

# Buddha

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The Louis E. Stern Collection, 1963; 1963-181-210

*Buddha, 9th century; Korean; Gilded bronze; 7 x 2 inches (17.8 x 5.1 cm)*



Philadelphia Museum of Art. The Louis E. Stern Collection, r963-18r-2r0  
*Gilded Bronze 7 x 2 inches (17.8 x 5.1 cm) Unified Silla Dynasty, 668-935 (8th Century) Korea*

## About This Sculpture

This tiny sculpture of a standing Buddha is only seven inches high. It may have once been part of a private altar, surrounded by a lacquered or gold and silver shrine, and used in worship by a royal or aristocratic devotee. Scholars have suggested that portable images such as this piece were important in the spread of Buddhist teachings and regional artistic styles. The delicate details and graceful proportions exemplify the refined taste and exquisite craftsmanship of artisans working during the years of the Unified Silla dynasty (668-935), a high point in the production of Buddhist sculpture in

Korea.

The sculpture was originally cast in bronze and then plated with a thin layer of gold, much of which has worn away. The figure has elongated, partially closed eyes, gently arched eyebrows, and a faint smile. The bump on his head, which accommodates superior wisdom, and his elongated ears, which reflect compassion and a desire to hear the sounds of the world, identify this figure as a Buddha. His right hand is raised with the palm facing outward, his thumb and middle finger drawn together in a gesture of teaching and serenity. His left hand is close to the body, the palm facing upward in a gesture of giving.

Buddha images are often seen wearing robes of a monk; in this case, he is shown in a two-layered, ankle-length garment that encircles the body, drapes over the left shoulder, and is left open at the chest. The modest dress reminds the devotee that the Buddha renounced all worldly pleasures and riches to live a simple, secluded life.

## The History of Buddhism in Korea

The religion of Buddhism began in India, and is based on the life and teachings of Siddhartha Gautama (called the historic Buddha or kyamuni) who lived between 563 and 483 BCE. Chinese monks brought Buddhism to Korea around the fourth century CE.

Members of the Korean ruling and aristocratic classes were the first to embrace the faith, which offered a new pathway to peace and enlightenment. During the Unified Silla (668-935) and Koryŏ (918-1392) dynasties, these wealthy devotees donated large amounts of money and land for the construction of Buddhist temples and works of art. By the mid-sixth century, Korean monks introduced the religion to Japan.

Buddhist teachings greatly influenced Korean society, culture, and arts. Many sects developed, the most prominent of which was Pure Land, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhism focuses on the worship of Amitabha ("infinite light"), who presides over the Western Paradise and is the Buddha represented in this sculpture from the Museum's collections. This sect teaches that salvation is not gained by good deeds or complicated rites or rituals, but by pure and simple devotion to Amitabha. Those who wished to be reborn in the Western Paradise had to simply invoke Amitabha's name in their worship.

With the rise of Pure Land teachings, the figure of Amitabha gained prominence in sculpture of the Unified Silla period. He is often the central image in Korean Buddhist temples. Today, there are more than 10,000 temples and 20,000 Buddhist monks in Korea. About one-third of the population practices within one of the 18 different sects of the religion.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**1.** Describe the sculpture of the standing Buddha using information from the text and image.

**2.** What qualities or values of Buddha are shown in this statue?

Support your answer with evidence from the text and image.

**3.** What is the main idea of this text?