

**KUAN-YIN BODHISATTVA**

Chinese, Northern Sung dynasty, ca. 1025

Wood; h. 67 in. (170.2 cm.)

Purchase, 1927 (2400)



This Kuan-yin bodhisattva figure sits frontally in a complex pose called the *maharaja lalitasana*. This pose, with left leg pendant and the right leg raised onto the top of the throne seat, the bent knee supporting the tensely stretched right arm, is known in Indian art from the fifth century, as evidenced by works in the Ajanta caves. The pose is documented by a bronze image discovered in a tomb in Chekiang province containing a variety of materials dated to the Five Dynasties period (909–960). This Kuan-yin is tentatively identified as Kuan-yin P'u-sa (Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva), the god-goddess of mercy and compassion, because of the representation of a small Buddha figure (thought to be the deity's parent, Buddha Amitabha) in the crown of the image.

Stylistically, the form possesses a lifelike reality and inner strength that convey an impression of alertness typical of early Northern Sung sculpture of the eleventh century. The ornamentation, not elaborately treated, is also

consistent with eleventh-century sculptural style. The particular division of the form's torso prevails in most images from the first half of the century; by the middle of the century the divisions acquire a stronger and sharper linearity than observed here. This evolution of sculptural form and detailing can be documented in a group of images, one dated 1012 (or 1020) and others dated 1038, all from the main Shrine Hall of the Fen-kuo Ssu in I-hsien, Manchuria, suggesting the possibility of a Liao origin for the Academy image. Its crown with rows of tiny petal-forms is apparently unique in surviving Chinese sculpture, but it occurs frequently in Japanese sculpture in the second half of the eleventh century.

This Kuan-yin dates stylistically and iconographically to about 1025, and, as such, is one of the earliest of its type to survive in a long line of similar images that are a dominant feature of Sung and Yüan Buddhist art. HAL

2400



### Gallery Alcove Named for Academy Supporters

The *Guanyin Bodhisattva*, housed in an alcove in the Asian art gallery (18a on the visitors map), is perhaps one of the most important pieces in the Academy's collection. The Honolulu Academy of Arts has named this alcove as a fitting tribute to Robert and Betty Ching Wo, two longstanding Academy supporters, for their generous and valued contributions to the Academy's Chinese programs and activities. *Nov/91*

*Guanyin Bodhisattva*  
Chinese, Northern Sung dynasty, ca. 1025  
Wood; h. 67 inches (170.2 cm)  
Purchase, 1927 (2400) *11/91*

*Kuan-yin poster available free. Photo by Robert Chinn*



*The Bodhisattva Kuan Yin (detail)*  
On view in the new installation of the galleries of Chinese art



## **Anonymous**

### ***Guanyin***

China, Northern Song (960-1126)

or Tangut Xia (1038-1227) dynasty, first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century

Wood with traces of pigment

Purchase, 1927

(2400)

This is a superb early example of one of the most popular iconographic styles for portraying Guanyin (Sanskrit Avalokiteshvara), the Bodhisattva of Compassion. The tenth and eleventh centuries saw an increasing naturalism in Chinese Buddhist sculpture, particularly in depictions of Guanyin, who around this time started to be most commonly shown in the position of “royal ease” (*maharaja lalitasana*), often sitting on an outcropping of rock that suggested this Bodhisattva’s island-mountain home of Potalaka. The sculpture originally might have been placed on such a rocky throne, perhaps as part of an entire sculptural wall suggesting a divine grotto. The naturalism of Song-dynasty sculpture led to increasingly feminized images of Guanyin, but in fact the deity remains male in the Academy’s sculpture.

This Guanyin was acquired in 1927 from the renowned collection of Matsukata Kōjirō (1865-1950). Matsukata was a prominent industrialist, and president of the Kawasaki Shipbuilding Company. He is best known for his collection of European painting and sculpture, which forms the core of the National Museum of Western Art in Tokyo, Japan.

According to early information in the museum's archives probably originating with Matsukata, the sculpture was discovered in 1919 at the site of an abandoned Tang dynasty (618-906) temple called "Chang-chiao ssu [sic]," located at the upper reaches of the Yellow River in a region that would have been controlled by the Tangut Xia dynasty, a non-Chinese kingdom that was at once a rival to, but also influenced in culture and politics by, the Chinese Northern Song dynasty. While this would make the Academy's Guanyin one of the most significant examples of Tangut sculpture to have survived, historical records have not confirmed the existence of this temple, and so the origins of the sculpture remain a mystery.

Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or Kuan-Yin  
Academy Purchase (1927)  
H. 67"  
#2400

China  
Sung - Yuan Period  
13th-14th centuries  
Gallery 18

Subject: Over life-size wooden figure which depicts the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara or Kuan-Yin. A Bodhisattva is a deity of Mahayana Buddhism who has renounced Buddha-hood and nirvana in order to act as saviour to all sentient beings. Kuan-Yin is the Chinese name for Avalokitesvara who is the Bodhisattva of mercy and infinite compassion. Kuan Yin thus played an important role in the development of later Buddhism in Northern China which was emphatically more emotional than that of the T'ang period. It should be noted that, in general, all Bodhisattvas are considered to be without gender or to combine and balance the spiritual virtues of both sexes. However, among the 32 forms which, Kuan Yin may assume to accomplish his aims, some are feminine. Thus, in later Buddhism the deity tends to become increasingly gentle and womanly. The figure is seated frontally in a position very similar to the Indian posture of "Royal Ease" (Maharajalila). The true position of "Royal Ease" is characterized by a flexed left leg and a raised right leg which supports the extended right arm that reaches out as though to bless or offer consolation. The posture of this figure varies from that of "Royal Ease" in that the left leg is pendant instead of flexed. This pose is equally popular, if not more so, than that of true "Royal Ease" and is known as the "Majaraja-Lalitasana" pose. The figure wears an elaborate necklace and a high tiara, surmounted by a representation of <sup>Amida Buddha</sup> the Infant Buddha which obscures the high topknot. Strands of hair flow over the shoulders while the deeply carved drapery wraps around the torso, up and over the left shoulder, and falls gently over the right shoulder. It also covers both legs and drapes over the seat naturalistically. Kuan Yin is usually depicted in Chinese painting, seated on a rock at water's edge with the full moon as a halo. In sculpture, the deity is frequently depicted seated in a weathered grotto

on the rocky shore of the fabled mountain home, Potala or Potalaka, supposed to be situated off South India. In China, an island near Ning-po, which had previously been dedicated to a goddess of seamen, came to be identified with the residence of Avalokitesvara and was renamed "P'u-t'o-shan" after "Potalaka." It eventually became one of China's holy mountains and a favorite pilgrimage spot.

Medium and Technique: Temple sculpture and painting during this period was the work of highly trained temple decorators. This image is carved from wood - most probably in several parts - and displays traces of greyish-white color, green and red paint and gold overlay.

Style: While this figure seems at first glance to be very similar to those produced during the Sung period (11th-12th centuries AD), certain aspects of the sculpture, when compared with those dating from the Sung, suggest a later date (13th-14th). These include the rigidity of pose, the segmentation of the torso and the treatment of the drapery. (For more on the dating of this piece see the article written by Robert B. Hawkins, "A Statue of Kuan-Yin: A Problem in Sung Sculpture." Princeton Univ. Art Museum Bulletin, Vol. XII, no. 1, 1953, pp. 3-36.)

Instructional Aids:

- Determine what attributes Bodhisattvas share with Buddha figures and what features identify this as a Bodhisattva.
- Speculate on how many pieces of wood may have been used.
- Determine whether the deity appears benevolent or hostile.
- Analyze the sculpture in terms of the repetition of basic shapes in positive and negative spaces.

REFERENCE

Kwan Yin at Potalaka or Kwan Yin of the  
Southern Seas (#2400)

13th-14th C.

The Gandavyuha, principal text of Avatamsaka (Hua-yen, Kegon) sect, describes the search of Sudhana who meets the Kwan Yin at Potalaka:

Sudhana, a young man in search of Supreme Enlightenment, seeks instruction from more than 50 ideal teachers, one of whom is Avalokitesvara, whom Sudhana visits at Mt. Potalaka, the Bodhisattva's residence. Avalokitesvara (Kwan Yin) was seated on a rock amid lush vegetation and rivulets.

Kwan Yin is shown in paintings, seated on a rock at water's edge, the full moon as a halo. It was a popular subject because Kwan Yin, Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, was asked for deliverance from every sort of peril. Many sculptures and paintings were made depicting Kwan Yin at Mt. Potalaka.

In China an island near Ning-po, which had previously been dedicated to a goddess of seamen, came to be identified with the residence of Avalokitesvara and was renamed P'u-t'o-shan, i.e., Potalaka. It became one of China's Holy Mountains, a pilgrimage spot.  
(from Fontein and Hickman, Zen Painting and Calligraphy, p.47)

ARTIST: 13th and 14th C. inscriptions on temple paintings and inside wooden images show that temple painting and sculpture was "the work of highly trained temple decorators who traveled about the country with their models and copy books." (from Sickman and Soper, Art and Architecture of China, p.99)