

Buddhism from India



to Sri Lanka and Himalayas

p. 41-66 Buddhist Art

REVIEW—BUDDHA IN INDIA

Before Spring Break, we looked at the evolution in style of the Buddha and why.



The Kushan Buddha

Humble, meditative, transcendent
--gesture of assurance.
Lion throne, bodhisattvas and
heavenly beings



The Gandharan Buddha

Humble, meditative, naturalistic.
Mixture of Greek and Indian styles.
Teaching mudra.



The Gupta Buddha—abstracted and simplified

Spiritual being— transcendent

REVIEW—BUDDHA IN INDIA

Before Spring Break, we looked at the similarities and differences in the Buddha.

Question 1: look at the three statues of the Buddha on the previous slide. Identify each and then make a list of the similarities and differences.

Include attributes, gestures and style.

Do research in previous lectures and/or the book if needed.

REVIEW—BUDDHISM INDIA

The last time we discussed Buddhism it was within the Gupta Dynasty. The Gupta Dynasty collapsed partly as a result of the infamous Attila the Hun.

Hinduism then became the main religion of India supported by Royal patrons.

Buddhism was soon weakened more by Islam.

Even though religious influence was diminishing, medieval Buddhist art continued in enclaves following the traditions of the Gupta.



Many of the images of the Buddha from this time were accompanied by pairs of bodhisattvas (enlightened beings), most of who later became the focus of their own cults. We looked at this before.

Maitreya---future Buddha—a stupa in his crown.

Vajrapani—held a thunderbolt

Avalokiteshvara—a seated Buddha in his crown and held a lotus...compassion of all Buddhas

BUDDHISM—through Asia

We also looked at how, throughout its 2500-year history, we see change, persecution and integration as Buddhist development moved geographically across the continents.

As Buddhism declined in India, it moved across Asia.

This map shows the movement of the different sects or directions within Buddhism that we discussed previously:

Theravada—tradition of the elders. The historic Buddha

Mahayana—inclusion of the bodhisattva and more personal directions toward nirvana

Vajrayana—even more images for worship. Physical becomes more important so images are more dynamic.



The movement across Asia means Buddhism changes as it integrates with other beliefs.

BUDDHISM MOVES BEYOND INDIA

At about the time Buddhism was declining in India, it was developing in other areas.

In East Asian cultures, civil unrest and dynastic patronage played major roles in the initial acceptance of the faith.

In Sri Lanka, Nepal and Tibet, all culturally similar to the Indian model, Buddhism was able to evolve from within-- in fact to shape the emerging culture.

Rather than providing an alternative during times of civil and political strife, **Buddhism shaped the cultures with political support.**

Along with Asoka's missionaries came the Buddhist concept of a 'righteous king', exemplified by Asoka himself.

Throughout the history of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, there has been a close relationship between the Buddhist Sangha (or community) and the Buddhist political leaders.

In Sri Lanka Buddhism, once introduced, shaped the political culture as well as spiritual.

BUDDHISM SRI LANKA

We have already seen how Buddhism was dying out in India.

In about the year 1200 a series of Muslim invasions destroyed the major monasteries in North India and effectively brought the history of Indian Buddhism to an end.

Even earlier during the reign of the Buddhist king Asoka (c. 268-239 BCE) the first Buddhist missionaries left India for Sri Lanka. From this effort grew the Theravada (tradition of the Elders) that now dominates all the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia except Vietnam.



See Sri Lanka, the small island off the southern tip of India.

In Sri Lanka, the Theravada tradition continued.

BUDDHISM SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka has been a Buddhist country for more than two thousand years. Rather than adopting the Mahayana direction, **Sri Lanka maintained Theravada** emphasis on the solitary, Individual path to enlightenment.

Legends tell of the Shakyamuni making 3 visits to the island.

Ashoka's son converted the king and a bodhi tree at Anuradhapura (the ancient capital) was believed to have originated from a cutting delivered during one of these visits



Seated Buddha, 12th Century, Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka

Several Sri Lankan kings supported Buddhism and while Buddhism was diminishing in India, Sri Lanka became the major center of Theravada belief.

BUDDHISM MOVES BEYOND INDIA

In Sri Lanka, all monastic buildings had a special shrine, dedicated to the bodhi tree—the bodhi-ghara.

It is a shrine erected by four seated images of the Buddha but instead of making the usual gesture of enlightenment, they are shown in meditation. They are shown in meditation.

In this Theravada area, the abstractions of the Buddha are replaced by an actual tree. Images of the Buddha in poses of meditation: calm, inward-turning and serene are seen.



Buddha Sri Lanka,
A bodhighara shrine. A symbolic tree with
fence.

SRI LANKA STUPA

The most distinctive Sri Lankan monument was the stupa like the one at Anuradhapura.

The basic shape is similar to Sanchi however, the Sri Lankan stupa has the taller harmika or spire.

Melding the two symbols of the pillar of the world and the heights of Mt Meru, the spire becomes an important part of the meaning. At the same time, it represents the Buddha as his ashes are thought to be buried here.

Remember: the pillars of Ashoka and Mt. Meru from Buddhist cosmology?



The Great Stupa at Sanchi studied earlier.



Stupa at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka

SRI LANKA STUPA

Another difference between the Sri Lankan and Indian are the decorations.

Indian stupas had many decorations, the Sri Lankan are more plain.

Neither the toranas nor carved railings are part of the stupa anymore.

In Sri Lanka it is the relics that have the greatest veneration.

Things like the ashes or tooth of the Buddha become subjects of importance rather than images of the Buddha.



Stupa at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka at night.

SRI LANKA STUPA

Ruwanweliseya, or the "Great Stupa", is regarded as the most important of the stupas at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka.

Standing at 300 feet, the stupa, is decorated by coral brought from the Mediterranean by an envoy of the Sri Lankan king who had an audience with the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus.

The stupa built by King Duttugamunu, is surrounded by an elephant wall.



Stupa at Anuradhapura, Sri Lanka
Elephant wall before and after reconstruction. The one on the left is in disrepair from years of neglect.



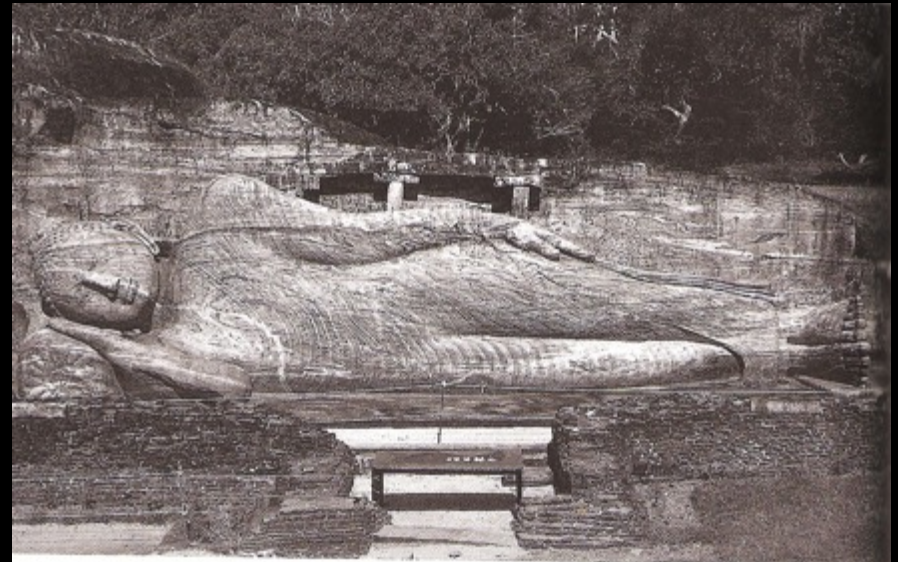
SRI LANKA Buddhism

Instead of decorations, small shrines or relic chambers were often attached directly to the anda at the cardinal points.



Ritual stupa inside a relic chamber. Part of the Stupa complex.

Consistent with Theraveda tradition, we see stories from the life of the Historic Buddha. In this case, his death.



Colossal Parinirvana, The death of the Buddha, Sri Lanka

NEPAL

Nepal is a large region border by the Himalayan mountains yet most of the artistic works are within the Kathmandu valley.

The culture is derived from India, though the native population is mostly Mongoloid, with origins similar to those of Tibet.



Notice Nepal in the North East area sandwiched between the Himalayas and India.

Sri Lanaka in the South.

BUDDHISM IN NEPAL

As in the legendary tradition of other Indian cultures, it is Ashoka who is attributed to have brought Buddhism to Nepal in the third century BCE.

Buddhism and Hinduism coexist in Nepal. Buddhism had its height in the eighth and thirteenth centuries.

Esoteric Buddhism was widespread, resulting in benign and angry forms of the same deity, with multiple heads and arms and numerous attributes, such as the lotus and the weapons appropriate to a being with a cosmic nature.



Esoteric Buddhism was popular in Nepal.

In Esotericism, the practitioner creates a special bond with a guardian Buddha, Bodhisattva, or deity during their initiations and eventually becomes spiritually united with that being.

In Esoteric Buddhism, we see many more images depicted with rich adornment. Much different than the Theravada images.

BUDDHISM IN NEPAL

The design of the stupa was faithful to India models with inclusion of small chapels surmounted by a series of 13 steps or diminishing circles...symbols of the 13 heavens.

The most distinctive part of the Nepalese stupa is the addition of the face painted on the harmika. The eyes are partly closed as if following the pilgrims circumambulating the monument.

The face also represents the eyes of the four protective lokapalas (guardians), residing inside or the all seeing gaze of the Buddha.



Swayambanath stupa, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Originally built in the 5th century, it has been rebuilt several times.

BUDDHISM IN NEPAL

The major achievement of the Nepalese is the brick and wood construction, including the extended wooden eaves, similar to those of the East Asian pagoda.

The Nepalese favored brightly painted and carved wooden struts to support the overhanging eaves.

We see this continuing in art throughout the Himalayas, including Tibet.

the bottom picture to the right is actually a monastery in Tibet taken by me.



BUDDHISM IN NEPAL

I've mentioned this before-- the stupa is part of an entire complex of shrines, other stupas, and statues for worship.

This one in Nepal is designed in a mandala to represent Buddhist cosmology of Mount Meru. You can see the mandala better at night.

Lights show the mandala pattern surrounding the stupa.



BUDDHISM SCULPTURE --NEPAL

Growing out of the Mahayana tradition, Esoteric Buddhism supports many different bodhisattvas and Buddha's.

Female deities as well emerge, each with their own role and powers.

Don't get confused, here are some of the new sacred figures we see along with the traditional historic Buddha:

Buddhas of the past

Buddhas of the future

Bodhisattvas—

Avalokiteshvara— Buddha of compassion.

Maitreya— the Buddha of the future.

Vajrapani— protector and guide to Gautama Buddha.

Tara— virtue of success in work and accomplishment.



Avalokiteśvara holding a lotus flower. 9th Century

BUDDHISM SCULPTURE –NEPAL and TIBET

Buddhist sculpture in Nepal embraced the full range of deities, from traditional images, such as a Buddha's birth to the complex schemes demanded by esoteric practices including images of the goddess Tara, the female counterpart of Avalokiteshvara.

Tara's attributes matched those of Avalokiteshvara, as did her function as protector from dangers.

The most popular female deity in Nepal was Vasudhara, goddess of abundance.

She is the Buddhist counterpart of the Hindu goddess Lakshmi.



You may notice how this image also departs from the earlier Yakshi image you wrote about.

BUDDHISM SCULPTURE –NEPAL and TIBET

While Tara is a female Bodhisattva, Vasudhara, who holds similar attributes and looks similar to Avalokiteshvara she is a Buddhist goddess of prosperity.

She holds symbols of her wisdom and power: a book, a sheaf of grain, a vessel of long life, a cluster of jewels and a fruit.

In Esoteric or Tantric Buddhism, many more characters appear. Tara is one of these. Vasudhara as well.

We will talk about Tara more with Tibetan Buddhism later in this lecture.



BUDDHISM TEXT—NEPAL and TIBET

We have mostly looked at sculpture and architecture with Buddhism. Very little painting remains in south Asia with the exception of the Ajanta murals from before 1000 C.E.

Among the earliest examples and smallest are the illuminated manuscripts of Nepal.

These manuscripts were made from pressed palm leaves, cut into long narrow strips.

Both sides were written on, decorated and tied together with cords.

Basically, the manuscripts contained the sutras, or sacred texts of Buddhism. The paintings illustrated some of the stories.



Above: the outside of the manuscripts.
Below: the inside.

They are this shape because they are written and painted on actual leaves of the palm tree.



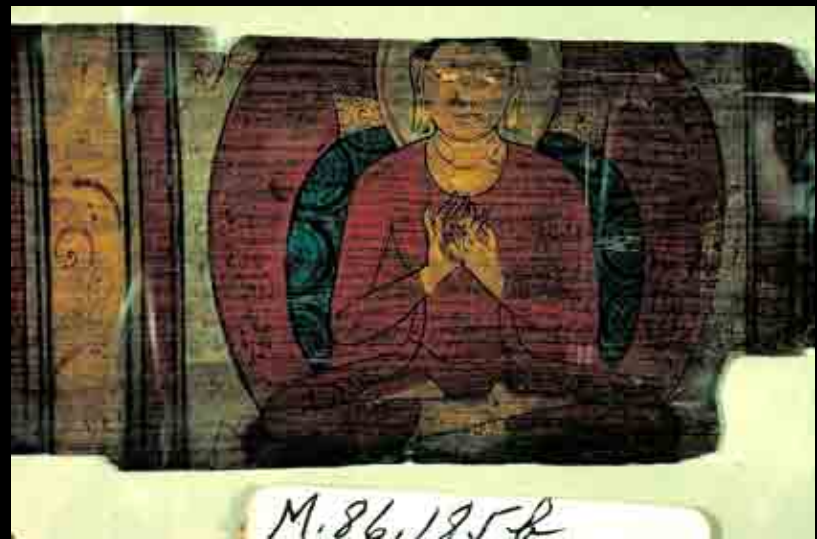
BUDDHISM TEXT—NEPAL and TIBET

The need for scriptures and scenes of the life of the Buddha show illustrations that are small yet feel monumental.

These paintings belong to a tradition seen throughout Buddhist cultures. They owe their format to the shape of the palm leaf but their importance as religious art is seen in China and Tibet.



To the left—the scripture with images.
Above and below: details of the paintings.



BUDDHISM --TIBET

In 2009 I traveled to Tibet to do a monastery tour and learn more about Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan history. This section will contain some of my pictures.

Even though the first diffusion of Buddhism in Tibet began in the 7th century, it did not become firmly established for another 300 years.

It was in the 7th century that a line of Tibetan kings united the tribes of the Tibetan plateau and began to turn attention beyond Tibet.

It was then they discovered Buddhism in the cultures of India, Nepal, China and Southeast Asia.



Above is a picture I took of the holy scriptures in a monastery in Tibet.

Below: the Himalayan mountains from the air.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

According to Tibetan tradition, King Songtsen Gampo (609-49) asked one of his wives to help establish Buddhism in Tibet.

Initial attempts were unsuccessful.

After the unsuccessful attempts to bring Buddhism to Tibet, one night King Gampo had a dream. In it he was told that Tibet lay on the body of a demoness and in order to establish Buddhism, she had to be subdued.

IMPORTANT

It seems important at this point to address the reality we are seeing already—that human beings tend to create stories to justify their beliefs.

The main reason I gave you the Creation Stories on the first week was to make this point.

The historic validity of these stories is not something we can verify. Nevertheless, entire belief systems, political systems and social structures are designed as if the stories are true.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

After the unsuccessful attempts to bring Buddhism to Tibet, one night King Gampo had a dream. In it he was told that Tibet lay on the body of a demoness and in order to establish Buddhism, she had to be subdued.

You may have noticed the importance of stories. Stories create meaning and give reasons for beliefs.



This is an imaginative map of Tibet with some of the cities. The map shows them overlaid on the demoness body.

Important monasteries were built to tie her down.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

He ordered a series of temples to be built around the country to pin down various parts of her body...her arms, legs, head, etc. All of these temples are important pilgrimage sites for Tibetan Buddhists.

Finally, a temple was built in Lhasa to pin down her heart.

That makes this temple particularly important for Buddhist pilgrims.



Jokhang Temple, Lhasa.

Tibetan Buddhist come from all over the country to the Jokhang Temple to give offerings and prostrate before the holy temple.

In the image to the left you can see Tibetan Buddhists prostrating in front of the temple.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

The actions of Songtsen Gampo not only established Buddhism but also marked Tibet with a form of Mandala.

This first Diffusion ended in the 800's when a king suppressed Buddhism.

The later diffusion did not occur until the 11th century. Indian teachers such as Atisha and Marpa reintroduced monastic learning from India.

From here the various schools emerged and once in place, Buddhism flourished.



Tsedang Monastery in the Yarlung District. One of the monasteries built to subdue the demoness. Notice the location of the monastery at the top of the rock cliff and prayer flags.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibet remained independent into the mid-20th century when it became fully under Chinese rule.

However, Chinese political influence appeared early, at least by the 13th century.

The term Sino-Tibetan art is used to indicate this influence of China on Tibetan art.



<https://freetibet.org/about/history>

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

The term Sino-Tibetan art is used to indicate this influence of China on Tibetan art.

A graceful and delicate bodhisattva reflects the composite nature of Tibetan art.

The pose and gestures are similar to Nepalese images while the heavy casting, gilding and attention to details suggest Chinese influence.

So with Tibetan sculpture the styles and tendencies of Nepal, China and Tibet intersect.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibetan Buddhism is a unique form of the religion, known as Lamanism, after the Tibetan name for a monk.

Extremely harsh natural conditions combined with early shamanistic practices (including the indigenous practice of Bon) produce a varied and complex Buddhist pantheon.

This combination often resulted in **brutal imagery and powerful colors** with fierce deities transformed into protectors of the Buddhist faith.

The Wheel of Life,



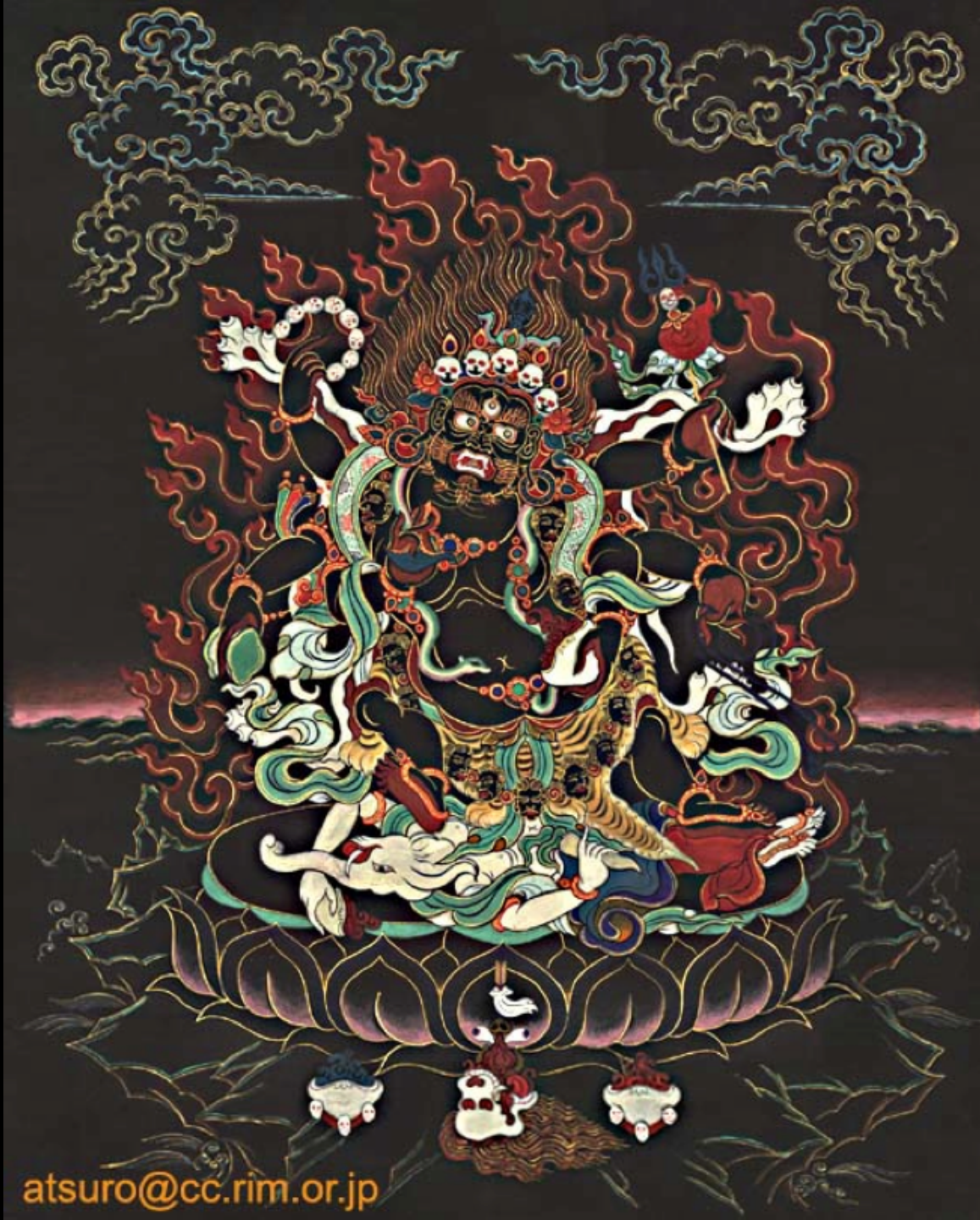
BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tantric Buddhism also known as the Vajrayana (diamond vehicle), can visualize the Buddha not just as the peaceful figure we know from earlier art but also as a wrathful deity and as the intimate union of male and female.

Look really carefully at this one.

Chakrasamvara (Tibetan: Khorlo Demchok) *Chakra of Supreme Bliss*

He is in union with his Wisdom Consort Vajravarahi.
Their embrace symbolizes the union of wisdom and skillful means.
Unity and diversity are one.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

The images of the wrathful Buddhas are representing Tantric texts that say the poisonous emotions, such as passion and wrath can be removed by cultivating and transmuting the emotions themselves.

“Just as water that has entered the ear may be removed by water and just as a thorn may be removed by a thorn, so those who know remove passion by passion itself. Just as a washer man removes the grime from a garment by means of grime, so the wise man renders himself free of impurity by means of impurity itself.”

Yamantaka, Destroyer of the God of Death

Yamantaka is a violent aspect of the Bodhisattva Manjushri, who assumes this form to vanquish Yama, the god of death. By defeating Yama, the cycle of rebirths (samsara) that prevents enlightenment is broken.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Within the Tantric tradition Buddhas can also be pictured as a union of male and female.

These figures are known as yab-yum, a Tibetan word for male and female or mother and father.

It is difficult to interpret the texts in regards to whether these images are intended to represent sexual union or to function as symbolic representation of a mind that has transcended all dualities, including the distinction of sex.

We saw this male/female union in Hinduism as well. Some different meanings and intentions but similar.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibetan painting ranges in size from tiny manuscripts to colossal hangings.

The walls of monasteries are covered with murals and cloth thankas.

The subject matter is vast, including historical figures, portraits of lamas, individual deities of the esoteric pantheon, ferocious protectors and mystics. Depictions of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni and events from his life.

The top image is from a festival in Tibet where a really large thanka painting is unrolled on the side of a mountain. The bottom image is from the inside of a monastery. Both photos are taken by me on my trip to Tibet.



BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Tara

The figure of Tara, the female counterpart of Avalokiteshvara, originated in India where she was one of a number of Mother Goddesses alongside Lakshmi, Parvati and Shakti. With the development of the Mahayana school of Buddhism, she was adopted into the Buddhist pantheon.



A statue of Tara in one of the small chapels at the Pelkor Chode monastery, Gyantse, Tibet.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Tara

Tara in Tibetan Buddhism is a female Bodhisattva. She is known as the mother of liberation, and represents the virtues of success in work and achievements.

Tara is a tantric meditation deity whose practice is used by practitioners of the Tibetan branch of Vajrayana Buddhism to develop certain inner qualities and understand outer, inner and secret teachings about compassion and emptiness.



These two images, a painting and sculpture, are from a monastery that had been destroyed by the Chinese.

These monasteries are covered with images and statues. Buddhists come to these monasteries to pray and leave offerings.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET--Bodhisatva

The most important deity in Tibet was Avalokiteshvara, patron of Tibet and since the 15th century, linked to the Dali Lamas, who are believed to be his reincarnation.

The eleven headed, six-armed Avalokiteshvara is found in Tibet and East Asia.

All the elements are familiar, the lotus, the flaming aureole, the lion.



*Bronze sculpture of Avalokiteshvara.
His 11 heads and multiple arms provide him
with more abilities to help people.*

THIS IS THE END OF PART 1

OPEN THE OTHER LECTURE FOR THE
REST OF THIS WEEK.