TREASURES FOR BUDDHA
THE LEGENDARY OFFERINGS FROM NANJING DABAO’EN TEMPLE
礼佛：南京大报恩寺的传奇供品

Organized by

China Institute Gallery
和
Nanjing Museum Administration
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Built in the third century the construction of Nanjing’s Temple was ordered by King Sun Quan after foreign monk Kang Senghui introduced Buddhism to the Wu Kingdom by way of what scholars now call, the “silk road of the sea.” Originally named Jianchu Temple, it became the first religious complex in the southern region of the Yangtze River to encourage the study of Buddhism. Renamed Changgan Temple through the Six Dynasties period, it was later dubbed Tianxi Temple in the Song dynasty.

It was during this period that in the fourth year of Dazhong Xiangfu (1011), with the blessings of the Song dynasty emperor, patrons gathered funds to build an underground chamber in Tianxi Temple, later renamed Dabao’en Temple in Nanjing; in it, they buried a magnificent gilded Ashoka Stupa. Nestled in iron and stone containers, accompanying the stupa were treasures that included a bronze plaque, coins, gold, jade, and rare glass objects wrapped in silk. For more than a thousand years, the stupa’s existence remained a secret. Even when Ming dynasty emperor Chengzu, or Yongle, ordered the rebuilding of the temple in 1412, the underground palace remained undisturbed.

After its completion, the fifteenth-century Dabao’en Temple came to be renowned the world over for its nine-story, 78.2-meter-high pagoda built with liuli tiles, a low-fired, color-glazed ceramic material. Known in the West as the Porcelain Tower, it soon became one of the Seven Wonders of the Medieval World, stirring the imaginations of writers into the nineteenth century.

Treasures for Buddha will highlight the long history of this celebrated temple while showcasing a Chinese national treasure unearthed in only 2008: the gilded Ashoka Stupa. On view for the first time in the United States, this exhibition will shed light on the historical significance of Buddhism in this region. It will also showcase for the first time to American audiences, the subject of Buddhist offerings and its associated practices, visualized through the display of treasured excavated bronze, glass, and silk-wrapped artifacts.

This exhibition is organized by China Institute Gallery and the Nanjing Museum Administration, under the direction of Willow Weilan Hai, Director of China Institute Gallery. The exhibition’s curators are Cao Zhijun of the Nanjing Museum Administration and Wu Tian. After its excavation, the Ashoka Stupa was exhibited for the first time at the Nanjing Municipal Museum in 2009, with the show later traveling to Japan and Taiwan. For China Institute Gallery, the Museum will reorganize and expand the exhibition to include 100 Song dynasty pieces of artwork from the underground chamber, as well as additional Ming dynasty architectural material from the ruins of Dabao’en Temple.
Willow Weilan Hai will serve as the general editor of the bilingual exhibition catalogue. Cao Zhijun and Wu Tian will contribute an essay on Dabao’en Temple and the history of Jinling Buddhism. Qi Haining, leader of the Museum’s Archaeological Team (the organization that conducted the excavation), will offer an essay on the discovery of the Ashoka Stupa. Additionally, Li Yuxin of Hangzhou Archaeological Research Institute will contribute an article that introduces the Ashoka Stupa's discovery in China. Nancy Steinhardt, Professor of East Asian Art at the University of Pennsylvania and Curator of Chinese Art at Penn Museum, will present a discussion of the architecture of pagodas and stupas. The final catalogue essay by Bai Ning, former Director of Nanjing Municipal Museum and original supervisor of the excavation and exhibition, will explore the subject of Buddhist offerings and practice through an analysis of the objects buried with the Ashoka Stupa. The bilingual full-color catalogue will also include all of the exhibits in view.

The exhibition is comprised of four sections:

**Section I: Discovery of the Underground Palace** will showcase the north wall of the stone case that stored the stupa, and introduce the ancient temple in the Song dynasty.

**Section II: The Ashoka Stupa and its Narrative Scenes** will feature the gilded stupa, the largest of the existing shrines to contain the Buddha’s remains, and the gold and silver mini-coffins found inside of it carved with depictions of the Buddha’s stories.

**Section III: Offerings and Beliefs** will exhibit donors’ offered objects found in the stupa’s container—including textiles recording patrons’ wishes and desires—to shed light on Buddhist practices from the period.

**Section IV: The Unique Offering of Yongle Emperor: Building of Dabao’en Temple.** Erected in the ruins of the Song dynasty temple by order of the Emperor Yongle, for centuries Dabao’en Temple with its porcelain tower, became a Wonder of the Western World. This section will feature architectural materials and an illustration of the Ming dynasty rubbing of the temple, to explore the Buddhist practices in Nanjing’s legendary temple.
CHINA INSTITUTE AND CHINA INSTITUTE GALLERY

China Institute advances a deeper understanding of China through programs in education, culture, business, and art in the belief that cross-cultural understanding strengthens our global community. Founded in 1926 by a group of American and Chinese educators, China Institute in America is the oldest bicultural, non-profit organization in America to focus exclusively on China.

China Institute Gallery, established in 1966, is distinct among the museums of New York City. It was the first in the United States to showcase Chinese art exclusively and on a regular basis, exhibiting the finest Chinese works of art, including painting, calligraphy, ceramics, bronzes, decorative art, folk art, architecture, photography and textiles from all periods. Today, China Institute Gallery is New York's only non-commercial exhibition space solely dedicated to Chinese art and is known for its innovative thematic and scholarly exhibitions, publications, and related art education programs.

For further information, please contact:

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*Please note that all information in these documents is tentative and subject to change without notice.*
FACT SHEET

Number of Works
Over 100 archaeological works, including the treasured gilded Ashoka Stupa, outer silver casket, as well as glass, bronze, and silk-wrapped artifacts.

Space Required
2,000–3,000 sq. ft.

Educational Materials
Introduction wall panel texts, object labels, video introduction, press kit, and set of digital images for publicity and educational purposes only. Additional images available upon request.

Publications
Bilingual catalogue of approximately 200 pages with full-color plates of all exhibits. China Institute Gallery will provide 20 complimentary exhibition catalogues to the hosting institution. Additional copies available at a discount.

Loan Fee
$75,000 for 12 weeks. Includes all artworks, didactic text, crating, admin costs, and comp. catalogues.

Shipping Costs
The hosting institution is responsible for shipping of the artworks.

Insurance Costs
Covered by hosting institution. The hosting institution will provide a Certificate of Insurance naming the lender as additional insured.

Couriers’ Costs
The hosting institution is responsible for minimum for transportation and courier costs (at least four couriers, two for installation and two for deinstallation).

Security
Museum standard.

Exhibition Dates
At China Institute Gallery
Available for travel Fall 2021
Spring 2022

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SELECTED IMAGES
Ashoka Stupa
Song dynasty
H. 47 1/4 in. (120 cm), W. (pedestal) 15 3/4 in. (40 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Partial details of the Ashoka Stupa
Song dynasty
H. 47 1/4 in. (120 cm), W. (pedestal) 15 3/4 in. (40 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Partial details of the Ashoka Stupa
Song dynasty
H. 47 1/4 in. (120 cm), W. (pedestal) 15 3/4 in. (40 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Guilt silver outer casket
Song dynasty
L. 7 3/16 in. (18.3 cm), W. 4 1/8 in. (10.5 cm), H. 7 1/2 in. (19 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Partial details of the guilt silver outer casket
Song dynasty
L. 7 3/16 in. (18.3 cm), W. 4 1/8 in. (10.5 cm), H. 7 1/2 in. (19 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Gold inner casket
Song dynasty
H. 2 13/16 in. (7.1 cm), L. 5 3/16 in. (13.2 cm), W. 2 3/8 in. (6.1 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Gold inner casket (detailed view)
Song dynasty
H. 2 13/16 in. (7.1 cm), L. 5 3/16 in. (13.2 cm), W. 2 3/8 in. (6.1 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Silver case  
Song dynasty  
H. 5 3/16 in. (13.1 cm), W. (each side) 5 5/8 in. (14.3 cm)  
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Gilt silver ping-vase
Song dynasty
H. 6 1/2 in. (16.5 cm), Diam. (at belly) 2 3/4 in. (7 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Gilt silver pomander
Song dynasty
H. 5 1/8 in. (13 cm), Diam. (at mouth) 4 3/4 in. (12.1 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Bronze plaque depicting the Tale of the Buddha and the Hungry Tigress
Song dynasty
(Dimensions to be provided later)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Gilt silver incense burner
Song Dynasty
H. 8 11/16 in. (22 cm), L. 13 3/4 in. (35 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Silver incense spoon
Song Dynasty
(Dimensions to be provided later)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Flower and leaf patterns in gold handkerchief
Song dynasty
L. 19 1/2 in. (49.5 cm), W. 18 11/16 in. (47.5 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Ink inscription handkerchief
Song dynasty
L. 19 5/16 in. (49 cm), W. 21 5/8 in. (55 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Ink inscription handkerchief describing a donation by patron Zhang Guangyi of 171 wen (ancient currency unit) asking for the Buddha’s blessing for his family
Song dynasty
(Dimensions to be provided later)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Glass ping-vase
Song dynasty
H. 5 1/2 in. (13.9 cm), Diam. (max) 3 1/8 in. (7.9 cm)
Unearthed in 2008 from the Changgan Temple outside the Zhonghua Gate in Nanjing
Illustrations by Westerners depicting the famous nine-story porcelain tower of Dabao’en Temple
Liuli tile with lion design, an architectural segment from Dabao’en Temple
Ming dynasty
H. 17 1/3 in. (44 cm), W. 17 2/3 in. (45cm), Diam. (max) 13 in. (33 cm)
Excavated from the Yanxiang Temple liuli kiln site at Yaogangcun in Nanjing