

GUEST LECTURE IN ART HISTORY

WHY DID THE BUDDHA HAVE TWO DISTINCT TYPES OF 'FIRST IMAGE'?

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In Buddhist cultures across Asia, the “First Images” of the Buddha hold a special status. Derived from the prototype allegedly commissioned by King Udayana and made in the likeness of the Buddha, the prototype and its copies possess attributes commonly associated with miraculous images, including supernatural forces in creation, mobility or immobility, light emission, and protective power. From China to Japan, Mongolia, and Tibet, the so-called Udayana Buddhas were widely worshiped. Acquisitions of Udayana Buddha statues enabled monastic institutions to claim religious orthodoxy and empowered royal patrons to assert legitimacy. Two distinct types of Udayana Buddha images exist, one seated and its robe has a smooth surface without drapery lines, and the other standing and displaying stylized drapery. Yet, scholars have not connected the different parts of this cult into an understanding of a larger phenomenon, nor explained the coexistence of two very distinct visual types. This paper argues that analytic tools that art historians deploy—from visual analysis to the study of the mobility and circulation of artistic models and styles, and the special values attached to a particular style or iconography—can contribute to an expanded notion of the materiality of religion that textual study alone cannot achieve.



Art History Professor Dorothy C. Wong

Professor Wong specializes in Buddhist art of China of the first millennium CE. Her research addresses topics of art in relation to religion and society, and of the relationship between religious texts/doctrine and visual representations. This talk stems from her current book manuscript, *The First Image of the Buddha*. Her publications include [Buddhist Pilgrim—Monks as Agents of Cultural and Artistic Transmission: The International Buddhist Art Style in East Asia, ca. 645–770](#) and [Dynamics of Interregional Exchange in East Asian Buddhist Art, 5th–13 Century](#).