

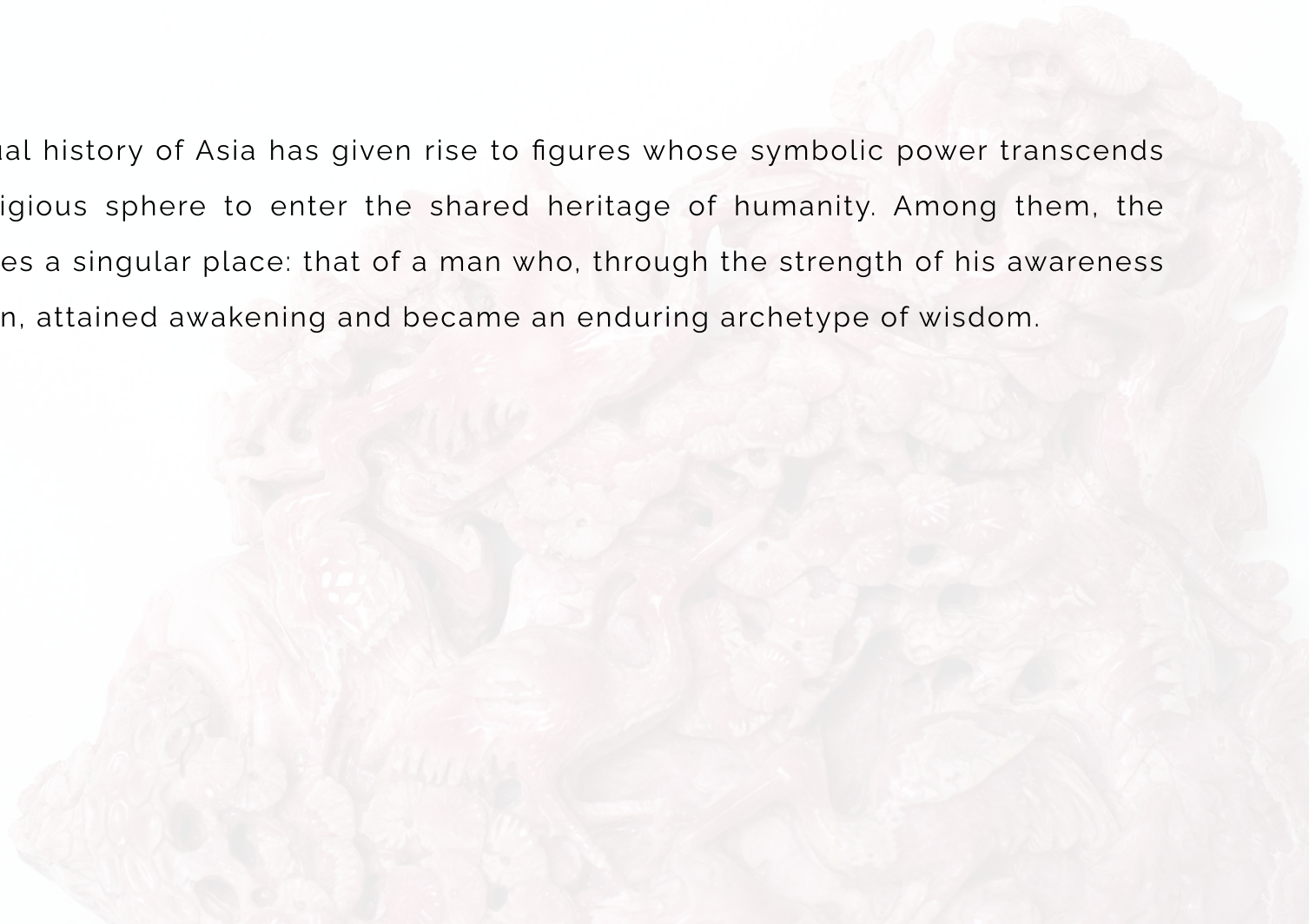


TresOrient

# **MEN AND THE GODS**

## **PART I — THE MEDITATIVE BUDDHA AND THE JOYFUL BUDDHA**

**T**he spiritual history of Asia has given rise to figures whose symbolic power transcends the strictly religious sphere to enter the shared heritage of humanity. Among them, the Buddha occupies a singular place: that of a man who, through the strength of his awareness and compassion, attained awakening and became an enduring archetype of wisdom.



# THE MEDITATIVE BUDDHA: SHAKYAMUNI, SAGE OF THE SHAKYA

**T**he historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama—known as Shakyamuni, “the Sage of the Shakya clan”—was born in the sixth or fifth century BCE at Lumbini, in what is now Nepal. Raised in princely luxury, he encountered during excursions beyond the palace the stark realities of human existence: old age, illness, death, and the figure of an ascetic. These “Four Encounters” profoundly transformed his understanding of the world and led him to renounce a life of privilege in order to pursue a spiritual quest.

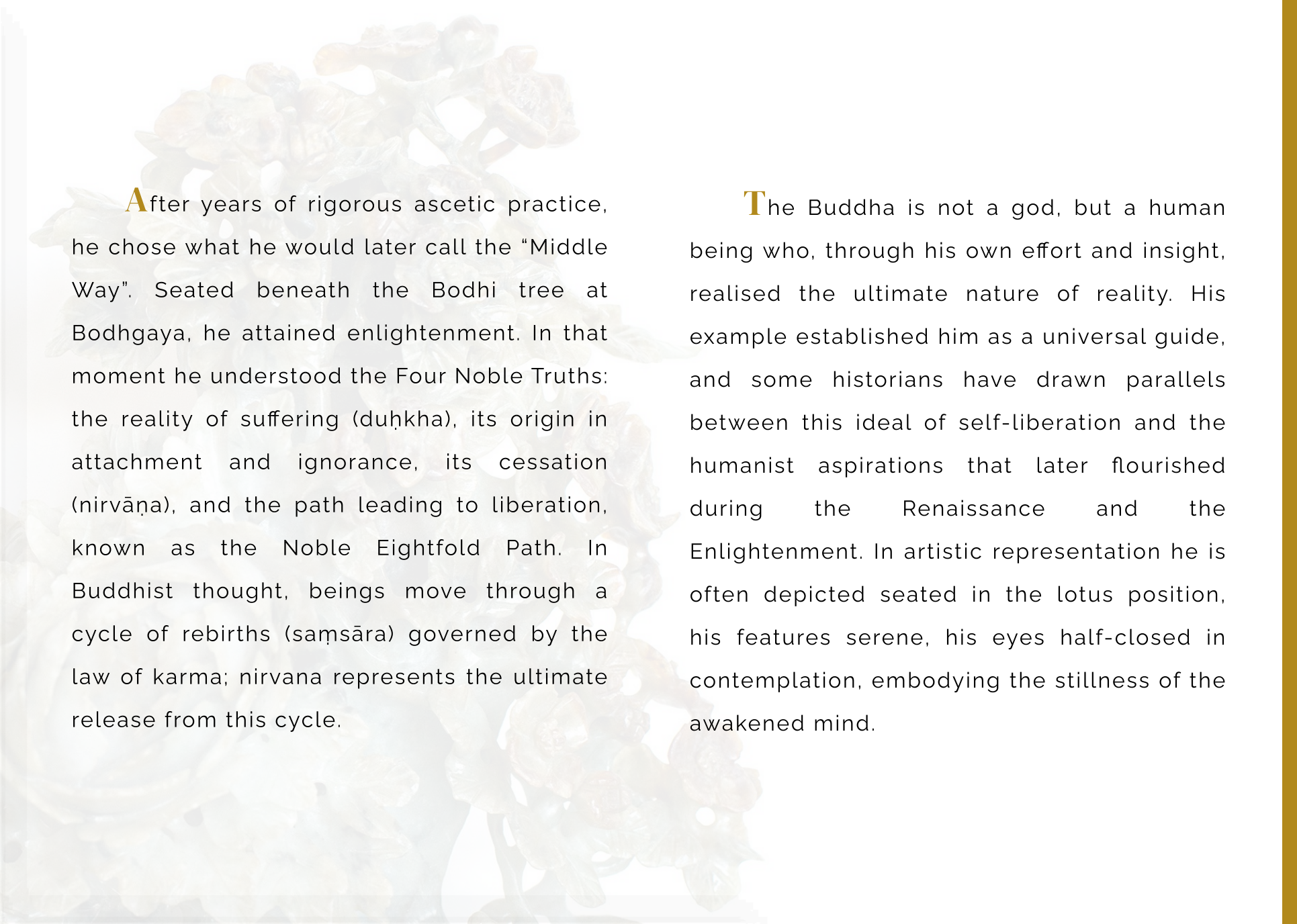
## *Dieu, meditations*

*Yes, my soul delights to shake off its chains;  
Casting aside the burden of human miseries,  
Letting my senses wander in this world of bodies,  
To the world of spirits I rise without effort.  
There, trampling beneath my feet this visible universe,  
I soar in freedom through the fields of the possible;  
My soul is cramped within its vast prison:  
I need a dwelling that has no horizon...*

*Lamartine*

White jade (tremolite)  
Chinese work, late 19th century  
Height: 19 cm ≈ 7.48 in  
Width: 12 cm ≈ 4.72 in





After years of rigorous ascetic practice, he chose what he would later call the "Middle Way". Seated beneath the Bodhi tree at Bodhgaya, he attained enlightenment. In that moment he understood the Four Noble Truths: the reality of suffering (duḥkha), its origin in attachment and ignorance, its cessation (nirvāṇa), and the path leading to liberation, known as the Noble Eightfold Path. In Buddhist thought, beings move through a cycle of rebirths (saṃsāra) governed by the law of karma; nirvana represents the ultimate release from this cycle.

The Buddha is not a god, but a human being who, through his own effort and insight, realised the ultimate nature of reality. His example established him as a universal guide, and some historians have drawn parallels between this ideal of self-liberation and the humanist aspirations that later flourished during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. In artistic representation he is often depicted seated in the lotus position, his features serene, his eyes half-closed in contemplation, embodying the stillness of the awakened mind.

*Peaceful serenity and an enigmatic smile*

Henan jade, hardness 6

Southern China workmanship, Yangzhou, 20th century

Height: 55 cm - 21.65 in

Width: 27 cm - 10.63 in



## *Supreme meditation*

Nephrite jade, hardness 7

Southern China workmanship, 20th century

Height: 62 cm ≈ 24.41 in

Width: 29 cm ≈ 11.42 in





## THE JOYFUL BUDDHA: BUDAI, THE MONK WITH THE SACK

Alongside this contemplative image, East Asian Buddhism also celebrates a more familiar and smiling figure: the Laughing Buddha. Known in China as Budai and in Japan as Hotei, this character is inspired by a wandering monk who lived during the tenth century in the region of Zhejiang.

Nicknamed Budai—literally “cloth sack”—he travelled from village to village carrying a large bag slung over his shoulder.

From it he distributed sweets and small gifts to children. His cheerful temperament, contagious laughter and boundless generosity gradually gave rise to a popular legend.

Over time, popular devotion identified him with Maitreya, the Buddha of the future, destined to appear when the teachings of Shakyamuni have faded. In this way, the humble wandering monk came to embody a joyful and tangible manifestation of the Buddha yet to come, heralding an age of peace, abundance and happiness.



### *A sacred joy*

Fossil mammoth ivory

Southern China. 20th century

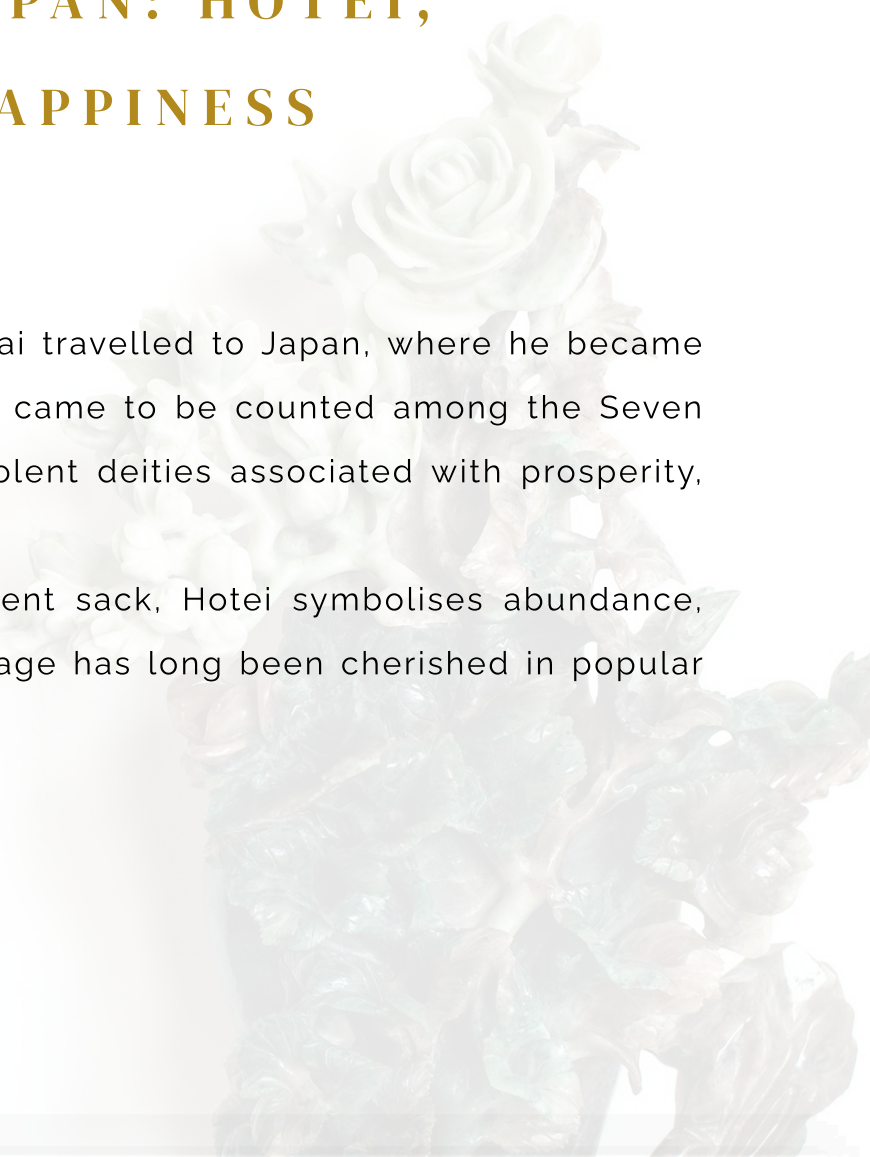
Height: 40 cm - 15.75 in

Width: 29 cm - 11.42 in

# FROM CHINA TO JAPAN: HOTEI, THE GOD OF HAPPINESS

**T**hrough cultural exchanges, the figure of Budai travelled to Japan, where he became known as Hotei. Integrated into popular belief, he came to be counted among the Seven Gods of Fortune (Shichifukujin), a group of benevolent deities associated with prosperity, happiness and good fortune.

With his round belly, radiant smile and ever-present sack, Hotei symbolises abundance, generosity and the simple joy of existence. His image has long been cherished in popular iconography and domestic devotion.



*Netsuke: Budai seated in an armchair*

Fossil mammoth ivory, 20th century

Height: 3.5 cm ≈ 1.38 in

Width: 2.5 cm ≈ 0.98 in



*A solid joy*  
*Elephant, symbol of stability*

Bone, Southern China  
Height: 38 cm = 14.96 in  
Width: 28 cm = 11.02 in





## *Alloy of joy*

*Budai in all his colours*

Cloisonné (enamel on bronze)  
Hebei workmanship, 20th century

Height: 63 cm ≈ 24.80 in

Width: 37 cm ≈ 14.57 in





## *Joy on all sides*

Serpentine (Hsiu Yu, jade from the Hsiu Yuen region, Heilongjiang, China), hardness 4

Beijing workmanship. 20th century

Height: 53 cm = 20.87 in

Width: 44 cm = 17.32 in



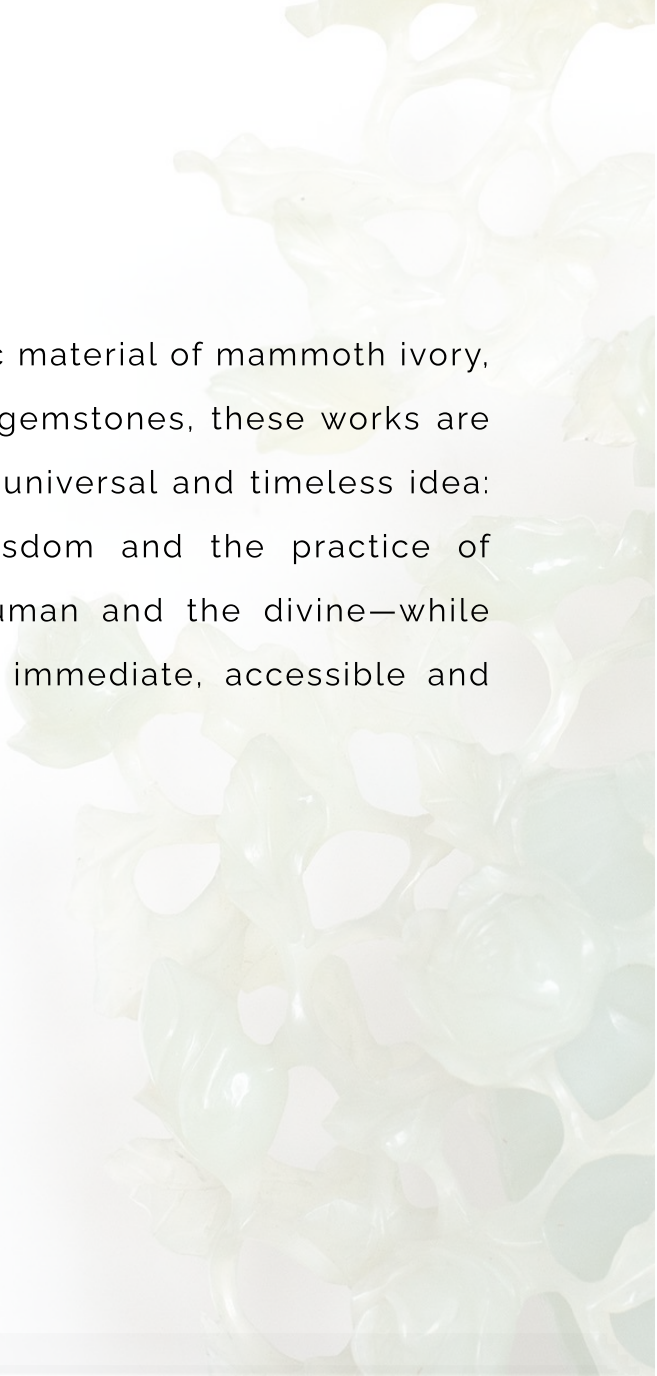


## A SMILING WISDOM: THE UNITY OF OPPOSITES

The harmonious coexistence of the meditative Buddha and the joyful Buddha within the same spiritual tradition reveals two complementary and inseparable dimensions of the search for wisdom.

One, embodied by Shakyamuni, invites deep contemplation, self-knowledge and the inner discipline required to move beyond the illusions of the world. The other, personified by Budai-Hotei, reminds us that authentic wisdom is not confined to solemnity; it may equally express itself through laughter, simplicity of heart, gentle detachment and generous sharing.

The sculptures gathered in this collection, through their refined craftsmanship and profound symbolism, continue this long and rich iconographic tradition.



Carved with remarkable delicacy from the fossilised organic material of mammoth ivory, or shaped from the translucent and richly coloured depths of gemstones, these works are far more than decorative objects. They give tangible form to a universal and timeless idea: that of a human being who, through the cultivation of wisdom and the practice of compassion, crosses the symbolic threshold between the human and the divine—while reminding us that kindness and joy remain among the most immediate, accessible and luminous expressions of awakening.



*Netsuke: Budai at rest*

Fossil mammoth ivory, 20th century

Height: 3.6 cm ~ 1.42 in

Width: 3.7 cm ~ 1.46 in



*Explosion of childlike joys I*



Fossil mammoth ivory  
Southern China (museum quality)

20th century

Height: 29 cm ~ 11.42 in

Width: 14 cm ~ 5.51 in





## **La vie en rose**

Rose quartz, hardness 7

Southern China workmanship, 20th century

Height: 46 cm - 18.11 in

Width: 30 cm - 11.81 in



### *Joy and knowledge*

Fossil mammoth ivory fragment

Southern China. 20th century

Height: 47 cm ≈ 18.50 in

Width: 14 cm ≈ 5.51 in

*Shades of joy*

Henan jade, hardness 5-6

Zhengzhou workmanship, 20th century

Height: 24.5 cm = 9.65 in

Width: 22 cm = 8.66 in





## Red of joy

Zoisite-corundum

Southern China, 20th century

Height: 13 cm ≈ 5.12 in

Width: 14 cm ≈ 5.51 in



*Joy and humour: Hotei with a round hat  
Shichifukujin, the seven Japanese gods of good fortune*

Bone, Southern China

Height: 24 cm - 9.45 in

Width: 64 cm - 25.20 in



*Secret joy, in a gourd*

Henan jade, hardness 5-6

Zhengzhou

Height: 15.5 cm ≈ 6.10 in

Width: 11 cm ≈ 4.33 in





### *Explosion of childlike joys II*

Fossil mammoth ivory

Southern China (museum quality)

20th century

Height: 30 cm - 11.81 in

Width: 18 cm - 7.09 in

## Precious joy

Beryl, carving quality

Southern China, 20th century

Height: 14 cm = 5.51 in

Width: 22 cm = 8.66 in





*Budai, simply*

Bone, Southern China

Height: 18 cm ≈ 7.09 in

Width: 31 cm ≈ 12.20 in



*Joy despite everything*  
*Sceptical monks, yet Budai prevails*

Fossil mammoth ivory  
Southern China, 20th century  
Height: 13 cm ~ 5.12 in  
Width: 14 cm ~ 5.51 in



## REFERENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

**E**ncounters between East and West have long fostered fertile intellectual exchanges. As early as the fourth century BCE, the Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis—who accompanied Alexander the Great on his campaign to India—may have been influenced by the sages he encountered there, contributing to the development of ancient scepticism.

In later centuries, thinkers such as Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Sartre took an interest in Buddhist thought, recognising in it echoes of their own reflections on the human condition.

**M**ax Weber's "Hinduism and Buddhism", published in 1916 during the turmoil of the First World War, remains a landmark study for understanding these traditions from a sociological perspective.

Such dialogues illustrate the remarkable capacity of spiritual traditions to transcend cultural boundaries and to nourish a shared reflection on humanity and its aspirations towards transcendence.



*Immense joy: 600 kilograms of  
happiness*

Xinjiang jade, China, hardness 6–7

Northern China workmanship. 20th century

Width: 115 cm = 45.28 in

Height: 111 cm = 43.70 in



This catalogue presents a selection of Asian sculptures from the gallery's collection.  
For any enquiries or pricing information, please contact us:

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