

Tibetan Art

Key Ideas

- The form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet is Tantric Buddhism, also known as Vajrayana and Esoteric Buddhism.
- Stylistic influences in Tibetan art come from India, Nepal, and China.
- A long and fractious relationship with China exists; China forcibly annexed Tibet as part of its own Communist nation in 1950.
- Tibet primarily produced religious art: paintings (thankas), illustrated texts, and metal sculptures.

Terms and Names

Tantric Buddhism (same as Vajrayana and Esoteric Buddhism): a combination of Buddhist and Hindu beliefs, with necromancy, mystical symbolism, magical rites, and ritual eroticism.

Thangka (or thanka): A Tibetan Buddhist painting.

Lama: Title for a teacher of the Dharma (teachings of the Buddha) in Tibet, synonymous with the word “guru.” Typically used to designate a spiritual master or head of a monastery.

Dalai Lama: the spiritual head of Buddhism in Tibet. (Originally was also the spiritual ruler of Tibet until the Chinese annexation.) The current Dalai Lama is the 14th incarnation and is a manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion, Avalokiteśvara. He is of the Gelug order.

Tulku: reborn master of Tibetan Buddhism, usually identified as a child.

Vajra: A thunderbolt or hammer used to smash ignorance and illusion.

Prajnaparamita: The Goddess of Transcendental Wisdom. In Tantric Buddhism, she is believed to be the mother of all Buddhas.

Green Tara: One of the most revered female bodhisattvas, worshipped for the ability to overcome obstacles. She is associated with the cosmic Buddha Amoghasiddhi, and transmits his wisdom to the worshipper. (artsmia.org)

Avalokiteśvara: Bodhisattva of Compassion (also known as Kuan-yin and Kannon)

Chorten: Tibetan word for a commemorative *stupa*, a burial mound that originally was erected to inter the remains of the Buddha.

Amoghasiddhi: Associated with the color green and believed to occupy the northern quarter of the five directions, he is one of the five Cosmic Buddhas, linked with the wisdom of accomplishment on the Buddha’s path to enlightenment. (artsmia.org)

Mia Works on View

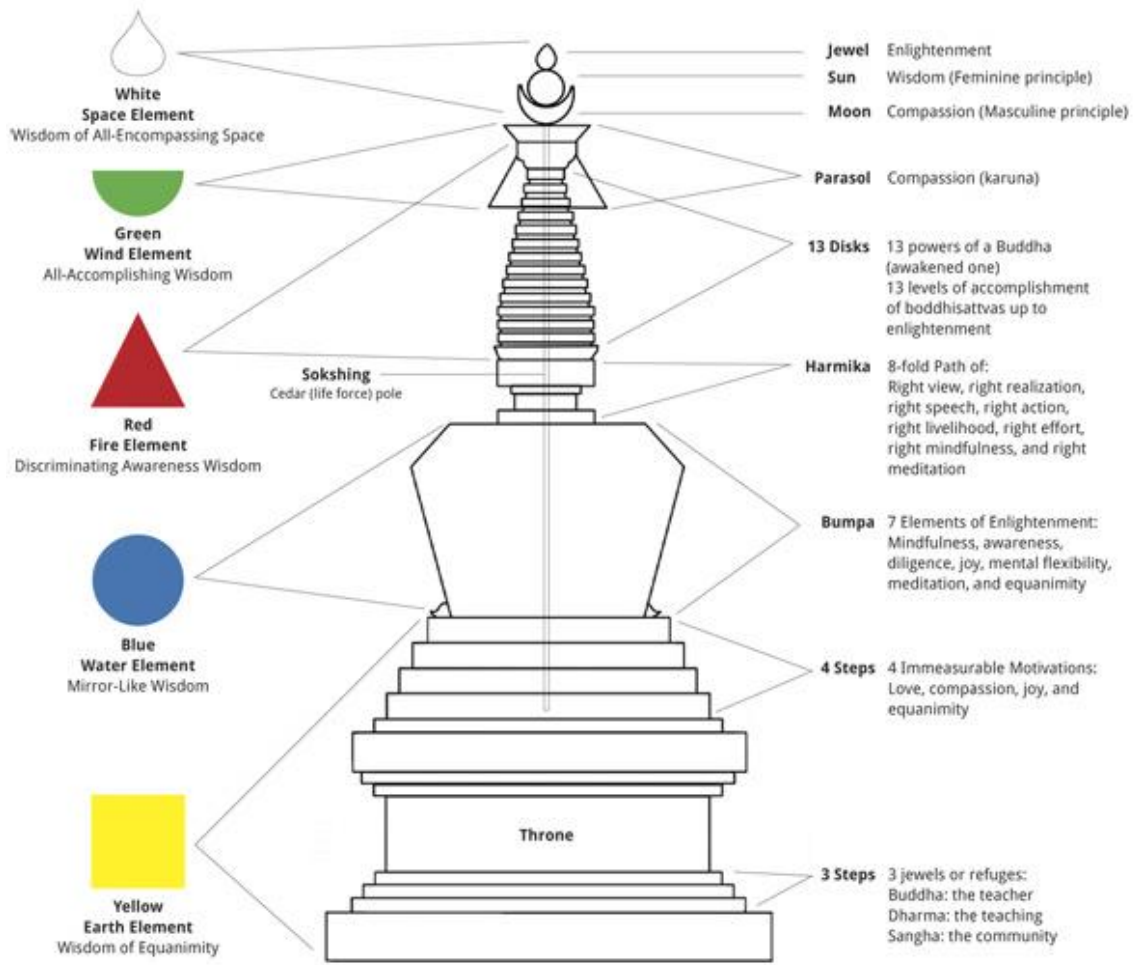
- Unknown artist (Nepal), *Leaf from a Gandavyuha Manuscript*, late 11th-early 12th century, Ink and opaque watercolor on palm leaf, 95.86
- Unknown artist, Tibet, *Prajnaparamita Book Cover*, c. 1200, Wood with pigments and gold, 97.47
- Unknown artist, Tibet, *Book Cover with Virupa and Guru with Amitabhas*, 14th-15th century, Opaque colors and gold on wood, 99.126
- Unknown artist, Tibet, *Portrait of a Lama*, 13th century (?), Bronze and copper, 2000.209.7
- Unknown artist, Tibet, *Chorten*, 13th century, Brass, 2000.31.7
- Unknown artist, Central or Western Tibet, *Amoghasiddhi*, 13th century, Brass with pigment, gilding, and silver inlay, 99.124.1
- Unknown artist, Tibet, *Green Tara*, 14th-15th century, Bronze with turquoise and gold, 99.124.2

Additional Resources:

A short video from the Asian Art Museum on the Sacred Arts of Tibet:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omy9xziXIEI>

The Great Stupa of Dharmakaya Which Liberates upon Seeing



Stupa Symbolism

From the Shambhalamountain.org, a Buddhist center in Colorado:

<http://www.shambhalamountain.org/great-stupa/great-stupa-symbolism/>

This link takes you to an explanation of the four Tibetan Buddhist orders (Nyingma, Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug):

<http://education.asianart.org/explore-resources/background-information/tibetan-buddhist-orders>