



**Vietnamese (French Cochinchina) Four Piece Solid Silver Tea Set, 19th century**

**£6,750.00**

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This beautiful Vietnamese tea set, inscribed on the tray with L.D., is estimated to have been part of the Lieutenant Governor of French Cochinchina's collection. This appears to coincide with Alexandre Antoine Etienne Gustave Ducos' (1851-1907) time in the post. Ducos was Lieutenant Governor twice, first in 18th of July 1895 to 22nd of March 1896 and 19th of November 1896 to 9th of May 1897.

1 2 'L' indicates 'Lieutenant' while 'D' is estimated to refer to 'Ducos'.

This solid silver set consists of four pieces; a tea pot, milk jug, sugar bowl and tray. Multiple representations of Buddhist figures and imagery decorate the objects, surrounded by intricate patterns and floral motifs. Buddhist art is characterised by elaborate combinations of divinities, creatures and objects, the complex tapestry of Buddhist legend and wisdom often encompassed in one artwork.

3 The figures represented on the tea set include bodhisattvas (enlightened beings. This term was often used in reference to the Buddha himself prior to when he achieved enlightenment. 'Sattva' means being intent on achieving while 'Bodhi' translates as enlightenment).

4 The multiple armed bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, known in Vietnam as Quán Thế Âm or Quan Âm, is one of the figures represented along the border of the tray. Initially always a male figure, in many cultures Avalokiteśvara was later also represented as female. Quán Âm is the Bodhisattva of Infinite Compassion, known to appear after recitation to anyone in distress. Representations of Avalokiteśvara are known to have two, four, six, eight, eighteen or more arms.

5 Avalokiteśvara was one of the most popular represented figures, typically portrayed with multiple limbs, wearing a headdress

6 and sitting on a lotus flower. This is how Quán Âm is shown on the border of this tray, surrounded by a floral shape. This bodhisattva is one of four figures represented on the border of the tray. Other comparable figures are depicted on the tray, tea pot and milk jug. The sugar bowl is decorated with elaborate patterns inspired by flora, but does not include humans, animals or supernatural creatures. Incised on the flat surface of the tray is a depiction of a bodhisattva riding

6 Robert E. Buswell Jr, ed.by, Encyclopedia of Buddhism, Volume One A-L, (New York, NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004) p. 61.

5 Tan Pham, Volume 3b of A Traveller's Story of Vietnam's Past, From the 10th to the 13th Centuries, Dai Viet and Champa: Panduranga, Kauthara, and Indrapura (New Zealand: 315Kio Publishing, 2024), p. 85. 4 Robert E. Buswell Jr & Donald S. Lopez Jr, The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, "Bodhisattva", [accessed 9th June 2025].

3 Robert E. Fischer, Buddhist Art and Architecture, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), p.11. 2 'Vietnam', World Statesman, [accessed 28 May 2025] .

1 'List of administrators of the French colony of Cochinchina', Wikipedia, [accessed 28 May 2025] . a horse with a whip aloft. This figure alludes to Crown Prince Siddhartha,<sup>7</sup> who later became Gautama Buddha,<sup>8</sup> with his horse Kanthaka.<sup>9</sup> On the other section of the tray's surface is a depiction of Māra (Vietnamese: Thiên Ma) and the elephant Girimekhala. Māra is the Buddhist symbol of evil, the personification of death who continuously endeavours and fails to thwart the Buddha's obtaining of enlightenment. One of Māra's most well-known attempts was when Māra fought the Buddha with an army of demons.<sup>10</sup> This battle is reflected on the tray through the depiction of both the armed Siddhartha and the warmongering Māra on the tray. Although Buddhist literature suggests that Māra could be a plurality of entities,<sup>11</sup> this image on the tray may also depict, in addition to Māra, generals of Māra's army who were said to have ridden an elephant during battle.<sup>12</sup> The elephant of Māra is known as Girimekhala. Māra is depicted on the tray riding Girimekhala and wielding daggers in his four arms, surrounded by soldiers of similar appearance. Comparable imagery in Buddhist art depicts Māra with lightening bolts as weapons instead of daggers.<sup>13</sup>

The milk jug is similarly decorated with incised figures of Buddha, divinities, demons and attendants. Buddha is depicted in a serene pose, surrounded by swirling shapes with his hands resting atop his crossed legs. The position, closed eyes and hand gesture of Buddha on the jug correlates with Dhyana Mudra, a meditative pose.<sup>14</sup> This pose and hand gesture is emblematic of a state of concentration, representing Prince Siddhartha's final meditation before enlightenment as the Buddha.<sup>15</sup>

The spout of the teapot features the head of a serpent known as Nāga in Sanskrit and Pīli. These creatures