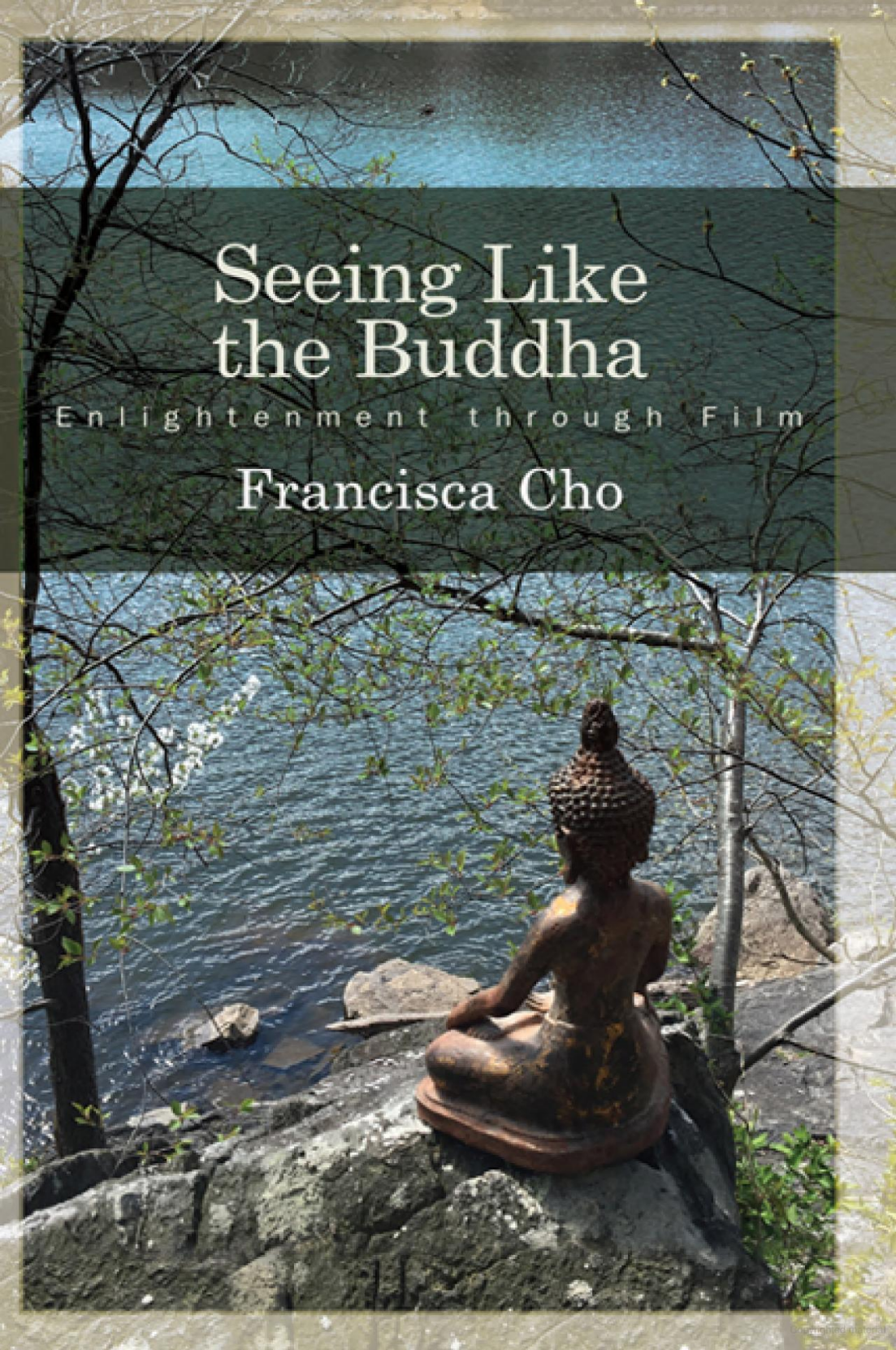
Seeing Like the Buddha
Enlightenment through Film
Francisca Cho

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Illustrations

Acknowledgment

For the students of my Buddhism and Film course offered in the Spring semesters of 2010, 2012, and 2014: It has been a privilege to share my ideas with you and you have inspired me with your amazing insights in turn.

Abbreviations

A *Anguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi as *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012.

AdS *Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra*. Translated by Hisao Inagaki in collaboration with Harold Stewart as *The Sutra on Contemplation of Amitāyus*. In *The Three Pure Land Sutras*. Revised Second Edition. Numata Center for Buddhist Translation, 2003.

D *Digha Nikāya*. Translated by Maurice Walshe as *The Long Discourses of the Buddha.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995.

M *Majjhima Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi as *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995.

PraS *Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra.* Translated by Paul Harrison. Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1990.

S *Samyutta Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi as *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

SN *Sutta Nipāta*. Translated by H. Saddhatissa. London: Curzon, 1985.

Vm *Visuddhimagga*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñyāṇamoli as *The Path of Purification.* Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1976.

CHAPTER 1

Seeing Like the Buddha

Erasing the Buddha

The objective of this book is to demonstrate that films can take on the role that has been played by traditional Buddhist icons and images. Film can articulate Buddhist teachings and, more significantly, put them into practice. This means taking film seriously as a medium for cultivating certain ways of being in the world that have previously been attained through ritual and contemplative practices. Both traditional and filmic practices can be put under the rubric of "seeing like the Buddha," which is intimately tied to the desire of Buddhists to see the Buddha himself. As a founded religion, Buddhists express devotion and piety toward the historical Siddhārtha Gautama of the Śakya clan (Śākyamuni). This means keeping him alive through images and narratives about his life, similar to the way Jesus is kept in mind by Christians. And parallel to Christology, theoretical understandings about the nature of the Buddha as both a historical and transcendent being have allowed Buddhists to "see" him in multiple ways, as well as in multiple things. But throughout Buddhist history, the project of seeing the Buddha has entailed a mandate to see *like* the Buddha, which, paradoxically, erases the individual form of Siddhārtha. The emphasis shifts from *what* is seen to *how* one sees, which in turn renders art and aesthetic experiences into equivalents of the Buddha himself.

This drift toward erasing the Buddha in favor of seeing like the Buddha is the central aesthetic and soteriological theme of this book, and the organizational principle behind the films that have been selected for

discussion. The progression of films increasingly loses references to and images of all things Buddhist until "the Buddhist film" is instantiated in ostensibly secular works. This pattern is modeled after a particular dynamic in Buddhist history. This is not to deny that the Buddha's image is revered, preserved, and perpetuated by Buddhists even now, some twenty-five centuries after his death. Depictions of the Buddha are governed by iconographical conventions such as hand postures (*mudras*) that signify certain activities or moments in the Buddha's life, and the thirty-two marks (*lakṣaṇa*) of the great man such as the fleshly protuberance on the top of the Buddha's head (*uṣṇīṣa*) and the imprint of wheels on the soles of his feet.[1] There are other kinds of Buddhist icons such as representations of bodhisattvas (Buddhas-to-be) and *maṇḍala* Buddhas that are endowed with fixed symbolic attributes. But there are also "open form" images that exhibit the layering and substitution of motifs (Shimizu 1992, 207). In such images, the Buddha is "present" primarily as a reference point that deliberately raises the question of what and whom else can be seen as the Buddha.

Itō Jakuchū's (1716–1800) painting entitled *Yasai Nehan* ("vegetable nirvana"), for example, takes the traditional image of the reclining Śākyamuni passing into his parinirvana and replaces him with a daikon radish surrounded by other vegetables that stand in for the various elements of this iconic scene. Eight corn stalks take the place of the Śāla trees under which the Buddha died, and the daikon radish is surrounded by an array of turnips, gourds, mushrooms, melons, chestnuts, and other vegetables to form the assembly of mourners who witness the Buddha's passing. Jakuchū's well-attested Buddhist piety eliminates the possibility that the painting is a mere parody, and the image must be understood in the context of Japanese Buddhist and culinary history. Relevant factors include the tradition of monastic vegetarianism, the association of the daikon with the pure and rustic life, and quite importantly, the Tendai Buddhist creed that even plants and trees attain Buddhahood due to the inherent Buddha-nature in all things. It is this notion that "allowed the interchangeability between the original subject (Śākyamuni) and other subjects, be they poets or mendicant monks"—or even vegetables (Shimizu 1992, 211).

The doctrine of Buddha-nature was not espoused by all Japanese Buddhists, let alone the entire Buddhist world, but it is dominant in the Mahāyāna-leaning regions of East Asia and Tibet.[2] The concept of Buddha-nature originates in the bivalent Indian Buddhist idea of

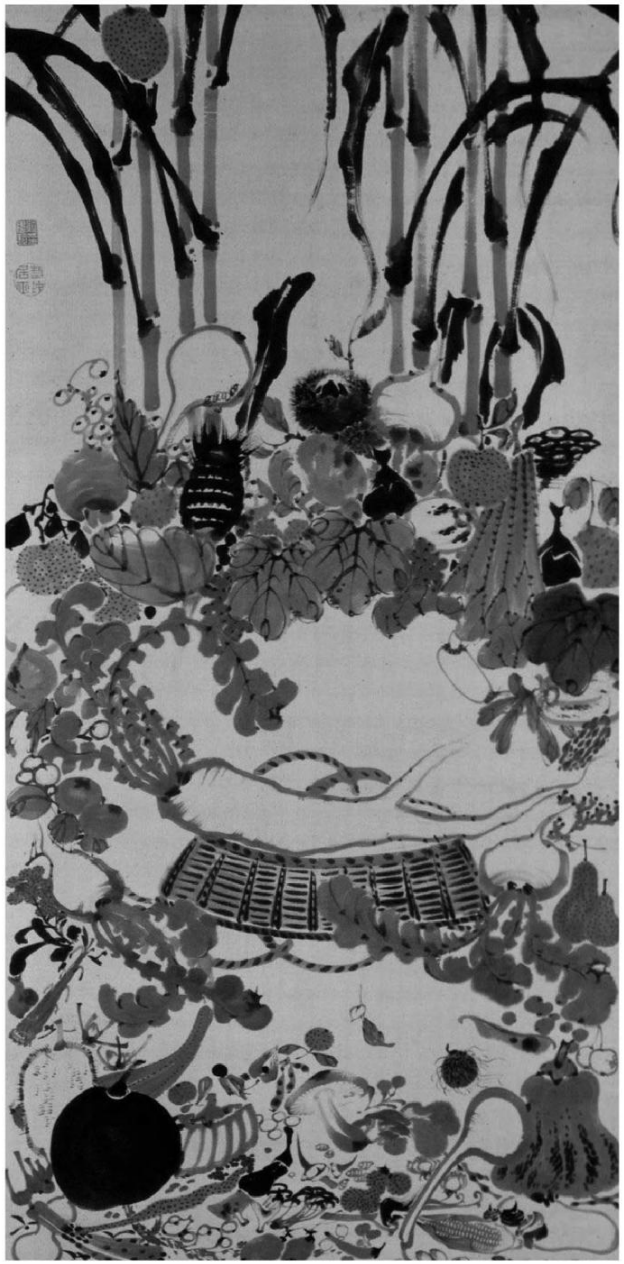

FIGURE 1.1. Itō Jakuchū (1716–1800), *Yasai Nehan* ("vegetable nirvana"), ca. 1792. (Courtesy of Kyoto National Museum)

tathāgatagarbha, which translates both as the "embryo of enlightenment," in the sense of the incipient and potential Buddhahood *within* all beings, and also as the "womb of enlightenment," in the alternative sense of a space that *contains* all beings. Both readings affirm that everyone is a Buddha, either in the future or as a present reality due to the fact that all beings are already contained within the womb of Buddhahood.[3] According to the *Śrīmālādevīsiṃhanāda Sūtra* ("The Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā"), when the tathāgatagarbha is covered by defilements then it is in an embryo state, and when it is not covered by defilements then Buddhahood is a present and actualized reality (Wayman and Wayman 1974, 45). The critical idea here is that even when it is covered with defilements, the tathāgatagarbha is nevertheless present. "Buddha-nature" is actually a translation of the term *buddhadhatu* ("Buddha element"), which is one of many synonyms for tathāgatagarbha, and which emphasizes this idea that it is a quality possessed by and present in all things.

Tathāgatagarbha thought is closely linked to the doctrine of emptiness (*śunyatā*), which deems that the dependently arising nature of all phenomena makes everything empty of inherent essence and identity. To be empty of an inherent essence may sound negative, but it is understood as the quality that enables beings to transform into a Buddha—Buddhahood is possible precisely because suffering and delusion are not inherent to human being and existence. This openness to becoming and change in a felicitous direction may be understood as the quality of the Buddha himself—the tathāgatagarbha. Understanding the truth of emptiness is "a necessary precondition of the realization of tathāgatagarbha" and the idea of tathāgatagarbha in turn corrects "a one-sidedly negative perspective" on the teaching of emptiness (King 1991, 16). Functioning as positive and negative formulations of the same insight, respectively, Buddha-nature and emptiness both erase the separation between the enlightened realm of nirvana and the tainted world of samsara, at least in their earlier interpretation as incalculably distant spatial and temporal domains. This also eliminates the distinction between the Buddha and other beings, and sanctions the idea that even "secular" aesthetic works can function as serious religious practice. This history is notable because it refrains from some characteristic anxieties regarding religious images in our more immediate monotheistic traditions.

Strictures against representing the divine in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are quite familiar to us, of course, but this is not to suggest a simplistic contrast between an image-affirming Buddhism versus

image-fearing monotheisms. The Buddhist world has also had its episodes of aniconism and iconoclasm but this similarity needs to be qualified with the particular reasons why Chan/Zen monks, for example, counseled against the use of religious images.[4] Zen iconoclasts embrace a semiotic worldview different from theists, as I have discussed elsewhere (Cho 2009), and although they express the familiar warning not to mistake the image for what it signifies, the same semiotics is used by other Buddhists to *affirm* the identity between artistic representations and the original reality. This ability to pivot seamlessly between iconoclasm and iconolatry is, paradoxically, the manifestation of a single logic. Some Buddhists reject images on the grounds that they are empty of any inherent qualities and suitability, and other Buddhists—sometimes the same person on a different occasion—embrace and sanction images *because* of their inherent emptiness.[5] We can begin to parse the reversibility of the two positions by remembering that the purpose of the Zen attack on religious icons is to point out the sacred in the *profane,* such as the world of vegetables. The objective, in essence, is to get past the nirvana-samsara distinction and its apparent opposition. This is diametrically opposed to theistic iconoclasm, which zealously guards the separation between the worldly and the divine.

Such differences lead to an interesting contrast when it comes to images of the Buddha and images of Jesus Christ. Depictions of Christ and the controversies they engender help make this contrast clear, and they might be summed up as an underlying anxiety about historical fidelity—given that Christ is understood as the flesh-and-blood embodiment of the divine who walked the earth at a particular place and time. This historical nature is a critical stipulation about who Christ was and central to the logic of his redemptive power. Śākyamuni was also a historical being but the early Buddhist tradition—as evident in the Pāli texts of the Theravāda school—prioritizes the Buddha's teachings over his personhood. In contrast, his historical form-body (*rūpakāya*) is relegated to the realm of the ephemeral and the illusory, to which Buddhist thought consigns all of phenomenal reality. When the Buddha's follower Vikkali complains that he has not seen the Buddha in some time, the Buddha famously responds: "One who sees the Dhamma sees me; one who sees me sees the Dhamma" (S III.120). This passage asserts the importance of the Dharma (Pāli: Dhamma)—that is, the Buddha's teachings—over the person of the Buddha himself. This leads to a distinction between the historical Buddha, who cannot remain in the world, and the Dharma-body

(*dharmakāya*) that does. This is a common explanation for early Buddhist aniconism: the recognition of Śākyamuni's impermanence dissuaded his followers from producing images and fixating on him in favor of looking instead to the body of his teachings. We will return to the permutations and implications of this Buddhology below.

A more succinct and illuminating exercise for the moment might be to compare Jakuchū's *Yasai Nehan* to the 1999 photographic installation created by the Jamaican-born artist Renée Cox called *Yo Mama's Last Supper*. Like Jakuchū's depiction of the Buddha's parinirvana, Cox takes on a significant hagiographical moment—this time in the life of Jesus Christ—that is overtly modeled on Leonardo da Vinci's iconic painting of the Last Supper. The composition is actually made from five photographic plates, with Cox herself, who is black and female—and nude—portrayed in the center image as Christ. In each of the two photographic plates on either side of the center piece, a triad of males aggregate into the twelve

FIGURE 1.2. The artist Renée Cox substitutes for Christ in *Yo Mama's Last Supper*, 1999. (Courtesy of Renée Cox Studio)

disciples—following da Vinci's own compositional structure—except that eleven of them are black and a lone white male sits in the position of Judas. The exhibition of *Yo Mama's Last Supper* at the Brooklyn Museum in 2001 led then-mayor Rudolph Giuliani to call for a decency commission to regulate publicly funded museums. There were also expressions of outrage from religious voices such as the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights (*New York Times*, "Affronted by Nude 'Last Supper,' Giuliani Calls for Decency Panel," Feb. 16, 2001).

The expressions of shock and accusations of anti-Catholicism are interesting for their inevitability, on the one hand, and the way they distract from the substantive social and theological issues the photograph provokes, on the other. Cox made this explicit in her response to critics by invoking her Catholic school education and its teaching that all humans are made in the image of God. This prompted the rebuttal that it was simply the offence of her nudity—"There would be no problem if

FIGURE 1.3. The plate just right of the Cox/Christ image depicts a white Judas in the triad of disciples. (Courtesy of Renée Cox Studio)

you had kept your clothes on," stated William Donohue, President of the Catholic League (*New York Times*, " 'Yo Mama' Artist Takes on Catholic Critic," Feb. 21, 2001). But this reply conveniently deflects the historical contradictions (and political tensions) in the alternatively accepted norm of the blond-haired and blue-eyed Christ. As a historical being Christ had a certain face and complexion, but social power determines what he looks like and creates difficulties for the purported catholicity of Christian salvation. Cox's work pointedly raises these problems and the expressions of outrage in response to it underscore them even more.

Tensions centering on historical fidelity in the representation of Christ continue in the realm of film. As soon as film became a mass industry in the United States, people began imagining its educational and religious possibilities. A 1910 essay by the Reverend Herbert Jump, "The Religious Possibilities of the Motion Picture," counseled Christians not to be put off by the novelty of the medium or the secularism of the industry, pointing out the potential of movies to function as lively sermons. Jump pays particular attention to the engaging qualities of film: "[T]he picture that is literally moving, that portrays dramatic sequence and life-like action, possesses tenfold more vividness and becomes therefore a more convincing medium of education" (2002, 218).[6] As this essay portended, the power of film for religious ends has not been lost on Christians. One recent and famous realization of this is Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), which was treated by Christians as a sermon and a religious meditation in much the same way that paintings, sculptures, and Passion narratives have been experienced since the medieval period.[7]

The Passion was engulfed in controversy, however, because of the way it inflames anti-Semitism. In this, the movie continues a long-standing legacy of both theological readings and artistic depictions that blame Jews for Christ's crucifixion. Hence, much of the pushback on the film consisted of challenges to its historical accuracy on multiple counts—not only the actions of Jews, but the languages spoken, the nature of the torture and crucifixion, and the personality of Pontius Pilate. These rebukes were induced by Gibson's own claim to tell the story of Christ as it "really" was, which reinforces the sense of realism that film dramatizations already possess. New Testament scholar Paula Fredriksen writes, "For better and (probably) for worse, Christianity in America is mediated as much through popular media as through the traditions and institutions of our various churches. Convictions both about the Bible and about Christianity can be as heart-felt as they are uninformed."[8] In Fredrik-

sen's estimation, Gibson problematically purveys the standard Hollywood blockbuster commodity, with its gratuitous violence and simplistic "good versus evil" action, in the guise of religious history.

Accuracy becomes a big question because historical claims are intimately tied to spiritual and moral ones in the Christian conception of Jesus. His story is linked to that of others, and when it comes to the Passion, Adele Reinhartz observes, "filmmakers do have a responsibility to think through the potential negative consequences of their films" because Jews are indelibly written into that history (2004, 28). Furthermore, the Christian understanding of Jesus is itself fraught, particularly in its attempt to balance his human and divine natures. The Jesus film often steps into this fray by making Christ either too superhuman or too human (Deacy 2001). For that reason, the Jesus film is doubly vulnerable to controversy, from the perspective of theological orthodoxy as well as historical accuracy. The protests over Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) for making the savior too recognizably mundane in his longings are a case in point. Gibson's own Christ, on the other hand, survives such an excess of physical brutality that he is rendered into an action superhero, compromising the theological view that it is Christ's very humanness that enabled the redemptive power of his suffering.

The sociopolitical and religious stakes in how one sees Christ, then, impose qualifications on Reverend Jump's enthusiasm for the motion picture, which he sanctions on the grounds that Jesus himself preached by means of exciting and accessible stories. He singles out Jesus's parable of the Good Samaritan because it was taken "from contemporary experience. It was the sort of thing that might have happened any day and to any one in the audience" (2002, 217). But this very approachability also creates the justification for iconoclasm. As David Freedberg observes, the power of images to attract and hold the attention is a double-edged sword, for, "What if the lingering is occasioned by color, line, and pleasure in anatomy, and not by reflections of sacred history and dogma?" (1989, 187). The moving action that film provides only adds to this litany of aesthetic pleasures. In the course of Christian history, the mesmerizing powers of art have required interventions in order to "draw the mind away from the attractive sign to the meaningful signified . . . [to] prevent our dwelling on quality and form" (Freedberg 1989, 188).

The Buddha was also a historical figure, but his human existence is contrasted to—and subsumed under—the ever-present Dharma-body of his teachings, which appropriately includes the idea that all beings

are ultimately insubstantial, impermanent, and not to be clung to. As theorizing about the nature of the Buddha progressed, the Buddha was understood in terms of the ever-present dharmakāya, understood both as a transcendent realm such as the *dharmadhātu* ("dharma dimension," "dharma sphere," dharma element") and as a personified being such as Vairocana, the Universal Buddha.[9] The impulses that initially minimized the historical Buddha through aniconism eventually gave rise to the view that Śākyamuni is only one historical manifestation of the ever-present dharmakāya.[10] Ironically, this provided a justification for reversing aniconism on the grounds that even images of the Buddha—as yet another historical manifestation—can also lead sentient beings to liberation. This logic is demonstrated in the well-known story of the first image of Śākyamuni and its implication that there is no functional difference between the image and the original person. This image was reputedly commissioned by King Udayana of Kauśāmbī when the Buddha was absent for three months preaching to his mother in the Trāyastriṃśa heaven ("heaven of the thirty-three").[11] Stricken by the absence of the Buddha, the king had an artist transported to the heaven to create a likeness in sandalwood. Quite interestingly, it is said that when the Buddha returned to the palace, the sandalwood image rose and greeted the Buddha, who in turn responded to the image and said: "The work expected from you is to toil in diligence to convert the unbelieving and to lead in the way of religion the future ages" (Beal 1980, 255).[12]

This mythical tale encapsulates Buddhist historical practice, in which the longing to see the absent Buddha has led countless followers to recreate him in likenesses that are animated into "living images" that are thought to be equal in every way to the original Buddha. The Jowo Śākyamuni housed in the Jokhang temple in Lhasa, which is often described as the most important image in Tibet, is another that was supposedly constructed during the Buddha's lifetime. It was purportedly brought to Tibet by Wencheng Gongzhu (628–680) from the Chinese Tang court as a part of her dowry when she was wed to the first Tibetan emperor, Songtsen Gampo (d. 649). Its status as a living image means "devotees do not view him as simply a statue but rather as a manifestation of the Buddha himself" (Warner 2011, 3). The Śākyamuni image in Seiryōji temple in Kyoto is another statue that is invested with the same status. It is supposedly a copy of King Udayana's sandalwood image that was brought from China to Japan by the monk Chōnen in the tenth century (Henderson and Hurvitz 1956).[13] Both the Jowo and Seiryōji

Buddhas are venerated as "first Buddha images" that were carved from life while the Buddha lived, and we can see a concern with historical continuity here in that the veracity of the images is vouchsafed by the claim that they were modeled on the actual Buddha.

But this conceit seems undermined by the fact that the Seiryōji Buddha, for example, is acknowledged to be a *copy* of King Udayana's sandalwood image, which means that it cannot be a "first Buddha image" that was modeled on the living Buddha. This apparent inconsistency actually holds the key to understanding how the power of Buddha images is rendered. A comparison to Buddhist relic worship provides helpful illumination. The centrality and power of relics in Buddhist ritual practice is tied to the fact that relics are either remains of the Buddha himself or were in direct physical contact with him, such as his begging bowl. Relics therefore make the absent Buddha present through the power of synecdoche and contact. Buddha images are also recognized as a kind of relic, but one that acts on a different kind of power:

> Images . . . gain their authority by their capacity to re-present the Buddha visually. . . . Images, unlike relics, can be reproduced endlessly, and they are accepted as worthy of veneration because they embody basic iconographic conventions. Images are also, in many cases, ritually consecrated. . . . In general, however, the ease of reproducing images allows for their proliferation outside monastic control to an extent that distinguishes them from relics, which are usually confined within the ritually defined boundaries of monastic complexes. (Trainor 1997, 30–31)

The power of images arises from the fact that they are ritually consecrated in monastic ceremonies that bring them to life as living Buddhas (Bentor 1996; Swearer 2004). Some images such as the Jowo and Seiryōji Buddhas are given distinction by virtue of a lineage that is traced back to the historical Śākyamuni. This logic works for the Seiryōji Buddha because it is connected to Udayana's sandalwood Buddha, which in turn is connected to the original Buddha. This idea of an unbroken physical lineage partakes in the logic of relics, which are also authenticated by chronicles of successive transmission from the Buddha down to the present day. But this proximity to the actual Buddha, which seems to guarantee the "likeness" of these images, has less to do with physical

similarity than with ritual efficacy. The consecrated images are "like" the Buddha in that their presence has the same potency in allowing devotees to generate merit.[14] And unlike relics, each of which must be an actual physical remnant of the Buddha, images can proliferate to the point where the criterion of physical proximity becomes far less relevant. This trend is reinforced by developments in theories about Buddhahood that see the potential of multiple historical entities to function as manifestations of the dharmakāya.

We can see this development in Buddhist locations that adhere closely to Mahāyāna tradition. Yael Bentor's study of Tibetan Buddhist ritual texts reveals that consecrated images and *stūpas* (Buddhist reliquary monuments) are "regarded as parallel to the emanation of a Buddha in the *saṃsāric* world" (1996, 5) because the act of consecration "establishes" (Sanskrit: *pratiṣṭhā*; Tibetan: *rab-gnas*) the dharmakāya in the physical object.[15] In Mahāyāna theory, the Buddha's form-body (rūpakāya) is only one of many "manifestations" or "emanations" (*nirmāṇakāyas*) that can appear in the world.[16] This signals an important shift in the conception of Śākyamuni, who is demoted into merely one agent in a universe of entities that function for the sake of liberating sentient beings. In the Tibetan consecration texts:

> [w]riters distinguish three types of emanation bodies. The supreme emanation bodies are the Buddhas; the born emanation bodies are various incarnations of Buddhas and bodhisattvas born in the world, such as the Dalai Lamas and other incarnate lamas; finally, the made emanation bodies are emanations made by artists and consecrated by lamas, such as *stūpas* and images, and even bridges. (Bentor 1996, 5–6)[17]

The nature of the dharmakāya that is established in these objects needs some parsing here. The Dharma-body may simply be the physical texts that preserve the Buddha's words even though he himself is gone. In the Pāli *Nikāyas*, the dharmakāya simply means the teachings of the Buddha (Xing 2005, 22). But the Dharma-body came to be understood in a second sense as the qualities (*dharmas*) of the Buddha's knowledge and enlightenment.[18] This enlarges the idea of the Buddha into something more than a historical person or even a body of teachings, focusing instead on the Buddha's knowledge (*adhigama*) as an abiding possibility that is ever-present in the world: "By implication, it is also a place where

the student or the worshipper can follow the Buddha's example and realize the Perfection of Wisdom for himself or herself" (Eckel 1992, 99). To say that the Dharma-body remains in the world, then, is to say that the virtuous qualities that the Buddha attained are an ever-present possibility for all beings. As a result, the importance of the historical Śākyamuni is diminished, as he is turned into one temporary manifestation of this larger principle of an abiding Buddhahood. The early tradition's aniconic sign—such as the footprint of the Buddha—emphasizes the Buddha's absence as a reminder that his "importance lies precisely and only in the *effects* he has upon those others to whom he appears to be present" (emphasis added; Griffiths 1994, 94). The point of seeing the Buddha is not so much to see *him* but rather to see what he sees.

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the desire to see what the Buddha saw deemphasizes Śākyamuni Buddha by creating a bewildering proliferation of Buddhas. This trend actually begins in Theravāda texts, where Śākyamuni recounts a lineage of six previous Buddhas who lived parallel lives in prior cosmic ages.[19] The Mahāsāṃghika, another early school, originated the idea of numerous Buddhas living in other worlds. Mahāyāna cosmology develops this idea to reveal countless simultaneously existing Buddhas and bodhisattvas in multiple world systems and Buddha-fields (*buddhakṣetra*), or Pure Lands. Working around the early teaching that only one Buddha can arise in a world system, the Mahāyāna emphasis on innumerable bodhisattvas who strive for complete liberation fueled the logic that there must be many Buddha lands for them to occupy (Xing 2005, 166).

The preeminence of bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism may have created the need to provide realms for them to occupy, but the idea that the universe is teeming with Buddhas and bodhisattvas in every direction also exhibits a soteriological principle: if the eternal Dharma-body can manifest as one specific being in a particular time and place, then there is no limit to the number and forms it can take. According to the *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* ("Ten Stages"), when beings reach the eighth stage of the bodhisattva path they are able to pervade "an unspeakable number of universes and undertake manifestations in the forms of the beings there according to their various inclinations, by means of knowledge of how to appear as a reflection" (Cleary 1993, 768).[20] In the twenty-fifth chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, which focuses on Avalokiteṣvara, it is stated that this bodhisattva can manifest in the form of a Buddha if needed, but also as numerous other beings ranging from gods, kings, laymen and women,