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## Sculpture

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### Categories and Functions

Sculptured images constitute the real nucleus of every Buddhist temple precinct and its individual halls and chapels because they represent, in anthropomorphic form, that ultimate reality which inspires Buddhist religion. This reality can only be defined negatively, as Nothingness, as "Emptiness." It embodies itself in the Buddha or the Buddhas as its highest possible manifestation, but also unfolds itself into a hierarchy of figures whose graduated form of descent symbolizes the entry of "Buddha nature" into the empirical world. These lesser beings may also assume special functions, such as protection against evil powers. They are, therefore, arranged inside the sanctuary in a strictly hierarchical spatial order related to the central Buddha.

The typical result is a well-structured and firmly centered configuration consisting of a larger or smaller number of images, depending on the size and rank of the temple or the individual building within the entire temple precinct or on the particular iconographic program. These stand, as mentioned before (p. 61), on a "Sumeru Terrace," which is regarded as world axis and world center. The spiritual and physical center of the platform is occupied by that figure to whom the sanctuary or individual building is dedicated (17, 28), and which is called the main cult image (pen-tsun, hon-zon). In the main halls of the temples this is usually a Buddha, but can sometimes be a Bodhisattva (52), Vidyârāja or Deva, or even a group of such figures.

Several figures of equal rank are frequently grouped together. One of them assumes a dominant role or at least is *primus inter pares*, and is therefore placed in the middle. For example, in the case of the Five Wisdom Buddhas, Vairocana is given the center position and put on a slightly raised pedestal (6). In the case of the popular Three-Buddha-Groups, Śākyamuni is flanked by Amitābha and Bhaiṣajyaguru (the former to his right, i.e., to the West, and the latter to his left, i.e., to the East, in accordance with the "geographical," or, better, the iconographic location of their paradises). Also encountered is the "historical" triad of Dipamkara, Śākyamuni (center) and Maitreya, the Buddhas of the past, present, and future. Finally, there is the "ontological" triad of Vairocana, Locana, and Śākyamuni as a reflection of the hierarchy of dharma-kāya, sambhoga-kāya, and nirmāṇa-kāya.



But most common are groups of figures surrounding a Buddha, with representatives of other categories of beings arranged symmetrically around it. A typical pattern or grouping emerges. In the center would be a Buddha with a Bodhisattva to his right and another to his left. The latter have a strictly defined "theological" relationship with the Buddha. This central triad (17) is called the *san-tsun* (J. *san-zon*) or "The Three Holy Ones" (Persons), a term which has often been erroneously translated as trinity, even though it bears not the slightest relationship to the Christian trinity in either doctrine or in iconography. The most common triad is composed of Amitâbha, Avalokiteśvara and Mahâsthâmaprâpta (24), but Śâkyamuni with Mañjuśrî and Samantabhadra, and Bhaiṣajyuguru with the sun and moon Buddhas (22, 49) are also rather common. Triads may also be joined by figures of monks representing the original community of disciples turned in veneration towards the three sacred figures (24, 21\*). Their number varies. They are placed somewhat behind the three figures or surround them in the form of a circle or semi-circle. Finally, the configuration may be completed by the Four Heavenly Kings (Lokapâla, world guardians) who stand at the four corners of the platform representing the world mountain and guard it against evil powers by assuming a threatening stance with respect to the four cardinal directions. These four are either all placed at the corners with their backs to the center or they all face the viewer standing in front of the group. In the latter case, the two figures in front strike active poses and display lively gestures and facial expressions while those in the back, given calm poses, radiate concentrated power. In China these Four Heavenly Kings are often given their own hall.

Additional figures may also be found on the platform, but they have no or only secondary relationships to the major cult images. One such example are the statues of great patriarchs of the different schools of Mahâyâna (88) or of the donors of the particular sect to which the sanctuary belongs. Depending on the figure serving as major cult image, the choice of the accompanying figures--called its "retinue" (*parivâra*; *chüan-shu*, *ken-zoku*)--changes.

These configurations frequently form *maṇḍalas*, particularly if viewed in the context of a design which includes the entire building and its parts, most notably its pillars. We should bear in mind that *maṇḍalas* may not only take the form of pictures or drawings but may also assume corporeal and even architectural forms (6). The size of the figures within a group depends on their religious rank and level of existence. The Buddha is largest; the Bodhisattva and Devas are somewhat smaller; while the figures of monks and founders are smallest. This makes obvious that the principle of "hieratic scaling," which is found in all religious art of the archaic and medieval type, also dominates the design of these configurations.

Most statues in such groups display a solemn quietude which symbolizes that the higher sacred beings are in the state of nirvâna. Monks are shown in poses of veneration or meditation. The central Buddha is usually, but by no means always, depicted in a seated position. Bodhisattvas are also sometimes seated. More frequently, they stand in a pose which allows them to be slightly turned toward the Buddha. Monks usually appear standing, frequently in the prayer pose with folded hands, while the patriarchs are preferably shown either in the seated meditative pose (86) or with their hands forming a *mudrâ* or holding an attribute, such as a rosary, incense vessel, or Sûtra scroll. Among all these figures the silence of sedate



wisdom and holiness prevails, and this impression is heightened to one of perfect quietude and remoteness in the figure of the central Buddha.

The world guardians are shown in an entirely different manner. Their poses are belligerent. This belligerence is further enhanced by active gestures and threatening facial expressions. They carry protective armor and weapons and direct this defensive power towards the outside world (cf. 73). However, even this surging power has its spiritual source in the concentrated, awesome stillness of the Buddha in the heart of the group, i.e., in the center of the world represented by the sanctuary.

All other figures of gods (Devas) find their place as distinguished protectors of the Buddha world and as promoters of the doctrine and helpmates of mankind. Most are found in the main hall, placed at the greatest distance from the enlightened, detached Buddha, who is immersed in his undefined state, because they still belong to the realm of *samsāra*. Closer to the Buddha are the spiritually advanced Arhats (91 ff.). Closer yet are the Bodhisattvas, who have achieved the highest wisdom. In this manner the configurations create a "crescendo of religious significance" (Rousselle); the metaphysically founded and mythologically constituted relationships among these figures, the hierarchy of their levels of existence, and their specific saving functions are clearly expressed in these spatial arrangements.

But this order may also express itself in sculptured images in a different, hidden manner. A small figurine, frequently made of precious metal, may be inserted into the interior of a hollow figure to impersonate the sacred figure to which the larger sculpture is theologically-iconographically linked. For example, a figurine of Avalokiteśvara may be placed in the interior of an Amitābha figure, or vice versa. Such figures are called Buddhas-inside-the-body (*t'ai-nei-fo*, *tai-nai-but-su*). They are hidden from view and frequently have only been discovered by inquisitive modern researchers or during restoration work. Though invisible, they have always been present in some magical sense and their numinous power is believed to have made the larger figure into a truly effective image of the numen by the very presence of these figurines.

Incidentally, figures held to be especially sacred--particularly if they are part of an esoteric cult--are often wrapped in several brocade covers and concealed in locked tabernacles. These are the so-called "secret Buddhas" (*pi-fo*, *hi-but-su*) (43). The fact that they are hidden from view has no adverse effects on their sacred presence. On the contrary, to uncover them would be to profane them, and would strip them of their religious powers.

In place of figures in the interior of a statue we may find other vehicles of sacred power--such as handwritten or printed Sūtra texts, or mantra formulas (*dhāraṇī*) which are inserted into a statue and constitute its spiritual core. Even small silk replicas of internal organs were detected in a famous Śākyamuni figure, which is derived from an ancient Indian and particularly sacred image, in the Seiryōji, near Kyōto. A cult figure attains its sacred efficacy and its full transformation from a mere artifact into a physically present numen only as a result of such hidden items and through the recitation of certain mystic "seed syllables" (*bīja*) containing the Absolute (such as *a*, *hum*, *om*) during the consecration of the individual parts of its body. Once in place, figures were also magically made to come "alive" by having their "eyes opened" (*k'ai-yen*, *kai-gen*) during a consecration



ceremony by painting in the pupils of their eyes. The brush with which the pious Japanese emperor Shōmu performed the eye-opening ceremony for the Great Buddha of Nara in 752 A.D. has been preserved in the Shōsōin.

Part of the consecration of a cult figure is frequently, but not invariably, a votive inscription (41) which may be found on the pedestal, on the halo or in the interior of the figure. If complete, such a votive inscription gives the name of the figure, the name of the temple, the model which inspired the image, the spiritual purpose of its creation (such as the salvation of the donor, the recovery of his father from disease, the welfare of the country), the name and rank of the donor, the date of the image's consecration, and perhaps the name of the artist. Sometimes even the dimensions and weight of the image and the quantities of materials used in its manufacture are given. These inscriptions may also be augmented during later times to describe repairs, the image's remodeling or removal to another temple. Such inscriptions are ideal source material for art historians, but unfortunately are not too numerous.

Still, there are a great many works, themselves dated or exactly datable by other means, which help to establish a reliable sequence for tracing the development of particular styles, and inscriptions often provide valuable sociological, religious or historical information about the personality of the donor or the purpose of the donation. In some instances we even learn something about the fate of an individual image. The donors are frequently not only mentioned in the inscriptions, but their figures appear either in separate spaces of steles or cave walls, or as a member of a configuration or group of sculpted figures, in which case the donor's statue is usually turned towards the main cult figure in a pose of prayer. The same is true of paintings. In most instances the sculpted figures of the donors are executed in a highly stereotyped manner. The craftsmen may have kept a regular stock of these figures on hand and simply individualized them by the addition of the donor's name. In some cases artistically important reliefs of groups of donors forming festive processions are found on the walls of large cave sanctuaries, particularly in the cases where these had royal benefactors. Occasionally, as in late medieval European painting, we may also find entire donor families portrayed; but usually such portrayals bear little physical resemblance to their putative models.

A Buddhist cult figure should never be taken in isolation because it is always related to other figures in several respects. Theologically, it is part of the Buddhist pantheon, and plays a role both within Buddhist doctrine and in the total iconographic program of the sanctuary. Formally, it is part of a particular configuration within the context of the temple's architectural design. We would capture only a part of a figure's total impact if we did not also take into account all that which points beyond the limitations of the figure's physical appearance and integrates the figure into its surroundings. Only in this manner is the image really rendered complete.

Such elements constituting inseparable parts of a figure are pedestals (especially the lotus flower throne [28, 29] which holds up the figure at the center of the world as if it were floating on an open bowl) and halos (17, 23, 28, 29, 42, 69), which may assume the most divergent forms but are always meant to be the magic, multi-colored or golden "Buddha light" emanating from the sacred figure and



symbolizing the world-illuminating power of absolute wisdom and of the "Buddha nature." These halos are usually circular; they may be designed for the head, but frequently a second is added for the trunk of the body; a third halo enclosing the entire figure (including the other two halos) may also be found. Halos round out these figures to bestow upon them ultimate perfection, even in cases where they emanate from those figures in the form of flaming aureolas.

In statues still possessing their original pedestals and halos (17, 28, 29), which are, after all, indispensable parts of the whole and by no means mere attachments, the utmost in harmony is achieved. And it is within the context of this harmony that the individual forms of the figure itself--its contours, the particular shape of its body and garment, its attributes--find their proper place and full expressive power. The halo accomplishes the transition to the canopy (38), which is suspended like a crown above the cult figures but frequently may just be represented by the richly decorated ceiling of the hall or by a lotus flower at the center of the ceiling. (In both instances the formal character and sacred function of a canopy is preserved.)

It is by means of the canopy that the cult image is integrated into the context of the entire building, but the image transcends even the building with the help of the Sumeru terrace. This terrace is located in the center of the hall--not always as a geometric fact but definitely in spiritual intent. To this center the figure is linked by virtue of its plastic volume, proportions, position in space, colors, and spiritual quality, and at the same time it bestows on this center the highest religious consecration and ultimate perfection.

It is essential to remember that a main cult figure and the figures in its immediate vicinity normally stand about 1.5 to 3 meters above ground level, and so are viewed from a position slightly below. To compensate for this low vantage point, standing figures are frequently given a slight forward tilt. The tilt of the head of many larger seated figures may perhaps also be explained the same way. Any attempt to read more into this particular posture by presuming that it is meant to have the figures turn toward the faithful in an act of benevolence may be going too far. Something comparable occurs in only a number of rather precisely detailed pictorial representations, most notable among which are works significant for the iconography of scenes linked to Amitābha (see pp. 22, 137 f.).

There are, however, instances where the cult figure seems to be set apart from the temple room by being confined to a separate shrine which serves to encase and protect the sacred "core." But this shrine itself is no less integrated into the architecture of the hall, or at least attached to it, than would be the pedestals, halos and canopies of figures standing freely in a hall. For such figures, the entire building constitutes the core casing. But the figure is never isolated and locked away in these shrines. Its sacred efficacy penetrates the spatial confinement--be it tabernacle or temple hall--and emanates its illuminating rays into the world. Firm links even exist between the various halls throughout the entire temple precinct. These arise from the total iconographic program formed by the relations among the images established within the sequence of halls along the sacred path. For example, in China these relationships find their spatial symbolic expression in the position of the guardian deity Wei-t'o or of Kuan-yin at the northern or back wall of the temple. Such figures turn their backs to the main cult images, but by facing north, i.e., in the direction of the adjacent "higher" hall, they establish a connection with the cult



images housed in that hall (6b\*). These links, however, usually remain hidden and are accessible only to those who follow the sacred path with proper spiritual insight and participation in the process of spiritual advancement.

No general statements can be made about the proportional relationships between the cult statues and the temple halls and chapels. The two elements frequently fit harmoniously apparently because of conscious planning, but just as often any resulting harmony may be rather accidental. Quite frequently, the figures appear to be too large for the narrow and low rooms they occupy. In such instances, however, it should be ascertained whether we are dealing with the original rooms or later constructions, or whether the figures were really created for these particular rooms or were placed there at a later time. In many cases the spatial harmony appears to us to be disturbed by the large number of statues crowding a particular hall. Most of these have been added over the course of the centuries and were placed in these halls without any efforts to assure their harmonious integration into the given space and existing figure groupings.

This is most frequently the case in halls where for reasons of piety and "accumulation of merit" a sizeable number of figures have been grouped together, as, for example, in halls containing the Thousand or Three Thousand Buddhas, i.e., those of all world-spheres and world eons which are to be understood as fictitious and partial manifestations and multiform projections of the Universal or Absolute Buddha. These often minute figurines are prone to occupy every vacant spot of a temple building, including even its wooden structural frame. Also of the same type are the several hundred figures accompanying the Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara as embodiments of his infinite transformability and compassion. These are simply lined up on long pedestal stairs, rather than in some artistic order expressing a hierarchical order. The same applies to the group of Five Hundred Arhats who do not form real groups either. Particularly in China they are even given their own chapel, where they stand in tight formations on regular pedestals placed along the walls and in other locations within the chapel. In Japan their stone figures are often found standing free in the temple precinct. In these cases the cultic center of higher-ranking cult images—to which these figures should have a mandated relationship—is missing. Statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas found in such halls have apparently been placed and exchanged at random and seem to have been unable to assert a dominant presence of their own in view of the large number of Arhat figures. The impression made by such groups is quite different from those in which the canonical group of 16 or 18 Arhats occupy a flanking position at the short sides of the hall facing the center from the left and right, respectively. They articulate a clear, visible relationship to the main group, preferably dominated by a Śākyamuni figure. In the other instances, the aesthetic order and harmony of forms is subordinated to the need for a maximum of sacred or even magic power. Quantity, though religiously justified, replaces quality.

At the opposite extreme from these "rows of figures" or "crowds of figures" we find single figures used as cult images in smaller sanctuaries or in special chapels within the larger temple complexes (53) dedicated to individual Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Vidyārājas, and Devas. Inside these more intimate spaces they are also frequently enclosed by a tabernacle, a niche or some other device. A special case is that of portrait figures which in Buddhist art almost always appear as cult



images, even in cases where they have a secular appearance. In most instances the portrait figures are those of founders of temples or sects, or of patriarchs of great importance for a particular doctrinal or cult tradition (86). Laymen, however, may also receive ritual veneration in this manner either because they have promoted Buddhism in a general way or because of their meritorious service for the particular sanctuary, as was the case with Japanese Prince Shōtoku (574-622; see p. 20; pl. 95). They could also belong to the house of the temple founder or patron and are therefore, the recipients of "requiem rites." It should be noted that non-Buddhist ancestral cults left a strong imprint on these practices.

The figures placed inside a building and described up to this point are distinguished from another genre rather common in East Asia: wall sculptures, carved out of natural stone in cave temples and therefore firmly locked in their place. The latter are mostly found on the continent and only rarely in Japan, where stone sculptures in general play a minor role largely because of the lack of suitable material, but perhaps also because the Japanese simply did not like stone sculptures.

The famous cave temples of China are at Yün-kang, Lung-mên, and T'ien-lung-shan (for their dates see p. 18). There were also cave monasteries along the silk routes crossing Central Asia, such as those at Tun-huang and Turfan. Many of them hold a vast number of such sculptures (most of them made out of clay). But here, too, we find the same typical alternative: either in the form of firmly defined, hierarchical groups centered both spiritually and literally around a main cult image (25) or in the form of loose clusterings of every imaginable type of figures and rows of figures as an expression of a zealous piety stimulated by the large stone surfaces of the caves. Figures of the latter type completely cover the walls of such sanctuaries in a highly irregular manner as if revealing a *horror vacui* (34). Contained among these masses of figures are numerous smaller coherent groups, but these are generally obscured by the confusing tangle of figures or have only recently been isolated from the conglomeration of figures in one of two ways. The first of these is robbery. Many figures or their heads have been vandalized for the purpose of selling them and are today the prized possessions of Western collections, where they are perforce viewed in isolation from their original context. Sometimes, though still in place, they have been separated from their context and discovered in their particular beauty with the help of isolating photographs. But only the original configurations represent iconographic systems. Other assemblies of figures represent mere accumulations of those Buddhist figures held to be particularly beneficial for a specific purpose.

There are numerous masterpieces among these groups found in China's caves and also among the many widely scattered and hidden individual figures they contain. But the majority of cave sculptures are provincial and more craftsmanlike in character (I should add that I will later qualify this evaluation in one important point). Nevertheless, by and large it appears that the art of cave sculpture has succumbed to mass tastes. In size, these sculptures may range from gigantic down to minute, even in the same cave.

In contrast to figures integrated into a temple building or hewn into the stone of cave temples, free-standing figures play practically no role at all in the Buddhist art of East Asia. There never developed an appreciation of figures presented as



isolated phenomenon in open space, placed under the open sky in the vast expanse of a city square or exposed in some other prominent open spot and unfolding in its own corporeality. Perhaps this is because East Asia lacked a corresponding humanistic image of man with its specific approach to life, the human body and space expressing itself in such free-standing figures.

On the other hand, figures are never so intimately tied to architecture that they are totally integrated into the building and thus appear as inseparable elements of the total design. Buddhist art in East Asia lacks therefore also an architectural sculpture in the strict sense of the term, except for the small, purely symbolic decorations found on posts and beams, roofs, pedestals, pillars or balustrades which draw on every imaginable motif, such as animals, plants, heavenly and demonic beings. The figures most likely to be linked to the design of the chapel are Buddhas, world guardians, and other figures. Frequently, they have nearly or totally full-bodied figures but usually are found in relief form on the central pillars or in the niches of the outer and inner walls. As already indicated, in an iconological sense they also belong to the "body" of such architectural world images. Similar figures may also be found on ground floors and portals of pagodas or on Sûtra and dhâranî pillars, with similar iconological meanings.

Small Buddha shrines may also be considered as free-standing pagodas or chapel-like stone monuments. These are usually boxlike roof-covered tabernacles, standing on pedestals and composed of stone slabs. Their openings are guarded on the left and right by world guardians. Occasionally they are crowned by dragons. On the interior back wall of such tabernacles is placed a full-bodied or relief Buddha configuration, while the inner and outer walls may also be covered with engraved Bodhisattvas, Devas, Apsarasas, ornaments and, particularly, also with figures of donors and with votive inscriptions. Such shrines constitute an intermediary stage between free-standing, outward-looking monuments and intimate chapels which house cult images as the core of an inner sanctuary. Outdoor sculptures are primarily Buddha and Bodhisattva figures of stone frequently found on graves, along the *via sacra* of temple precincts, predominantly as votive figures, or at crossroads where they are placed to perform magical functions. But in the totality of East Asian Buddhist sculpture, outdoor figures are of very minute significance. If a monumental figure is actually found under open skies, like the famous Great Buddha (Amitâbha) in Kamakura, closer investigation reveals that it, too, originally had been placed in a spacious temple hall long ago destroyed by a tidal wave from the nearby ocean.

Monumental sculptures in the sense of free-standing, widely visible, oversized figures do therefore scarcely exist. On the contrary, it is a characteristic preference in Buddhist sculpture to put very large, even gigantic images inside a sanctuary and even to confine them in relatively undersized rooms where they can hardly achieve their full aesthetic effect. But size can be a sign of devotion, and confinement within a small space was perhaps intentional. The very contrast between the surroundings and the confined image allows the image to appear as the embodiment of the cosmocratic power, all-encompassing mercy and world-permeating wisdom of the Buddha which exceeds any earthly vessel and impels the faithful into a state of veneration. Large figures of this kind may be found in the Chinese cave temples mentioned earlier and in Japanese sanctuaries of later



periods. They impress by their technical achievements, but their sheer size is itself a statement about the universal nature of the Buddha as world-embracing "Great Being" and spiritual world ruler. Compared to him, all other Buddhas are merely derived, reflected and transformed manifestations. However, such large figures remain relatively rare, if only for economic reasons. The Buddhist cult figure found its fully adequate embodiment in a moderate-sized format which varied according to changing conditions but always fit harmoniously into similarly scaled buildings and groups of related figures.

The predominantly wooden architecture of the temple halls, which ruled out monumental architecture in the European sense, imposed clearly defined limitations. These could perhaps be stretched as, for example, in the Great Buddha Hall of the Tōdaiji in Nara, but could never be ignored at will. On the average, Buddhist cult figures are at least life-size, occasionally a little smaller, but are normally enlarged to something more than life-size, without (except for those special cases noted above) reaching the kind of colossal dimensions which would totally overwhelm the viewer. For a Buddha, the height of sixteen feet was considered to be the normal monumental size because in Buddhist legend one of the many miraculous physical signs was the number 16--the square of four, the original Vedic number standing for totality and thus a symbol of completeness and perfection in esoteric Buddhism. Particular contexts imposed many exceptions to this rule. In spite of their impressive size, most Buddha figures remain accessible to the pious for devotional identification (28).

On the other hand, the art of small figurines was cultivated with tender care, not the least because it served numerous tasks. The small figures inside cult statues have already been mentioned, as have the small figures of the Thousand Buddhas and similar groups. There is a certain predilection for suspending on pillars in the interior of temples, plaques with small Buddha figures in high relief. These are the so-called suspended Buddhas (*J. kake-botoke*). But the most important function of such figurines was to provide images for private worship. Bronze or wooden figures between twenty and thirty centimeters in height--some occasionally taller--are often found on house altars and in small tabernacles. Very small, even minute shrines were created to serve as house altars and frequently also as objects of veneration during travel. These portable, light and easily installed miniature shrines with their open doors painted on both sides or adorned with reliefs look like miniature triptych altars. Many of these are attractive objects with delicate carvings, but a large number are of cheap, ordinary quality because they were designed to satisfy the needs of larger groups within the population who could not afford more expensive versions.

We may include among these images Buddhist (but also Taoist) figurines of stone, wood, ivory, jade, porcelain--predominantly Chinese ones of the Ming and Ch'ing periods--which, though not deeply religious works, nonetheless deserve a better reputation than that foisted on them by Western amateur collectors of being mere bric-à-brac. In passing, we should mention that Buddhist motifs also appear in more recent times (since the 16th-17th centuries) in the applied arts--particularly in ceramic and lacquerware decoration, and in Japan primarily in swordguards and netsuke.



Miniature sculptures were also used for group scenes composed of several or many figurines depicting episodes such as Śākyamuni's miraculous birth (30) from the side of his mother as she was grasping a branch in the palace garden or the Buddha's deathbed scene, his so-called "Entering Into Nirvāṇa," as found, for example, in the ground-level chapel of the Hōryūji pagoda. In the latter scene, numerous small clay figurines, each about twenty to thirty centimeters in height, surround the reclining figure of the dying Buddha. The entire scene is placed in front of a rather nondescript mountainous landscape, also made of clay.

Here Buddhist sculpture serves a narrative-illustrative function but, we should add, this role is rare and limited to miniature sculpture. The proper medium for this function is, of course, relief sculpture, which was extensively used in the cave temples of China. It is also not uncommon in such buildings as stone pagodas, but no outstanding works have been found. Narrative reliefs predominantly depict stories from the Buddha legend, including the Jātakas (stories from previous existences of Śākyamuni) or scenes from the myths of the different Bodhisattvas and deities. These were embellished by an ever livelier pictorial imagination. Extensive depictions of a Buddhist "paradise," like the Pure Land of Amitābha, covering entire walls, such as the one from Hsiang-t'ang-shan (now in the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C.), are rare.

In the cave temples there are numerous such narrative reliefs sculpted from the stone walls but individual figures or groups are dominant. Their treatment ranges from low to nearly full relief and may even extend to fully rounded figures standing against walls. Large, multi-figure stucco reliefs also occur. Carved versions of wall paintings constitute yet another variant. High-reliefs are not popular in East Asia. Nothing comparable to Borobudur in Java has been created. Strictly speaking, relief figures are merely normal three-dimensional figures projected onto a flat surface rather than works conceived from the outset as true reliefs. Beautiful examples of works of the latter kind do occasionally appear, as, for instance, in the famous cave sanctuary of Sōkkul-am (J. *Sekkutsuan*) near Kyōngju in South Korea (ca. 750). These were carved on the stone slabs lining the walls of an earthen grotto. In this sanctuary, a free-standing central Buddha is surrounded by Bodhisattva and Arhat figures. These reliefs represent the mature T'ang style dominant at that time and constitute perhaps the most important surviving works of the Buddhist relief art of East Asia (57).

Also attractive are the reliefs of hammered metal (24). These are relatively numerous in Japan but represent a type originally evolved in China. Common during the Suiko and Nara periods, they were used on domestic altars and served to complete the decorations on the interior walls and doors of tabernacles. They appear either as individual figures and groups of figures, but also as "Thousand Buddha" figurines and similar types.

Another important field for relief sculpture in stone, metal, wood and other materials are the halos of cult figures (17, 151, 152). With few exceptions, these halos do not portray particular figures but are only of symbolic and ornamental character. However, they frequently include small figures of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas or Apsarasas'. These show an attractive transposition of fully round sculptures to the medium of low and high relief. Similar reliefs can be found on cult



implements (154 f.). Even sculpted figures may themselves carry relief figures or scenes on their surfaces. There are larger than life-size stone Buddha figures which are almost completely covered with scenes from the Buddha legend and "paradise" scenes executed in very shallow relief. There are even small bronze statues with a few groups of such figures attached to them. All these are intended to be tangible expressions of the doctrine that Buddha body and Buddha world are not separate entities.

An especially important field of relief sculpture, particularly during the oldest period of Chinese Buddhist art, are the stone votive steles (41). These have been preserved in large numbers and are of great historical importance because they often bear inscriptions allowing them to be dated exactly. The front and frequently also the back of these steles include niches containing groups of figures executed in strong relief, surrounded by a halo and crowned by a canopy. The two narrow sides of such steles as well as their bases and upper parts also carry relief carvings or line engravings, particularly of donor figures, but illustrations of the Buddha legend or of Sūtra texts, executed in flat (low) relief, also occur.

The depth of a relief is in many instances dependent on the hierarchic level of being represented by the figures. Often Buddhas are in high relief, being nearly fully three-dimensional in their niches, while Bodhisattvas and world guardians are more shallow. Apsaras and human beings, like monks and worshippers, are carved still more shallowly, while the donors are done in flat relief--without or nearly without rounding--or just in mere line engravings. Obviously, then, adoption of a particular sculptural technique is not primarily based on artistic considerations and even less on a desire to create a spatial illusion, but rather is determined by iconographic considerations. Furthermore, variations in the depth of reliefs should not be linked directly to phases of stylistic development.

The back and the two narrow sides of a stele usually contain similar flat reliefs or engravings. Consecrating inscriptions, frequently of considerable length, may be found on all four sides. The iconographical programs of steles, with the exception of that of the rather stereotyped main groups, are quite varied. They include a number of narrative scenes and generally follow a particular Sūtra text. These scenes are depicted in a manner ranging from utmost simplicity to most lavish ostentation. Such steles primarily date from the Wei through T'ang periods. They appear to have been less popular during preceding and succeeding periods. Those extant are almost exclusively found on the continent. In Japan, where stone sculptures played almost no role at all, they are missing altogether, with the exception of a few imported examples. But steles bearing inscriptions enjoyed great popularity as vehicles for preserving important documents and texts displaying calligraphic masterpieces at all times throughout East Asia; among these are many of Buddhist content. They are, however, only occasionally adorned with relief sculptures and do not belong to the field of sculpture.

Another popular form of sculpted monuments, particularly in China, are inscription or memorial pillars. In most instances, these are octagonal stone columns with richly decorated bases and tops. They also frequently have one or several intermediate layers or "roofs" which cause the entire structure--no doubt intentionally--to resemble a pagoda. On the smooth surfaces of the pillars are engraved Sūtra texts, magic formulas (*dhāraṇī*), consecrating inscriptions, and the



like. They are also frequently decorated with sculptures executed in bas relief or relief and embedded within shallow niches. These relief figures, just like those found in pagodas, radiate their beneficial powers in all directions. Such monuments are charming works of sculpture, frequently well-proportioned and executed with outstanding craftsmanship.

Reliefs are also widely found on foundations, cornices and tops of stone pagodas, on pedestals of statues, on terraces and balustrades of temple halls and in many other places in need of symbolic ornamentation. (In Japan this tendency was muted, since Japanese tastes emphasized the austere beauty of line and surface over abundant surface sculpture.) In addition to the usual flower, garland and cloud motifs of Chinese art and China's ever-present symbolic animals (dragons, etc.), we frequently encounter such typically Buddhist symbols as the lotus and lion, along with divine and semi-divine beings such as Apsaras', Gandharvas, and Yakṣas used as guardians and decorative motifs even on relatively low-ranking monuments.

A certain type of mask, the procession mask, may be mentioned as a last category of Buddhist sculpture which has for a long time gone unnoticed in the West (76, 77). The famous, highly expressive Bugaku masks have been used in Buddhist cults for musical and dance performances during big temple festivals for about 1200 years and are today still so used in Japan, where a large number of them have been preserved. Most of the types originated in China and in Central and West Asia. These masks and the plays in which they are used were of non-Buddhist origin, and became part of the Buddhist cult only as secondary elements which enriched and intensified ritual performances. They may perhaps also have been used because they were believed to have magical efficacy, as, for example, the power to induce rain.

But Buddhism has also produced its own kind of masks which were worn during solemn processions by the carriers and followers of the main cult image. These masks mostly represented such protective deities as Devas and related deities of a more demonic character. Some bore a grotesque but others a calm and dignified expression, just as found on the statues and paintings of the same types, though they occasionally departed from them in iconographically interesting ways. Bodhisattva masks were also very common in processions designed to demonstrate how the faithful were welcomed at the moment of their deaths into the Pure Land of the West by Amitābha and his holy retinue. Amitābha himself, as one who had entered nirvāṇa, was not represented by a living person but rather by a cult statue. This explains why no Buddha masks other than those belonging to the sphere of the Nô play exist. But here, too, they are rare exceptions.

As far as we know, procession masks have survived only in Japan but were presumably also used in China during the Wei through T'ang periods, and found their way to Japan at that time. Nô masks, fully developed from the 15th century on, are purely Japanese creations, though they have been strongly influenced by the older Buddhist masks. They can no longer be counted as Buddhist sculpture in the proper sense, both formally and historically. The same holds for Chinese theater masks from more recent times. These are made of brightly painted and lacquered papier-mâché, cover the entire head, and are used in popular but edifying Taoist and Buddhist "mystery plays."



### Materials and Techniques

Buddhist sculptures are fashioned from virtually the same materials as their European counterparts--stone, metal (primarily bronze), wood, and clay. But there is one material unique to them--lacquer.

With few exceptions, stone sculptures (23, 25, 41, 42, 53, 57, 82, 83) occur almost exclusively on the continent. (In Japan some may be found in grottoes or on cliffs but are limited in number and importance.) Particularly in China, a variety of beautiful stone materials like marble, limestone, and sandstone were available and were used not only for the wall figures in the cave temples (Yün-kang, Lung-mên, T'ienlungshan, Hsiangt'angshan, etc.) but also for temple statues. The most important surviving works of China's ancient Buddhist sculpture are made of stone, since the works from earlier periods and larger-sized works made of other materials have almost all perished. (On small-sized bronze sculpture see below.)

Many seemingly free-standing stone figures found in our museums, however, were originally more or less fully round sculpted wall figures in cave temples. Even the popular votive stele were made of stone. In Europe, Chinese miniature stone sculptures became particularly well known and were at times the object of an almost overly intensive interest on the part of collectors. Such figures of sacred and legendary beings were made of jade (nephrite and jadeite), the favorite stone of the Chinese which had been almost mystically venerated since earliest times, or, more frequently, of the soft, easily shaped steatite (soapstone). Ivory was also very popular. All such miniature figures come from later and even from recent times, and rarely exude any of that profound spirit of Buddhist art which pervades the ancient stone statues of the classical period.

In many instances (perhaps even always), these ancient stone figures had their surfaces coated with gesso; occasionally, at least in more recent times, paper was used as grounding material. The figures were then painted with bright colors and frequently also partly gilded. Most surviving pieces bear only remnants or traces of such colors and gold; but in some instances large painted or gilded areas are hidden underneath layers of dirt. On large figures, technical devices, such as holes for plugs used to tighten the ropes which, following the folds of the garments, held the plastering in place, can still be seen. The coating has fallen off in most cases, and the figures today reveal only their stone cores, except for those which were later given a new, thick and uninspired surface covering. Most Western critics tend to overlook this fact and charge that certain figures are cumbersome and are flawed because of their crude surface modeling which is, in turn, taken as indicative of provincial craftsmanship of lesser quality. It should be conceded, however, that a good many of these mass-produced sculptures do represent a modest artistic level, even if allowance is made for their present dilapidated state.

The most valuable material--excepting the occasional use of gold for small or miniature sculptures--was bronze. Because bronze was so precious and works of bronze were in constant danger throughout the centuries from fire or from deliberate melting down for commercial considerations, few bronze works of large size have survived in China. We have to go to Japan, much more conservative in some matters, in order to locate perfect examples of the classic East Asian bronze sculpture.



Buddhist statues, other than those of larger format which had to be put together from several pieces, were cast with the lost wax (*cire-perdue*) method and, as a rule, were fire-gilt through the application of an amalgam of mercury and gold to the heated piece. This would allow the gold to chemically combine with the surface of the bronze after the mercury had evaporated. The Chinese masters of the Tang period and their talented Japanese disciples had outstanding expertise in bronze casting, and the best of their surviving works (17-22, 44, 49, 52, 60) can be called perfect examples of its kind. The loss of most early monumental bronze sculptures in China is partly compensated by the numerous attractive miniature bronzes (16, 18, 19) of Buddhist figures and groups of figures whose purpose and historical significance has already been discussed.

In addition to cast images, embossed metal sculptures (24) can also be found in Buddhist art. Reliefs of modest size, already mentioned, were made by embossing bas reliefs into thin sheets of copper, bronze or silver over carved, solid metal blocks (such blocks have survived). Such plates were subsequently mounted on wooden boards. This was an easy and cheap technique and particularly suited for the mass production of devotional and votive works for popular and private cults.

Metals other than bronze, particularly iron, were also used from at least the sixth century on for the manufacture of Buddhist statues. But many of the relatively few surviving cast iron figures do not convey the impression that this material was particularly suited for this purpose nor do they give signs of any higher artistic inspiration. It should, however, be noted that the figures were originally polychromed over a coating of gesso. Among the surviving works only a few Arhat figures and heads from the Sung to the Ming period (93) are truly significant.

Clay and lacquer sculptures are among the most important works of Buddhist art. Clay sculptures were most popular in the Central Asian sanctuaries, and soon found their way from there into China and Japan as an easily mastered and cheap technique to create cult figures of even larger sizes. Both countries already had a pre-Buddhist tradition of using clay sculptures as tomb figures. Buddhist clay sculptures were produced by two methods. One way was to cast such figures into negative wooden molds. The other, predominant in East Asia (26, 56, 70, 73), consists of applying layer after layer of clay over a wooden core or wooden frame. The latter is wrapped in straw or hemp to allow the clay to adhere to it. Each layer must dry in the open air before the next can be applied. Bits of straw and paper and, in the outer and finer layers, thin animal hair and plant fibers, are mixed into the clay to make it hold together. The final surface is given a coating of finely textured gesso of burnt white shell mixed with mica powder. This not only adds lustre but quickens the drying out process and reduces the harmful effects of humidity. Colors and gold are applied over this coating. More delicate individual parts or freely protruding parts of the figures, such as fingers or seams and corners of garments, are usually supported from within by bronze foil or wires (73) to which the layers of clay are attached.

Clay sculpture was apparently popular only during the Tang and Nara periods. Few examples have been found from later periods other than miniature sculptures. But during the classical period many masterpieces of life-size clay sculpture were created with this technique. We can only speculate about the



reasons why it fell out of use. Perhaps these figures were too easily broken and too vulnerable to humidity. It is also possible that the soft modeling of this style no longer corresponded to later stylistic ideals.

Related to sculptures made of unfired, air-dried loam or clay are those made of fired clay. These were used not only as architectural decorations, particularly as roof ornaments, but occasionally also as larger and weightier cult sculpture. There are, for example, reliefs containing individual figures and groups of figures made by this technique. The fact that they are gilded, indicates that these works held a certain sacred value. The most famous works of fired and glazed clay are the magnificent Arhats from I-chou (91, 92) which are counted among the most important spiritual achievements of East Asian sculpture in general. Later on, even porcelain figures of Buddhist beings, though possessing a charm of their own, were held in only the same modest esteem as those miniature sculptures carved from steatite or ivory, mentioned above.

Lacquer sculptures (*chia-chu*, *kan-shitsu*) constitute perhaps the most peculiar technique of East Asian image making (58, 86, 87, 89). Here, too, the figure is fashioned over a wooden core or frame, occasionally also over a clay core, around which several layers of cloth soaked in the juice of the lacquer tree are wrapped until the figure has been given its basic form. Surface details are then fashioned with the help of a thick paste of lacquer mixed with different powders and fibers, while protruding parts are supported by internal wires and similar devices.

After the successive layers of lacquer have dried the solid core or "skeleton" is often removed. At best a simple supporting frame is left inside the figure. The result is an image of remarkable size yet with extraordinarily light weight and great strength which, owing to the marvelous properties of East Asian lacquer, is immune to such destructive influences as humidity, chemical decomposition, and destructive pests. The surface is either painted in various colors or gilded by the application of gold foil onto the still moist outermost layer of lacquer.

Like clay sculpture, lacquer figures occur almost exclusively during the T'ang and Nara periods, though their origin can be traced back into the Six Dynasties period. They also enjoyed a certain revival around 1300. Their importance during the T'ang and Nara periods may perhaps have resulted from the fact that their light weight and great stability made lacquer figures particularly suitable for portable images used in processions, but this was perhaps not the only reason for their popularity and certainly does not explain the sudden discontinuance of this particular technique. Economic factors may have played a part in this. Lacquer is an expensive material. Vast quantities of it were needed for large figures, and the procedure itself was very time-consuming. But artistic considerations must also have been involved. Lacquer and clay provided ideal media for the subtly rounded plastic style of that period, and it is certainly no accident that bronze sculpture, which lent itself to the same treatment, also experienced its greatest flourishing during that time. Later on, different styles required that other materials and techniques be brought to the forefront.

Generally speaking, stone, bronze, clay, and lacquer appear to have been the predominant materials during the earlier phase from the Wei through the T'ang (in Japan from Suiko through the Nara) periods. Later, these all appear to have yielded more and more to wood, probably at least in part for economic and



technical reasons. In Japan, where the entire development of sculpture can be studied thanks to the wealth of surviving works, it is very evident that the preference for wood is intimately linked, from early Heian times (ca. 800), to a reduction of expenditures and to a gradually evolving method of division of labor within large workshops which resulted in more skillful handling of so difficult a material as wood. The use of wood, however, required also a new sense of form which could exploit the sharp edges naturally produced by wood carving, as opposed to the previously dominant rounded-off style.

It is difficult to ascertain whether similar changes occurred in China. There, even stone sculptures, which usually followed changes in style quite closely, show no such sharp break. This is perhaps a result of the fact that the Chinese sense of form tends to be more "plastic" and for this reason gave rise to a style softer and fuller than that of the Japanese. Still, conditions in China remain confusing to us. From the end of the T'ang period (after 900), however, wood seems to have been more widely used there, too. To draw conclusions based on Japanese works about the older, now mostly lost, Chinese wood sculpture is no longer permissible, because the period during which wood carving flourished in Japan coincided with the period during which that country entered into its first great phase of cultural independence from China in all fields.

Wood sculpture, as we encounter it in its most perfect form in Japan from the late 9th to early 10th to the 13th century (27-29, 45-48, 59, 61 ff., 88-90, and others), mainly employed two techniques. In the older technique the entire figure was carved from a single block. After this had been done, peripheral small elements like hands, individual fingers, corners of garments, or attributes were attached. The other technique relied on assembling a figure from numerous individual parts (*yosegi*). In addition to savings in material, this technique had the advantage of avoiding undesirable effects caused by the "working" of the wood. It also made it possible to overcome limitations to the size and shape of statues imposed by the size and shape of naturally grown wooden blocks on which the former technique relied. Another advantage of the second technique was that it facilitated division of labor, speed and production.

The master craftsman would make an exact plan based on a detailed list of measurements for the proportions of the individual parts of the figure. We know as yet very little about such proportions, but they played an important part in East Asian and also in Indian art (cf. p. 24). A number of blocks were first roughly shaped by assistants in accord with this plan and then assembled into a hollow conical or cylindrical shape roughly corresponding to the outlines of the sculpture. The details were first sketched and then carved onto the individual blocks after they had been disassembled. Finally, the figure was given its final assembly and its parts glued together. Small individual details were carved after this process had been completed. Additional elements, such as pieces of clothing, were then attached to the figure.

This technique made it possible to reserve the work of applying the finishing touches for the master craftsman and artist. All the preparatory phases of the work could be done by assistants without detrimental effect on the quality of the finished sculpture. But a certain danger of lapsing into a somewhat mechanical way of executing these figures was always present. Mistakes could, however, easily be



corrected simply by replacing the faulty part. Thuja, the wood of the sandarac tree, was the preferred wood, but cryptomeria (Japanese cedar), cherry, camphor and keyaki (*Zelkova acuminata*) were also used. Fragrant sandalwood was often employed for the most valuable figures, while boxwood could be used for small-sized figures.

Wooden figures were normally given a surface treatment. They were either painted after being given a base of gesso and then decorated with gold (a technique we will describe in the section on painting), or they were covered with cloth soaked in lacquer and, atop still another layer of lacquer, covered with gold foil. However, no surface treatment was applied when a particularly valuable wood, like sandalwood, was used. In such cases, the sculptors confined themselves to the application of light red coloring for lips, black for hair and pupils, and delicate gold ornaments on the garments.

Attributes and body ornaments were often made of metal (43, 63), particularly since the 13th century but also in earlier times; semi-precious stones (73) or rock crystal were often used for the eyes, to give the figures a livelier appearance. This was accomplished by the following procedure. After the head had been carved it was split vertically from left to right just in front of or behind the ears, or in both places; the facial mask was then hollowed out until the eye openings could be pierced and the crystal eyes inserted from the inside. A piece of gold foil with a painted-on pupil was attached to the back of such eyes, and the head then put together again. Subsequent surface treatment was applied to cover any trace of the splitting procedure.

East Asian wood carving reached a particularly high level in Japan. We do not know much about its Chinese counterpart--which has only become truly accessible to us since the Sung period--but it is clear that it had come to play a dominant role by about the year 800. Though the beauty of the grain of carved wood disappears under the surface treatment, all these works convey a profound understanding of the natural material which the Japanese forests provided for artists in varieties of superior quality. Though the differences between a bronze (44, 49), a lacquer (89), and a wooden figure (47, 48, 90) were not very obvious in East Asia because surface treatment and gilding tended to obliterate them and because iconographical types ruled out major variations, they become clearly visible upon closer examination (60, 61).

### **Sculptural Morphology**

Buddhist figures of different religious rank in the pantheon are clearly differentiated by their poses and degree of movement. The Buddhas remain in that absolute state of cool and remote quietude which symbolizes the state of nirvāna. But even at this level certain distinctions can be found. The Buddha immersed in meditation, seated, with his legs folded under him and his hands forming the samādhi-mudrā (28), displays the highest quietude imaginable for a human figure in an awake state. Buddhist art has created in this pose a perfect archetype.

A Buddha in an identical pose but forming a different mudrā such as that of teaching (24), or that of protection or wish-granting (17), has begun to act; he begins to speak to the believer through the symbolism of the mudrā. But the element of activity arising from this mudrā is still only minimal; its effect remains quiet, gentle,



and calming. This slight agitation is merged with and negated by the pervasive serenity of the pose--a very effective way of intensifying the impressions of these figures.

Buddhas depicted standing erect almost without exception show no movement of their heads and trunks, arms and legs. But the very fact that the figure is standing gives it a more "active" pose. Frequently, if not always, a standing pose represents the Buddha walking the earth or manifesting himself in a vision as *nirmāṇa-kāya* or *sambhoga-kāya*; i.e., as the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, as Amitābha appearing to the believer on his deathbed, or as some other Buddha. The standing pose is more active than the sitting pose. Through these differences in poses Buddhist art symbolizes distinctions between levels of being and forms of manifestation. Such seemingly purely formal features, which are easily mistaken for formal conventions, therefore have iconographic value and religious significance.

Such symbolic forms or formulas are never left to the free flight of the artist's imagination. Rather, it was the artist's task to impart to these rigidly defined entities as "tangible a presence" as possible, and to point through them to that state which, as the ultimate ground of being, transcends all images. To have achieved this paradoxical unity of "Emptiness" and powerful presence is one of the most admirable achievements of Buddhist art, especially for so "earthy" an art as sculpture, whose best works have nevertheless resolved this paradox in astounding fashion. A vital element in this realization of a religious archetype based on a religious idea transcending all ideas, images and representations, are these imperious and yet disinterestedly lofty poses of the Buddha statues. They are simultaneously strictly formal and yet at ease, possess inexpressible quietude and also tremendous, though hidden, power. These images, even more than the sacred texts, allow us to experience in a most compelling way what a Buddha truly is.

By necessity, a Buddha's pose must be frontal, with a strictly vertical central axis and perfect or nearly perfect symmetry. Such frontality and symmetric axiality intrude least into the "world" and into empirical/phenomenal space. If these figures were allowed to turn--no matter how slightly--or to move their extremities, their effect would be drastically different. Frontality is the pose of sacredness. It is the symbolic representation of the remoteness of the Absolute and of its majesty which dominates but does not become active itself. To the believer, the Absolute manifests itself out of the profundity (depth) of "Emptiness." It accepts veneration without turning into a responding "Thou." Conceptually and in the manner in which it symbolizes space, this "Other" is firmly linked to the vertical architectural symmetric axis of the sanctuary. The Buddha figures owe their monumentality and convincing powerful effect essentially to this pure and strict symmetry. It is, therefore, inadmissible to view them from some angular perspective. None of its forms is designed to accommodate such perspective which does not allow any of them to speak to us and from which they are never (or at least only accidentally and therefore quite improperly) seen if encountered in their normal settings.

The Bodhisattvas, the next lower category of beings, are intermediary figures. They belong to both the realms of *nirvāṇa* and *samsāra*, and so have much more of the "world" about them or assume more of its burden than do the totally remote Buddhas. Formally, their poses express their close doctrinal relationship to the Buddha. The slight turn of the two Bodhisattva figures in a triad (24, 25) toward the



central Buddha figure usually involves a kind of contrapposto including variable positions of their arms; this attitude can only be understood in terms of their integral relationship to the central figure. Though the individual Bodhisattva figures stand asymmetrically and have abandoned strict frontality, the paired figures on both sides of the Buddha figure cancel out their individual asymmetries by serving as each other's mirror image. The resulting composition of the triad, though permeated by muted dynamic tensions, comes to rest in a balanced and unshakable equilibrium. Great care is also taken to ensure that the group has clearly defined limits and that the formal direction of all movements (poses of bodies and extremities, the lay of the garment folds, etc.) converges towards the center. The outer arms of the Bodhisattvas are, therefore, left pointing downward, while their inner arms are raised towards the Buddha. Wherever the group has been enlarged, this pose is assumed by the outermost figures (25).

But whenever a Bodhisattva stands alone and is himself the main cult image (honzon), he normally assumes a strictly frontal and axial pose (compare 52, 58 with 24, 25, 40). Wherever this is not the case, we may assume that his pose has been carried over from his role as an accompanying figure of a Buddha, or that an accompanying figure has been belatedly elevated to the rank of a main figure. Therefore a strict or loose attitude (pose) is not to be taken as a direct symptom of a "strict" or "loose" sculptural style. Such purely formal features as the S-shaped curve of the body of a standing Bodhisattva, the bend of a sitting Bodhisattva, the turning of the head and the raising of the arm towards the Buddha, document an ontological more than a psychological or emotional relationship between the Bodhisattva and "his" Buddha within the hierarchy of levels of existence and being. But the idea of the Bodhisattva as a being of merciful compassion dispensing infinite favors out of his infinite compassion also implies such a high degree of loving surrender and mercy that, though the ontological aspect dominates, the psychological aspect is bound to be much more prominent than in the case of the Buddha figure. This idea has found its perfect symbolic form in the specific and singular Bodhisattva pose.

We speak of poses because we should not speak of movement in the true sense, despite certain apparent movement of the body, head and extremities. Bodhisattva figures, too, stand or sit in a composed manner without ever becoming truly active. They never seem to focus on any particular object as the result of some mental impulse; rather, they define, through their pose, their own essence and the essence of their relationship to the Buddha. Hence the peculiar and charming effect suggested by their poses of suspension in or beyond either quietude and movement.

This union of quietude and movement appears in a slightly different manner among a doctrinally related group of beings, the Vidyārājas (ming-wang, myō-ō, such as Acala=Fudō). Though these beings have a manifestly demonic presence, they normally (but by no means always) assume a calm pose. Their pose is full of concentrated power. It is charged with energy which threatens to erupt any moment so as to destroy evil, the darkness of illusion, and thus sin (69). Vidyārājas and Bodhisattvas are related as opposites in polarity, but the "Buddha nature," though expressed differently in both, also constitutes the base of ultimate reality for both. Beneath their apparent movement the Vidyārājas display that same profound quietude in which compassionate activity hides itself without seeming to "do" anything.



Devas (70, 71, 79, 80), except when they appear as main cult images or accompany main figures and hence also assume calm poses (74, 78), can perform genuinely purposeful and expressive actions when they carry out the function of world guardians, Heavenly Generals, and Gate Guardians. This is because they are still part of the *samsāra* sphere, even though they belong to the ranks of supra-human beings. Their artistic representation can therefore tie them more intimately to empirical reality, particularly with respect to pose and movement, than those types referred to above. Their function is to protect the Buddha, his teaching, his community, his sanctuary, and the world in general. They appear, therefore, on the periphery of either the altar platform or the sanctuary as splendidly armed and armored warriors with fiercely threatening facial expressions and frequently in highly active poses. Because such activity is directed toward the outer world, the inner pressure toward symmetry is relaxed to a degree unknown elsewhere in Buddhist cult sculpture. But in the final analysis, even extremely active poses only serve as antipole to that Buddha quietude from which the being and actions of these figures arise. But even in cases where divine or semi-divine beings are depicted in the act of veneration, most notably the Apsaras' (*J. hiten* or *tennin*), they are frequently shown in lively, graceful floating, flying or dancing poses. While they are so treated as early as in the "archaic" art of the Wei and Suiko periods (35), Bodhisattvas do not begin to receive a more mobile treatment of their bodies and extremities until late T'ang or early Sung, and even then are never presented in poses as active as those of the Devas. A more quiet, lyrical type of deity is the Devī (goddess), such as Śrīmahādevī (*J. Kichijōten*), the bestower of riches and good luck, who appears as an elegant lady, richly attired and gentle in her attitude.

Figures from the human sphere, such as disciples, Arhats, patriarchs, or pious laymen (24, 26, 81-96), are generally presented turning in devout veneration towards the Buddha or in poses of meditation, prayer or cultic performance. Though obviously earthly figures, they are permeated by the self-contained assurance possessed by those who have matured to great wisdom by means of a profound insight into the nature of reality, or who have overcome attachment through ascetic practices. The poses of such figures, depending on their iconographical relationships, are either frontal, particularly for portrait statues (86), or slightly turned to the side. They are either completely quiescent or show only the barest hint of movement or activity. Though they are not truly active, they also lack that pronounced "empty" silence of the Absolute and, formally speaking, that pronounced frontality and symmetry displayed by supra-mundane sacred beings and their configurations.

Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats and monks are also often depicted in the state of meditation--that spiritual-physical state most important in Buddhist teaching and practice. This is the archetypal state for one who has either become a Buddha or is striving for Buddhahood. Its perfect remoteness and profound silence symbolize the Absolute. This state becomes, therefore, the standard against which all postures, states, or modes of behavior are measured. The degree to which any figure of the hierarchy approaches this state of perfection or deviates from it indicates in every instance the place in the order of being which this figure occupies. Devas never appear in the state of meditation because of Buddhist teachings that entry into *nirvāna* is impossible from the level of the deities but can only be attempted from



that of human existence. For men, especially monks, meditation begins as a daily exercise, performed according to established rules, and designed to achieve that singular state of mind and body which allows one to enter the path of salvation.

Man is able to advance up the ladder of the minutely differentiated stages of meditation as far as his individual capacity and degree of maturity will take him. But even if one were to attain the necessary maturity for entry into nirvāna in this present life, like the Arhats are supposed to have done, one would remain in the realm of samsāra until the moment of final extinction. Man is not yet a Buddha, but his meditative pose is no longer merely a form of spiritual exercise and a point of departure. Rather, it exhibits that fulfillment characteristic of a being which has achieved its goal or is very close to doing so. All this becomes very evident if we compare depictions of meditation among historical or quasi-historical monks and Arhats to those of Buddhas (86, 127, 128).

To a certain degree, the Bodhisattvas stand outside of the sequence of mediating types and are rarely depicted as immersed in meditation, presumably because emphasis is placed on their compassionate, unselfish activities. But these activities, too, flow out of their enlightenment and reflect something of the remoteness and quietude of the highest meditation without whose fruit of wisdom the Bodhisattvas could not have become what they are and which—as the most profound ground of being of their essence and activities—illuminates their essence and activities at all times and in all places. Buddhist art deserves the highest admiration for its success in allowing us to sense in this profound radiance the loving compassion of the Bodhisattvas which distinguishes them from the Buddha as well as from monks or Arhats.

In Buddhist sculptures we do not encounter mere temporary expressions, psychological characterizations or more or less faithful depictions of practical religious acts. Rather, we encounter an internal and external "disposition," the essence of a sacred person. An ontological statement is made; not so much by means of attributes of an iconographic nature, by body postures, mudrās of meditation, or by means of realistic depictions of concrete physical characteristics, but rather by means of a total definition of these figures through the unified design which this state of meditation imposes on them down to the minutest detail. In viewing these figures we see and understand directly and immediately what meditation is, because this is unmistakably revealed to us by their artistic realization. There is no need to read such figures in a manner analogous to the manner in which we might attempt to understand a text by deciphering its individual words.

Much has still to be done to gain a more detailed understanding of this phenomenon which is so important for Buddhist religion and art. For example, from the perspective of formal criteria it should be clarified whether and how Buddhist art gives technically exact descriptions of the different types and degrees of meditation or the phases of an individual act of meditation on the basis of existing prescriptions or doctrinal schools. The way in which the variant meditative poses and states are already differentiated within the categories of monks and Arhats suggests that such description may indeed already have been attempted at this level. A description of the historical and psychological background of meditation in general and its links with the practice of Yoga in particular would go far beyond the



scope of this study. That we encounter in this pose one of the basic attitudes and archetypes of Asian religiosity is demonstrated dramatically by the fact that it already occurs in the depictions of seated divine figures on the seals of the early Indus civilization.

In cases where different figures are joined in groups, the unifying principle is not just some mutual interaction or an arbitrary rule of artistic composition but a common inner relationship to a spiritual state forming the very ground of being for all of them. This relationship is crystallized in tangible form in the quiet harmony of the figures of a particular group. There may be a more active mood on its fringes, but the group is firmly held together in its core by uniformly applied lines of composition--contours, body and garment lines, and geometric patterns. Within this assemblage, poses and movements are graduated from the immobile center formed by the Buddha figure to which all the other figures are related doctrinally and formally. The power with which these statues have been sculpted fills the group with an intense life of its own and confronts the viewer with the tremendous presence of the world order which unfolds in the archetypal images of these sacred figures.

But as we know, Buddhist figures are not only spiritually and formally linked to the other figures in such groups but also to the room in which they are placed. This raises the question of how Buddhist statues relate to these rooms. The answer may be found in the comments made earlier on their poses and movements: a genuinely three-dimensional unfolding into the space surrounding the physical borders of the figures occurs to only a negligible degree. The divine and protecting figures are perhaps the only figures which direct their attention away from the center in order to defend the sacred sphere against the outer realm of the "world." But even they always remain bound to the sacred circle to which they belong and which is the source of their activity. The other figures rest completely within themselves but are formally linked to the temple room through their attached elements (thrones, halos, canopies, etc.), though in only a quasi two-dimensional manner: their frontality has the effect of presenting them as being in a rather shallow space where they appear as essentially two-dimensional or at least relief-like images. The main plane of their bodies is projected onto the rear wall or some imaginary background plane. Their visual effect therefore depends largely on their silhouettes, i.e., on their linear outer contours rather than on the volume defined by them (22, 23, 25, 28, 40, 52; compare 24). Here we see again the high value of the line as the definer of meaning and expression of form in all of East Asian art including even the three-dimensional medium of sculpture.

This dominance of line also helps explain the strong role of relief forms in East Asian art. The contours and internal forms of the figures only express their intended meaning if viewed frontally. Any angled view, which allows the improper intrusion of the third dimension, destroys the relationship between the forms and the peculiar beauty of the flow of their lines. This beauty rests on their being lifted out and beyond their empirical connection with a particular room. They are placed into an ideal space whose nature is no longer determined by the laws of three-dimensionality. The muted glow of the gilded surfaces and the rich splendor of the colorful ornaments of the figures and the temple's interior make vital contributions



to this effect by dissolving, to a certain degree, the solid volume, the firm definitions and the material weight of these figures. They become nearly dematerialized, stripped of spatial limitations, and transparent.

But it would be erroneous to assume that because of their moderate spatial expansion and two-dimensionality Buddhist sculptures had no relationship at all to the space surrounding them. Their peculiar effect is due precisely to their withdrawal from the third dimension, i.e., the dimension of phenomenal, illusory existence, because their power emanates into this world out of the core of their spiritual concentration without, however, becoming physically active. Such images are, therefore, not speaking directly to the viewer, rather they confront him "indifferently," even though in a higher sense an ultimate metaphysical unity exists between them and the viewer. They speak "above" him and yet for the sake of his salvation. They radiate their "Buddha light" from the quiet darkness of the temple hall into the whole world. They are free from ties to empirical space, but also free from pure two-dimensionality (as found in archaic art) because they have transcended this and all other alternatives and have reached the state of "Emptiness" which can be labeled neither transcendent nor immanent because it combines and yet transcends both. Without reference to this paradoxical-dialectic basic attitude of Mahâyâna none of its works of art is intelligible.

This attitude found its perfect tangible embodiment in the Buddha and Bodhisattva statues of the mature period. These are fully defined in space and yet seem outside space. They have volume and yet appear almost transparent. They are present and yet remote. It is, therefore, risky to make one-sided statements about them or about Buddhist works of art in general. Any such statements would have to be negated by a statement exactly contrary in nature. The "emptiness" (in the strictly Mahâyâna sense of the word) thus created makes visible that which is essential and can no longer be spoken of. We may well be justified in raising the question if this is not true with respect to all great art, though particularly religious art, and if, therefore, Buddhist art possesses particularly paradigmatic value because this intent constitutes such a conspicuous element of this art.

This basic world view also determines the way the human body is treated. Though this treatment is not based on empirical knowledge of anatomy, it may nevertheless be claimed that the Buddhist artists of East Asia understood the structure and function of the human body in all its essential aspects and knew how to make its living forms serve their creative intentions. They never turned the organic human body into a perfect vehicle of an ideal of human beauty or anthropomorphic divinity, but also never negated it in the way early medieval Western art did. The body is present, is accepted and used as an instrument for imparting religious meaning without, however, ever trapping the Buddhist artists into becoming preoccupied with it. The body is given volume, even substantial volume, and is obviously made quite deliberately a part of the total artistic formula, but it is at the same time treated in a manner to make the anthropomorphic figures appear light and "floating." They appear to be in gentle retreat from their own corporeal presence, because their volume does not surge from within by displacing imagined or real space and because their physical mass appears to be peculiarly dematerialized (22, 23, 28, 29, 40, 46, 58, 64). It is permeated by weightlessness and



seemingly freed from the laws of gravity, as is characteristic of the "subtle" body created in Yoga exercises and in meditation. We have already pointed to analogous features in the movements and relationships of the figures to their surrounding space.

Once the archaic stage had been left behind, body movements in mature Buddhist art (from the 7th or 8th century on) are quite natural or, at least, do not contradict natural movements (24, 55-57, 68). It is precisely the unassuming matter-of-factness with which these movements are displayed that makes them such convincing vehicles for expressing a religious view which has left nature far behind without, however, radically and ascetically divorcing itself from it. This is quite in line with the basic Mahâyâna teachings about the relationship between nirvâna and samsâra: they do not exclude each other but neither do they merge into one. Just as the phenomenal world "is as if it were not," the figures of Buddhist art, too, have their human organic bodies as "if they had them not." Just as nirvâna is inherent in all samsâra existence and is only visible in it and through it, the "empty" Buddha nature dwells in those bodies on which it has to depend in order to manifest itself.

Many figures are very beautiful (28, 42, 46, 48, 57), and this beauty is somehow magically enhanced by their supernatural nature, but their bodies, poses, motions or self-contained quiescence also contribute significantly to it. It does not matter that the Buddhist artists do not stick to anatomical details to any significant degree. They standardize human forms into ideal shapes which are occasionally determined by iconographic rules (23, 44, 47, 49). This is quite in line with the religious function of this art, since Buddhism sees in the body only a symbol of essence and not a visible phenomenon. This is true not only of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, but also of the much more active, mobile, and therefore organically more strongly modeled figures of the Devas and similar beings. And the play of their very pronounced muscles and joints is also subject to the restraining impulses arising from religious ideals (70, 73). The fact that they appear rather baroquely realistic to Western observers does not invalidate this claim, because Westerners tend to be inclined to focus only on one particular aspect of East Asian phenomena.

Buddhist images reveal a few characteristic peculiarities in their treatment of details of body structure and function. We are likely to notice, frequently even with a little uneasiness, a certain plumpness of the body shapes, particularly among the figures of highest level, i.e., Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Their bodies are given a massive volume which only faintly displays articulations indicating the organic functions of their parts (22, 23, 58, 66). The forms of the trunk as well as the head tend toward spherical and those of the extremities to cylindrical forms (49, 60). The joints are smoothly padded and therefore lack emphasis as functionally important points in the organic structure and mechanism of the body, even though they are frequently marked by indented lines, as, for example, along the wrists. The Buddhist sculptor does not penetrate to the skeletal structure and the linkages of its joints, but instead attempts to give a total and convincing image of the human body as a unified structure which not only meets all religious-iconographic requirements but is also aesthetically effective.

In the case of beings on the highest level, these iconographic requirements make necessary a high degree of abstraction from the organic-functional realities of the empirical human body, i.e., the depiction of certain generalized ideal forms.



These do not, however, idealize the living body in the Greek manner nor, on the other hand, do they permit the abandonment of the body in favor of an anti-realistic supra-worldliness. Rather, this idealization causes the number of form elements to be reduced and their treatment to be stereotyped. In the case of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, these elements may even become nearly "geometrized"--a fact which becomes evident by observing the shape of the basic volumes of their bodies or the curves which appear on chests and bellies and also on the lines running from the nose to the eyebrows (28, 47, 48, 49, 61).

But in spite of the clarity resulting from such treatment, the figures manage to display extraordinarily soft, in some instances almost dough-like forms. Arms and hands (50) cover underlying structures of bones and joints so thoroughly that a smooth flow from body part to body part is achieved. This, in turn, gives the entire figure the appearance of a unified structure sustained by a flexible rhythm of its own. Its individual parts are no longer consciously noticed as such, nor is there any functional articulation. While this rhythmic flow is noticeable in the outlines of the body and the garments of seated or standing Buddha figures (22, 23) and has much to do with the effect of complete quietude they produce, the Bodhisattva figures, which may assume different and even slightly active poses (24, 54, 55, 57, 68), show more of this flow permeating the body itself. Characteristically, the slightly forward thrust of hip and belly is accompanied by a corresponding backward inclination of the upper part of the body. In mature Buddhist art, Bodhisattvas display a sort of contrapposto which is missing only when Bodhisattva figures are main cult images and must assume an erect and axial pose (52, 58). This contrapposto (the term is a misnomer) originated in Indian art, where since ancient times the tribhanga, or "thrice bent" pose, was customarily used for numerous figure types. It is not anatomically "correct" in the way classical European art demanded and cannot be expressed in mathematical formulas; for example, the position of the legs and feet is only slightly influenced by the twist of the trunk. Nevertheless, the effect of this pose is rather pronounced and imparts to a figure a marvelous vitality and charm.

But their charm really arises from the religious nature of these figures, and not from their idealization of the forms of the human body. Masterly use is made of the body and its possibilities, but the image is not dependent on or even tied to organic principles. The formal play of the tribhanga pose may occasionally even assume something akin to a dancing movement (55). The pose of the head--upright or slightly inclined--and that of the arms fit harmoniously into the overall rhythm. But we have to bear in mind that the positioning of the arms and hands, no matter how essential for the total artistic impression, is iconographically determined and should not be understood as being primarily a matter of physical posture and aesthetic charm. The hands of the Bodhisattvas are soft and often seem virtually boneless. Their flexible, bent figures speak the language of the mudrās in a refined and noble, and occasionally also quite affected manner. The hands of the Buddhas (50), however, though also full of the expressive powers of the mudrās, lack the peculiar charm of the Bodhisattvas' hands. It is not the purpose of the Buddha images to express the charm of merciful compassion; they aim at solemn grandeur and majesty, are remote from the world but full of grace. Their innate mercy, tenderness and grace are hidden behind this grandeur and majesty and become



openly manifest only in the Bodhisattvas, who are mediators between the Buddha and the world of suffering beings.

The farther we descend on the scale of beings, the more attention is paid by the Buddhist sculptors to the structure and functions of the body. Many of the Devas have an almost Bodhisattva-like appearance, but their *samsâra* links are mainly expressed through a more realistic depiction of their garments. Their heads, too, seem more earthly and worldly. Deva expressions are not as remote and spiritualized as those of the Bodhisattvas. This becomes very evident if we compare both types side by side (52, 58, 74). The same contrast is sharply revealed in the figures of the belligerent deities (70, 73). The entire body of such a figure, down to the finger tips and hairs, is filled with an expressive dynamism which is at times kept more restrained by a nearly rigid pose of concentrated power, but may occasionally also be unleashed in a furious rage. Their bodies are treated more freely. Organic details, like muscles, sinews, and veins on the foundation of a more or less clearly defined skeletal structure are worked out with great diligence to properly serve their iconographic functions. The same holds for tensions and movements, which are expressed through extended, strutting and belligerent poses of the legs or the aggressive grasping and stretching of the arms, all of which represent most powerfully expressive exaggerations. The same attention to detail is also found in the masterful design of the faces. Eyes, eyebrows, cheeks, lips, and frequently screaming open mouths are of frightening vivacity and reveal considerable mastery over body forms and their expressive language.

It is only the application of the full use of very specific artistic means which enables the Buddhist sculptors to do justice to their task without slavishly imitating nature. The range of this art is admirable. It allowed Buddhist artists to create simultaneously and with equal mastery such opposite types as those belligerently expressive deities or the Vidyârâjas, who in many ways resemble them, and the calm Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. In Buddhist terms, these contrasts are not real because both share a final common ground and only differ so strongly at the phenomenal level. Buddhist art has succeeded in suggesting that inner unity hidden beneath all these external contrasts.

The difference in the treatment of the body between human figures (81-96) like monks (primarily Arhats), priests and laymen and the Buddha and Bodhisattva types is of another sort. Human figures lack the Bodhisattvas' aura of supra-worldly grace. Their unassuming appearance actually puts them nearer to the Buddha figures, who despite their metaphysical elevation, are still basically depicted as simple Indian monks. But closer investigation reveals crucial differences. Human figures, even those remaining completely inactive, are treated with much greater attention to anatomical structure, primarily of heads and hands but also of the body, which is highly noticeable under the garment which veils it. Their skulls and facial features are more strongly individualized, even in cases where the pose of meditation produces an expression of detached calm and maturity. Many of these figures are portraits of real persons, idealizing portraits intended to capture the essence of their personality as they exist or could exist in the historical world.

The home of the Buddhas is, on the other hand, the supra-personal and supra-historical world. A comparison of the figures of a Buddha and a monk, which at first glance may appear to the Western observer to be extraordinarily close to



each other, reveals a fundamental difference (22, 23, 28, 86), even in works from approximately the same period. The head of the Buddha has a perfectly regular oval or spheric shape, and, with the exception of the *uṣṇīṣa*, which is a purely iconographical symbol, all the individual features of the Buddha face are modeled in a perfectly symmetrical and stereotyped ideal fashion. They are fashioned in a way which smoothes all uneven spots on their surfaces. The heads of monks, on the other hand, display a variety of irregularities to indicate that these are beings who are still part of the earthly sphere of *samsāra*. The contours of the skull, the curvature of the eyebrows, the nose, and wrinkles between nose and mouth, the mouth itself are not only different in the sense that there are superficial stylistic variant forms, individual to individual, but because all such individuals belong to a different level of existence and therefore reflect a different attitude towards empirical reality.

The body of a monk, though closer to the supra-empirical realm by virtue of its meditative or venerating pose, is still treated as a time-bound, individual phenomenon, while the body of a Buddha is treated as a symbol of the Absolute. This distinction is maintained down to the minutest formal feature, as even a cursory glance at garments or hand poses will confirm. The human figures indicate also various specific human age groups in rich and delicate variations, whereas there are no images which distinguish between young, middle-aged or old Buddhas. The same applies to the Bodhisattvas, though they appear to be slightly more youthful than the Buddhas. This, however, is not an empirical youthfulness but rather a symbol for a particular spiritual state of being.

Differentiation, though within narrow limits, begins with the Devas, but only the Arhats and monks fully enter the empirical flow of time. They are physically a part of this flow even though they have either spiritually already left it behind or are striving to do so in order to enter into that timeless Buddha nature which already shines from within these figures no matter how short of perfection they may be. In one case (86), the expression of meditation on the face of a monk combines in a marvelously delicate manner with the effects of his blindness. Thus his whole being seems to be suspended in some intermediary realm between external blindness and inner enlightenment. His earthly limitations and empirical appearance and fate are gently transcended into the Buddha nature which is already beginning to permeate his bodily form and somehow helps elevate lifelike depiction into the sphere of higher ideality.

Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, monks and also certain Deva types, though quite different from the demonic figure types, are also profoundly different from each other in their psychic expressions. The Buddhas actually display no expression at all, because they are beyond the realm of all psychic stirrings. Their "expressionlessness" is still extremely eloquent; i.e., in a non-psychological, but rather ontological sense as the manifestation of the absolute ground of being. In its emptiness all expressions and meanings are contained. True, it is possible to distinguish between Buddha figures originating from different sects and periods and those based on different teachings, cults, types of piety and general outlook on life. There are those who appear distant, coolly majestic, solemn, nobly refined, or mildly compassionate. But these differences are overwhelmed by the tremendous weight



of their common ontological statement which manifests itself in that universal expression of perfect neutrality.

The facial expressions and body poses of the Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, allow us to sense their role as intermediary expressing their compassionate kindness towards the suffering world. This intermediary role and compassion are the form and fruit of supreme wisdom and partake in the absolute essence of the Buddha nature. But these figures only let us sense their Buddha nature implicitly. They do not make it really visible and tangible because its external manifestations are but a very faint reflection of its essence. The "smile" (47, 48) is not accompanied by any identifiable change in their facial expressions which could link them to the imperfect samsāra world. However, compared to the face of the Buddha, their features are perceptibly animated. Although they turn to and approach the sphere of the phenomenal world and its emotions they are kept aloof from and are never made to succumb to it--by virtue of a detached remoteness.

The Devas, though sometimes displaying a calm and lofty character, are one step closer to earthly phenomena. This is revealed by their expressions. They make visible that decisive step which marks the crossover from the state of liberation into the realm of samsāra. While displaying a powerful and benevolent majesty and combining it with a worldly fullness and gravity--occasionally even with a touch of sadness--they reveal that lack of spiritual alertness which is an unmistakable sign that they still fall short of that crucially important enlightening wisdom. A careful comparison of the heads of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Devas from identical periods and equal artistic levels makes these differences very clear (22, 23, 29; 47, 48, 65; 74, 77, 78).

The belligerent divine types (world guardians, heavenly generals, etc.; 70 ff., 79) share with the Devas their participation in the samsāra world. Though clearly supra-human, they are not supra-worldly. But it is characteristic of Buddhist art that even their demonic outbursts remain within the imaginary circle of actions sacredly bound and related to the highest center, the Buddha, and the mandate originating from it. Though their expressions may, therefore, be highly intensive, this intensity is also always visibly restrained.

A similar point could be made about the Vidyārājas. But the difference which exists between their wildly demonic, even frightening expressions and that of the divine warriors exists *mutatis mutandis* between the expressions of Bodhisattvas and Devas. We encounter in both cases the parallel distinctions in levels of existence and enlightenment. The Vidyārājas, as embodiments of the ultimate, all-permeating, most secret wisdom, display, in Anesaki's formula, "expression in suppression," "eloquence in silence." Even in these terrifying beings, the *numinosum tremendum* also always manifests the *numinosum fascinans*--a hidden kindness and compassion revealing their true Buddha nature. The power of both the benevolent and the terrifying sacred beings is only sensed below the surface. Their energy is unleashed in a manner mild enough for human hearts to bear. The Tao-te-ching's (4th cent. B.C.; chapters 4 and 56) passage "Radiance subdued, adapted to the worldly dust" is frequently quoted to characterize this particular quality.

Human faces--regardless of the spiritual levels attained by the monks and the Arhats--lack that glow from within and that beatified "smile" which symbolize non-attachment to the world. Their expressions are in most instances permeated by the



solemnity of profound spiritual struggles, frequently also by the primordial force of world renunciation, and occasionally by joy at the attainment of enlightenment. The Arhats may even display an occasional touch of grotesque humor which also expresses their inner sovereignty and freedom. In the great Arhat series (of 16, 18, or even 500 figures) Buddhist art has succeeded in expressing nearly all characterological types and numerous variants of expression of the *homo religiosus* in an authentic, psychologically extremely revealing form, which has as yet hardly been appreciated.

But all these figures and faces, no matter how impressive, do not proclaim the same truth as do the faces of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas which reflect the fact of their effortless possession of the highest truth and their attainment of the final state of liberation in nirvāna arising out of this truth. Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are, in turn, distinguishable from each other by the fact that their expressions make it very evident that the former have absolutely attained this blessed state, the state of parinirvāna, and are therefore elevated above all "expression," all activity and all empirical forms, while the latter, for the time being, belong to this state only potentially in their innermost essence, but have not yet entered it in actuality. It is this state of "not-yet" arising, as it does, from a free decision to intervene compassionately in the suffering world and the state of "but already" implicit in it as its potential fruit which we sense in the distinct Bodhisattva expression. There is a simultaneousness and a dialectic unity of "infinitely compassionate response and sublime, knowing indifference to his eternal task" on the part of the Bodhisattva. Buddhist art would seem to have succeeded to a degree we can hardly overestimate in capturing these very subtle religious distinctions in meaningful and convincing images through the medium of the human figure and the possibilities offered by its forms and expressions.

The independence of the Buddhist artist from the conditions of empirical reality mentioned above had important consequences for the entire manner in which the human body was treated. It also made possible the creation of figures with several heads and arms and "abnormal" supernatural body signs (*uṣṇīṣa*, etc.). Surprisingly, these figures do not appear as abstruse, grotesque or repulsive as one might expect. Their multiple extremities, whether in repose--as in the case of the six-armed form of Avalokiteśvara (63)--or in ecstatic movement (as in the case of certain beings of esoteric Buddhism), appear "natural" as if plausibly integrated into the organic structure of the body. This is so because the structural laws of anatomy were always only observed, even with respect to normal human figures, as long as the religious function of the figure and the artistic means suitable for its realization required or permitted their observance. In the West the figures of the Buddhist pantheon frequently had the reputation of being exotic and bizarre, but a quick glance at our illustrations reveals how little this applies to East Asia. There, out of a profoundly humanistic spirit, artists have always shied away from extreme distortions of the human image even in cases where it served only as a symbol for supra-human and supra-worldly truths.

Finally, Western observers may be inclined to ask about the role of the nude figure in Buddhist sculpture. The completely nude body does not occur at all, with the exception of particular cult figures such as that of Kṣitigarbha (Ti-tsang, Ji-zō)



which were draped with real items of clothing; some even had wigs of real hair and their bodies were fashioned in a rather standardized, doll-like manner so that they can hardly be considered as works of art. The nude figure is rather rare in East Asian art, including painting. There are many reasons to explain this fact but we are unable to discuss them any further in this context. Nudes occur only in places where their presence would be natural and appropriate for the themes to be illustrated, as, for example, in working or bathing figures or in erotic scenes depicted in certain Chinese and Japanese woodblock prints. But even in these instances the totally or partially dressed figure was considered to be more attractive. In religious art, nude figures appear most conspicuously as denizens of hell (124) and among demonic or semi-divine beings of low ranks (31, 70 lower picture). But the semi-clothed figure is very important. Many Bodhisattvas, Vidyârâjas and similar figures (25, 52, 58-61, 66, 69, 75) wear only dhoti of varying lengths and long scarf-like pieces of clothing, in addition to rich jewelry on their nude upper body and arms. The Indian model is retained here down to the smallest details. Even the massive soft body structure, which we may mistakenly view as being fat and phlegmatic, is ultimately perhaps also of Indian origin. Bodhisattvas, above all, represent the type of the Indian prince transposed into the spiritual realm. Similarly, the Buddha (22, 28, 29) retains the appearance of the Indian mendicant monk. After the early phase, during which his body was entirely covered by a richly folded garment, he also appears only partially clothed. Usually his chest and one shoulder are left bare and his garment--the robe of a monk--frequently veils the body only so thinly and tightly that it is not only visible but the Buddha almost appears to be naked.

However, truly nude Buddha figures do not occur in East Asia. The Buddha appears with bare upper body only as a child (Buddha after his birth; 32), and even then his dhoti extends to his knees or feet. One arm is raised; the other points down to earth. This is the pose in which he proclaims his mission to save the world. Such figures have always been used during a ritual performed on Śākyamuni's birthday (April 8). For Bodhisattvas and Vidyârâjas, semi-nudity is of considerable importance. It bestows upon them a kind of ideality and, on the other hand, serves to provide them with exact characteristic features. Nudity is treated completely differently in the case of Bodhisattvas than, for example, in the case of Temple Guardians (Dvârapâla), as it expresses the particular essence of both figure types. In both cases naturalistic treatment is absent but in the case of the former the body forms are stylized to produce an effect of graceful smoothness and softness. In the case of the latter, they are used to convey a sense of heightened dynamic tension without, however, divorcing them significantly from their organic substance. Anatomically speaking, muscles and sinews are frequently found in the wrong places, but they still produce the "right" effects. A more naturalistic design of the naked body parts can be found in the case of monks (87) and of similar figures who had spiritual distinction and inner wisdom but not physical strength and beauty bestowed upon them as symbols of a supra-human or supra-worldly essence.

The normal type is, therefore, the half or fully clothed figure. It may be generally claimed that a rather natural, lifelike relationship exists between body and garment. The garment follows the body, covers it more or less, but always allows it to be perceived in its natural form, with the exception of the archaic sculptures of the Wei style in China and Japan (16, 17, 42). Even in cases where nothing of the



body itself, other than head, arms and feet, is visible under a wide, richly folded monk's robe, the artist usually excels in conveying a sense of the body, its volume, its pose and movements with the help of the garment. We encounter here a remarkably unforced, natural relationship between body and garment in which either the one or the other may assume the leading role, but the two never clash or ignore or negate each other. This typifies the "mean" position in which all possible alternatives, tensions and contrasts have already a priori been surmounted without effort. That "clash" between body and garment, which is characteristic of large parts of European art, hardly ever occurred in East Asia.

The function of garments is therefore found, first, in their contribution to the creation of convincing sacred figures and in the construction of their corporeality. East Asian art generally conceptualizes the body in unity with the garment, so that body and garment occur simultaneously rather than in the manner of a naked body which has then been covered by a garment. The notion--cultivated in Europe by the Greeks and also found in more recent art--which sees the naked body as the true body in its authentic state and as the purest and most suitable vehicle for ideal artistic forms is alien to East Asia. The role of the garment is, in the second place, defined by the specific characteristics of the individual types of beings and involves therefore also clear iconographical distinctions.

The Indian-style garment of a Bodhisattva is entirely different from that of a Deva whose dress or armor follow certain Central Asian and Chinese models so closely that such figures may serve as almost ideal documentations for the history of costumes and weapons in those areas. A divine world guardian is modeled after a Central Asian-Chinese armed warrior (70). A goddess, like Śrī-devī (74) resembles a Chinese lady dressed according to the fashion of a particular period, in physical type, pose, garment, hair style, and jewelry. All this demonstrates the fact that these figures belong to the saṃsāra world in spite of their supra-human character. It is, therefore, not permissible to speak of them as representing attempts to humanize the divine. Bodhisattvas and Buddhas are elevated into an ideal sphere by virtue of their peculiar dress and jewelry or, in the case of the Buddha, by virtue of his complete lack of jewelry. Indian body, garment and jewelry types--coming, as they did, from the holy land of Buddhism and serving Chinese and Japanese alike as distant yet piously venerated models--imparted to these figures *eo ipso* a kind of classic, ideal form far removed from the stock of ideas and treasures of forms found in China's and Japan's original secular and national environment.

The third function of the garment is to make visible as intensively as possible the essence and the spiritual state of the different sacred beings with the help of a genuinely artistic expressive play of forms to supplement the iconographic characteristics of these garments. Though still in the service of the figure as a whole, the garments can still be seen as an independent vehicle of stylistic traits traceable from period to period. It is particularly characteristic of East Asian art that such stylistic changes are almost exclusively expressed through the medium of the free play of lines formed by the folds, seams, and corners of the garments. It has been claimed with good reason that the lines of the garments assume the same role in East Asian sculpture as the brush lines do in painting and calligraphy.

It remains to be exactly analyzed with the help of specific examples how the essence of a Buddha is expressed in the flow of the lines of his robe--which are



totally calm, clear, relaxed and yet filled with melody and rhythm (22, 23, 25, 28)--and how the circular movement of these forms, constantly returning to themselves and thus focused on a central point, corresponds to the poses of these figures as a whole and the state of mind they symbolize. The livelier, more flexible, more graceful, and more expressive flow of the garment folds found on figures of Bodhisattvas (52, 55, 57, 58, 60, 61, 65) expresses their essential nature. Drapery is intensified into raging, tension-filled, powerful and active dimensions whenever Devas and similar figures of a belligerent character have to be created (69, 73, 80).

It could also be shown, for example, that crucial differences exist between the stylistic treatment of a Bodhisattva and an apparently rather similar female or male Deva figure with respect to the forms of their garments, and that such differences parallel those of all the other design features. For Deva types all the features are somewhat "earthier," i.e., closer to the human sphere. They have more of the quality of our empirical sphere and less of that of an abstractly spiritualized realm (52, 55, 58, 74, 78).

At a more general level, it may be stated that the more or less two-dimensional, largely decorative-symbolical lines dominate with respect to the garments of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Vidyârâjas, while for beings of the samsâra world, such as gods, demonic beings and human beings (78 ff.), garment folds assume a much more plastic, three-dimensional and also materially more precisely characterized form, which is quite in harmony with their more realistic, life-filled, but as yet spiritually unemancipated corporeality. Also very revealing is a comparison between the strictly stylized, regular, nearly geometric-ornamental play of the garment folds of the Buddha figures (22 f.) and the entirely different, more randomly lifelike pattern of the robes of monk figures (86). This distinction is not yet as clearly visible at the earlier archaic stage of development with its generally dominating archaic style (16, 17, 42) but, beginning with the period of maturity since the early Tang period (7th century), these stylistic levels have been clearly differentiated. As we have already shown, features corresponding to differences in the treatment of garments may also be observed in the treatment of body poses and facial expressions.

All this may lead us to an insight crucial for an understanding of Buddhist art. If we review our statements about general figure types, poses and movements, about relationship to the third dimension, treatment of body and garment, etc., it becomes evident that as we are descending the ladder of the Buddhist pantheon the more we encounter realistic depiction, fullness of detail, corporeality, and activity which reaches out into the world. In short, we encounter an ever-increasing "realism." The different figure types occur simultaneously but the Western observer is prone to perceive the obvious differences in style as style phases following each other in historical sequence, i.e., to transpose these ontological states into historical categories and not to recognize the primarily "iconographical" values of those stylistic features.

Experience has shown that we arrive at totally erroneous dates if we follow the assumption that more active figures, depicted in more lifelike corporeality and garments, are more recent than quiescent, idealized, more strongly abstract figures with fewer naturalistic details. This is not to say that Buddhist art did not experience historical changes in style which allow us to date individual figures with a



considerable degree of accuracy. (I will have more to say about this in a later chapter.) As a matter of fact, it is Buddhist sculpture which reveals such changes with exemplary clarity. But these changes take place at a level below the differences among figure types which are determined by their religious categories of existence maintained across the sequences of historical phases. Within these types we find a relatively high degree of stability and continuity which may easily mislead the uninitiated into assuming that the East knows no historical changes. Such changes do occur. But in art, as elsewhere, the principles (if not laws) of historical processes, and particularly the relationship of each present to its past, i.e., to tradition, is somewhat different than in the West.

### **The Buddhist Sculptor**

If we attempt to answer questions about the artists who created the Buddhist images, we must assume that conditions were similar to those of the European medieval period. Sculptors were primarily craftsmen in the employ of religious institutions, most notably of temples and monasteries and their workshops. In most instances they remained anonymous. We are more likely to learn the names of the priests who were responsible for the correct iconographic design and, hence, the religio-magical efficacy of the images. These priests are often erroneously identified in the sources as the creators of those works in the sense that they had actually fashioned them. Particularly in China, where artists are usually deemed worthy of being mentioned in the official historiography only if they were painters or calligraphers who fit the definition of the classical Chinese artistic literati ideal, sculptors are rarely ever mentioned or at best are referred to only in passing. It is typical that one of the very few masters mentioned in the official chronicles of the Six Dynasty period, Tai Kuei (4th century), was both a painter and musician. And several sculptors of the T'ang period are only mentioned because they had built their reputation primarily as painters. Other sources, local and temple chronicles, devotional books and inscriptions also yield little or no information about sculptors even in cases where they provide detailed information about the date, size, weight and material of those large images which attracted more than ordinary attention, constituted the true center of a temple building and provided the reason for its construction. We must be aware that the "makers" of an image identified by name on consecrating inscriptions were frequently not its real creators, but rather sponsors or donors.

The situation is somewhat different in Japan. The first great sculptor, Tori Busshi (Busshi means "Buddha master"), was a descendant of immigrant Chinese. He enjoys a well-deserved fame as the creator of the main cult image (17) of the Golden Hall of the Hōryūji (early 7th century) and therefore as the father of Buddhist sculpture in Japan. Beginning with him down through the Kamakura period with its great wood carvers, the names of many masters appear in historical sources, inscriptions and signatures. These individuals should, however, not be regarded as artistic personalities in the Western sense, but more as workshop directors, heads of certain schools and leading representatives of particular artistic traditions. Their fame was based on craftsmanship, and they were closely linked to particular religious institutions and aristocratic sponsors. They emerged into the



limelight, while the vast number of their anonymous workshop assistants and the many, mostly obscure, provincial sculptors remained anonymous.

These protagonists could only rise to prominence after the immigrant Chinese and Korean teachers, who dominated the early periods, gradually lost their importance and finally disappeared altogether--a process which began as early as the 8th century during the Nara period. It is well documented that important images of the early period were created by Chinese or Korean masters, or by Japanese disciples working under their direction. We know that the portrait statue (86) of the Chinese abbot, Chien-chen (J. *Ganjin*, 688-763)--who had been invited to Japan with great fanfare and who had lost his eyesight during the long drawn-out and dangerous voyage--was created by one of the Chinese artists who had accompanied him. Many of the other Buddhist sculptors may have been monks who had artistic talent and expertise in various crafts.

But the leading masters of medieval Japan whose names are known to us were not members of the clergy or were so only pro forma. One of the greatest among them was Jôchô (died 1057), the creator of the refined, aristocratic, mature classic style of the courtly Fujiwara period (28). He was the founder of the first major independent woodcarving workshop from which all important later workshops descended or branched off. He was an artist who received commissions from all quarters but primarily, of course, from temple-monasteries and the court aristocracy, and was therefore by no means an "independent artist." He could cope with all those commissions only by means of a form of division of labor applied to the carving process which I have described above. He was the first to be awarded the rank of a Buddhist priest as an honorary title--a fact which demonstrates the rise in social prestige of these craftsmen-artists.

A large number of great masters were active during the Kamakura period. Each had his own individual style and also tended to sign his works, albeit not in very conspicuous places (usually in the hollow interior of the statues). Such signatures are somewhat different from and rather more personal than, for example, the official consecrating inscription engraved on a statue (17) which identifies Tori as its master creator. The documents identify the carvers of the images, and (occasionally even ahead of them) the painters who applied the figure's surface coating, which was of crucial importance just as it was in gothic wood-carved figures.

This does not mean, however, that it is easy to compile a reliable list of all the works of the greatest master of the Kamakura period, Unkei (ca. 1153-1224), on the basis of such source material and more general stylistic criteria. Among the statues which are more or less reliably ascribed to him (29, 88-90) are some of the most outstanding works of Buddhist sculpture in all of East Asia. These works have been praised because of their technical expertise as well as their inspired vitality and religious spirituality. Unkei's father, Kôkei, had also been a great master who had made basic contributions to the evolution of the Kamakura style. His son and grandson managed to continue his school for a while until Buddhist sculpture suffered a gradual decline.

Such traditions of particular families, workshops and schools, created and maintained in part by natural descendants and in part by the general practice of adopting talented disciples, were extremely important for the steady development of Buddhist sculpture and many other fields of art. Sustained by this steady flow of



tradition, important masters could rise like waves above the average level without seeing the continuation and future impact of their legacy jeopardized. Of course, these conditions also favored a certain trend toward mechanical reproduction and mass production. This did not, however, pose the same threat to artistic creativity so evident in modern times, because these culturally vigorous earlier periods still mainly relied on individual creative personalities. The master in charge of producing a sculpture put his own stamp more or less clearly on all work done in his workshop, even though not every, perhaps not even a single one of these works should be regarded as an authentic creation or as the free expression of his personal style in the modern sense. The high quality of the major products of a workshop reflects the decisive influence of the master with respect to design and adjustment and it is he who put the finishing touches on these works. Such personal finishing touches may frequently not even have been necessary, because the master had raised the work of the entire workshop to such high levels that every member and every individual piece of work was permeated by his individual style. We should perhaps visualize this relationship as being similar to that prevailing within an outstanding orchestra whose achievements are neither exclusively those of its conductor nor those of its individual musicians but arise from the creative atmosphere generated by its leader joining both leader and musicians in a common creative venture.

Men of "original genius" in the modern sense, therefore, did not exist or did so only very rarely. They appeared, if at all, in much more recent periods, as, for example, a poor mendicant monk who up to now has been little known in the West and was only recently discovered in Japan. He called himself Mokuji Shōnin (The Honorable Plant Eater or Vegetarian, 1718-1810). As a sign of his gratitude and in fulfillment of a vow, he would leave carved wooden figures (94) wherever he had been given shelter. A large number of them have been preserved in remote rural areas. The inspiration for these figures may have come from rural folk-art to which we owe carved dolls and figures of goddesses of fortune, etc., of great charm. It may also be found in the style and particular sculpting techniques of Shintō cult images. But these works do reveal a truly outstanding, though naive, original talent which had broken away from the long since ossified official tradition of Buddhist sculpture. They are also permeated by a scurrilous humor arising from the world-transcending and smiling wisdom of a mendicant monk. This humor does not spare even the Bodhisattva figures, but it never profanes them.