Ian Alsop: "From the hair between the emperor's eyebrows there emanated a mendicant on whose head the Buddha Amitabha dwelt. The mendicant, who was sent to fetch the tutelary deity, found it in the form of an eleven-headed Avalokitesvara which he brought back to Tibet and presented to the king who was very pleased." Alsop, "Phagpa Lokeśvara of the Potala," *Orientalism* 21 (1990): 58. A more complete account of this miraculous manifestation is in Gyurme Dorje, Tashi Tsering, Heather Stoddard, and André Alexander, *Jokhang: Tibet's Most Sacred Buddhist Temple* (London: Edition Hansjorg Mayer, 2010), 68–69.
- 201 Gyurme Dorje, *Tibet Handbook* (Bath: Footprint Handbooks, 2009), 89–90; Gyurme Dorje, et al., *Jokhang*, 68–69. The 14th Dalai Lama gives evidence of the Tibetan reverence for this icon. "Another impressive image [in the Jokhang] was that of Mahākārunikā ..., with one thousand arms and one thousand eyes. After I reached India, just before the Cultural Revolution and shortly before this renowned Mahākārunikā image was destroyed, one night I had a very clear dream in which I approached the original statue inside the Great Temple. I looked at the image, which was almost winking to indicate that I should draw near. With deep emotion and faith, and a close feeling of empathy, I approached and embraced that image, as you would a person. Then, immediately it started reciting a verse. ... The main point of the verse is the admonishment to maintain one's courage, resolve or determination. Shortly thereafter, the image of Mahākārunikā was destroyed, so I had the thought that this dream may indeed have been relevant!" "Personal Reminiscences of the Great Temple by His Holiness the Dalai Lama," in Gyurme Dorje, et al., *Jokhang*, 31.
- 202 Gyurme Dorje, *Tibet Handbook*, 115; Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 417–18; Alsop, "Phagpa Lokeśvara," 51–61.
- 203 Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting*, 12. For an exhaustive investigation of these figures, see Karl Debreczeny, *The Black Hat Eccentric: Artistic Visions of the Tenth Karmapa* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2012) and David P. Jackson, *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2009). In the latter source, see especially Karl Debreczeny, "Bodhisattvas South of the Clouds: Situ Panchen's Activities and Artistic Inspiration in Yunnan," 223–225. Two rare and unusual 17th-century works attributed to Karmapa Choying Dorje are in the Cleveland Museum of Art, *Avalokitesvara*, 1968.280, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Seated Avalokitesvara, The Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion*, 1972.123.
- 204 Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting*, 9, 11. Although the Jacksons describe the Tibetan attitude toward *thangka* painting as belonging to a bygone era, the whole passage could be rendered in the present tense.
- 205 Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, 150.
- 206 Gilles Béguin, "Techniques of Tibetan Painting and Sculpture," in Marilyn M. Rhie and Robert A. F. Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum; New York: Tibet House; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 385–86.
- 207 Marilyn M. Rhie, "Tibetan Buddhist Art: Aesthetics, Chronology, and Styles," in Rhie and Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion*, 54; Denise Patry Leidy, "Buddhist Art," in James C. Y. Watt and Denise Patry Leidy, *Defining Yongle: Imperial Art in Early Fifteenth-Century China* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 61–73; 88–90.
- 208 Rhie, "Tibetan Buddhist Art," 65.
- 209 Jackson, *Patron and Painter*, xi; David P. Jackson, *The Nepalese Legacy in Tibetan Painting* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art, 2010), xix–xxiii.
- 210 See Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, for fine Indian-inspired examples of early Tibetan sculpture.
- 211 Von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculptures in Tibet*, vol. 1, 17; Béguin, "Techniques of Tibetan Painting and Sculpture," 388.
- 212 This is a rare and important Tibetan site, one of the few temple complexes to survive largely undamaged from the Cultural Revolution.
- 213 The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, however, has equated *mani* with compassion and *padme* with wisdom; *hum* symbolizes the union of the two. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, 130–31.
- 214 Bokar Rinpoche, *Chenrezig*, 80–81.
- 215 In fig. 35, the realms (clockwise from top right) are: human, hungry ghost, hell, animal, and the segment at upper left combines both the god and demigod realms.
- 216 Kapstein, "Remarks on the *Mani bKa'-bum*," 93.
- 217 Lorne Ladner, ed., *Wheel of Great Compassion: The Practice of the Prayer Wheel in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 15–21, 24–26.
- 218 Schopen, "A Note on the 'Technology of Prayer' and a Reference to a 'Revolving Bookcase' in an Eleventh-Century Indian Inscription," in *Figments and Fragments*, 345–49. On page 348, the author implies that these devices would more accurately be called "recitation"—not prayer—wheels. But practitioners not only recite mantras when using them but also adopt a prayerful attitude while aspiring to generate benefit for all beings. In that light, the traditional name seems appropriate.
- 219 Ladner, *Wheel of Great Compassion*, 31–32, 87–93.
- 220 Quoted in Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, 130.
- 221 Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-la*, 115.
- 222 Ladner, *Wheel of Great Compassion*, 9.
- 223 Words to his nephew, Billy James, in 1902 (quoted in Leon Edel, *Henry James, The Master: 1901–1916* (New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1972), 124.
- 224 Yu, *Kuan-yin*, ix-x.
- 225 Epprecht, "Perceiver of the World's Sounds," 14–15.
- 226 See "A to Z Photo Dictionary: Japanese Buddhist Statuary," <http://www.onmarkproductions.com/html/kannon.shtml#>, accessed May 10, 2014.
- 227 "Canon Logo," <http://www.canon.com/corporate/logo.html>, accessed August 29, 2014, reproduces the original logo. According to the Canon website, "This title reflected the benevolence of Kwanon, the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, and embodied the Company's vision of creating the best cameras in the world. The logo included the word with an image of 'Kwanon with 1,000 Arms' and flames." Thanks to Karen St. Pierre for this information.
- 228 Peter Matthiessen, *The Snow Leopard* (New York: Penguin, 2008; first published 1978), 101. My thanks to Eve D'Ambra for encouraging me to read this book.
- 229 Mandala makers do not actually use sand, but crushed minerals that have been colored with vibrant dyes. They have a wide array of mandala designs that correspond to many different Tibetan Buddhist deities in addition to Avalokitesvara.



## Embodying Compassion in Buddhist Art: Catalogue Entries

All dimensions are height x width x depth.

The reader may consult the glossary on page 73 for definitions of foreign terms.

See the time line on the inside covers for dates of historical periods and style categories referenced in this publication.

### Image

The objects in this section of the exhibition represent some of the many forms Avalokiteshvara has taken throughout the centuries. The bodhisattva's iconography initially emerged in India about two thousand years ago. At first playing a subsidiary role as Buddha's attendant (cat. 1, fig. 39), Avalokiteshvara later became an independent focus of veneration, providing opportunities for "auspicious viewing." His diverse manifestations display graceful sitting and standing postures, significant gestures, recognizable attributes, and an idealized body; these features are both iconic (that is, a direct manifestation of his presence) and at the same time, symbolic. Each visual aspect points to a Buddhist ideal, especially the inseparability of compassion and wisdom. An outstretched hand (cat. 13) or an upraised teaching gesture (cat. 3) express these values; the lotus conveys his purity (cat. 4), while the willow symbolizes his healing abilities (cat. 7). In esoteric forms, he has multiple heads and limbs to signify increased power (cat. 6). Avalokiteshvara's most easily identifiable attribute is a small buddha on his crown, which represents his spiritual progenitor Amitabha (cat. 2).

The sculptures, East Asian hanging scrolls, and Tibetan paintings (T: *thangkas*) in this section all demonstrate these key visual attributes and meanings. The works show how Avalokiteshvara's original Indian iconography transforms and takes on new, efficacious associations as it spreads north and east through Asia. Especially significant is the shift from a princely figure in the Indian context to a more maternal, nurturing presence as Avalokiteshvara became established in China and Japan (compare cats. 2 and 11).

*Four-Armed Avalokiteshvara* (detail), China or Tibet, 18th–19th century; gilded metal with inlays; 10 1/4 x 7 1/4 in.; Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 85.04.0682.



Fig. 39. Shakyamuni Buddha, with Avalokiteshvara (left) and Maitreya (right) as attendants, Mahabodhi Temple, Bodhgaya, Bihar, India, 2013.

1. *Amitabha Buddha*, Central Tibet, 19th century; pigment on cloth; 38 1/2 x 25 1/2 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, F1997.6.3.

Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, fills the space in this painting with a serene yet commanding presence. He is exemplar to all around him, who are beings (*S: sattva*) intending to achieve the same enlightened state (*S: bodhi*). Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara appears here as part of Amitabha's retinue. Although seated immediately to the Buddha's right, Avalokiteshvara is much smaller; he is just one of a group known as the "Eight Great Bodhisattvas."<sup>1</sup> Yet he also enjoys a special relationship to Amitabha, who is his spiritual mentor and the head of his family.

In depicting Avalokiteshvara's posture and attributes, the Tibetan painter closely followed Indian precedents; Chinese traditions informed his rendering of the idealized landscape. White in color and holding a lotus (both features suggesting purity), the bodhisattva sits in a sinuous, relaxed posture with an antelope skin draped over his shoulder. He also exhibits more general bodhisattva attributes: the headdress, clothes, and ornaments of a medieval Indian prince. In contrast, the presentation of Amitabha reveals his status as a renunciant: sitting in crossed-legged yogic posture, his hands in meditation gesture, he wears the robes of a fully ordained monk. Sanskrit texts such as the *Sukhavativyūha Sutra* describe how Amitabha—through his exemplary Mahayana vows to benefit all beings—created Sukhavati, the Land of Bliss that is the setting of this painting. Avalokiteshvara manifests there as well, radiating beneficial light throughout the universe.<sup>2</sup>



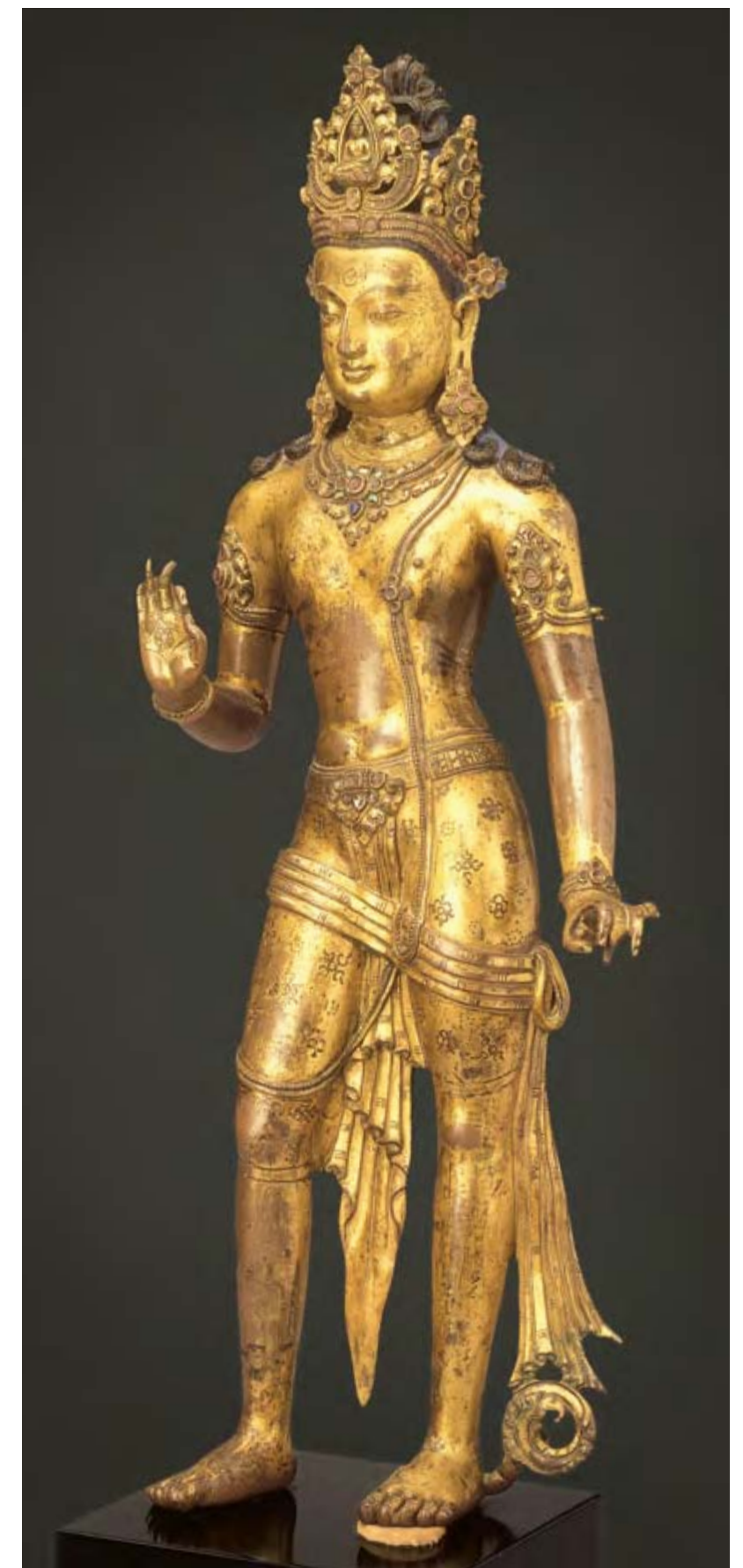
2. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the Form of Khasarpana Lokeshvara*, India, Bihar or Bengal, Pala period, late 11th–early 12th century; schist; 37 1/2 x 18 1/2 x 6 3/4 in.; Asia Society, New York, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.40.

According to Indian liturgical descriptions, this youthful form of Avalokiteshvara resides in the womb of Mount Potalaka, the bodhisattva's sacred island. Khasarpana Lokeshvara is the "Sky-gliding Lord of the World." Typical of the Indian Pala style, this stele displays richly decorated surfaces and elaborate features, such as the double lotuses, complex jewelry, stylized matted hair, and floating ribbons.<sup>3</sup> In its original context, the work would have been painted and installed in a niche on the side of a temple (see fig. 37). Those circumambulating the perimeter of such buildings would look up reverently at Khasarpana from below.

A beneficent but imposing bodhisattva sits with right leg pendant, while awakened beings known as Wisdom Buddhas float above. Surrounded by his canonical retinue—which distinguishes this form from the closely related Padmapani (fig. 7)—compassionate Tara to his right makes the gesture of reassurance and holds a blue lotus. On Khasarpana's left, the wise Bhrikuti, with a miniature reliquary in her matted crown of hair, joins her hands in adoring supplication (*S: anjali mudra*). Together these female deities personify the indivisibility of Avalokiteshvara's core qualities: compassion and wisdom. Khasarpana displays his unbiased care for all beings through his outstretched right hand; drops of nectar feed Suchimukha, a hungry ghost who kneels below. Such beings habitually languish in agony, unable to satisfy their unquenchable desires. But the all-powerful, compassionate Khasarpana is able to nurture this needle-nosed, supplicating spirit with life-giving elixir (*S: amrita*).<sup>4</sup>

3. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, Nepal, Transitional period, late 10th–early 11th century; gilt copper alloy with inlays of semiprecious stones; 26 3/4 x 11 1/2 x 5 1/4 in.; Asia Society, New York, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection, 1979.47.

With consummate skill, the Nepalese metalworker who created this standing Padmapani (Lotus Bearer) adapted Indic models for one of Avalokiteshvara's earliest and most characteristic forms. Smilingly gently with a sweet expression, Avalokiteshvara's face effectively conveys the essence of the bodhisattva's compassionate, beneficent nature. His ornate three-lobed crown contains a seated Amitabha, an icon that denotes Avalokiteshvara's spiritual heritage. Elegant and lithe, this naturalistic—yet at the same time idealized—figure stands in the typical South Asian triple-bend posture (see fig. 8). His raised right hand makes the teaching gesture (*S: vitarka mudra*) and reveals the wheel of the Buddha's precepts (*S: dharmachakra*) on the palm. The other hand once delicately grasped the stem of a lotus (now lost) that rose from the scroll at his heel, with the flower blossoming above his left shoulder. One of the earliest extant South Asian works to feature inset semiprecious stones, this sculpture retains some of these gems in the figure's lush ornaments.<sup>5</sup> In its original context, the fire gilding on this cast-metal sculpture would have gleamed on the altar of a candlelit temple, suggesting a kind of divine radiance.





4. *Avalokiteshvara, One of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas*, Eastern Tibet, 18th century; pigment on cloth with silk mount; 39 3/8 x 20 3/4 x 1 1/2 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2008.9.

Avalokiteshvara appears here in ways that both conform to—and radically depart from—well-established pictorial traditions. His Indian-derived iconography includes bodhisattva apparel, upswept hair, antelope-skin attribute, and glowing halo surrounding his head. These features are presented, however, in a blue-green landscape setting totally unknown in Indian art. The Tibetan painter borrowed this approach from the Chinese painting style, employed since the Tang dynasty to render awe-inspiring mountainous landscapes. Yet the work is also idiosyncratic. The mountains serve as a simple seat for the bodhisattva, and the flowers behind him are surreally over scaled.

In Avalokiteshvara's relaxed posture, left leg crossed over the pendant right, the painting evokes elements of both the Indian pensive bodhisattva type and the Chinese Water-Moon Guanyin. Yet departing from all known iconographic precedents, Avalokiteshvara's spiritual progenitor, Amitabha, does not appear as a small statue on the bodhisattva's crown. Instead, this work presents the celestial buddha on top of Avalokiteshvara's blooming lotus, held at arm's length. This unique presentation captures a psychological depth in the relationship between Amitabha and his heart son, quite different from Avalokiteshvara's subsidiary role in cat. 1, as merely one of the Eight Great Bodhisattvas.

The painting demonstrates how forms of Avalokiteshvara were transmitted across cultures and over time. It derives from a Tibetan prototype that was part of a set of Eight Great Bodhisattvas executed in the 16th century; two centuries later, the important Tibetan lineage holder Situ Panchen Chokyi Jungne commissioned copies of this set for Palpung monastery near Derge; through Situ Panchen's influence, the iconography traveled as far as the southwestern frontiers of China, and a close version of this composition survives as a wall painting in the Jade Peak Temple (C: Yufengsi), in Lijiang, Yunnan.<sup>6</sup> Such replicas were valued for conveying the spiritual qualities of revered prototypes.

5. *Four-Armed Avalokiteshvara*, China or Tibet, 18th–19th century; gilded metal with inlays; 10 1/4 x 7 1/4 in.; Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 85.04.0682.

The “Six-Syllable Lord of the World” (S: Shadakshari Lokeshvara) is a four-armed esoteric—or tantric—form of Avalokiteshvara. The figure sits with legs crossed (S: *padmasana*) on a double-lotus throne—indicating both yogic attainment and divinity. A small head of his spiritual progenitor Amitabha—one of Avalokiteshvara's most characteristic attributes—rises above the bodhisattva's five-lobed crown, and the skin of the gentle *krishnasara* antelope drapes over his left shoulder. Fire gilding adorns this cast-metal sculpture; the technique of inlaid semiprecious stones derives from Nepal, as seen in cat. 3.

This form of Avalokiteshvara no doubt endures because of Shadakshari Lokeshvara's connection to the Sanskrit mantra *om mani padme hum* (or *mani* mantra), which Tibetans consider especially efficacious. Throughout contemporary Tibet, and within Tibetan refugee communities in India, Avalokiteshvara is still depicted much as he appears in Indian iconography created more than ten centuries ago (compare figs. 10 and 36).



6. *The All-seeing Lord Avalokiteshvara*, Tibet, 14th–15th century; ground mineral pigment on cotton; 29 1/4 x 25 1/4 x 1 1/4 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2006.66.190.

In the presence of Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara made a vow: “As long as there is even one being who has not attained awakening, I will strive for the benefit of all. And if I break this promise, may my head and body split into a thousand pieces.” The bodhisattva pursued this aspiration for eons but one day realized that—despite his heroic efforts—innumerable beings still remained in samsara. Despairing, he burst into a thousand pieces. Amitabha reconstructed Avalokiteshvara, giving him eleven faces and a thousand hands in order to increase his ability to relieve suffering.<sup>7</sup>

Taken from one of the many legends recorded in the *Mani Kabum*, this Tibetan story provides an explanation for the multiple heads and arms in this form of Avalokiteshvara. The Thousand-armed Lord of the World (S: Sahasrabhujalokeshvara) stands with ten heads in addition to his smiling frontal face, his thousand arms forming a divine nimbus. “All-seeing” because an eye appears on every palm, he gazes simultaneously in every direction. Rendered in an early Nepalese-inspired style, the striking central figure occupies a brilliant red, vibrant space, against a grid of small niches.

Flanking Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara are his attendants, the yellow “jewel-holding” Manidhara and white four-armed Shadakshari Mahavidya.<sup>8</sup> Indian teachers, Tibetan lamas, the Eight Great Bodhisattvas, various celestial buddhas, wrathful deities, and protectors fill the niches. This arrangement conforms to the hierarchy of enlightened beings in Tibetan Buddhism. The main meditational deity looms large in the center, with the all-important lineage gurus occupying the highest position of respect.<sup>9</sup>

A medieval Indian nun, Bhikshuni Shri Lakshmi (T: Ani Palmo), venerated this form of Avalokiteshvara and appears in the line of lineage gurus at top, second from the left, beside Shadakshari Lokeshvara (see fig. 10 and cat. 24). She promulgated a purification and fasting ritual associated with this deity that Tibetans still practice today. The invocation for this practice reads:

May the starving spirits be satiated,  
bathed, and always cooled by the streams  
of milk flowing from the hands of  
Arya-Avalokiteshvara.<sup>10</sup>



7. *Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin)*, China, Tang dynasty, late 7th–8th century; gilt leaded bronze, piece-mold cast; H. 9 1/6 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1933, 33.91.

At a bit over nine inches tall, this gilt bronze Guanyin probably once stood on a home altar, the object of individual worship. Elevated above the ground on a double lotus pedestal, the figure derives from Indian traditions in certain respects. Amitabha (C: Amituo), the Buddha of Infinite Light, sits on the bodhisattva's crown; an ambrosial vase appears in his left hand. Yet the Chinese bodhisattva also departs from South Asian precedents in style and attributes. Although Indian artists depicted Avalokiteshvara in flowing garments, their depictions were more full bodied and firmly situated on the earth (see cat. 2). In contrast, Guanyin's thin, animated scarves lend the sculpture a weightless, diaphanous quality. They fall in calligraphic curves around the bodhisattva's sinuous, elongated body, forming a complex arrangement of void spaces.

The willow branch held near the bodhisattva's shoulder represents the most important Chinese innovation in this work. Although Sanskrit texts mention the willow in association with Avalokiteshvara's healing powers,<sup>11</sup> the plant apparently never appeared in Indian iconography. Chinese artists were the first to feature the willow as one of Guanyin's important attributes.<sup>12</sup> And perhaps since Chinese Buddhists had little contact with Indian wandering ascetics, they often transformed Avalokiteshvara's squat, spouted vessel (S: *kundika*) (see fig. 6) into the elegant, slim-necked Guanyin vase seen here.

8. *White-robed Guanyin*, inscribed by Quanshi Zongle (1318–1391), China, Ming dynasty, late 14th century; hanging scroll, ink on paper; image: 36 x 12 7/8 in., mount: 70 x 17 5/8 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Edward Elliott Family Collection, The Dillon Fund Gift, 1982, 1982.3.3.

This monochrome ink depiction of White-robed (S: Pandaravasini; C: Baiyi) Guanyin departs from earlier, more ornamental and iconic traditions. The thoroughly sinicized presentation nevertheless retains traces of Avalokiteshvara's original Indic symbolism. The artist positions Guanyin resting with head on hand, seated on a rocky promontory that evokes Avalokiteshvara's island Potalaka (which at this point, many Chinese believed to be located in their own country). The figure gazes into an empty expanse; only a ghostly moon painted in reserve appears at top left. The artist followed Chinese landscape conventions in the radically asymmetrical composition, free gestural brushstrokes, and splattered ink used to suggest Guanyin's dematerialized setting. Lacking the usual attributes, such as a nimbus or willow branch, the bodhisattva resembles a scholarly gentleman rather than a Buddhist deity. The contemplative Guanyin reposes in quiet reverie.<sup>13</sup>

Quanshi Zongle, who held an important administrative position in the Chan institutional hierarchy, added the poem at upper left. Contrary to the norms of Chinese writing, the inscription reads from left to right. It begins with the sentence: "Like a speck of dust, ephemeral is the body, so is the doctrine ephemeral, like a speck of dust." The poem concludes with the insight that only when all beings have reached realization will Guanyin's "all-compassionate heart rest."<sup>14</sup> Complementing the subtle visual aspects of this painting, the inscription makes clear how profoundly the Chinese Avalokiteshvara exemplifies the bodhisattva ideal.<sup>15</sup>



9. *White-robed Kannon (Pandaravasini Avalokiteshvara)*, Japan, Muromachi period, late 14th century; hanging scroll, ink on silk; image: 37 15/16 x 19 3/8 in., mount: 73 1/4 x 23 15/16 in.; Princeton University Art Museum, Gift of Duane Wilder, Class of 1951, y1992-6.

As with Baiyi Guanyin in cat. 8, this depiction of White-robed (J: Byakue) Kannon is a model for the contemplative life. Both works reflect the Chan/Zen penchant for rendering the bodhisattva in monochrome ink, but this painting's style is much less gestural and abbreviated than that of the previous work. The androgynous figure appears in the bodhisattva's paradise, known as Fudarakusan in Japan, with finely painted details that convey Kannon's complex iconography and scriptural associations. Kannon reclines in a cross-legged position, resting head on hand and dreamily gazing toward a waterfall in the distance. A transparent halo surrounds the bodhisattva's body, indicating divine status. Near the right elbow is a small vase containing a willow branch.<sup>16</sup> To the lower left, Zenzai Doji (S: Sudhana) reverently bows. According to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*, this youth sought the bodhisattva in his quest for enlightenment.

The work brings together many closely related iconographic traditions. It contains elements of the Potalaka, Water-Moon, Waterfall Gazing, and White-robed Kannon. This proliferation of overlapping forms poses challenges in assigning nomenclature. But such multiplicity is thoroughly in keeping with the bodhisattva's many guises in the *Lotus Sutra*; in that canonical scripture, he displays a protean ability to adopt any form in order to benefit beings. In this manifestation, the bodhisattva transmits wisdom to the pilgrim, thereby assisting in the youth's search for ultimate truth.

10. *White-robed Kannon*, attributed to Shugen (fl. 1469–1521), Japan, Muromachi period; hanging scroll, ink on paper; 32 1/4 x 14 5/16 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Purchase, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Leo Steinberg (Dorothy Seiberling, class of 1943); Elizabeth Woodcock, class of 1925; Bertha Mather McPherson, class of 1928 and Philip Johnson, by exchange, 2014.29.

This Japanese depiction closely corresponds to the work in cat. 8—not surprisingly, since White-robed Kannon descends from Chinese sources developed during the Tang period.<sup>17</sup> Shimizu tells us that "Zen traveled eastward in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and Japan was the soil on which it thrived. Early Japanese paintings related to Zen Buddhist themes reveal a wholesale transplanting of both the genre and form of works originating from China, mainly because so many Japanese monks were trained at Chinese monasteries, and a group of Chinese masters trained monks in Japan. Zen Buddhism ... provided Japan with a source of extraordinary creative energy that is unparalleled."<sup>18</sup>

Following austere Chinese models, this work presents Byakue Kannon without attributes, except for the enveloping white robe that forms a hood over the bodhisattva's head. Loose gestural brushstrokes barely define the figure against the blank background beyond Fudarakusan's cliffs. The simple composition centers on the contemplative gesture of hand to chin, as Kannon serenely gazes into unarticulated space.





12. *Nyoirin Kannon (Cbintamanichakra Avalokiteshvara)*, Japan, Edo period, ca. 1693; wood with gold paint, gold leaf, lacquer, and crystal inlays; 16 9/16 x 12 1/8 x 10 1/4 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund 1956, 56.39.

Nyoirin is an esoteric manifestation of Kannon, whose name refers to the wish-fulfilling jewel and the wheel of the Buddhist doctrine. This Japanese form of Avalokiteshvara often has six arms, two of which typically hold these objects. But this two-armed Nyoirin does not carry the attributes associated with his name.<sup>21</sup> However, jewels and a wheel do adorn the figure's necklace in this example. According to Fowler, the jewel represents the promise of achieving worldly goals like material success and good health. But these attributes can also indicate larger aspirations, such as complete liberation from the cycles of rebirth known as samsara.<sup>22</sup>

Carved of wood, and then lacquered and gilded, this beguiling figure sits in a posture of royal ease amidst a golden pool of drapery folds, while resting the left hand on a small pedestal meant to suggest Fudarakusan. The other hand touches the cheek, in a gesture of reflection. In materials, technique (such as lacquer), and ornamentation, it is a thoroughly East Asian creation. Yet the figure's posture and attributes suggest its Indian ancestry, transmuted through China.<sup>23</sup> Nyoirin Kannon also manifests Avalokiteshvara's typical qualities of salvation and mercy. A famous legend recounts that this form of the bodhisattva appeared in response to Kukai's prayers, as the Shingon monk was in danger of drowning. This deity quite frequently is the principal object of worship in esoteric Buddhist temples, for example, at Nachi (see cat. 18). An inscription on the bottom of this sculpture reveals that several women donated it to a Japanese temple in 1693.<sup>24</sup>



11. *Songzi Guanyin, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara as the Bestower of Children*, China, late Ming or Qing dynasty, 17th–18th century; sandalwood with traces of pigment and gilding, single-woodblock construction; 5 3/8 x 2 3/4 x 2 1/2 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1951, 51.15.

The *Lotus Sutra* recounts that Avalokiteshvara bestows children of either sex, depending on the mother's wishes:

If a woman wishes to give birth to a male child, she should offer obeisance and alms to Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds and then she will bear a son blessed with merit, virtue and wisdom. And if she wishes to bear a daughter, she will bear one with all the marks of comeliness, one who in the past planted the roots of virtue and is loved and respected by many persons.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this, the Chinese most often supplicated the Child-giving (C: Songzi) Guanyin for male heirs, the only gender qualified for the most prestigious profession of government service. Derived from the White-robed form, Songzi Guanyin developed during the Ming dynasty. Missionaries and foreign visitors nicknamed this form of Guanyin the "Goddess of Mercy." European depictions of Mary and the Christ Child circulating in China during late Imperial period may have in part inspired the iconography of this work. Yet unlike Mary, Guanyin never bears children herself, only bestows them on others.<sup>20</sup>

Small in size, the sculpture was probably a precious object of personal devotion. Playing the role of fertility goddess, this Chinese form of Avalokiteshvara appears unambiguously feminine. Songzi wears voluminous robes and cradles a child in her right arm; her left is now missing. She tenderly supports her tiny charge, as if to respond to her worshippers' ardent desire for offspring.



13. *Descent of Eleven-headed Kannon (Avalokiteshvara)*, Japan, Kamakura period, 14th century; hanging scroll, ink, color, gold, and cut gold on silk; image: 33 15/16 x 15 1/4 in., mount: 64 1/4 x 19 1/2 in.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Charles Wrightsman Gift, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, Dodge, Pfeiffer and Rogers Funds, and funds from various donors, 1972, 1972.181.

In Pure Land iconography, Kannon is the most important attendant to the Buddha Amida (S: Amitabha). He leads the Welcoming Descent (J: Raigo) of bodhisattvas who come to greet dying devotees and offers them a lotus throne (fig. 24), which symbolizes their transfer from the mundane world to Amida's pure realm of Gokuraku (S: Sukhavati). In paintings, Kannon usually appears within the bodhisattva entourage, but some depictions, such as an important Kamakura period scroll in Todaiji, Nara, show Kannon alone. This example resembles the Todaiji work in presenting a single Eleven-headed (J: Juichimen) Kannon,<sup>25</sup> an esoteric manifestation sometimes seen in Pure Land imagery.

Floating down from Gokuraku on a pedestal of clouds, a lotus supporting each foot, Kannon emanates golden light rays while holding a vase that contains a lotus. The bodhisattva's right hand makes a compassionate gesture (S: *varada mudra*) derived from Indian iconographic traditions. However, Juichimen here actually has twelve faces, unlike the usual Indic form, in which all of the heads add up to eleven (compare fig. 11). Directly above the main face, six smaller ones form a circle like a diadem; four more are arranged above those, and a haloed Amida tops them all. In addition, an icon of this same buddha stands on Kannon's crown. Gorgeous jewels and sumptuous fabrics adorn the androgynous deity,<sup>26</sup> contributing to a radiant vision of the bodhisattva that reflects the splendor of Amida's Pure Land.



## Pilgrimage

According to Naquin and Yu, pilgrimage gives “individuals a direct experience of the transcendent and an opportunity to show devotion and seek blessings.”<sup>27</sup> In medieval India, Avalokitesvara’s legendary island Potalaka represented the ultimate destination for seekers of the bodhisattva, and as his worship spread throughout Asia, each country established its own locations for face-to-face encounters with the deity. The scrolls and sculptures seen here relate to several of Avalokitesvara’s most important pilgrimage sites: the Potala Palace and Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tibet (cats. 14, 15); the Saigoku pilgrimage route in Japan (cats. 18, 19); and Guanyin’s most important center of worship in China, Mount Putuo Island (cat. 17, fig. 40). Such places have seen a resurgence of Buddhist pilgrimage in recent decades, especially at Mount Putuo and Lhasa.

By the Edo period (1615–1868), the Saigoku pilgrimage was replicated many times at different locations in Japan. Several mountains were designated Japanese versions of Potalaka, including Mount Myoho at Nachi.<sup>28</sup> A 15th-century inscription encouraged Japanese pilgrims to visit such places: “If you once travel there, you will be protected from all afflicting boils and painful disasters. The ten evils and five sins will vanish when you once set foot on that holy site. And peace, in this world and the next, is guaranteed to whomever makes pilgrimage there.”<sup>29</sup> Countless pilgrims over many centuries have traveled to Avalokitesvara’s sacred sites seeking such worldly and spiritual benefits.



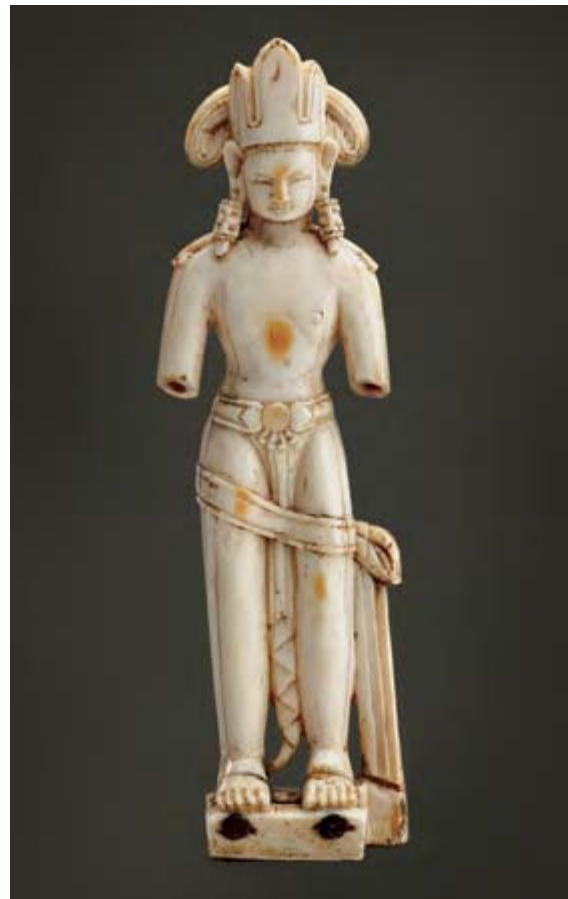
Fig. 40. *A View of Mount Putuo of the Southern Sea, China*, late 19<sup>th</sup> century; cloth, paper, pigment, wood, metal, string; image: 21 5/8 x 39 15/16 in., scroll: 27 15/16 x 44 1/16 in.; Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, 70/11655.

14. *Phagpa Lokeshvara*, Nepal, 16th–17th century; ivory; H. 5 1/2 in.; The Newark Museum, Purchase 1973 Wallace M. Scudder Bequest Fund, 73.130.

The Tibetan epithet *phagpa* means noble, so this unusual manifestation of Avalokiteshvara is the Noble Lord of the World. Despite its small size, this sculpture evokes one of the holiest objects of worship in Tibet; the original resides in its own chapel in the Potala Palace, where—according to tradition—it may have served as King Songtsen Gampo's personal icon. The Potala Phagpa Lokeshvara has been frequently and faithfully copied in wood, metal, and in this case, ivory.<sup>30</sup>

Over the centuries, many pious worshippers have visited the Potala to venerate Phagpa Lokeshvara. Some donate funds to refresh the statue's gilding; photographs reveal thick, bumpy layers of paint on the face, giving evidence of frequent re-applications. On a rare occasion when Phagpa Lokeshvara's clothing was removed for re-gilding, the researcher Ian Alsop discovered the work's simple, archaic composition, reproduced here in this ivory replica. The figure has a three-lobed, mitre-like crown, the hair is bunched in a large bun on each side of the head, and from the ears dangle bell-like earrings. It wears a simple loin-cloth and low-slung sash across the hips (a sign of Nepalese workmanship). Both arms hang down his sides; the right hand—now lost—would have displayed an open palm—the gesture of generosity. A small square recess in the back probably once held consecratory material.

Ivory icons are rare in the Himalayas, and the work—although small—would have been expensive. No doubt its original owner acquired it as an auspicious or protective object. It may have also been the focus of practice and personal devotion. Perhaps it was even a pious memento of a pilgrimage to the Potala Palace in Lhasa. According to Alsop, the original Phagpa Lokeshvara is a precious relic of the early years of Mahayana Buddhism in the Himalayas, and because of its prestige and importance, many small replicas such as this one were produced.<sup>31</sup>



15. *Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara*, Tibet or China, 17th–18th century; gilded bronze; 15 15/16 x 9 1/2 in.; Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 85.04.0160.

Like *Phagpa Lokeshvara* (cat. 14), this modestly scaled sculpture reproduces a monumental sacred image in the Tibetan capital, Lhasa. The standing *Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara* displays the typically Indic array of heads that gives this form its name. They tower above the main face like a lofty crown. Various attributes reflect Avalokiteshvara's wide-ranging powers: Amitabha icon, dharma wheel, lotus, jewel, bow and arrow, and vase. (The customary prayer beads are missing.) Directly addressing the worshipper before him, Avalokiteshvara makes the typical gesture of generosity with the lower right hand, while the central ones come together in the respectful *anjali mudra*.

Departing from canonical iconography, the figure has ten arms instead of the usual eight, indicating a special variant of the eleven-headed form. According to legend, the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo miraculously manifested a life-sized clay statue of Eleven-headed and Ten-armed Avalokiteshvara. Filled with consecrated items,<sup>32</sup> including a smaller sandalwood statue of Avalokiteshvara from India, the sculpture initially served as Songtsen Gampo's main meditational deity in his Potala residence; later, the king moved it to the Northern Inner Sanctum of the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa. At some point over its history in the Jokhang, the statue acquired one thousand arms, with an eye in the palm of each hand. Known as Mahakarunika, it has been the most sacred of all images there, with the exception of Jowo Shakyamuni. Tibetan pilgrims venerate it in the Jokhang's Supreme Compassion Chapel.<sup>33</sup> For the original owner of this replica, probably familiar with its reference to the sacred image in Lhasa, this statue of Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara may well have been an artifact of an imagined pilgrimage, not one actually undertaken.

16. *Kannon (Avalokiteshvara)*, Japan, Edo period (1615–1868); hanging scroll, ink and color on silk; image: 61 7/8 x 33 in., mount: 87 7/8 x 39 1/2 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Gift of Daniele Selby '13, 2014.20.1.

A 7th-century Chinese pilgrim to India described how avidly followers of Avalokiteshvara pursued him: "Those who strongly desire to see this Bodhisattva do not regard their lives, but crossing the water ... climb the mountain forgetful of its difficulties and dangers."<sup>34</sup> Such is one context for understanding this depiction of Kannon on Fudarakusan, the Japanese name for the bodhisattva's paradise. Given its monumental size, the work probably once hung in a temple or a large private residence. Many features identify the setting as Kannon's island realm, including the steep, craggy cliffs overhanging turbulent waves, and the presence of Zenzai Doji—the boy pilgrim known as Sudhana in Sanskrit—in the lower left corner. Several iconographic elements evoke Indian traditions, especially the relaxed posture, Amitabha in the elaborate headdress, and the South Asian-derived ornaments and flowing garments. But certain features are distinctively East Asian: the cliffs that resemble Chinese scholar's rocks; the feminization of the figure; and the sinicized attribute of a vase with willow branch.<sup>35</sup> Pan-Asian iconographic and stylistic currents coexist in this painting, and together, they create a visionary presentation of Kannon looming over the diminutive pilgrim who stands in awe at the bodhisattva's feet. According to Shinno Toshikazu, pilgrimage is "one of the great pillars" of Japanese religion,<sup>36</sup> and the desire for direct contact with Kannon's presence has motivated many a journey.



17. *The Complete Map of the Imperially Established South Sea Mount Putuo Area*, China, Qing period, early 20th century; hand-colored woodblock print; 43 5/16 x 24 7/8 in.; Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History, ASIA/0578.

The Chinese consider mountains to be abodes of the deities, and going on pilgrimage is literally "paying one's respect to a mountain."<sup>37</sup> This colorful map depicts Mount Putuo (C: Putuoshan), one of China's Four Sacred Mountains and Guanyin's special domain. A Chinese surrogate for Avalokiteshvara's legendary Indian island, Putuoshan is a small, hilly landmass off the coast of Ningbo, Zhejiang Province. At Putuoshan, Guanyin is said to appear miraculously in a blaze of golden light at the Cave of Tidal Sound (this location is marked on the map in the lower left corner). Over time, pilgrims experienced Guanyin's presence at different spots on the island. For hundreds of years, their testimonials have encouraged others to journey to Putuoshan in search of direct encounters with the bodhisattva.<sup>38</sup>

This hand-painted early-twentieth-century map outlines the prescribed route for pilgrims, helpfully indicating the customary paths with curving orange lines. It also labels the important stops on the pilgrim's quest. Eye catching yet surprisingly abstract, the map probably served as a souvenir for the returning visitor rather than an actual guide for navigating the island's pilgrimage sites.<sup>39</sup>

Vulnerable to bandits and marauding military brigades, the buildings on Putuoshan have been destroyed many times over the course of the island's history, most recently during the Cultural Revolution. In the 21st century, reconstructed monastery complexes and manicured grounds once again attract large numbers of pilgrims, and a modern sixty-five foot statue of Guanyin now dramatically reasserts the bodhisattva's presence on the island.<sup>40</sup>





18. *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala*, Japan, Edo period, 16th–early 17th century; hanging scroll, ink, colors, and gold leaf on paper; 59 x 59 1/2 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Pratt Fund and Betsy Mudge Wilson, Class of 1956, Memorial Fund, Purchase, 2004.10.

Already established as a place for the worship of local gods (J: *kami*), Nachi became part of the Kumano pilgrimage during the 11th century in Japan. Faith in Kannon and in Pure Land salvation motivated pilgrims to journey to Nachi, which was incorporated into the Saigoku circuit during the early modern period (see cat. 19). The *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* depicts this important site, the first stop on the Saigoku circuit. Many pilgrimage mandalas (J: *sankei mandara*) such as this one survive from the 17th century, depicting at least a dozen sites. About twenty-five Nachi *mandara* remain, by far the most frequently represented subject.<sup>41</sup>

Although it portrays a sacred realm, this type of “mandala” departs iconographically from the Indian esoteric tradition; it is a pictorial map in contrast to a two-dimensional diagram of the cosmos, as seen in cat. 25. The picture’s flattened composition and boldly outlined features contrast sharply with the refined Japanese ink paintings represented in this exhibition (cats. 9 and 10), reflecting the practical intentions of *mandara* painters and their patrons. Itinerant priests and nuns used such large pictures to illustrate lectures, as they toured the country promoting the practice of pilgrimage to lay believers. The clear, well-defined features advance the *mandara*’s didactic purpose, reflecting the perspective of ordinary pilgrims—here a man and woman appearing over ten times as they travel through the sacred precinct.<sup>42</sup>

Dressed in white pilgrims’ garb and carrying staffs, the couple enters at lower right near the red gate that marks the spot where passengers seeking Kannon’s paradise depart in boats for Fudarakusan. The pilgrims wind their way along the narrow paths between many temples and other significant landmarks, a journey that culminates on Mount Myoho at top left. During their journey, the couple will certainly pay homage to Nyoirin, the Saigoku pilgrimage icon at Nyoirindo (now called Seigantoji), and ask for Kannon’s blessings.<sup>43</sup>



19. *Saigoku Pilgrimage Scroll*, Japan, Meiji period, late 19th century; ink stamps on paper mounted on silk; mounted prints: 36 x 14 5/8 in., mount: 58 1/2 x 22 3/4 in.; Private Collection.

Since the Heian period (794–1185), Kannon’s followers have undertaken the Western Provinces pilgrimage (J: Saigoku junrei) in hopes of miracles, penance, or adventure. Some traverse it on behalf of departed loved ones or to improve their own karma. At first, only religious ascetics and aristocrats undertook the arduous 620-mile circuit, but by the Edo period (1615–1868), the Saigoku junrei had become a popular endeavor, with Nachi as its first stop (cat. 18). At each of its thirty-three stations (the number corresponding to Avalokiteshvara’s manifestations in the *Lotus Sutra*), a pilgrimage temple’s main hall houses the principal image of Kannon, often kept secret and revealed to visitors only once a year, once every thirty-three years, or never. Hidden in closed shrines, such images—most frequently in the form of the Thousand-armed, Nyoirin (see cat. 12), or Eleven-headed Kannon (see cat. 13)<sup>44</sup>—are no less spiritually potent for their inaccessibility. In fact, their status as secret icons intensifies their mystique. As a substitute for direct access to Kannon’s visible form, each temple offers small prints (J: *ofuda*) of their icons, and pilgrims often collect these images, occasionally affixing them to scrolls that encompass all of Saigoku’s thirty-three stops. As such, these works represent the entire pilgrimage in miniature.<sup>45</sup>

An inscription on the back of this scroll tells its history and attests to the filial piety of Taro, son of the pilgrim who collected all the examples of *ofuda* seen here while traversing the Saigoku junrei. The father had intended to assemble the icons into a scroll format, but—as the inscription poignantly tells us—“how could we imagine he would pass away from a sudden illness?” Taro had the scroll mounted in 1897, perhaps as a memorial during the traditional forty-nine day mourning period following the death of his father. The accumulated array of Kannon images, many in the thousand-armed form, gives an impression of the bodhisattva’s limitless presence.<sup>46</sup>



## Practice

This section highlights representative objects in relation to daily spiritual activities, such as spinning prayer wheels (cat. 26, fig. 41), reciting, copying, or venerating sutras (cats. 20-22), paying homage to statues and paintings (cats. 23, 28-30), reciting mantras (cat. 27), and engaging in elaborate Vajrayana techniques of visualizing the deity (cat. 24). Both art and practice aim to purify devotees of impediments blocking their potential for unbiased wisdom and compassion so that they themselves can emulate Avalokiteshvara. Although each country represented in this exhibition, and every Mahayana subdivision within these countries, has different traditions and forms of practice, the common goal is to seek liberation and assist others in achieving ultimate freedom. The prayer wheel, beads, mandala, devotional icons, *thangka*, and calligraphic texts in this section establish Avalokiteshvara's key role in assisting devotees to attain Mahayana Buddhism's most sacred goals.



Fig. 41: Elderly Tibetan Woman with Prayer Wheel and Recitation Beads, Lhasa Barkhor, Tibet, 2006.



**20. Five Leaves from an *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Manuscript*, India, Bihar, Nalanda monastery, Pala period, late 11th century; ink and opaque watercolor on palm leaf; each approx. 2 7/8 x 22 3/8 in.; Asia Society, New York, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Acquisitions Fund, 1987.1.**

These five palm leaves are among a handful of surviving illustrated medieval manuscripts, all that remains of a once flourishing Indian Buddhist painting tradition. Carried to Nepal and Tibet, such beautifully adorned texts helped establish the Pala painting style in the Himalayan region. Written in *lantsa* (or *kutila*) script, this manuscript is one of the most revered sutras in Mahayana Buddhism, the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines*.<sup>47</sup> To commission or execute such a lavish manuscript was believed to garner enormous merit for the patron as well as the artist. Monasteries such as Nalanda and Vikramashila once contained huge numbers of such works, preserved between wooden covers and stored on library shelves. Material evidence, such as the residue of offerings, indicates that *Prajnaparamita* texts were treated as icons to be venerated.<sup>48</sup>

The long, narrow pages conform to the natural size of a palm leaf. Two holes in each leaf indicate where threads passed through the stack to form a “book.” Eight major life scenes of the Buddha bracket the central depictions of bodhisattvas with their retinues. These “ornaments” were believed to increase the manuscript’s auspiciousness and efficacy.

Padmapani appears on the third leaf, the bodhisattva’s white form outlined in black against a bright red background. His presence does not directly correlate with the contents of this page of the text, but elsewhere, the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* praises Avalokiteshvara as Lokanatha, “Lord of the Universe, he who protects the world.” His appearance here may represent his role as protector.<sup>49</sup>



**21. *Sumidera Heart Sutra (Sumidera shingyo)*, Japan, Nara period, 710–794; handscroll, ink on paper; 9 x 16 11/16 in.; Princeton University Art Museum, Museum purchase, Fowler McCormick, Class of 1921, Fund, 2012-99.**

This scripture is the “heart”—or distilled essence—of the lengthy *Prajnaparamita Sutra*, an early Mahayana text. The *Heart Sutra* unmasks the mind’s tendency to imagine things as solid, concrete, and independent of the conditions from which they arise. As an alternative, it offers an awakened, nondual perspective on perceptions and experience—in other words, the perspective

of a buddha. Mahayana Buddhists believe that a bird cannot fly without two wings; so too wisdom cannot thrive without compassion. Appropriately, it is Avalokiteshvara who speaks the *Heart Sutra*’s message.

According to tradition, the great teacher Kukai is said to have ritually copied this text in a temple located in the northeast corner (J: *sumidera*) of ancient Nara in Japan. The temple’s location gives the *Sumidera Heart Sutra* its name. This form of Japanese calligraphy—“standard script”—(J: *kaisho*) is based on Tang Chinese prototypes.<sup>50</sup> The text reads from right to left, and from top to bottom. An abbreviated title appears in the upper right corner. Most columns have seventeen characters, standard for sutra transcriptions in China and Japan during this period. One column of eighteen characters gives the sutra’s Sanskrit mantra.<sup>51</sup>

A sophisticated philosophical treatise, the *Heart Sutra* is also chanted to ensure stability, peace, and the prevention of natural disasters.<sup>52</sup> Copying it by hand is a meritorious ritual act; this particularly embodied form of Buddhist practice occurs at many Japanese temples.



**22. Page from the *Illustrated Miracles of Kannon, Gold-Inscribed Kannon Chapter of the Lotus Sutra*, Japan, Edo period (1615–1868); silk, ink, and gold; 14 1/2 x 13 1/2 in.; The Newark Museum, Purchase 1909 George T. Rockwell Collection, 9.2314.**

This text entitled the *Illustrated Miracles of Kannon* derives from the Universal Gateway chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*. The chapter focuses solely on Avalokiteshvara and is often excerpted as a stand-alone scripture called the *Guanyin Sutra*, or in Japanese, *Kannonkyo*. It begins with a dialogue between Shakyamuni and a bodhisattva named Inexhaustible Intent who wants to know why Avalokiteshvara is called “Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.” The Buddha recounts Avalokiteshvara’s thirty-three forms and the many deeds he performs for his followers.<sup>53</sup>

Because East Asian Buddhists revere this text, many versions of the *Guanyin Sutra* exist, some lavishly hand painted, and others, inexpensively printed. During the Ming and Qing periods, the sutra appeared most often in folding book form. The earliest Japanese versions of the *Kannonkyo* are handscrolls,<sup>54</sup> but this later deluxe edition adopts the Chinese book format. It includes more than twenty scenes in two volumes. The scene depicted in this example can be found in early-15th-century Chinese illustrated manuscripts.<sup>55</sup> Here a grimacing villain with a threatening spear has forced the white-robed man off the cliff. Sharp spikes below indicate the falling man’s certain death, but the calm, seated bodhisattva comes to the rescue. “The long arm of Kuan-yin stretches across the sky and reaches the man in trouble,” in Murase’s words.<sup>56</sup> The elongated arm is a delightful visual invention, and the picture quite vividly brings to life a passage from the *Lotus Sutra*: “Suppose you are pursued by evil men who wish to throw you down from a diamond mountain. Think on the power of the Perceiver of Sounds and they cannot harm a hair of you!”<sup>57</sup>

**23. *Avalokiteshvara*, India, Pala period, 9th century; copper alloy; 4 1/2 x 3 x 2 1/8 in.; long-term loan from the Nyingjei Lam Collection to The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, L2005.9.4.**

This is the only metal sculpture in this exhibition to retain its full-body halo, which symbolizes Avalokiteshvara’s radiating spiritual energy. At first glance, the sculpture seems to depict Padmapani, one of Avalokiteshvara’s earliest and most widespread manifestations in India (compare fig. 7). His left hand holds the eponymous *padma* or lotus, while the right makes the characteristic gesture of generosity, and an image of Amitabha appears on the crown. Yet closer inspection reveals two additional arms, one holding prayer beads, the other grasping what appears to be a three-stalked staff (S: *tridanda*), a wandering ascetic’s attribute that sometimes appears with multi-armed Indian statues of Avalokiteshvara.<sup>58</sup> The sculpture’s multiple limbs suggest an early tantric form.

Like the Tang Chinese work in cat. 7, this small cast-metal sculpture no doubt served as a personal icon, easily carried on pilgrimage or placed on a home altar as a focus for practice. Because of the wear on the sculpture, its owners most likely frequently lustrated it, ritually bathing the object with unguents like butter and fragrant liquids. Yijing, a 7th-century Chinese pilgrim to North India, wrote of such embodied devotional activities when he lived at the renowned monastic community of Nalanda. He advised practitioners to offer flowers and incense and bathe the sculptures with water, also cleaning them with a perfumed paste made of ground sandalwood. Yijing counseled his readers to treat sacred images as if the worshipper were actually in the Buddha’s presence.<sup>59</sup>



24. *The All-seeing Lord with Four Arms, Avalokitesvara Chaturbbuja*, Tibet, 14th–15th century; pigment on cloth; 22 1/4 x 18 1/2 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, C2002.8.1.

Practitioners visualize this four-armed (S: *chaturbbuja*) form of Avalokitesvara when reciting the mantra *om mani padme hum*. As Studholme observes, the Tibetan use of this mantra “is a basic, foundational practice taught to children and beginners. Yet it is also a practice that not even the most advanced practitioner would ever wish to leave behind. Its recitation is one of the central pillars of the Tibetan religious system.”<sup>60</sup>

Shadakshari Lokeshvara (Six-Syllable Lord of the World) sits in the center of this religious icon (T: *thangka*), with elongated torso and slender waist. This early Tibetan painting has Nepalese-inspired stylistic features, such as the intensely red color scheme juxtaposed against a dark blue field scattered with flowers. Avalokitesvara’s serene, composed visage conveys encouragement to those who aspire to emulate his compassionate equanimity. In his right hand, he holds a tiny string of prayer beads (S: *mala*), an indication of mantra practice. To the left of Avalokitesvara’s head, a small figure wearing a ceremonial black hat represents the Karma Kagyu lineage, one of the four great schools of Tibetan Buddhism. This is the Gyalwang Karmapa, who willingly reincarnates life after life to guide his followers.<sup>61</sup> Painted red and standing in the right border is Avalokitesvara’s spiritual mentor, Buddha Amitabha. Below, several seated lay devotees make abundant offerings to their meditational deity.<sup>62</sup> They pay homage to a bodhisattva who—as John Huntington notes—“represents the paradigm of the perfected practitioner.”<sup>63</sup>



25. *Avalokitesvara Mandala*, India, Dharamsala, September 1991; painting on cloth; image: 22 3/4 x 22 3/4 in., framed: 29 3/4 x 29 1/2 in.; Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art, 92.11.1025.

Tibetan mandalas appear in numerous forms and serve many purposes. They play a part in tantric initiations and are aids to meditation and visualization, functioning as a repository of significant symbols and elemental relationships that can be memorized and brought to mind during practice. An anonymous expatriate artist in Dharamsala executed this example, commissioned to honor the Dalai Lama during his visit in 1991 to the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art on Staten Island. Since the Tibetan people consider their spiritual leader to be an emanation of Avalokitesvara (T: Chenrezig), the Museum requested a Chenrezig mandala for this occasion.<sup>64</sup>

The painter followed traditional Tibetan iconography in this modern rendering. No element in the work is purely decorative; every item brims with meaning and associations. A series of concentric circles, made up of flames, thunderbolts (S: *vajra*), and multicolored lotus petals defines the outer boundaries the deity’s sacred realm; within, a field contains auspicious symbols and meditating adepts. Brightly colored superimposed squares indicate the floor plan of Chenrezig’s palace, with ornamental gateways opening in each of the cardinal directions. An eight-petaled lotus appears in the palace, with the deity occupying the center. He does not manifest here in bodily form, as in fig. 9, but as a pinkish-white lotus that signifies both Chenrezig and the head of the Padma family, Amitabha. Symbols of the other Wisdom Buddhas stand symmetrically on four of the petals radiating from the center. In using such a mandala, the practitioner would internally generate an entire perfected cosmos, identifying with the central deity. All meditative activities aim to emulate Chenrezig’s wisdom and compassion.



26. *Prayer Wheel*, Tibet, 19th century; metal, wood, bone, paper; 11 x 2 3/4 in.; The Newark Museum, Gift of Mary Pyne Cutting, 1982, 82.82, photo: Robert Goodbody, Courtesy of The Newark Museum.

Popular in Tibet for at least five centuries, the prayer wheel comes in different sizes and functions in many contexts. Usually a metal cylinder, the wheel rotates on an axle, around which are wound strips of paper inscribed with mantras (most commonly *om mani padme hum*). Attached to the drum is a weight at the end of a chain (missing in this example), which maintains the wheel’s motion when in use. Practitioners spin it clockwise, believing that this multiplies many thousands-fold the effects of activating the sacred syllables.<sup>65</sup>

The decoration on this hand prayer wheel includes Avalokitesvara’s mantra *om mani padme hum* in large letters circling the barrel. Written in *lantsa*—an Indian-derived script often used to write mantras and scriptures—the syllables are punctuated with icons of the five Wisdom Buddhas. A bone collar reduces the friction of the rotating metal against the wooden handle. At the top of the barrel, a band of skulls reminds the user of impermanence. This *memento mori* spurs the Buddhist practitioner to engage in vigorous practice.

Numerous complex practices involve prayer wheels, including many that require the visualization of light. One instructional text states: “Light beams from the great Dharma wheel take the delusions [and] sufferings ... of all sentient beings in the six realms and cause these to be collected and absorbed into the six-syllable wheel. All the disturbing thoughts, karmas, seeds, and imprints are burnt, destroyed, and purified.”<sup>66</sup>

27. *Mother of Pearl Prayer Beads*, Tibet, early 19th century; mother of pearl, coral, ivory, silver alloy, copper alloy; 21 3/4 x 2 1/8 x 1/2 in.; The Rubin Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Anne Breckenridge Dorsey, C2012.49.

Employed throughout Asia, Buddhist prayer beads (S: *mala*) serve to count the repetitions of a sacred utterance, similar to the way Christians use rosaries. They come in various forms: wrist *malas* have twenty-one or twenty-seven beads; most longer versions, like this example, are composed of 108 primary beads, an auspicious number in ancient Indian and Tibetan traditions. A larger “guru bead” helps practitioners note when they have completed a full cycle of mantra recitation, as do the spacer beads, made of coral in this Tibetan example. As hundreds and thousands of repetitions accumulate, the practitioner moves separately attached counter beads, appearing here on two beautiful red silk cords with tassels. The silver bell and thunderbolt ornaments on the counters symbolize wisdom

and compassion. When not in use, *malas* are worn like a necklace or wrapped around the left wrist.<sup>67</sup>

*Malas* come in a variety of materials that correspond to different practices. For the six-syllable mantra *om mani padme hum*, the practitioner usually chooses a white or crystal *mala*, like the one Avalokitesvara holds in cat. 24. Purportedly once owned by a princess in Eastern Tibet, this *mala* is made of especially fine and hard-to-obtain materials.<sup>68</sup>

Buddhist prayer beads are more than just counting devices. Often blessed by the practitioner’s teacher, the implement is thought to embody the beneficial power of mantra recitation and the lineage that promulgates the practice. While wishing to free all beings from suffering, the meditator recites the *mani* mantra, moving one bead for every repetition of the six syllables. In the Tibetan system, each syllable corresponds to the six realms of samsara. A skilled practitioner imagines Avalokitesvara’s transformative effects in each of these realms as she repeats the mantra.<sup>69</sup>

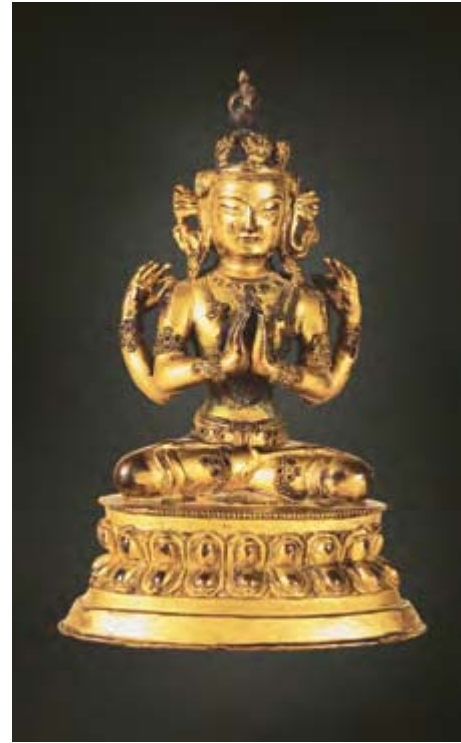




28. *Amitayus*, China, Qing dynasty, 18th century; gilt bronze; H. 7 1/8 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Gift of Daniele Selby '13, 2014.31.4.



29. *White Tara*, Sino-Tibetan, 19th century; bronze with cold gold and inlays; H. 7 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Gift of Daniele Selby '13, 2014.31.1.



30. *Six-Syllable Lord of the World (Shadakshari Lokeshvara)*, Tibet, 18th century; gilt bronze; H. 5 3/4 in.; The Frances Lehman Loeb Art Center, Vassar College, Gift of Daniele Selby '13, 2014.31.3.

Amitayus (cat. 28), the Buddha of Infinite Life, is an alternative form of Amitabha (see cat. 1), but unlike the latter—who wears monkish robes—he is adorned with celestial jewels and a five-lobed crown. In his lavish adornments, he resembles a bodhisattva, and as his name indicates, Amitayus serves as a focus of longevity practices. So too does the female bodhisattva shown here sitting on a high throne, White Tara (cat. 29). She is distinguished from her related manifestation Green Tara (fig. 5) by her seated crossed-legged posture in *padmasana*. Similar to many esoteric forms of Avalokiteshvara, she has additional eyes: in her case, on the palms, forehead, and soles of the feet. This increases her efficacy in assisting devotees. The statue evinces the typical Tibetan technique of applying paint, or “cold gold,” to deities’ faces. Finally, Avalokiteshvara (T: Chenrezig) (cat. 30) completes the familial triad. According to Tibetan tradition, Chenrezig emerged in a ray of light emanating from his spiritual father, Amitabha/Amitayus, while White Tara in turn was born from the bodhisattva’s compassionate tears.

## Notes to Catalogue Entries

- In art, these figures often flank either Shakyamuni or Amitabha and include such well-known bodhisattvas as Manjushri, Maitreya, and Vajrapani, as well as more obscure ones, such as Sarvanivaranavishkambin.
- Jeff Watt, *Amitabha Buddha*, no. 85, Himalayan Art Resources (hereafter HAR), <http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm?iCode=85&submit2=Search>, accessed June 24, 2013.
- Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, 129; Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 159–61.
- Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara in the Form of Khasarpana Lokeshvara*, 1979.40, Asia Society Museum: The Collection in Context, [http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search\\_object.asp?keywords=khasarpana&ObjectID=544](http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search_object.asp?keywords=khasarpana&ObjectID=544), accessed March 11, 2013.
- Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara*, 1979.47, Asia Society Museum: The Collection in Context, [http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search\\_object.asp?keywords=bodhisattva+avalokiteshvara&ObjectID=551](http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search_object.asp?keywords=bodhisattva+avalokiteshvara&ObjectID=551), accessed March 21, 2013.
- Junghee Lee, “The Origins and Development of the Pensive Bodhisattva Images of Asia,” *Artibus Asiae* 53 (1993): 311–57; Debreczeny, “Bodhisattvas South of the Clouds,” 222–51; Jeff Watt, *Avalokiteshvara*, no. 65829, HAR, <http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm?iCode=65829&submit2=Search>, accessed June 24, 2013.
- Bokar Rinpoche, *Chenrezig*, 32–33.
- Manidhara (Manidharin) is thought to be male, Shadakshari Mahavidya, female. The iconography for these two attendant figures is not fixed, and artists sometimes render them in different colors with varying numbers of arms. Compare *Avalokiteshvara*, no. 73807, HAR, <http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm?iCode=73807&submit2=Search>, accessed March 29, 2013.
- Jeff Watt, *Avalokiteshvara*, no. 211, HAR, <http://www.himalayanart.org/image.cfm?iCode=211&submit2=Search>, accessed June 24, 2013.
- From the Eleven-headed, Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara practice. Wayman, *Buddhist Tantras*, 79. See also Barbara Lipton and Nima Dorjee Ragnubs, *Treasures of Tibetan Art: Collections of the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Jacques Marchais Museum, 1996), 149.
- The Dharani Sutra of Invoking Avalokiteshvara Bodhisattva to Dissipate Poison and Harm*, translated during the Eastern Qin dynasty (317–420), recounts that Shakymuni told those suffering from horrible diseases to offer Avalokiteshvara willow branches and pure water. Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 49, 78–83. Mark MacWilliams, “Living Icons: *Reizō Myths of the Saikoku Pilgrimage*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 59 (Spring 2004): 56, n73, notes that the willow plant contains an analgesic, now commonly used in aspirin, so the symbolism probably has a basis in ancient medical practice.
- Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin)*, late 6th century, 12.161, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/54208?rpp=30&pg=1&ft=12.161&pos=1>, accessed May 1, 2014.
- Shimizu compares the White-robed Guanyin/Kannon to a Daoist recluse or Confucian scholar. “*White-Robed Kannon*,” late 14th–15th century, Asia Society, 1998.1, cat. 42, in Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 186. This, of course, contrasts with Yu’s reading of this form as feminine.
- White-robed Guanyin*, 1982.3.3, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/36140>, accessed October 11, 2013. The tradition of Chan masters inscribing figural subjects began in the 12th century, so their identities can sometimes be traced; in contrast, most Chinese monk-painters were anonymous. Lippit, “*Awakenings*,” 39. Although the orientation of the poem is unusual, since Chinese texts normally read from right to left, other examples exist. See Yoshiaki Shimizu, “*Guanyin of Putuoluo*,” early 14th century, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 10.82, cat. 39, in Levine and Lippit, *Awakenings*, 174; and “*Byakue Kannon*,” 14th century, private collection, cat. 24, in Epprecht, *Kannon: Divine Compassion*, 160–63. Poem translated by Fong, *Beyond Representation*, 362.
- The mounting indicates that this scroll was once in a Japanese collection. Thanks to Joseph Scheier-Dolberg for graciously sharing many useful insights into the meaning of this work and its context.
- The hairstyle seems based on contemporary Japanese women’s coiffure. Compare *Byakue Kannon*, late 14th–15th century, 1998.1, Asia Society Museum: The Collection in Context, [http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search\\_object.asp?keywords=byakue+kannon&ObjectID=504](http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search_object.asp?keywords=byakue+kannon&ObjectID=504), accessed May 8, 2013. Note that a spouted Indian *kundika* holds the willow rather than a Chinese *Guanyin ping*.
- Shimizu and Wheelwright, *Japanese Ink Paintings*, 48–49. Elsewhere, Shimizu states that in “the twelfth century, an iconographic sketch (dated 1088) of Guanyin on Putuoluo was copied by the Japanese and included in the voluminous collection of drawings ... kept at the monastery Ninnaji in Kyoto.” “*Guanyin of Putuoluo*,” 174.
- Shimizu, “Zen Art?,” 95.
- Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 300.
- Robin Burlingham, “*Guanyin Bestowing a Son*,” cat. 46, in *Later Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism, 850–1850*, ed. Marsha Weidner (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas; Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994), 358–59; Yu, *Kuan-yin*, 257–59.
- Iconographic drawings frequently depict the Nyoirin manifestation with two arms; sculptures usually depict the six-armed form, although there can also be four, eight, ten and twelve-armed versions of the deity. Fowler, “Nyoirin Kannon,” 59. Since the 9th century, Nyoirin Kannon has been revered for averting national calamities. Washizuka Hiromitsu and Roger Goepfer, *Enlightenment Embodied: The Art of the Japanese Buddhist Sculptor (7th–14th Centuries)* (New York: Japan Society, 1997), 24.
- Fowler, “Nyoirin Kannon,” 59.
- Lee, “Origins and Development of the Pensive Bodhisattva,” 352.
- MacWilliams, “Living Icons,” 60, 62. My thanks to Sinead Vilbar for information about this work and its inscription.
- Compare fig. 158, in Okazaki, *Pure Land Buddhist Painting*, 157. Another contemporaneous example is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 11.4046.
- Careful inspection reveals a tiny moustache and goatee on the bodhisattva’s face.
- Naquin and Yu, “Introduction,” 3.
- Ten Grotenhuis, “Saikoku Pilgrimage,” 130; ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas*, 161.
- Quoted in D. Max Moerman, “Picture Scroll of the Origins of the Kumano Deities,” in *Pilgrimage and Buddhist Art*, ed. Adriana Proser (New York: Asia Society Museum, 2010), 142.
- Pratapaditya Pal, *Tibet: Tradition and Change* (Albuquerque: Albuquerque Museum, 1997), 93.
- Alsop, “Phagpa Lokeśvara of the Potala,” 51–61; von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculpture in Tibet*, vol. 2, 820–23; Valrae Reynolds, Amy Heller, and Janet Gyatso, *Catalogue of The Newark Museum Tibetan Collection*, vol. 3 (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 1986), 89. For pictures of the Potala statue as it is usually displayed and in the process of being repainted, see illustrations in von Schroeder, *Buddhist Sculpture in Tibet*, 195A–D.
- Cat. 15 also has a sealed consecration chamber, located in its back.
- Gyurme Dorje, et al., *Jokhang*, 68–69; Lipton and Nima Dorjee Ragnubs, *Treasures of Tibetan Art*, 150–51.
- Quoted in ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas*, 160.
- This painting especially resembles Korean depictions of the Water-Moon Kannon (compare fig. 25) in the diaphanous textiles and compressed torso.
- Quoted in Ian Reader and Paul L. Swanson, “Editors’ Introduction: Pilgrimage in the Japanese Religious Tradition,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 24 (Fall 1997): 225.
- Naquin and Yu, “Introduction,” 11.

- 38 Daisy Yiyou Wang, “*The Complete Map of the Imperially Established South Sea Mount Putuo Area*,” cat. 38, in Proser, *Pilgrimage and Buddhist Art*, 94; Yu, “P’u-t’o Shan,” 190–245.
- 39 Wang, “*Complete Map*,” 94.
- 40 Louise Tythacott, *The Lives of Chinese Objects: Buddhism, Imperialism, and Display* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 38. This author states that as of 2007, there were over three million visitors a year to Putuoshan, with thirty-three temples open to the public.
- 41 Ian Reader, “Buddhist Pilgrimages in Japan,” in Proser, *Pilgrimage and Buddhist Art*, 30–33; ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas*, 10.
- 42 Ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas*, 3, 175–77.
- 43 Ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas*, 164, 172–82; Moerman, *Localizing Paradise*, 27, 48–52. See cat. 19 in this exhibition, which has an *ofuda* in the top center row that represents the Nyoirin icon at Nachi.
- 44 MacWilliams, “Living Icons,” 54.
- 45 Ten Grotenhuis, “Saikoku Pilgrimage,” 128; Reader, “Buddhist Pilgrimage in Japan,” 30–33.
- 46 Many thanks to Sherry Fowler for the translation and interpretation of this inscription.
- 47 The bottom leaf gives the history of manuscript. It was probably made at Nalanda monastery and later owned by the renowned Kashmiri pundit Shakyā Shri (1127–1225), who preached a commentary on the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* in Tibet. Subsequently, Buton (1290–1364), the first compiler of the Tibetan Buddhist canon, had it in his possession. “Five of the Leaves from an *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Manuscript*,” 1987.1, Asia Society Museum: The Collection in Context, [http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search\\_object.asp?keywords=prajnaparamita&ObjectID=479](http://www.asiasocietymuseum.org/search_object.asp?keywords=prajnaparamita&ObjectID=479), accessed October 4, 2014; Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 185–89; Reynolds, et al., *Catalogue of The Newark Museum Tibetan Collection*, vol. 3, 136–37.
- 48 Schopen, “The Mahāyāna and the Middle Period,” 6.
- 49 Guy, *Lost Kingdoms*, 260; Huntington and Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, 188–89.
- 50 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, *Selected Masterpieces of Asian Art*, 109.
- 51 *Sumidera Heart Sutra*, object file, 2012-99, Princeton University Museum of Art; “Calligraphy Stories,” Kyoto National Museum, <http://www.kyohaku.go.jp/eng/dictio/shoseki/hannya.html>, accessed March 3, 2014. My thanks to Sherry Fowler for this reference.
- 52 Morse and Morse, *Object as Insight*, 104.
- 53 Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 298-306.
- 54 See *Universal Gateway, Chapter 25 of the Lotus Sutra*, 13th century, 53.7.3, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, <http://www.metmuseum.org/collection/the-collection-online/search/44849?rpp=30&pg=1&f=53.7.3&pos=2>, accessed August 10, 2014.

- 55 Beautiful hand-painted depictions of Guanyin’s long arm appear in two virtually identical versions of the *Guanyin Sutra*, dated 1432, preserved at the Taipei National Museum and at the Harvard Art Museums, 1926.46. These texts, however, illustrate the Pit of Fire episode in the *Lotus Sutra*, instead of the Diamond Mountain scene represented here. Thanks to Mengna Da for discovering these examples.
- 56 Murase, “Kuan-yin as Savior of Men,” 70–71. Compare fig. 16 in Murase’s article to this work; see also Miyeko Murase, “Illustrated Scroll of Chapter 25 of the *Lotus Sutra*,” in Epprecht, *Kannon: Divine Compassion*, 114–23.
- 57 Watson, *Lotus Sutra*, 304.
- 58 Chutiwongs, “Iconography of Avalokiteśvara,” 147–48. However, this form is not included in Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography*.
- 59 Behrendt, *Tibet and India*, 17–18.
- 60 Studholme, *Origins of Om Manipadme Hūm*, 2.
- 61 According to Lipton and Nima Dorjee Ragnubs, the Karmapas, who head Tibet’s oldest reincarnation lineage, are manifestations of Shadakshari Lokeshvara. The present head of the lineage is Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the seventeenth in this line. These authors are not certain whether the reincarnated line of Dalai Lamas, lineage holders of the Gelugpa school, are also manifestations of this or another form of Avalokiteshvara. *Treasures of Tibetan Art*, 146.
- 62 Jeff Watt, *Avalokiteshvara*, no. 65080, HAR, <http://www.himalayan-art.org/image.cfm?iCode=65080&submit2=Search>, accessed April 29, 2013.
- 63 Huntington, “Amogapasha Lokeshvara,” *Circle of Bliss*, 186.
- 64 Brauen, *Mandala*, 11; Lipton and Nima Dorjee Ragnubs, *Treasures of Tibetan Art*, 153.
- 65 Katherine Anne Paul, “*Prayer Wheel*,” in Proser, *Pilgrimage and Buddhist Art*, 118; Newark Museum, *Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection and Other Lamaist Articles in The Newark Museum*, vol. 2 (Newark, N.J.: Newark Museum, 1950), 5.
- 66 Losang Palden Tenpay Nyima Chogle Namgyal Pel Zangpo, the Fourth Panchen Lama (1781–1852), quoted in Ladner, *Wheel of Great Compassion*, 46.
- 67 Newark Museum, *Catalogue of the Tibetan Collection*, 9–10.
- 68 Lipton and Nima Dorjee Ragnubs, *Treasures of Tibetan Art*, 149; Wall label, C2012.49, The Rubin Museum of Art.
- 69 Bokar Rinpoche, *Chenrezig*, 81.

## Glossary of Foreign Names and Terms

C=Chinese; J=Japanese; S=Sanskrit; T=Tibetan

Terms that have become loan-words in English are attributed to their original language.

*Abhaya mudra* (S): gesture of reassurance.

Amida (J): Japanese name for Amitabha. Focus of worship in East Asian Pure Land Buddhism.

Amitabha (S): Buddha of Infinite Light, from whom Avalokiteshvara emanates.

Amitayus (S): Buddha of Infinite Life. Alternate name and form of Amitabha.

*Amitayurdhyana Sutra* (S): *Sutra on the Visualization of Amitayus*. Probably an indigenous Chinese scripture, also known as the *Visualization Sutra*.

Amituo (C): Chinese name for Amitabha. Focus of worship in East Asian Pure Land Buddhism.

Amoghapasha Lokeshvara (S): Lord of the Unfailing Noose. Esoteric form of Avalokiteshvara, popular in Nepal.

*Amrita* (S): elixir of immortality.

*Amrita kalasha* (S): vessel that holds the elixir of immortality.

Anige (1243–1306): renowned Nepalese artist who produced works for Kublai Khan and other patrons in China.

*Anjali mudra* (S): gesture of prayer, respect, or salutation. Formed with palms pressed together at the heart.

*Arya* (S): noble or sacred.

Asana (S): special postures of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Atisha (982–1054): important Indian teacher who came to Tibet and promulgated practices associated with Avalokiteshvara.

Avalokiteshvara (S): Lord (*ishvara*) Who Looks Down (*avalokita*). Mahayana Buddhist bodhisattva of compassion. Known as Guanyin in China, Kannon in Japan, Karunamaya in Nepal, and Chenrezig in Tibet.

*Avatamsaka Sutra* (S): *Flower Garland Sutra*. One of the most influential sutras in East Asian Mahayana Buddhism. The last chapter, *Gandavyuha* (*Entering the Dharma World*), recounts the story of the young pilgrim Sudhana and his encounter with Avalokiteshvara on Potalaka.

Baiyi Guanyin (C): White-robed Avalokiteshvara. Indigenous Chinese form, derived from the Water-Moon Guanyin, but wears a more austere white garment. Favorite subject of Chan/Zen artists.

Bato Kannon (J): Hayagriva in Sanskrit. Japanese horse-headed form of Avalokiteshvara.

*Bhagavad Gita* (S): key chapter of the Brahmanical epic, *Mahabharata*.

Bhrikuti (S): female attendant to Avalokiteshvara, associated with wisdom.

*Bodhicitta* (S): mind of enlightenment.

Bodhisattva (S): being (*sattva*) who seeks enlightenment (*bodhi*). Mahayana bodhisattvas aspire to achieve awakening for the sake of all sentient beings. Great bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara have already achieved a high degree—if not complete—awakening.

Brahmanism (S): polytheistic Indian religion based on ancient Vedic scriptures. Hinduism, so named by British colonialists, evolved from Brahmanism.

Buddha (S): Awakened One. Often used to refer to the “historical Buddha,” Siddhartha Gautama, an Indian prince, probably born sometime in the 5th century BCE. He achieved enlightenment and became known as Shakyamuni. The religion based on Shakyamuni’s teachings aims to free beings from suffering and to lead them to awakening. In Mahayana Buddhism, numerous celestial buddhas and bodhisattvas assist in this goal.

Byakue Kannon (J): White-robed Avalokiteshvara.

Chan (C): Buddhist school that emphasizes meditation, one-on-one encounters with teachers, and in some subdivisions, the study of paradoxical statements or questions, and the belief in sudden, spontaneous awakening. Known as Zen in Japan.

*Chaturbhujā* (S): four-armed.

Chenrezig (T): One Who Continually Looks Upon All Beings with the Eye of Compassion. Tibetan name for Avalokiteshvara. Chenrezig is thought to be the creator and protector of the Tibetan people.

*Chintamani* (S): wish-fulfilling jewel. One of Avalokiteshvara’s characteristic attributes.

Chokyi Jungne (1700–1774): Eighth head of the Tai Situ reincarnate lineage, who was also an accomplished Tibetan artist and patron.

Choying Dorje (1604–1674): Tenth Gyalwang Karmapa, who was an extraordinary Tibetan painter and sculptor.

Dabei (C): Great Compassion. Often refers to the thousand-armed form of Avalokiteshvara.

*Dabei Zhou* (C): *Great Compassion Dharani*. Also known as *Qianshou* (Thousand-armed) *Zhou*. A popular esoteric recitation practice in China.

Dainichi (J): central esoteric deity. Known as Vairochana in Sanskrit.

Daiseishi (J): bodhisattva who—along with Kannon—usually flanks Amida in Pure Land triads. Also called Seishi. Known as Mahastamaprata in Sanskrit.

Dalai Lama (T): title of the spiritual leaders of Tibet since the 17th century. Each reincarnated holder of this title is considered one of Avalokiteshvara’s emanations.

Daochuo (562–645): a patriarch of Pure Land Buddhism in China.

*Dharani* (S): mnemonic device, or verbal formula, that encapsulates the meaning of an entire scripture.

Dharma (S): law. In Buddhism, the principles and teachings of Shakyamuni.

*Dharmachakra* (S): wheel of the Buddha’s teachings.

*Darshana* (S): auspicious viewing.

Dashizhi (C): attendant bodhisattva, along with Guanyin, to Amituo. Known as Mahastamaprata in Sanskrit.

Ekadashamukha (S): eleven-headed. Common esoteric form of Avalokiteshvara.

Fudarakusan (J): Japanese localization of the Indian Potalaka, Avalokiteshvara’s sacred island. There are several Fudarakusan sites in Japan, including Mount Myōho at Nachi.

Gokuraku (J): Japanese name for Sukhavati, Amida’s Pure Land.

Guanyin (C): Chinese name for Avalokiteshvara. A shortened form of Guanshiyin, which translates as Lord Who Perceives the Sounds of the World. Often manifests as a female bodhisattva.

*Guanyin ping* (C): long-necked vase filled with the elixir of immortality, carried by Guanyin.

*Guanyin (Guanshiyin) jing* (C): “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.” Chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* devoted to Avalokiteshvara, sometimes excerpted as a stand-alone text in China.

Guanzizai (C): Master Perceiver. One of Avalokiteshvara’s Chinese names.

Hayagriva (S): “horse-neck” form of Avalokiteshvara. Known as Bato Kannon in Japan.

Honen (1133–1212): a founder of Jōdo-shū, a school of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan.

Indra (S): a god of the ancient Indian Vedic scriptures. “Indra’s Net” is a metaphor that originated in the Huayan school of Chinese Buddhism, in which all phenomena in the universe give rise to—and in turn mutually arise from—all other phenomena.

Jainism: Indian religion founded by Mahavira and a lineage of other teachers or “liberators.” Arose contemporaneously with Buddhism and shares some of its features.

*Jatamukuta* (S): crownlike matted hair. Sign of a spiritual ascetic.

*Jianfo* (C): To See the Buddha.

Jile jingtu (C): Amituo’s Pure Land. Known as Sukhavati in Sanskrit.

Jina Buddha (S): Victor Buddha. Also known as Wisdom Buddha. These buddhas head their respective families in an all-encompassing esoteric system. Amitabha is one of Five Wisdom Buddhas, and Avalokiteshvara is a member of his retinue.

Jingtu (C): Pure Land Buddhist beliefs and practices in China.

Jodoshu (J): one school of Pure Land Buddhist beliefs and practices in Japan.

Jokhang (T): Great Temple of Lhasa. Houses a legendary statue of the Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara.

Juichimen Kannon (J): Eleven-headed Avalokiteshvara.

Juntei (J): Buddha-Mother. One of the Six Kannon set in Japan. Known as Cundi in Sanskrit.

*Kaisho* (J): standard script. Form of Japanese calligraphy based on Tang Chinese prototypes.

*Kami* (J): local gods of indigenous Japanese nature worship.

Kannon (J): Japanese name for Avalokiteshvara. A shortened form of Kanzeon, which translates as Lord Who Perceives the Sounds of the World. Often manifests as a female bodhisattva.

*Kannonkyo* (J): “The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds.” Chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* devoted to Avalokiteshvara, sometimes excerpted as a stand-alone text in Japan.

*Karandavyuha* (S): *Jewel-Casket Array Sutra*. Important early sutra devoted to Avalokiteshvara.

Karma (S): action. A person’s accumulated karma determines rebirth in a specific realm of samsara.

Karmapa (T): title of the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage in Tibetan Buddhism. Each reincarnated holder of this title is considered one of Avalokiteshvara’s emanations.

*Karuna* (S): compassion.

Karunamaya (S): Nepalese name for Avalokiteshvara.

Khasarpana (S): Sky-gliding. Khasarpana Lokeshvara is an esoteric form of Avalokiteshvara, popular during the Pala period in India.

Krishna (S): avatar of the Bramanical god Vishnu. Appears in *Vishvarupa* form to Prince Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

*Krishnasara* (S): legendary black antelope symbolizing gentleness and compassion. In depictions of Avalokiteshvara, he often wears a *krishnasara* skin over his shoulder.

Kublai Khan (1243–1368): founder of the Yuan dynasty in China and patron of Buddhist art.

Kukai (774 to 835): monk and a proponent of esoteric Buddhism in Japan. He studied in China under Huiguo (746–805) in the lineage of Amoghavajra (705–774).

Kumano (J): region in the southern part of Kii Peninsula in Japan. Kumano beliefs pay homage to local gods who are enshrined at Nachi.

Kumarajiva (344–409/414): influential translator of the *Lotus Sutra* and many other texts into Chinese.

*Kundika* (S): long-necked spouted water bottle used in ritual activities.

*Lalitasana* (S): relaxed posture.

Lama (T): Tibetan spiritual teacher.

*Lantsa*: an Indian-derived script often used to write Buddhist mantras and scriptures. Also known as *kutila*.

Lokanatha (S): Protector of the World.

Lokeshvara (S): Lord of the World. Common epithet of Avalokiteshvara.

*Mahabharata* (S): Brahmanical epic containing a famous chapter known as the *Bhagavad Gita*.

Mahabodhi (S): Great Awakening. Name of a commemorative temple on the site of the Buddha’s enlightenment in Bodhgaya, India.

Mahakala (S): Great Black One. Wrathful form of Avalokiteshvara.

Mahakarunika (S): Great Compassion.

*Mahasattva* (S): Great Being. An advanced bodhisattva such as Avalokiteshvara.

Mahasthamaprapta (S): One Who Has Obtained Great Power. Along with Avalokiteshvara, usually flanks Amitabha in Pure Land triads.

Mahayana (S): Great Vehicle. Arising in the first millennium, this movement evolved—and also departed—from the earliest Buddhist schools. Its philosophy and practices place special emphasis on bodhisattvas and their mission. It also includes a vast number of celestial buddhas who preside over innumerable Pure Lands.

Maitreya (S): Benevolent One. Bodhisattva of loving-kindness who is predicted to succeed Shakyamuni as the next buddha in this world system.

*Mala* (S): prayer beads.

Mandala (S): a geometric, cosmological diagram used in rituals and meditation. The most common type represents a deity in his or her palace.

*Mani* (S): jewel.

*Mani* mantra (S): sacred utterance associated with Avalokiteshvara that consists of six Sanskrit syllables: *om mani padme hum*.

Manjushri (S): Gentle Glory. Bodhisattva of wisdom.

*Manjushrimulakalpa Tantra* (S): early and important *tantra* that includes—among many other things—instructions on drawing images of deities and mandalas.

Mantra (S): sacred utterance used in Buddhist practice.

*Mappo* (J): age of the decline and disappearance of the Buddha’s dharma.

Mencius (ca. 372–289 BCE): influential Chinese philosopher.

*Miaofa lianhua jing* (C): *Lotus Sutra*.

*Mofa* (C): age of the decline and disappearance of the Buddha’s dharma.

Mudra (S): gesture, usually made with the hands and fingers, which symbolizes an enlightened quality.

Muqi Fachang (active mid-13th century): Chinese painter who created an early and much revered image of the White-robed Guanyin.

Myoho (J): Infinite light. Mountain at Nachi—associated with Amitabha—that represents Potalaka.

Nachi (J): pilgrimage site sacred to both Kannon and indigenous Japanese deities. It is the first station on the Saigoku Pilgrimage circuit.

Nagarjuna (ca. 2nd century): Indian scholar, philosopher, and yogi. According to legendary accounts, he discovered the prayer wheel.

Nalanda (S): one of the great monastic centers of learning in Buddhist India, located in present-day Bihar.

*Namo Amituo fo* (C): Praise of Amitabha Buddha.

*Nenbutsu* (J): Praise of Amitabha Buddha.

Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617–1682): Fifth Dalai Lama, who massively expanded the Potala Palace and established the authority of the Dalai Lamas as spiritual and administrative leaders of the Tibetan people.

*Nianfo* (C): Mindfulness of the Buddha.

Nyoirin Kannon (J): Jewel-holding Wheel-turning Lord of the World. Chintamanichakra Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit.

*Ofuda* (J): amulet or stamp issued by a temple or shrine, representing an icon from the site.

*Om mani padme hum* (S): six-syllable mantra associated with Shadakshari Lokeshvara. *Mani* means jewel and *padme* refers to lotus, both attributes of Avalokiteshvara.

Omizutori (J): Water Drawing Ritual. Conducted in Nara since 753. At the conclusion, the water is offered to Kannon.

*Padma* (S): lotus. One of Avalokiteshvara’s primary attributes.

Padmapani (S): Lotus Bearer. One of Avalokiteshvara’s common early forms.

*Padmasana* (S): yogic cross-legged position associated with meditative concentration.

*Pandaravasini* (S): white-robed. Female esoteric deity.

*Pasha* (S): rope.

*Pata* (S): painting on cloth. Known as *pauba* in Nepal.

Phagpa Lokeshvara (T; S): Noble Lord of the World. Venerated icon of Avalokiteshvara in the Potala Palace. Many replicas of this statue were made.

Potala (S): palace of early Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo and the Dalai Lamas. The name refers to Avalokiteshvara’s sacred island.

Potalaka (S): legendary mountain island where Avalokiteshvara dwells.

*Prajnaparamita Sutra* (S): *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. One of the earliest and most important compilations of scriptures in Mahayana Buddhism. Contains the *Heart Sutra*.

Purusha (S): thousand-armed mythic figure in the ancient Sanskrit scripture *Rig Veda*.

Putuoshan (C): hilly island in the South China Sea near Ningbo, Zhejiang province, that represents Potalaka.

Raigo (J): Pure Land tradition of Welcoming Descent, in which Amida, Kannon, and other bodhisattvas come down from Gokuraku to greet dying devotees.

*Rajalilasana* (S): royal ease. Seated position in which one arm rests on a raised knee while the other leg is either horizontal or pendant.

*Sadbana* (S): spiritual discipline.

*Sadbanamala Tantra* (S): compilation of Vajrayana *sadbanas* that describes attributes, mudras, and asanas.

*Saddharmapundarika Sutra* (S): *Lotus Sutra*.

Sahasrabhujalokeshvara (S): Thousand-armed Lord of the World. Common esoteric form of Avalokiteshvara.

Saigoku pilgrimage (*junrei*) (J): one of the most popular pilgrimage circuits in Japan. It is dedicated to Kannon and consists of thirty-three sites in the Western Provinces.

Samsara (S): Wandering. Continuous cycle of birth, life and death that sentient beings endure until achieving enlightenment. Buddhist texts describe six realms that constitute samsara: god, demigod, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell.

*Sankei mandara* (J): pilgrimage mandala.

Sanskrit: scholarly language of ancient and medieval Indian scriptures.

*Satori* (J): awakening, Buddhist enlightenment.

Seigantoji (J): temple at Nachi where the principal icon of Nyoirin Kannon is currently housed. Previously, it was in a building called Nyoirindo, which is depicted in the Nachi mandala.

Senju Kannon (J): Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara.

Shadakshari Lokeshvara (S): Six-Syllable Lord of the World. This form of Avalokiteshvara is visualized when repeating the *mani* mantra.

Shakyamuni (S): Sage of the Shakyas. Name that Siddhartha Gautama acquired once he achieved enlightenment and became a buddha.

Shingon (J): True Word. Esoteric school of Buddhism in Japan. Known as Zhenyan in China.

Shinran (1173–1263): a founder of Jodoshinshu, a school of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan.

Shinto (J): refers to the veneration of *kami*, the local gods in Japan.

*Shittan* (J): Seed syllable. *Bija* in Sanskrit.

Shiva (S): one of three major gods in Brahmanism and its later offshoot Hinduism.

Sho Kannon (J): Noble or Sacred Avalokiteshvara.

Shri Lakshmi (T: Ani Palmo): *bhikshuni*, or Indian Buddhist nun, who promulgated a Thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara practice that is still performed by Tibetans.

Shuiyue Guanyin (C): Water-Moon form of Avalokiteshvara. Indigenous Chinese manifestation, who sits a relaxed posture, often in a rocky setting suggesting Potalaka. A large full-moon nimbus envelops the bodhisattva. Known as Suigetsu in Japan.

*Shunyata* (S): nature of things as interdependent and nondual.

Songtsen Gampo (ca. 617–49): first Tibetan king to patronize Buddhism, perhaps due to his marriages to the Chinese princess Wencheng (d. 680) and Bhrikuti from Nepal. Believed to be an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, and his wives are considered manifestations of Tara.

Songzi Guanyin (C): feminine form of Avalokiteshvara who bestows children on supplicants.

Stupa (S): reliquary structure.

Suchimukha (S): hungry ghost who is fed nectar from Khasarpana Lokeshvara’s hand. His name means “needle-necked.”

Sudhana (S): youth seeking enlightenment in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Also called Sudhanakumara. Known as Shancai in Chinese and Zenzai Doji in Japanese.

Sukhavati (S): Land of Bliss. Amitabha’s Pure Land where his followers can quickly progress toward enlightenment.

*Sukhavativyuba Sutra* (S): *Land of Bliss Sutra*. An essential text of Pure Land Buddhism, it describes Amitabha, his vows, and Sukhavati. There are “larger” and “smaller” versions of this text, with significant differences in content.

Sumidera (J): temple located in the northeast corner (J: *sumi*) of ancient Nara. The temple’s location gives the *Sumidera Heart Sutra* its name.

Sutra (S): Indian scriptures. Buddhist sutras are believed to record Shakyamuni’s teachings.

*Tantra* (S): teachings and practices found in esoteric texts that began to appear in India around the 7th century.

Tantric Buddhism: Mahayana Buddhist vehicle that employs visualizations, mandalas, mantras, yogic postures, mudras, and techniques for utilizing the body’s energies to reach enlightenment.

Tara (S): female bodhisattva considered an emanation of Avalokiteshvara and thus a powerful embodiment of compassion. Although often depicted as his attendant, she is also worshipped as an independent deity. Green Tara and White Tara are two of her most important manifestations.

*Thangka* (T): Tibetan religious painting on cloth employed to help visualize a deity during meditation, memorialize a deceased loved one, or heal sickness. Creating or commissioning a *thangka* also helps to accumulate merit for both the artist and the patron.

Thukje Chenpo (T): Great Compassion.

*Tribhanga* (S): triple-bend posture.

*Tridanda* (S): triple rod or three-pronged stick associated with Indian ascetics.

*Upaya* (S): skillful means for promoting liberation.

*Utpala* (S): blue lotus. Attribute of several bodhisattvas, including Tara, Manjushri, and Maitreya.

Vairochana (S): central deity in esoteric Buddhism, known as Dainichi in Japan.

*Vajra* (S): ritual thunderbolt. Important symbol of the active expression of compassion in Vajrayana Buddhism.

Vajrayana (S): Diamond or Adamantine vehicle. Branch of Mahayana Buddhism characterized by esoteric or tantric practices. Vajrayana deities often have multiple limbs and heads to signify increased powers and abilities.

*Varada mudra* (S): gift-giving gesture that bestows compassion. Performed with the hand extended downward and palm facing out.

Veda (S): knowledge. Vast corpus of ancient Indian religious and philosophical scriptures.

Vikramashila (S): thought to be the largest center of monastic education in Buddhist India, once housing as many as ten thousand students. Model for monasteries in Tibet.

Vishnu (S): one of three major gods in Brahmanism and its later offshoot Hinduism. Vishnu has many avatars, including Krishna.

*Vishvarupa* (S): Universal Form. Krishna briefly appears as a many-headed and -armed *Vishvarupa* in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

*Vitarka mudra* (S): gesture that indicates the teaching or discussion of dharma. Made with hand raised and index finger touching the thumb, forming a circle that symbolizes a *dharmacakra*.

*Wu* (C): awakening, Buddhist enlightenment.

Xuanzang (600/602–664): renowned Chinese scholar and pilgrim.

Yoga (S): yoking, union.

Yongle (1360–1424): Ming Emperor, who was a practitioner and patron of Tibetan Buddhism.

Zen (J): Japanese Buddhist school that emphasizes meditation, one-on-one encounters with teachers, and in some subsets, the study of koan (a paradoxical statement or question) and the belief in sudden, spontaneous awakening. Evolved from Chinese Chan Buddhism.

Zenzai Doji (J): youth seeking enlightenment in the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. Known as Sudhana in Sanskrit.

*Zhicheng* (C): utmost sincerity.

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