

Author's Name:

Charles M. Mueller

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Abstract

This chapter applies a cognitive linguistics framework to the analysis of imagery encountered within the context of Buddhist worship. The analysis shows how both metaphor and metonymy underlie depictions in religious iconography. Visual representations in this genre afford multiple layers of interpretation based on devotees' prior embodied experiences, cultural knowledge, and expectations related to religious contexts. The chapter suggests that primary metaphor is especially crucial as it provides a preliminary layer of affordances to religious devotees who lack deep cultural and doctrinal knowledge related to their local Buddhist tradition. More complex metaphors and metonymy afford further layers of semantic potential, which are often only accessible to more knowledgeable viewers. It is noted that imagery is typically encountered within multimodal contexts, and these other modes further disambiguate, modulate, and elaborate the conveyed meanings. The final sections of the chapter consider how visual metaphorical mappings are used for ideological purposes and how conceptual mappings with a strongly embodied basis may underlie the durability of specific iconographic motifs through time.

Keywords

iconography, imagery, metaphor, metonymy, multimodality, religious art, religious imagery, visual metaphor

Symbols and Icons in Buddhist Worship

Introduction and background

The cognitive linguistics (CL) framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) has generally been applied to verbal communication, but recent work on multimodality (e.g., Forceville, 2020; Hart & Marmol Queralto, 2021) has demonstrated that it is also applicable to descriptions of symbolic expression within other modalities such as imagery and gesture. This chapter employs a CL framework to examine metaphor and metonymy in monomodal and multimodal Buddhist iconography as it appears in the form of statues, relief carvings, temple paintings, and other visual forms. The analysis will consider these mostly as monomodal representations (i.e., as images), but the final section will also examine such representations as they occur within multimodal contexts (for example, when encountered within religious rituals).

This chapter will tentatively put forth four claims. First, it will argue that visual representations in Buddhist iconography often afford multiple layers of interpretation which are constrained by genre-related expectations related to religious contexts. Second, it will show that these interpretations are often evoked through many of the same conceptual mapping principles used in verbal communication, to include metaphor (especially *primary* metaphor) and metonymy. Third, it will suggest that some of the conceptual mappings, especially those related to primary metaphor, ensure that a minimal initial layer of interpretation is available to most viewers regardless of their familiarity with particular Buddhist traditions. Fourth, it will argue that the conveyed meaning of imagery is, within religious contexts, further enriched and disambiguated through multimodal forms of expression. The final sections of this chapter will consider the implications of these claims, particularly in relation to how metaphor is used to reinforce doctrinal positions and factors contributing to the endurance of religious motifs.

Prior to engaging in the main topic of this chapter, we should first note that the visual modality differs in some important ways from verbal language, and these unique features have important implications for patterns of conceptual mapping. Verbal language is linear, so CL analysis of written or spoken language often involves breaking a text down into sequential units that are then placed into the categories relevant to the analysis (e.g., metaphor, simile, metonymy, etc.) An image, on the other hand, is viewed holistically. While the viewer's eyes may move around, fixating on various facets of a work (a dynamic process that the artist may attempt to control through the manipulation of compositional patterns), many of the interpretive conceptual mappings afforded by an image are present simultaneously. To give just one example, an image in a temple may express the eminence of the Buddha through an image's size, vertical positioning, centrality, or bright golden color; yet these elements are all available as part of a single gestalt, and their symbolic affordances are presumably processed, mostly on an unconscious level, in tandem. Moreover, key components of the communication model applicable to the visual mode differ from those of the verbal mode. Speech often occurs between interlocutors who share extensive knowledge related to communicative

intentions and the immediate situation, and misunderstandings can be addressed through ongoing interaction. In the visual mode, at least in the case of religious iconography, the communicator (i.e., the producer of the iconographic representation) often has only a vague and general understanding of potential viewers and must accommodate heterogeneous audiences.

In spite of these obstacles, producers of religious iconography can create highly expressive works that often surpass verbal modes of communication in their ability to convey meanings and evoke sublime emotions. This is partly due to the ability of genre attributions to set up certain expectations that elicit the audience's encyclopedic knowledge, which then facilitates interpretation (Forceville, 1996, 2020). In the case of religious iconography, viewers typically encounter visual representations within the context of worship, and they consequently assume that the representations have religious significance. For example, Buddhists visiting a temple would presume that most of the depicted anthropomorphic figures are to be venerated, or at the very least, that they are supernatural entities that support or protect associated figures that are to be venerated. They can also assume that the images will sometimes allude to narratives that are intended to be edifying in some way.

It must also be noted that religious iconography differs in important ways from the visual works (e.g., modern paintings, advertisements, and comics) that have been the focus of much previous academic research that has used a CL framework to examine imagery. Unlike these works, iconography, as an expression of specific religious traditions, tends to be very conservative, repeating specific motifs through time (often through centuries or millennia). In addition, religious devotees who attend a specific temple or regularly visit a holy site may encounter the same work repeatedly (in the case of a home altar, even daily) and may spend considerable time viewing the same sets of images. Iconography also reflects institutional requirements regarding doctrinal coherence and consistency. Finally, religious images are often encountered in an established order, as when Catholics visit each station of the cross when visiting a church. In northeast Asia, Buddhists will similarly often encounter images in a set order, bowing before the main gates of the temple and then the main hall prior to visiting other buildings within a temple compound.

Since this chapter analyzes Buddhist iconography in terms of conceptual mappings related to metaphor and metonymy, it is useful to briefly review the work of Forceville, one of the most influential scholars using a CL framework to examine visual modes of expression. In his seminal book, Forceville (1996) adapts Black's (1962) interaction theory of metaphor to examine pictorial metaphors in advertisements. He classifies the images in the ads as being based on four types of mappings: metaphors with one pictorially present term (MP1s), metaphors with two pictorially present terms (MP2s), pictorial similes, and verbo-pictorial metaphors (VPMs). He notes that in MP1s, the explicitly presented "term" (i.e., domain), tends to be the target domain, in contrast with verbal metaphors, in which it is the source domain that is explicitly presented. MP2s and pictorial similes are similar in that both domains (target and source) are pictorially represented; however, the pictorial elements in similes can be differentiated in that the two elements do not form a single gestalt. Forceville gives the example of a swimsuit ad

showing a woman gracefully diving into the water alongside a dolphin. Forceville's MP1 and MP2 distinction is similar to the distinction between "Symbolic Suggestive" and "Symbolic Attributive" structures in Kress and van Leeuwen's (2021) work (p. 102).

Forceville (2020) notes that some images may be accompanied by verbal (e.g., written) elements, which can clarify, augment, or expand on the visual message (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). In VPMs, one of the domains is presented verbally (in writing, in Forceville's examples), and the metaphor cannot be understood without that element. Forceville's research also draws on Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), especially, the idea that an image can contain explicatures (ostensively communicated assumptions) and implicatures (implicitly communicated assumptions). Communicative representations (to include images) containing a wide array of weak implicatures require the addressee to work to derive plausible interpretations, are said to produce a "poetic effect" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 222).

The examples of pictorial metaphor discussed in this chapter primarily involve MP1s. The lower occurrence of MP2s and pictorial similes in the examples probably reflects genre differences: unlike advertisements which work to establish a connection (often, a very arbitrary connection) between a product (which is nearly always the target domain) and a positive characteristic (usually the source domain), iconography generally employs metaphor to attribute positive features to a figure of veneration. Moreover, the repeated viewing of religious imagery allows for a rich array of metaphoric and metonymic associations that are only understood after multiple viewings or are understood solely by those with extensive knowledge of the Buddhist tradition (e.g., monastics). Verbal elements can occur in iconography when, for example, written titles, stanzas from a poem, or lines from a sutra accompany an image. Often, the hall housing an image will have a plaque or nameplate that identifies the key figure. Liturgical practices can also help in identification, as when a congregation turns towards a wall painting and then performs a devotional chant to the image's central figure.

Many of the metaphors that appear in Buddhist iconography are *primary* metaphors. These are deeply entrenched mappings from a source domain that is associated with sensory experience (e.g., verticality) to a target domain that is associated with our interpretations or response to the world (e.g., social dominance). Due to these metaphors' grounding in experiential correlations, they appear widely within lexical patterns across the world's languages (Grady & Ascoli, 2017). Ortiz (2011) argues convincingly that these basic metaphors, while thus far explored almost exclusively in research on verbal language, are also highly relevant to the analysis of monomodal *visual* metaphors. She examines various primary metaphors occurring in film and advertisements (many of which also occur extensively within religious iconography), such as CONTROL IS VERTICALITY, IMPORTANCE IS SIZE, and SIMILARITY IS ALIGNMENT. In this chapter, it is argued that primary metaphor, when used in monomodal images, plays an important role in rendering key elements of artistic representations readily interpretable by a wide audience regardless of the viewers' level of expertise or their cultural or temporal distance from the creator of the object (for similar findings related to political cartoons, see El Refaie, 2009).

Like metaphor, metonymy can also appear in nonverbal communication and expression. *Metonymy* has been defined as “a cognitive process in which one conceptual element of an entity (thing, event, property), the vehicle, provides mental access to another conceptual entity (thing, event, property), the target, within the same frame, domain or idealized cognitive model” (Kövecses, 2006, p. 99). In other words, metonymy is based on relationships within the same network of knowledge. It should be noted that this knowledge is often cultural and is not limited to physical reality or personal beliefs. Thus, a picture of Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer would be sufficient to evoke the idea of Santa Claus or Christmas to most modern English-speakers even if they were fully aware that Rudolph is a fictional character.

Whereas metaphor involves a mapping across domains, metonymy involves mapping within the same domain. Metonymy achieves this by highlighting a salient feature of a domain, and for this reason, metonymy (like metaphor) can evoke specific construals of the target domain. For example, we could refer to workers as either *heads* or *hands* (e.g., field hands), but the former will promote a construal of the employees as intellectual workers whereas the latter will construe them as manual laborers. Metonymy’s strong reliance on cultural knowledge can make it opaque to those who lack such knowledge or relevant experiences. Consider metonymic expressions for the concept of MEAL in various cultures. Chinese, Japanese, and Korean speakers all use words for *rice* metonymically to mean *meal*. This is likely to cause initial confusion for an English speaker learning these languages since bread, instead of rice, is a more salient part of the Western diet. For this reason, Christians traditionally talk of “breaking bread” together during communal meals (e.g., Luke 24:35, Acts 20:7).

Within religious discourse, narrative plays an especially central role, and key stories and myths are often expressed through metonymy, which serves multiple functions. In the case of well-known stories, depictions of key scenes can evoke the entire story in the mind of the viewer. Visuals set off by framelines (e.g., comic strips) or by “white space” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021, p. 205) can also use metonymy to evoke key events of a story, leading the viewer to subconsciously fill in the missing scenes based on general schemas and expectations regarding coherence (Forceville, 2020).

In this chapter, the discussion of iconography primarily focuses on visual images, but religious imagery often conveys meanings through multiple modalities simultaneously. Linguistic research has generally focused on morphosyntactic or lexical features that are associated with monomodal verbal communication, so it is easy to lose sight of the fact that human beings have a wide range of means with which to convey their thoughts. These range from the nonverbal elements that accompany spoken language (e.g., gesture) and written texts (e.g., font design) to an extensive array of resources to include static images (e.g., painting and sculpture), dance, and music. All of these modes can co-occur within religious ritual activities, which tend to involve relatively rich multimodal forms of expression.

Conceptual Mappings in Buddhist Iconography from an Embodied Perspective

Buddhist iconography frequently employs several primary metaphors in its imagery. One of the most common is IMPORTANCE IS CENTRALITY (cf. Arnheim, 1982). As part of the more general metaphor PROPERTIES ARE PHYSICAL PROPERTIES, the metaphor is deeply grounded in human embodied perceptual and social experience and is therefore ubiquitous across cultures. In normal lighting, our vision is acute only in the center of our field of view due to the high density of cones in the fovea, a deficit that we overcome by moving our eyes three or four times per second (Snowden et al., 2012). We therefore learn, from a very young age, to place objects where they will be in the center of someone's field of vision if we wish to draw attention to them, and conversely, to place them in the periphery (or better yet, outside) of another person's visual field if we want to hide them. Within social interactions, an important speaker will tend to be positioned at the center of a group where she will be more easily seen and heard, and groups of people who are interested in a person will tend to gather around her. These embodied experiences have led to a metaphor that appears in iconographic depictions in the placement of the most revered figure in the center of a bounded frame (e.g., a picture frame, a carved figure, or an architectural structure). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2021), the center is often presented as the core element with which other elements are associated and from which they draw meaning and coherence (p. 201).

Centrality, as a signal of importance, can also be used to incorporate figures from competing religious traditions while relegating them to peripheral status. From the onset, Buddhism has historically taken a syncretic stance as it adapted to new cultural milieus. While taking in indigenous elements, it has managed to maintain the doctrinal primacy of the Buddha by relegating competing figures to subsidiary status. This is reflected within the iconography of all the main Buddhist traditions. Consider a typical large Korean monastery as an example. The *Daeungjeon* (literally, "Hall of the Great Hero") occupies the center of the monastic complex, and the statue of the historical Buddha occupies the center of this hall. This main figure is immediately flanked by key bodhisattvas, while the walls of the hall often contain large paintings depicting throngs of minor figures (e.g., guardians, deities taken from Indian, Chinese, and Korean pre-Buddhist traditions, and so on.) This hierarchy also finds expression in the layout of the monastery. The halls devoted to more traditional Buddhist figures (e.g., bodhisattvas) appear near the *Daeungjeon*, while those devoted to indigenous deities such as the *Sanshin* (Mountain Spirit) or *Chilseong* (Seven Stars—spirits associated with the Big Dipper) tend to be small and are located on the periphery of the temple grounds.

Such central positioning of figures also hints at some interesting cultural differences between traditions. Japanese temples, compared to those of Korea, have a much greater tendency to place indigenous patriarchal figures at the center of their temples. Thus a wooden statue depicting Shinran, the Japanese founder of the Jodo Shinshu Sect, is the central figure in the *Goeido* (Founder's Hall) of Higashi Honganji, the head temple of one of the major Japanese Pure Land sects (cf. Dobbins, 2001). One is hard-pressed to find equivalents in Korean iconography. Some Korean Buddhist temples have a hall devoted to patriarchs of the order (*josadang*), but it is invariably a small structure located on the outskirts of a monastery.

In the examples discussed so far, centrality has been associated with a positive evaluation, but this does not appear to be a requisite feature of the metaphor. For example, Tibetan *bhavacakra* thangka paintings depict *samsāra* (the cycle of mundane existence) as a centrally positioned demonic figure holding a wheel. At the center of the wheel are a pig, snake, and bird (representing the three “poisons” of ignorance, aversion, and attachment). Moving out from the center, one finds other concentric layers of symbolic depictions of *samsāra* until finally coming to the enlightened buddhas or bodhisattvas which are positioned at the periphery of the painting as an indication that they have transcended mundane existence.

In addition to CENTRALITY, VERTICALITY is often used as a key source domain in primary metaphors due to its association with several key target domains that are common in religious discourse, to include CONTROL, POWER, and GOD. In our everyday embodied experience, verticality is highly relevant since it relates to our ability to apply force. This is perhaps most obvious in situations involving aggression in which one person wrestles an opponent to the ground. The person on top is able to use the weight of his torso to amplify his effective strength when striking the other person or holding the person’s limbs to the ground. Even in situations in which we interact with objects or human artifacts, power and control are related to verticality. It is therefore easier to nail a large board to the floor than to the ceiling of a room.

The metaphorical construal of VERTICALITY has received solid support in empirical research. Schubert (2005), in a series of experiments, has demonstrated that judgments of a group’s power is influenced by vertical position in space and that this affect is not driven by valence differences. Valenzuela and Soriano (2009) have similarly found, in psycholinguistic experiments, that their participants naturally associate VERTICALITY with CONTROL. As might be expected, these primary metaphors form the basis for conceptualization of powerful supernatural agents such as God. As an all-powerful being who is control of everything, God and other such powerful entities are naturally construed as occupying a higher spatial position (e.g. Meier & Fetterman, 2020; Meier et al., 2021;). In numerous cultures, verticality metaphors underly social practices such as bowing (the lowering of the self on a vertical axis, accenting the power or worth of the object of devotion), and these practices have, in turn, become pervasive within many religious practices.

One of the most graphic portrayals of power and control as expressed through verticality can be found in representations of the Four Heavenly Kings, which often appear at the entrance to Buddhist temples in China, Japan, and Korea. These guardian figures are frequently depicted as stepping on grimacing demonic figures, who writhe in pain underneath their feet. These guardians are also often depicted as larger than the typical human. In this way, metaphorical entailments related to VERTICALITY are further augmented by conceptual mappings related to SIZE. The mapping of SIZE to IMPORTANCE or POWER also has a solid basis in embodied experience. Throughout the animal kingdom, size is closely linked to hierarchy, and consequently, many animals will manipulate visual or auditory cues to fool a potential aggressor or predator into thinking that they are larger than they really are. Size is also a salient cue for human society. From an early age, children are aware of a correlation between the size of

agents (particularly, *human* agents) and a host of other properties such as strength, authority, and power. Humans associate size and power even in modern situations in which such a link would appear to represent an unwarranted bias or prejudice (Littlemore, 2019, pp. 108-109). For example, research shows that physical stature is linked to the perception that someone is more dominant, charismatic, intelligent, high in status, and leaderlike (Blaker & van Vugt, 2014). It is therefore unsurprising that height is positively associated with career success for both men and women (Judge & Cable, 2004). The association appears to be bidirectional, with more powerful people perceived as possessing greater physical stature (Higham & Carment, 1992).

As would be expected, the experiential correlation between size and power has led to the development of size-related cognitive metaphors throughout the world's cultures. For example, Yu et al. (2017), in an analysis of English and Chinese, found consistent mappings between the source domains of SIZE and WEIGHT and the target domain of IMPORTANCE. In both languages, these associations are lexicalized, an indication that the conceptual metaphor is conventional. Research by Meier et al. (2008) indicates that large size is also associated with positive valence.

Metaphorical links between size and power are perhaps one of the most pervasive image-related metaphors employed in sculpture from the ancient past to the present, ranging from the massive carved megaliths at Göbekli Tepe (c. 9500 to 8000 BCE) to the two 20-meter-tall bronze figures of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il at the Mansu Hill Grand Monument in Pyongyang. In Buddhism, massive sculptures have appeared in the Buddhist world throughout history. Two notable examples would be the 55-meter-tall Buddha (built around 570 AD) and 38-meter-tall Buddha (built around 618 AD) at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, which were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001. The continued prevalence of the IMPORTANCE IS SIZE metaphor in Buddhism can be seen from the fact that many of the world's tallest statues are figures of the Buddha that were erected in the last couple of decades. These include the 128-meter-tall Spring Temple Buddha in Lushan, China (completed in 2008), the 116-meter-tall Laykyun Sekkya Buddha in Khatakan Taung, Myanmar (also completed in 2008), and the 100-meter-tall Amitābha figure in Ushiku, Japan (completed in 1993).

Size-related metaphors are used even when they distort natural proportions of well-known entities. Tanaka (2015, pp. 34-37) discusses one such example: an early Indian statue of the Buddha and an elephant depicting an incident in which Devadatta, an evil monk who was the Buddha's cousin, tried to kill the Buddha by setting an intoxicated elephant loose. When the elephant saw the Buddha, it was so overcome by his loving kindness that it immediately calmed down and knelt before him. In the iconic depiction of the event, the Buddha is shown with his right palm turned outward in what is known as the Gesture of Fearlessness (*Abhayamudrā*) with an elephant to his right. The elephant comes up just past the Buddha's ankles and could thus be easily mistaken for a kitten or tortoise. To the Buddha's left, an attendant figure is also depicted as unrealistically small, coming up just past the Buddha's left knee. The image demonstrates how the sculptor has, through the manipulation of relative size, chosen to sacrifice naturalness in order to convey the Buddha's power, authority, and control.

The primary metaphors related to CENTRALITY, VERTICALITY, and SIZE discussed so far map onto related target domains (e.g., IMPORTANCE and POWER), and for this reason, they are often combined in depictions in which a key figure is centrally located, positioned above the viewer (often on a pedestal), and is large in size. Another primary metaphor, which creates mappings from the domain of PROXIMITY to the domain of SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, is used in iconography to establish affiliations between figures of veneration. Like other primary metaphors, this has a strong embodied basis. Human beings who are socially intimate tend to be in close physical proximity with each other, so if we see a group of people huddled together in a park, we assume that they must be part of the same family, club, or group of friends. The metaphor underlies various common expressions related to human relationship, such as *drifting apart* and *getting closer*, and can also be seen in hand gestures in which the distance between the hands indicates the degree of intimacy or estrangement (Winter & Matlock, 2017).

The PROXIMITY metaphor is commonly used in iconography. To develop greater organization and integration of figures within the vast Buddhist pantheon, figures associated with the same texts, narratives, liturgies, vows, or practices are often placed within the same bounded frame. Such portrayals of affiliation are used extensively within esoteric Buddhism (e.g., Japanese Shingon). Leidy (2008, pp. 123-125) gives the example of the Womb World Mandala, which symbolizes the possibility of enlightenment within the phenomenal world. The mandala shows 12 courts that contain 414 deities. The central court shows Vairocana (the primordial “sun” Buddha) sitting on an open lotus whose eight petals contain seated buddhas at the cardinal points of the compass and bodhisattvas at intermediate points. On the right is the “Vajra Holder’s Court” (symbolizing the power of the intellect to destroy human passions) and on the left is the “Lotus Holder’s Court” (symbolizing the inherent purity of all sentient beings). The mandala is in turn paired with the similarly complex Diamond World Mandala, which serves as a guide to the spiritual practices leading to enlightenment. The two mandalas are used during public ceremonies, while sections of the mandalas are used in more private and specialized rituals. The arrangement of figures within geometric shapes (in the case of the Diamond World Mandala, a square containing nine squares, which in turn contain symmetrically placed circles) undoubtedly serves as a mnemonic for liturgy specialists (e.g., Shingon priests) while also expressing a meta-message conveying intimations of a vast and intricate cosmic order (cf. the concept of “layering” in Sperber & Wilson, 1987, p. 751).

In addition to the metaphor examples discussed so far, metonymy is also used extensively in iconography. Some examples come from the early period of Buddhism, during which anthropomorphic depictions of the Buddha appear to have been avoided and metonymic elements used in their stead. These include the Buddha’s footprint used to represent the Buddha, or the bodhi tree where the Buddha achieved awakening used to represent the Buddha’s enlightenment. The explanation for the apparent absence of the Buddha’s bodily image in early Buddhism is controversial. Many (e.g., Linrothe, 1993) have claimed that there was an initial period of so-called “aniconism” during which the Buddha’s physical form was not directly depicted, while others (e.g., Huntington, 2015) have argued that depictions such as the Buddha’s footprint, which can be classified as metonymic, were more likely popular alternative styles of

representation. A typical example of an “aniconic” depiction is provided by Tanaka (2015, pp. 5-6), who discusses a relief carving on the Great Stupa at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh, India. In the detailed and crowded relief (full of other human figures) that shows the night-time departure of the prince (soon to become Buddha) from the palace in order to become an ascetic, the prince’s presence must be inferred based on a parasol on the back of the royal stallion. As Tanaka (2015, pp. 5-6) points out, the idea that members of the royal family would be shaded by a parasol in India’s hot climate makes perfect sense, but the depiction is nevertheless unnatural since the departure famously took place at night when everyone at the palace was asleep and a parasol would not be needed to block the sun.

Metonymic associations also serve an important function in iconography in the identification of key figures. To the untrained eye (and sometimes for experts as well), the myriad figures appearing in Buddhist art are often difficult to distinguish, but they can be identified through the placement of accompanying attendants, objects, or motifs that are conventionally associated with the figure (cf. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Some of these, for example, the use of lion figures to identify portrayals of Shakyamuni from early Buddhist art (Leidy, 2008), could be regarded as MP2s. Hand gestures (mudras) and postures (especially, positioning of the legs) can also function as metonymic elements that facilitate identification of figures, and, in some cases, the narrative event being portrayed. For example, the *bhūmisparśa mudrā* (the depiction of the seated Buddha touching the ground with his right hand) is associated with the narrative of the historical Buddha’s temptation by Māra, the evil one (Spagnoli, 2005). With this gesture, the Buddha invoked the goddess of the Earth to acknowledge his past merit and right to attain awakening.

In many instances, metonymy can be used to evoke or convey a narrative through depictions of multiple scenes from a story. An example of this is a lacquerware depiction found on the Tamamushi Shrine in Nara Japan (discussed by Leidy, 2008, p. 113). The work shows Siddhartha, during a previous lifetime as a bodhisattva, throwing himself off a cliff so as to provide food to a starving tigress and her cubs. In the depiction, Siddhartha (in a former life) is shown multiple times (within a single image lacking framelines) at the top of the cliff, in the air after diving off the cliff, and at the base of the cliff being consumed by the tigress and cubs. The artwork thus shows salient scenes of the story in superimposed form to remind the viewer of the entire narrative, which would be familiar to Buddhists as part of a shared oral and textual tradition. For the modern viewer, the use of multiple scenes to evoke a narrative is familiar (e.g., in comics). Even so, the reappearance of the same figure (the Buddha as bodhisattva) within the same scene without framelines is confusing since this sort of portrayal is not part of our current “grammar” of visual communication in which narrative frames are typically separated by boundaries or repeated spatial dimensions.

Metonymy can also function to evoke inferences that give a static image a sense of temporal depth. An example of this is found in a relief carving from Pakistan (2nd to 3rd century) showing Shakyamuni’s final transcendence (Leidy, 2008, p. 41). The image shows the grieving monks gathered around the Buddha, who is shown lying peacefully on his side in the center of the work. As Leidy (2008) points out, minor elements in the

work have been placed to hint at preceding and concurrent events. For example, monks' staffs with carrying bags on top are shown in front of the funerary bed, indicating that monks have come from far away to attend the funeral, while an incense burner placed on the bottom left indicates that rites have been performed. A leafy medallion with a female figure inside shows the deceased Queen Maya descending from heaven to visit her son one last time. The use of metonymy to evoke temporal depth has received support in empirical research. For example, Shen and Biberman (2010) have shown that naïve participants who are asked to view pictures showing a "pregnant moment" will tend to enlist elaborate narrative organization to make sense of pictures, organizing "visual information as a sequence of temporally and casually related events" (p. 191). They add that this tendency to seek narrative organization appears to hold true when people view isolated pictures irrespective of genre.

Implications and future research

As the above discussion demonstrates, Buddhist iconography expresses meaning through conceptual mappings that are often realized through metaphor and metonymy. The examples suggest that the choice of mapping reflects some of the varied ways in which religious artwork is viewed. For example, the use of primary metaphors presumably reflects concerns that the iconography be accessible to a wide audience. This is apparent if we imagine a scenario in which a visitor from abroad with no prior knowledge of Buddhism visits a Buddhist temple. It is difficult to imagine that even such a naïve visitor, after walking around the temple grounds, would be unable to readily infer that the giant Buddha image seated high on a pedestal at the center of the compound is of central importance to the devotees of the religion and that the smaller figures on the side walls of peripheral halls represent more minor figures.

As our imaginary visitor gained greater familiarity with the tradition, they would realize that the iconography also evokes some less obvious meanings. Some of these would be based on mappings associated with more complex metaphors that may be associated with a specific Buddhist tradition. The visitor might learn, for example, that a specific hand gesture (Skt. dharmachakra mudra) shows the Buddha "turning" the wheel of the dharma and that the image of a wheel is associated with the Buddha's teachings and first sermon. The visitor may also learn a set of associations, perhaps images evoking key narratives and events, that are expressed through metonymy. In this chapter, a key conjecture then is that iconography uses a mix of conceptual mapping types to ensure that religious art affords interpretive possibilities ranging from those that are readily accessible to all viewers, to include neophytes, and those that are accessible only to more knowledgeable viewers.

A possible objection to this line of reasoning is that there is often a considerable temporal gap between the production of iconography and the viewing of these representations. In practical terms, why would creators of iconography work to ensure that their works are interpretable in specific ways (e.g., in ways that accord with their specific tradition) by later viewers who encounter the works decades or even centuries later? One possible response is to adapt Sperber's (1996) notion of an "epidemiology of representations". This is the idea that the successful transmission of beliefs relies on a

constellation of psychological and ecological factors, such as people's ability to understand and recall a belief, the existence of institutions to record and transmit the beliefs, and so on. Along these lines, it might be argued that the producers of iconography are transmitting the more successful representational processes of their predecessors. When iconography successfully provides affordances for doctrinally relevant interpretations to both neophyte and expert viewers (often through masterful use of both metaphor and metonymy), the same styles and motifs are maintained with only minor modification. When they fail to achieve such effects, artists presumably strive to create alternative depictions that break more radically from previous artistic practices.

The less accessible elements in iconography may play a similar role as the weak implicatures that produce "poetic effects" in poetry and literature by providing rich possibilities for additional interpretations beyond those that are immediately obvious. While Sperber and Wilson (1995) view explicatures and sets of weak implicatures as *alternatives* related to different communication strategies, it can be argued that *religious* audiences will often continue to search for additional layers of meaning within representations (regardless of the mode) even after a plausible explicature has been identified. This is due to distinctive assumptions related to religious discourse: the notion that there are deeper layers of significance awaiting the religious seeker who is willing to pursue them (Richardson et al., 2021, p. 122). Moreover, religious texts and images can sometimes be the object of intensive study and reflection for centuries, a situation that virtually ensures that multiple layers of alternative meanings ("weak implicatures" in Relevance Theory) will eventually emerge as the texts' audience seeks interpretations relevant to their society and their individual needs.

When analyzing religious iconography, it should be kept in mind that these works, while often encountered in museums or books, are typically designed for use within a rich context that involves liturgical activities and ritual. Such activities often employ the use of multiple modes of communication to include imagery, sounds, and spoken language. A good example of this is the ritualized use of a wooden gong. Throughout northeast Asian temples, this instrument often takes the form of a carved wooden fish. In early tradition, the instrument was used to notify the monastic assembly of mealtimes or work details. The fish shape was purportedly selected since fish never close their eyes, and the fish-shaped wooden gong thus reminds meditation monks to minimize their sleep as they engage in spiritual practice. In more modern times, the wooden gong has continued to be used in Zen temples in China, Japan, and Korea, primarily as a percussion instrument that accompanies chanting.

In Korea, in addition to this small wooden gong, called a *moktak*, larger monasteries also have a large wooden gong called a *mogeo*, which hangs in a central pavilion (along with a large bell and other instruments) that is located at the center of a complex. As a prelude to the morning and evening service, the wooden fish is struck by drumsticks that are moved back and forth in the hollow inside of the instrument. If we consider the Korean *mogeo* in terms of its actual function within devotional services, it serves as a good example of a multimodal representation based on both metaphor and metonymy.

The fish shape creates a metonymic link to a traditional tale of a monk who violated the teachings of his master and engaged in improper activities (Richardson et al., 2021). According to the tale, when the wayward monk died, he was reborn as a fish, which (due to his bad karma) had a tree growing out of his back. One day the master saw the fish struggling as it swam through the river and realized that it was the reincarnation of his wayward disciple. Out of compassion, the master performed a “water and land” ceremony (an offering to spirits in water and on land), which allowed the wayward disciple to return to human form. The disciple, deeply repentant, carved the tree that had grown out of his back into a fish as an admonition to others. The dragon head, seen on many *mogeo*, links to traditions of a magical jewel (Skt. *cintā-maṇi*) said to be obtained from the dragon-king of the sea. The jewel is said to manifest whatever one desires and is regarded as a metaphor for the teachings and virtues of the Buddha.

Part of viewers’ experience of the *mogeo* when it is used in ceremonies involves nonverbal sounds (the striking of the hollow interior of the wooden instrument at a dramatically accelerating tempo). The instrument is quite loud, as it is meant to be audible throughout the entire monastic complex, and it therefore serves the obvious function of attracting attention. The loud and accelerating strikes are also associated with wakefulness, which is metaphorically associated with *spiritual* awakening (an association reinforced, in the visual mode, by the folk notion of fish as animals that do not sleep). As this example shows, multimodal religious representations are often rich and layered, and often involve the use of both metaphor and metonymy in multiple modes.

This chapter has briefly explored the use of the conceptual mapping principles put forth in CL in the analysis of religious iconography. This framework has been under-explored in work on religious art and iconography, so many questions remain. For example, is there a relationship between the primary functions of religious icons and the conceptual mappings type (e.g., primary metaphor, complex metaphor, metonymy) employed? Are there systematic differences between icons that are prominently displayed to the public and icons that are designed primarily for use in the esoteric practices of specialists? What is the relationship between the conceptual mappings employed in visual art and those found in spoken and written language? Moreover, there is tremendous scope for multimodal research that examines religious iconography in authentic contexts. Buddhist iconography is typically encountered within worship and ritual activities that may involve multiple modes of representation to include the recitation of related texts, the use of musical elements (e.g., the striking of a wooden gong or ringing of a bell), bowing (done individually or in unison), visualization practices, and the lighting of incense. It is odd that this exceedingly rich source of multimodal discourse has been ignored entirely in recent edited volumes on the subject.

Further readings

Forceville, C. J. (2020). *Visual and multimodal communication: Applying the relevance principle*. Oxford University Press.

This is a recent overview of Forceville's influential framework, which applies relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995) to the analysis of pictorial images.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2021). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

This provides another excellent introduction to the analysis of imagery. It is more comprehensive in scope than Forceville's theory and is based loosely on systemic functional grammar (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014).

Pérez Sobrino, P. (2017). *Multimodal metaphor and metonymy in advertising*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Many of the recent studies applying metaphor theory to the analysis of imagery have employed multimodal approaches. This work provides nuanced insights into the interactions between metaphor and metonymy within the genre of ads.

Pinar Sanz, M. J. (Ed.) (2015). *Multimodality and cognitive linguistics*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Fahlenbrach, K. (Ed.) (2016). *Embodied metaphors in film, television, and video games: Cognitive approaches*. Routledge.

These two recent edited collections provide excellent examples of recent work on multimodality. The latter work is especially useful in its discussion of metaphors within the macro-structures of film, which is characterized by especially rich compositions that bring together imagery, sound, and movement within narrative sequences.

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