

For Immediate Release

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Donates Relics to Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism



Venerable Hosan, The Abbot of Bongseonsa, 25th District Head Temple of Jogye Order, prepares to move the relics, or sarira, into a replica of a 14th-century Buddhist reliquary to transport to Korea.

BOSTON ([April 16, 2024](#))—The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), has donated to the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism a group of relics, or sarira, which are the symbolic remains of three Buddhas and two Buddhist monks. A private religious ceremony to complete the donation took place at the MFA on April 16, 2024, with delegates from the Jogye Order and the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Boston in attendance.

The sarira—three glass and bronze spheres and small fragments—came to the MFA inside a Korean Buddhist reliquary of the Goryeo Kingdom (14th century), which the Museum purchased from the dealer Yamanaka and Company of Boston in 1939. The sarira were held in small containers in the shape of miniature stupas, or Buddhist monuments, that accompany the larger reliquary. According to Chinese-character inscriptions on the stupas, the sarira are associated with Buddha Shakyamuni, Kassapa Buddha and Dipamkara Buddha as well as the Buddhist monks Naong (1320–1376) and Jigong (died 1363). It is not known for certain where the reliquary originated.

“It was our great honor to work with the Jogye Order, the Cultural Heritage Administration of the Republic of Korea and the Consul General of the Republic of Korea,” said Matthew Teitelbaum, Ann and Graham Gund Director. “It was very meaningful to donate these objects of great religious significance to the Order. We look forward to a continued partnership in support of our shared mission of showcasing and celebrating Korean culture.”

The Jogye Order presented the Museum with a plaque of appreciation expressing gratitude for the voluntary donation of the sarira. On April 19, the day after the sarira arrive in Korea, a brief religious ceremony will be held at the Office of the Jogye Order to announce the transfer to Buddha. The sarira will then be enshrined at the Hoeamsa temple and public viewings will take place after the Buddha’s Birthday, which this year falls on May 15.



Matthew Teitelbaum, Ann and Graham Gund Director at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and Venerable Hosan, The Abbot of Bongseonsa, 25th District Head Temple of Jogye Order, after signing the Deed of Agreement to transfer ownership of the sarira to the Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism.

“As the abbot of Bongseonsa Temple, the parish that oversees Hoeamsa Temple, I feel an indescribable emotion to hear that the sarira are finally returning,” said Venerable Hosan of the Jogye Order. “The relics must be properly transferred and enshrined in accordance with their historical, religious and noble values.”

“This is the result of continuous efforts by the Jogye Order, the Cultural Heritage Administration, the Consulate General of the Republic of Korea in Boston and other civic groups. Above all, I would like to express my generous gratitude to the MFA for its careful consideration and respect for religious sentiment,” said Venerable Hyeogong, Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs, Jogye Order.

The Seoul-based Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism first contacted the MFA in 2009 to request the return of the sarira. In February 2024, delegates from the Jogye Order, the Cultural Heritage Administration of the Republic of Korea and the Consul General of the Republic of Korea in Boston visited the MFA for a discussion that led to the agreement confirming the Museum’s voluntary donation of the sarira to the Order.