

61. BODHISATTVA MAITREYA

9th century

Bronze, H: 14.3 cm × W: 8.4 cm × D: 5.3 cm

Museum of Vietnamese History, Ho Chi Minh City, BTL5 674

22

Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand*, 58.

23

Bunker, "Pre-Angkor Period Bronzes from Pra Kon Chai," in Chutiwongs and Leidy, *Buddha of the Future*.

24

Woodward, *The Sacred Sculpture of Thailand*, 58.

25

Guillon, *Hindu-Buddhist Art of Vietnam*, fig. 17, plates 25, 61, and 103; *Champa Collection, Viet Nam Historical Museum, Ho Chi Minh City*, plate 4.

The bodhisattva Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, has claimed a large following in Asia throughout the long history of Buddhism; he was particularly prominent in Southeast Asia during the period when this image was created. By the late seventh century in Thailand, he was often paired with Lokeshvara as attendants to the Buddha.²² In other contexts, such as his role in the *Gandavyuha* and as one of the eight great bodhisattvas, his importance is attested to in the many images of him carved at Buddhist temples of central Java (such as Borobudur and Candi Plaosan) built during the ninth and tenth centuries. The large group of Pra Kon Chai bronze images found in northeast Thailand, which include many images of Maitreya, confirms his ascendancy during a slightly earlier period.²³

While the *stupa* in his headdress identifies this figure as Maitreya, his hand gestures are unusual: both hands rest on his knees with palms up in an approximation of *varada mudra*, though differing in that the thumbs cross the palm. This is not an isolated instance of this gesture; seventh- and eighth-century Thai images of Maitreya also depict him with

his hands in *varada mudra*.²⁴ He sits in royal ease, bejeweled with multiple necklaces, armbands, a chest band, belt, earrings, headband, and anklets. The textile pattern of the *sampot*, and its arrangement over the lotus pedestal and the elaborate headdress, embellish his thin form. The arrangement of his locks, with curls looping down the two sides and a high chignon with curls spilling over, helps to date the piece because it relates to a style worn by sculptures generally associated with the tenth century.²⁵ The hairstyle also distinguishes the image from Indonesian examples whose demeanor and jewelry are depicted similarly.

LITERATURE

Pierre Baptiste and Thierry Zephir, eds., *Trésors d'art du Vietnam: la sculpture du Champa v–xv siècles*, 2005; *Suu Tap Hien Vat Champa tai Bao tang Lich su Viet Nam Thanh pho Ho Chi Minh (Champa Collection, Viet Nam Historical Museum, Ho Chi Minh City)*, 1994.