

The way of *Bhaishajyaguru*: the way of healing the wounded

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Abstract

This paper examines the various aspects of the concept of *Bhaishajyaguru*, the Medicine Buddha in Asian Art and culture, and how its arty approaches contribute to relieve mentally distressed person. Apparently, the beginning of image making was part of religious communication, and made its way through different dimensions when and where possible. Regardless of various disputes of the origin of the Buddha image, it significantly developed in multitudes depending on socio-cultural needs of each region. While Southern Buddhism appreciated the mortal (*Gautama/Śākyamuni*) Buddha, the Northern Buddhism preferred His divine aspects and bestowed its eternal basis, hence emerging the concept of self-manifested Buddha: *Swayambhū*. This particular concept promoted the notion of *Dhyani Buddhas*, and *Bodhisattvas* claiming the authority of manifesting in different forms as needed to help sentient beings to liberate themselves from *Saṃsāra*. The societies that favoured this notion magnified the Buddha image significantly and developed the icons of the Buddha assimilating the later developed Mahayana Buddhist concepts. Of the icons, *Bhaishajyaguru*, having the potency to heal the grievances of the ordinary man, became so significant that various statues and icons were made to worship and venerate him to overcome their infirmities i.e. cure diseases, prolong the lifespan, avoid calamities and thefts etc., The ultimate goal of his followers is to relieve themselves from the distress and join *Bhaishajyaguru* in the heaven of Pure Land (eastern pure land of *Vaidūryanirbhāsa*). This concept has promoted the art of image making, and developed a tradition of iconography proving the socio-religious demands that were depicted through icons. It also proves the means of image making of the man in the beginning of the civilization has incorporated into the present day needs of the society. Thus, this paper examines the ways and means of expressing the way of *Bhaishajyaguru* through art and icons.

Key words: *Bhaishajyaguru*, *Buddha image*, *Mahayana Buddhism*, *Dhyani Buddha*, *Buddhist icons*.

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