

The Spread of Buddhism in Asia

Buddhist Iconography

Symbol	Meaning
Seated	Suggests “non-action” and is a way to show the absence of the Buddha (that he has left the world for nirvana)
Standing	Suggests that the figure is still active in this world
Lotus position	Meditation position, symbolizes non-action
Top knot or bump (ushnisha)	Sign of Buddha’s knowledge and wisdom
Elongated earlobes	Reminders of Siddhartha Gautama’s wealth in the days before he became the Buddha (he wore many earrings, and they stretched his earlobes); symbol of his renunciation (rejection) of worldly possessions.
Mark on the forehead (urna)	Sign of the Buddha’s special wisdom
Short hair	Reminder of the time when Siddhartha Gautama renounced all his worldly possessions, and cut his hair as a symbol of his commitment to his new life
Many folds on the neck	Sign of the Buddha’s wisdom and spiritual age
Facial expressions	The Buddha has no facial expression; Guardians have angry facial expressions to scare away those who wish to harm Buddhism
Clothing	The Buddha wears simple clothing (shows that he has renounced worldly objects); Bodhisattvas wear elaborate clothing (shows that they are still part of the everyday world)
Lotus flower	Purity
Sword	Strikes down ignorance
Wheel	The Wheel of Dharma (symbolizes the Buddha’s teachings)
Halo	Shows enlightenment
Mudra	Hand gestures (see board)

1. Tibet
2. China
3. Southeast Asia (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, etc)
4. Korea, Japan

Each group member should choose one of the regions above.



Directions: Using reliable sources, like Museum websites, find an example of Buddhist art from your region. Then complete the following.

Source:

Place the image here:

Describe the artifact:

Discuss the iconography:

How does this artifact reflect the core beliefs of Buddhism? Provide evidence.

How does this artifact reflect the culture of its creators? Provide evidence.

Share your artifact with the group and complete the chart:

Artifact Similarities	Artifact Differences

What conclusions can you draw about the spread and practice of Buddhism in Asia?