

Sacred Arts of Tibet **Art from the Roof of the World**

**An Educator Workshop presented by the Asian Art Museum
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Prepared and edited by Deborah Clearwaters and Robert W. Clark, Ph.D.
based on research by Terese Tse Bartholomew and other authors.

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Asian | **Education**

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Background Reading

About this Packet

The Tibetan art in the collection of the Asian Art Museum/Chong-Moon Lee Center for Asian Art and Culture dates from the tenth to the twentieth centuries. This packet provides a context for the study of traditional Tibetan arts, but also attempts to bring the reader up-to-date with contemporary Tibet. Traditional Tibet has been nearly eliminated in its homeland.

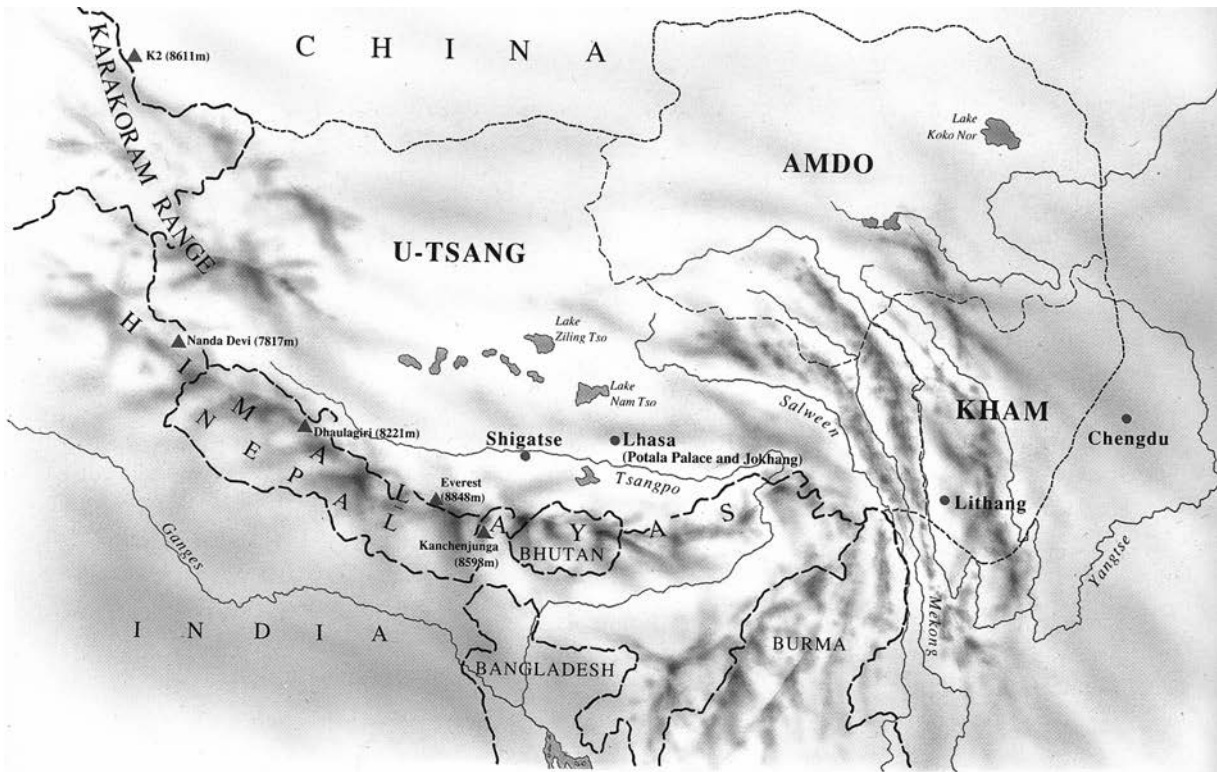
This background text has been adapted from a previous packet on Tibetan art offered in conjunction with the exhibition *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet*, in 1991.

The Land of Tibet

Tibet is located in the heart of Asia, held aloft on a vast mountainous plateau. Besides sharing borders with India to the west and south and China to the east, Tibet is also neighbor to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Burma (Myanmar) to the south, and Eastern Turkestan to the north. The south eastern corner of Tibet is near the northern borders of Laos and Vietnam. The current borders of the so-called Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) were drawn after the Chinese invasion in 1959, and incorporate only the western quarter of Tibet. However, Tibet's historic homeland, from ancient times until 1959, is more than twice this size (see maps on next page). The TAR covers an area of about 500,000 square miles, about one quarter the size of the United States. Before 1959, Tibet covered some 900,000 square miles, stretching from the Hindu Kush (Kashmir) in the west to the present day cities of Lanzhou (Kansu Province), Chengdu (Sichuan) and Kunming (Yunnan), north into Amdo and east into Lihang (modern-day Qinghai and Sichuan). These areas remain culturally and linguistically Tibetan. However, the Peoples Republic of China continues a massive program of population transfer of Han Chinese (the ethnic majority of the People's Republic of China) into Tibet that has caused Tibetans to become a minority in many parts of their own country.

Tibet is renowned as one of the most inaccessible countries on earth, the "Land of Snows" on the "Roof of the World." Tibet is geographically a natural fortress with the Kunlun and Altun ranges to the north, and the Karakorum Hindu Kush mountains to the west. Along the southern border is the 1,500 mile stretch of the Himalayas, home of Jomolungma (Mount Everest), the tallest mountain on earth, and Gang Titsi Rinpoche (Mount Kailash), the most sacred mountain to both Buddhists and Hindus. To the east are the triple river gorges cut by the Yangtze, Mekong, and Salween Rivers, followed by rings of lesser mountains and high plains forming a daunting barrier of their own. Generally, access to Tibet can be gained only by means of steep, high-altitude mountain passes. Tibet was, therefore, not in the path of trade, migration, or expanding empires until the twentieth century. Commerce with India from the fifth through the fifteenth centuries brought with it a steady flow of spiritual masters from the West. Tibet's inaccessibility served to preserve its seclusion, spiritual nature, and national and cultural homogeneity. In the late 1950s China was able to successfully invade Tibet for the first time in history. This was accomplished only with the help of modern technologies such as airplanes and tanks.

Tibet is a diverse land of stark beauty and sudden dramatic changes in landscape. The northern and north-central regions of Tibet, about one third of the country, are mainly comprised of a series



The map above shows the extent of Tibet before the Chinese invasion:
below, the size of China's Tibet Autonomous Region is shown.



Tibet before and after the Chinese invasion in 1959. Map from Kendra, Judith. *Tibetans*. Threatened Cultures Series. New York: Thomson Learning, 1993, p. 18.

of mountain ranges and rocky deserts interspersed with grassy pasture. Rainfall is scarce, although sudden tempests can sweep across the land bringing sand, snow, and hailstorms with winds strong enough to blow a rider off a horse. After such fierce storms it is not unusual for spectacular rainbows to appear, seemingly joining heaven and earth. The average elevation in the north is 16,000 feet, with a wide variation in temperatures caused by strong solar radiation. On a summer's day the temperature could reach 100 degrees Fahrenheit at noon and plunge to 32 degrees Fahrenheit at night. These conditions make for a distinctive environment. This gives Tibetans a respectful reverence for the power and beauty of nature. The bright colors that are characteristic of Tibetan art bring warmth into this austere setting. Little more than grasses and scrub grow in this region, which is sparsely populated by hardy nomads following herds of sheep, goats, and yaks.

Tibet's glacial waters are the source of most of the major rivers in Asia: the Sutlej, Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra, Salween, Mekong, and Yangtze and Yellow rivers. In Tibet itself, the headwaters of these rivers nourish the land to the south and east, creating fertile valleys, gentle pasture, and milder environmental conditions. This is where most of the arable land lies and where most of Tibet's population is concentrated. The elevation is approximately 12,000 feet and the daily temperatures fluctuate only about 40 degrees. Here grow peach, apricot, pear, and walnut trees, along with the crops raised by farmers. To the south are vast forests of pine, juniper, aspen, and willow, sheltering rare wild flowers and even grapes. In the far south east of Tibet are vast rain forests where semi-tropical vegetation flourishes and banana trees are abundant. This far south eastern part of Tibet, near Laos and Vietnam, is near the tropic of Cancer, as far south as Miami and the Bahamas.

The wildlife of Tibet is a fascinating mix of the exotic and the everyday. Blue sheep, wild-yak (both unique to Tibet), gazelles, antelopes, white-lipped deer, wild asses, foxes, owls, brown bears, snow leopards, black-necked cranes, and the occasional tiger all roam "the roof of the world." Most of these are now endangered or extinct due to over hunting and habitat destruction by the Chinese since 1959. Even the panda finds its home in the smaller mountain ranges of eastern Tibet. Tibetans view the wild animals of their country as symbols of freedom. Until recently they wandered the land in large herds, coming right up to settled areas with little fear of humans. Because of strong Buddhist influence, hunting wild animals has been seldom practiced by Tibetans, with the exception of the nomads in the north where it was sometimes necessary for survival. Now much of Tibet has been devastated by Chinese policies and depredations. Tibet is used as a nuclear dumping ground. Mining for uranium and other minerals has laid waste to many of the most beautiful and productive lands in Tibet. The vast forests of Eastern Tibet have been largely cut down to supply the needs of the Chinese. The panda and many other rare Tibetan species face imminent extinction due to the destruction of their habitat.

The People of Tibet

The traditional Tibetan way of life involves a vast range of social roles: farmers, nomads, monks and nuns, merchants, artisans, scholars, doctors, engineers, legal experts, and so forth. Merchants traveled throughout Asia from their Tibetan homes, bringing salt gathered in the dry lake beds of the north, wool from a variety of highland sheep and goats, distinctive Tibetan carpets and textiles, and objects of art and ritual crafted by Tibetan artisans skilled in working gold, silver, and bronze with inlays of jewels, turquoise, lapis, and coral. However, the greatest export of Tibet, from ancient times to the present, has always been its intellectual and spiritual treasures. The great monasteries of Tibet have served, for over a thousand years, as the center of learning for the peoples of Asia. From India, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma, China, and Mongolia, as well as the Altaic and Uraltic regions of Central Asia, schools would send their best students

for advanced training in Tibet. The Tibetan monastic universities, such as Drepung, Sera, Ganden, Tashi Lhunpo, Kumbum and Lhabrang Trashi Kyil each housed and taught many thousands of students, scholars and artisans. There they could learn the fine arts, medicine, natural sciences, literature, philosophy and every aspect of the ancient religious lore of Tibet. Having completed their education, many would return to their homelands and become the principle teachers in their own schools and universities. Over six thousand such monastic universities, with their great libraries and teaching facilities, existed in Tibet in 1959. Within seven years, the invading Chinese armies had destroyed all but sixteen. Those sixteen were converted by the Chinese into government facilities and museums for tourists.

All of these diverse social roles, except for perhaps the nomad, have changed or disappeared within Tibet since 1959.

Nomads

Nomads of northern Tibet constitute one of the last great nomadic pastoral societies once found in the world today. This lifestyle has survived in northern Tibet because no one has discovered an alternative means of survival. There are no competitors for the land, since it cannot be farmed. The Chinese use some of it as a dumping ground for nuclear waste, mine it for minerals, but find the life there too harsh. In the north, nomads convert the energy of the wild grasses into food, clothing, and shelter by means of the large herds they tend. They are dependent on their animals for survival in the way that American plains Indians were dependent upon the buffalo. Like Buffalo Bill and his henchmen in the American Far West during the nineteenth century, the Chinese have sought to demoralize and economically destroy the nomads of Tibet by confiscating or killing their herds of yak.

Nomads value their freedom and self-sufficiency above all else. They live in collapsible yak-hair tents, which they can pack on the strong backs of their yaks and move to their next seasonal pasture. A complicated system of rotation often causes families to wander for extended periods of time, since different families tend different animals in the widely scattered feeding grounds. Often alone with their animals, the life a nomad is a solitary but free one. The landscapes of the northern part of Tibet provide some of the most spectacular scenery on earth.

As in most other Asian cultures, the family is the basic economic unit. Nomad women, however, hold a much higher role in their society than their counterparts in other cultures. The children start to work as shepherds from a very early age, steering the groups of animals with pebble slings and sheep dogs. This is a great responsibility, for the nomads eke out a living almost entirely from their herds; the family's survival depends on the survival of their animals, which they must protect from wolves and other calamities. Most chores have to be done outside regardless of the weather, so the nomadic lifestyle is often looked upon as harsh. Compared to the farmer, however, the nomads say their life is easy. The grass is already there.

A family will always have its investments distributed among different animals to ensure that all their needs are met. The staples of the nomads are meat, milk, butter, cheese, yogurt, and salt, which they collect from the brackish lakes that dot the north. The harsh environment demands that the nomads eat some meat to survive, but because there is such a strong Buddhist taboo against killing, nomads depend upon animals who have died a natural death. To obtain what herds cannot produce directly they trade with farmers and merchants. In exchange for salt and wool, they receive agricultural products like barley, the major staple of the Tibetan diet, and imported goods such as tea.

In the nomad's life the importance of trade is second only to that of tending the herds. A nomad will travel many days to reach a market place. In addition to trading goods, this provides an opportunity to meet with others, see new places, and keep up on the news. Tibetans have a system of hospitality quite unknown to other cultures. They will take in travelers seeking food and shelter in return for news and entertaining stories. This is a custom so ingrained in the people that even the poorest homes would not turn away a traveler in need. They have formed cooperative systems that help them deal with the harshness of the elements and unites them in the common purpose of a peaceful and prosperous society.

Until the recent past, trading trips were usually combined with pilgrimages, visits to distant temples and holy sites in order to pray and bring offerings. Pilgrimages also supported the vast Buddhist monasteries throughout the land. These monastic institutions housed and trained a significant portion of the Tibetan population, around thirty percent. As each family usually sent one son, and sometimes a daughter, to a monastery or nunnery, there was an intimate connection between the monastic and lay communities. Nomads and farmers supported not only local monasteries, but traveled long distances to visit and give offerings to important monasteries and temples everywhere, with at least one visit to the most sacred of all, Jokhang in Lhasa. To a considerably lesser extent some of these practices continue today, however, for much of the last forty-two years, the Chinese occupiers have prohibited the open practice of religion.

Farmers

Traditional Tibetan farmers till the soil in relatively small plots, using yak-drawn plows. Typically they live in simple two- or three-story houses. The animals are kept on the ground floor, the supplies on the second, while the family lives on top. The best room in the house is reserved for the family shrine. Farming relies on melting glacial waters for irrigation and careful crop rotation; survival is helped by a traditionally low population level. The soil is good for growing barley, winter wheat, peas, soybeans, and buckwheat. The arid climate allows for grain and other food stuffs to be safely stored for years. Compared to the north, the southern climate is mild, but a whole season's crop could still be ruined by a single hail storm. To balance against agricultural uncertainties, animal husbandry is an integral part of the farmer's way of life. Thus the line between farmer and nomad was not always clear cut.

For Tibetans the natural forces are a potent hazard needing to be tamed through prayer and ritual. This adds to the naturally strong religious sensibility of most Tibetans, who practice meditation, engage in various ritual activities, give charity and use prayer wheels and prayer flags in order to maintain a continuous auspicious connection with the transcendent gods such as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. For the worldly gods of the mountains, valleys and streams, etc., they employ various rituals and offerings to maintain cordial relations and promote mutual benefit.

Monks and Nuns (The Monastic Life)

In the past, most families contributed at least one family member to a monastery; the result was that monks and nuns constituted a large portion of the population prior to 1959. This custom meant that at least one member of the family would receive a degree at an institution of higher learning. After receiving the degree, a son or daughter could choose to remain a monk or nun and stay at the monastery as a teacher, or could return home as a leader of a local school or temple, or as a lay practitioner. Within the monastery the child could pursue any of a number of educational and career tracks. One could become an ordinary monk with duties around the monastery, a member of the administration, a scholar, a medical doctor, an artisan, engineer, priest or teacher. Especially gifted monks could continue their studies and

receive high graduate degrees such as the Geshe (doctoral) degree. Each of the larger monasteries contained separate colleges specializing in such fields as ritual, philosophy, meditation or medicine. Monks in Tibet have always enjoyed a measure of freedom that contrasts sharply with their Western counterparts. They could seek teachers of their own choice, return to their family's home, live in their own home, transfer to other monasteries or enter into solitary meditation retreats. The Buddhist religion demands intellectual integrity and independent thought above adherence to any doctrine or authority. This made traditional Tibet a peaceful and spiritual society, but has now proved disastrous in the face of the Chinese penchant for absolute obedience to arbitrary authority.

The monasteries were the cultural and administrative centers of Tibet. They were primarily the places of worship and religious training, but they were also the preservers of tradition. They were the centers of learning and the arts as well as the libraries and printing houses (see Slide 7, 8, and 12). They provided social welfare to the needy in the way of orphanages and retirement homes. The monasteries had their own lands, which were worked by hired laborers; these laborers were paid by the monasteries, thus fulfilling a role similar to that of farm workers in America and Europe. The monasteries were self-contained communities complete with elected leaders and bureaucracies. The largest, Drepung Monastery near Lhasa, had over 10,000 monks at one time.

In fact, what made the Tibetan system unique is that the religious and secular systems were thoroughly mixed together right up to modern times. This unification is best represented in the figure of the Dalai Lama, who, from the sixteenth century until today, is viewed by Tibetans as both their spiritual and political leader. His winter palace in Lhasa, the Potala, held the highest offices of both the lay and monastic officials who comprised the central government of Tibet. This complete blending of the two worlds permeates all aspects of Tibetan life and thought, producing an essentially spiritual outlook. One important expression of wealth is the commissioning of religious statues of precious metals and paintings of exquisite workmanship to be kept in the family shrine or donated to a monastery or temple. Religious art is thus close to the heart of all Tibetans.

This historical role of monasteries no longer exists in Tibet. Since the invasion in 1959, most of the 6,000 monasteries have been destroyed. The remaining monasteries are run by a skeleton crew of monks who are forced to perform on demand for tourists. Parents who want to send their children to be educated in monasteries often leave Tibet to join the growing exile communities in India and elsewhere.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN TIBET

Buddhism in Tibet

Buddhism became predominant in Tibet sometime in the sixth century. For the next eight hundred years, great Buddhist teachers of India and the spiritual masters of Tibet joined together to transmit the vast body of Indian Buddhism to Tibet, in all its detail and complexity. The Buddhist canon, more than 7400 volumes, was translated and retranslated into Tibetan from Sanskrit and Pali. In contrast, China received only around 1100 such volumes and these were only partially translated. After the ninth century, Chinese Buddhism was reduced to a shadow of its former glory. It never recovered from official persecution that continues to this day. In India, Moslem invaders began centuries of persecution that, by the fifteenth century, all but destroyed Buddhism in its homeland. Tibet remained the great repository of Buddhist tradition until the Chinese invasion of 1959. Due to the efforts of the Dalai Lama, and the benign patronage of the modern Indian nation, the great monastic universities and institutions of Buddhism have now been re-established in their ancient homeland of India.

Religion permeates all aspects of daily life for the average Tibetan. Typical Tibetan families engage in religious observances at the family shrine, and prayers are recited throughout the day. Even ordinary people go on retreats for meditation and long pilgrimages to distant holy places, such as the seat of Avalokiteshvara (the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who is manifested by the Dalai Lamas of Tibet), formerly the Potala in Lhasa, now in Dharmasala, India, where the current Dalai Lama lives. Religious education begins at an early age. Children's heroes are the Buddha and the great bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri, and the great saints like Tsongkhapa, Padmasambhava, Milarepa, Sakya Pandita and Ra Lotsawa Dorje Drak. Many fascinating stories, filled with magic and adventure, tell of powerful holy men pitting themselves against demons, evil monsters, and wicked kings. Tibetans adhere closely to Buddhism, and many also honor the indigenous Bön religion that was strongly influenced and ultimately transformed by Buddhism.

The Development of Buddhism in India

Buddhism is founded by Shakyamuni Buddha who lived and taught in India in the sixth century BCE, a time of burgeoning religious and philosophical thought from Greece to China. Born as the crown prince of the great Shakya Kingdom, the young Siddhartha Gautama was groomed to be a king in accordance with the wishes of his royal father. However, when he was about 28 years old, he learned of the deep suffering experienced in life by most people. He left his palace life, gave up his fine garments and jewelry in order to find the causes of this suffering and the means to overcome it. After a long period of study, deprivation, and deep meditation he finally realized his goal. He had become the Enlightened one (Buddha) (see Slide 1). In the Deer Park at Sarnath, near Varanasi in India, he gave his first sermon, an event which is called the first turning of the Wheel of Buddhist Law (*Dharmacakra*).

Enlightenment and the Buddha's Teachings

Shakyamuni Buddha described Enlightenment as relating to a full comprehension of the nature of reality which produced a complete freedom from all suffering. The nature of reality he taught involves the principle that all things are ultimately relative. Everything arises from causes and conditions therefore nothing whatsoever exists inherently or by way of its own nature. The innate misconception of oneself and other

phenomena being truly existent gives rise to desire, hate, envy, and the other ills of living beings. This ignorance of the true nature of reality is the ultimate root of all suffering. The desires and hatreds that arise from this ignorance bind one to suffering in the cycle of rebirths, a state called *samsara*. Each being has been born over and over in a beginningless series of lifetimes. The sufferings of birth, sickness, aging and death, as well as the terrible miseries of lower, even infernal states of being make *samsara* an endless source of suffering. Realizing the true nature of reality is the wisdom that frees one from *samsara*. Such wisdom arises only in the presence of profound and endless compassion for the miseries of all other living beings. Therefore compassion is the natural expression of wisdom. Compassion arises with the realization of one's innate and inalienable connectedness with each and every living being. True compassion entails a profound and immutable desire to lead other beings to the state of ultimate wisdom where they are liberated from all suffering and attain true happiness.

To aid his followers in their pursuit of liberating wisdom, Shakyamuni Buddha created the first monasteries in the history of the world, where they could live and meditate without being completely distracted by the world around them.

The Bodhisattva

As an advanced bodhisattva, one becomes powerful and effective in bringing about the liberation of beings. Great bodhisattvas like Manjushri (Slide 8) or Avalokiteshvara (Slide 2) can save vast numbers of beings from the miseries and terrors of the world and become widely worshiped by ordinary people as gods and goddesses. Avalokiteshvara is worshiped as Guanyin in China, Kannon in Japan, and in Tibet is known to take on many aspects, such as the Dalai Lama, in order to better encompass the welfare of the world.

Vajrayana Buddhism

Vajrayana Buddhism, which is the form of Buddhism practiced in Tibet, provides a great variety of special practices, meditations and rituals to accomplish the goals of cultivating compassion and the ultimate liberation of all living beings. Vajrayana is based on the esoteric doctrines of Buddha Shakyamuni given to selected disciples. It uses yogic techniques of meditation, mantra, and ritual to bring about psychological and physiological transformations. Initiations and empowerments are needed to understand and engage in these techniques, and to use the sacred implements such as the vajra and ghanta (bell) (Slide 10), sacred images (such as those in the museum collection), hand and body gestures (mudra), and sacred power words (mantra).

Tibetan Buddhism comprises four lineages. All trace themselves back to Buddha Shakyamuni in an unbroken lineage of enlightened masters and disciples that extends down to the present day. They are distinguished much more by lineage than by any major difference in doctrine or practice. The four lineages are Gelukpa, Sakyapa, Nyingmapa and Kagyupa.

Bön, Tibet's Indigenous Belief

Bön (Slide 20), Tibet's indigenous religion, is a high form of religious ritualism primarily concerned with righting the causes of human ailment and misfortune and coexisting with the underlying forces of the universe. It focuses on the living, but has a clear sense of an afterlife and seeks to bring benefits and happiness in both this world and the world to come. The Bön outlook is basically one where humans are

beset by a variety of spiteful demons and temperamental local gods, who are the major cause of disease and strife in this world and danger in the next. Some of the Bön practices of exorcism have been borrowed from Tibetan Buddhism, while some of its terrifying deities and mighty demons were converted and tamed to serve as guardians of Buddhism. Bön assimilated a great deal of Buddhism's profound doctrines and powerful rituals and has come to emulate many fundamental Buddhist theories and practices, but it also influenced Tibetan Buddhism.

In the Bön view, mountain gods are particularly important. It is through them that many clan leaders trace their ancestry from mythic god-heroes, to the first kings of Tibet, and down to the present day. It is not that they themselves were gods, but that the deity of a local mountain sent a hero to lead its clan, giving divine legitimacy to their dynasty.

HISTORY

The Age of Kings: The "First Transmission" of Buddhism to Tibet (approximately. 400 BCE- 850 CE)

According to traditional accounts, Tibet began its movement toward nationhood in 400 BCE, when the first king descended a ladder of colored rope (a rainbow bridge between heaven and earth) to the top of a mountain in the Yarlung Valley. The earliest dated foreign reference to Tibet is found in second-century Chinese annals referring to Tibetan armies raiding the Chinese frontier regions. It is not until the early seventh century that any significant information is recorded. At this time Tibetans thrust themselves into Chinese attention as a powerful military force crossing their borders and establishing influence all the way into the Chinese heartland. Tang Dynasty documents describe the Tibetans as fierce, powerful warriors. There is genuine admiration expressed for Tibetan horses, armor, tactics, and courageous, single-minded determination. The Tibetans are also described as having great castles, walled towns, and as being skilled in metalworking, art, and rhetoric.

Songtsen Gampo (618-650), the First King of a Unified Tibet

In 627, the Tibetan Emperor, Songtsen Gampo (618-650), with the backing of other powerful clans, arose as the first historical ruler of a unified Tibet. He was a unifying figure also because he was believed to be descended from a line of divine kings from Tibet's mythical past. His rule is the first subject dealt with in clear historical terms by the earliest Tibetan documents. Emperor Songtsen Gampo quickly finished the work of putting together the empire that had been started by his father. After bringing eastern Tibet under his control, he immediately conquered Koko Nor to the north, and from there swept down into the heartland of China. Upon receiving an official homage from a Chinese ambassador, Emperor Songtsen Gampo demanded the daughter of the Tang Emperor in recognition of his position. This sort of royal marriage was a form of diplomacy and a method for establishing close relations between two courts. In response to what he must have regarded as a lack of Chinese enthusiasm, he led his forces all the way to the Chinese capital. The Chinese quickly produced the desired princess, Lady Wen Cheng.

Empress Wen Cheng and Empress Bhrikuti Help Establish Buddhism in Tibet

Lady Wen Cheng (see Slide 2) was an ardent Buddhist; she used her talents and influence to help her royal husband to spread Buddhism to every corner of the Tibetan Empire. She brought with her a famous statue of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Jo Rinpoche. This is still the most venerated object of worship in Tibet, housed in the Jokhang in Lhasa, the ultimate pilgrimage site for Tibetan Buddhists. Aside from bringing Buddhist sacred art and devotional objects, she also sent to China for paper makers, brewers, and silkworms. The Tibetan customs of drinking tea and wearing silk brocades date from her time. Under her insistence, Emperor Songtsen Gampo forbade certain Tibetan practices, such as decorating faces with red pigment and wrestling with bears, a custom she characterized as barbarous.

The Emperor Songtsen Gampo's first wife was also the daughter of a great king, Amshuvarman, King of Nepal. Her name was Bhrikuti, and she did much to propagate Buddhism in Tibet. She brought with her a sandalwood statue of the goddess Tara, one of the most popular deities in the Buddhist pantheon. For their role in bringing Buddhism to Tibet, Emperor Songtsen Gampo's two principle wives, the Chinese and Nepalese princesses, are regarded in Tibet as emanations of the two most influential Taras, White

Tara and Green Tara (see Slide 2).

Tibet's Important Ties with India

From India came the whole of Indian Buddhist culture, permeating every aspect of Tibetan life. The religion, writing system, medical system, art, science and many other aspects of Tibetan high culture were obtained directly from India. One cannot stress this Indian influence enough, for by comparison Chinese influence was mostly superficial, affecting only the life styles of wealthier Tibetan families.

Emperor Songtsen Gampo, seeing the value in what Indian Buddhist culture had to offer, sent many scholars and students to India for both religious and secular studies. One of these students, Thomi Sambhota, developed the written Tibetan script based on the Indian Gupta form of Sanskrit (see Slide 8). From this point on, translations were made with great industry, and the first recordings of Tibetan religious history were set to paper. The king also invited a number of teachers and translators to Tibet. Emperor Songtsen Gampo is revered both as the first in a line of great Tibetan kings and as the first great Tibetan patron of Buddhism.

Expansion of Emperor Songtsen Gampo's Empire

Emperor Songtsen Gampo's successors continued the expansion of the Tibetan empire. The conquest of parts of Turkestan and the Tarim Basin granted them access to the great east-west trade routes, the Silk Road, which exposed Tibetans to a variety of culturally rich traditions, including Nestorian Christianity from Iran, Islam from the Arabs, and Taoism from China. Tibetans were particularly interested in the medical sciences practiced by the Indians, Chinese, and the Greeks (through Iran). Many works of science were translated using the new Tibetan script. It is interesting to note that among these traditions it was from among the Greeks and Indians that the emperor's physicians were chosen.

In the east, Tibet pushed further and further into China proper. Between the courts there were no less than 100 missions recorded in Chinese and Tibetan documents during China's Tang dynasty (618-906). Chinese documents reflect Tibet's great power and influence, and Tibetan documents record the vast amounts paid by China in tribute to the Tibetan court. It appears that militarily China was constantly on the defensive from ancient times until the twentieth century.

Padmasambhava, the "Lotus Born," Confronts the Bön Deities

The next important great religious emperor of Tibet was the great-grandson of Emperor Songtsen Gampo, Emperor Trisong Detsen (740-798). He ascended the Lion Throne in 755 and proved to be a great temporal leader as well as an ardent supporter of Buddhism. Under his patronage many more Buddhist texts were translated and many new teachers arrived from India and Nepal. Of particular importance was the great Tantric master, Padmasambhava, the "Lotus Born." His task was to confront the gods, demons and priests of the Bön religion, who were resisting Buddhism as a foreign faith. He achieved victory by subduing the local deities right in front of the eyes of the priests and followers, making the Bön deities and demons swear allegiance to the new religion. Thus he transformed the local deities into the Great Protectors of Buddhist Teaching, or Dharmapalas, who give Tibetan Buddhism much of its frightening imagery. Many Tibetans think of Padmasambhava as having tamed their wild

spirit by converting their gods and absorbing them into Buddhism. Padmasambhava, also called Guru

Rinpoche, is a patriarch of the Nyingmapa lineage (one of the four Buddhist lineages of Tibet).

Establishment of the First Buddhist Monastery in Tibet

Tibet's first monastery, Samye, was founded in 779 under the guidance of Padmasambhava, and the first Tibetan monks were ordained. This marks the establishment of monasticism, the basis for all Buddhist societies, in Tibet. To Tibetans it is more than their oldest monastery, Samye symbolizes the root of their Buddhist heritage. The monastery grounds were designed as a mandala, a physical representation of pure nature of the universe (see Slide 4). Samye became an important center of translation of texts, religious practice, and art. Many great teachers and artisans came from India, Nepal, Kashmir, and Central Asia to work here. In 791 Buddhism was declared the official religion of Tibet.

In 836 a reactionary king, named Lang Darma, seized the throne with the support of conservative nobles and Bön priests. He set out to extinguish Buddhism in Tibet, destroying monasteries and persecuting monks. Although he was successful in Lhasa, Buddhist practice continued in the other regions of Tibet. He was finally assassinated in 842, marking the end of any effective opposition to Buddhism in Tibet. After his death the court fell to internal power struggles, which, coupled with a series of military setbacks on the frontiers, broke Tibet into regional territories held by local kings. For the next two centuries, Tibetan history falls into a fragmented political state until the next great religious awakening.

Religious Rule: The “Second Transmission” of Buddhism to Tibet (Approximately. 850-1000)

From the ninth to the eleventh centuries, after the collapse of the Yarlung dynasty and the persecutions of Buddhism, the monastic tradition was somewhat reduced in Tibet. Kings of western Tibet sent students to India and invited Indian Buddhist masters to come to their land to spread the true doctrine.

Atisha (982-1054) and the Revitalization of Buddhism

In 1042, the most venerated Buddhist teacher in India, Atisha Dipamkara (982-1054), was invited to Tibet by one of these kings (see Slide 8). It was Atisha’s arrival that began the “Second Transmission” of Buddhism to Tibet. Atisha was the master of the vast body of Indian Buddhism, including the profound practices of Tantric Buddhism. Religious teachers involved in revitalizing Buddhism in Tibet came from all over the country to be his disciples. Atisha stressed the importance of the fundamental attitudes of Buddhism such as sincerely taking refuge in the Three Jewels (the Buddha, his Teaching, and his enlightened followers), renunciation of the world, and impartial compassion for all beings. He demanded strict monastic discipline and emphasized the focal relationship between spiritual teacher and student. He founded the Kadampa Lineage, which was the precursor to the Gelukpa Order, the most powerful lineage in Tibet from the seventeenth century until the present day. Due to the efforts of Atisha and his disciples, such as Drom Tonpa, Buddhism was revitalized and the Mahayana, with its Tantric teachings, prospered throughout Tibet. At this time, in the eleventh century, many of the great orders and monasteries were founded.

Milarepa (1040-1123), Tibet’s Most Beloved Hero

In the eleventh century, one of the most influential popular figures in Tibetan Buddhist history was born in western Tibet, near Jomolungma (Mt. Everest). This was Milarepa (1040-1123). His father died when Milarepa was a child. Greedy relatives robbed his mother of their property and forced them into servitude. Prompted by his mother, Milarepa mastered dark magical arts and used them to destroy many of the relatives. Realizing the extent of his crime, and fearing its consequences in future lives, Milarepa set off on a spiritual odyssey. He sought a way to overcome his past and attain true freedom and happiness. He met Marpa the Translator (1012-1097), who had brought a new lineage of Buddhist teaching directly from the great Indian masters. After years of turmoil and trials, he gained the precious teachings and went off to solitary caves in the high Himalayas to master them. Overcoming demons, both external and internal, Milarepa finally won highest Enlightenment. He became one of the most famous of all Tibetan Lamas and his story and many religious songs and poems helped to spread authentic Buddhism throughout Asia. The importance of Milarepa’s life story can be seen in how it demonstrates the power of the newly transmitted form of Buddhism to bring even a miserable sinner to highest Enlightenment in one lifetime.

The Mongols and Tibet

In the twelfth century, history shifted from kings and great families to monasteries and religious orders. Monasteries cropped up everywhere and became very powerful. Now, families interested in holding or struggling for power had to do so through their association with the monasteries. In the following century, the monasteries themselves were battling for temporal power, leaving the country once again fractured and without central authority. This set the stage for the Mongols to help Tibet gain political

unification.

Chinggis (Genghis) Khan (1162-1227) was the founder and first ruler of the Mongol empire, the largest empire in human history. He sent emissaries to Tibet in 1189, and established relations with Tibet in 1207, when a Sakyapa monk was sent as ambassador to the Mongol court (see Slide 17). By accepting outside influence, Tibet was able to preserve its internal autonomy and escape destruction, unlike the Chinese who resisted bitterly and were devastated by the Mongols and put under iron rule. The Sakyapa abbot so impressed Chinggis Khan that he was invited to teach Buddhist doctrine in Mongolia and throughout the empire. This established the “priest-patron” relationship, which continued until the period of the decline of Mongol influence at the end of the fourteenth century. This relationship not only brought Tibet a valuable patron of Tibetan religion and art in Chinggis Khan and the Mongol court, and gave temporal power of Tibet to the Sakyapa Order, but succeeded in causing Tibetan Buddhism to spread and prosper throughout the vast Mongol empire.

Ironically, Tibet’s close relationship with the Mongols was used by the People’s Republic of China as justification for their invasion of Tibet in 1959. China was crushed under the weight of Mongol occupation for several centuries as part of the Mongol Empire (in China known as the Yuan dynasty), while at the same time Tibet enjoyed an honored position of providing spiritual and educational leadership to the Mongols. Tibet was never occupied and never lost its sovereignty until the 1950s. Tibet, China and most of Asia as well as large portions of Eastern Europe and the Middle East were all in some way part of the

Mongol Empire. By Communist China’s logic, this would give them claim to Tibet, Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), the Great Religious Reformer

After a century of temporal entanglements, there appeared on the scene a great religious reformer, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), who founded the Gelukpa Order in 1403. The Gelukpa Order continued Atisha’s work of four centuries earlier by enforcing strict religious practices for monks. He insisted on the need for morality and the traditional monastic disciplines taught by the Buddha. He taught the graduated path to the attainment of enlightenment, rejecting false “shortcuts” and the variety of spiritual conceits that had strayed from the orthodox teachings of the Buddha. Tsongkhapa had studied in monasteries of all the major traditions and from this came the special stamp of the Gelukpa Order—its comprehensiveness in collecting Buddhist teachings into one cohesive system. Under his guidance came the founding of the three largest monasteries in the world, the “Three Pillars” of Tibetan Buddhism: Ganden, Sera, and Drepung, with 10,000 monks in Drepung alone.

After Tsongkhapa’s death in 1419, the Gelukpa Order spread widely through Tibet and became far more popular than the other orders. Tsongkhapa was viewed as a great scholar, yogin, and debater in his time and received recognition as a true living Buddha not only in Tibet but also throughout China and Mongolia. Paradoxically, it was his strict religious emphasis and avoidance of temporal affairs that gained his new Gelukpa Order powerful patrons and ultimately put political control of Tibet in the hands of his disciples.

The Sakyapa Order had fallen from political power with the decline of Mongol influence at the end of the fourteenth century. This ushered in a short period of secular rule in Tibet under the King of Tsang (the Southwestern province of Tibet). He tried to reinstate the glories of the ancient kings, foster a sense

of Tibetan nationalism, and resist any outside influences, either from Mongolia or anywhere else. The Chinese Ming court was unable to establish a priest-patron relationship on the model of their old Mongol overlords. Some Ming emperors, however, did retain ties with Tibetan monasteries and became generous donors (see Slide 10). Chinese influence in Tibet at this time appears to have been limited to the sponsorship of religious art and inviting Buddhist scholars and artisans to China.

The Institution of Identifying Reincarnate Lamas (*tulku*) is Established

It was at this stage that the institution of reborn lamas (*tulku*) became widespread in Tibet. Instead of the ruling position within the a monastery being hereditary or chosen by council, it was filled by a bright young child who had been discovered to be the former head lama's rebirth. Following clues from dreams, oracles, and sometimes hints from the words of the dying lama, members of the monastery would go to the place indicated and examine children born late in the year after the lama's death. A successful candidate would be required to identify a number of associates and personal articles. For example, several persons would be presented. One would be an associate of the dead lama, a personal attendant or best friend. The others would be strangers. The child is required to pick the associate out of the group. The same test might be done using a favorite tea cup, string of religious beads or other personal article. (This process is described by the Dalai Lama in *Freedom in Exile*, pp. 215-218.)

The Origin of the Name of the Dalai Lama

Sonam Gyatso (1543-1588), the third head lama of the Gelukpa Order after Tsongkhapa, set in motion the events that would transform the order from a strictly religious one to the most powerful political force in Tibet since the Age of Kings. In 1573, Sonam Gyatso was invited to the court of Altan Khan, the leading prince of the now fractured Mongol clans. He traveled widely in Mongolia, gaining Altan Khan, his clan, and large numbers of other influential Mongols as his spiritual disciples. Sonam Gyatso was venerated by Altan Khan and was given the title of "Oceanic Lama." The Mongol word for ocean is "Dalai." The two earlier Gelukpa patriarchs were posthumously given the same title, making Sonam Gyatso the Third Dalai Lama. By gaining such powerful backing, Sonam Gyatso lay the foundation upon which the future Dalai Lamas' political powers would rest.

The Fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682) Becomes Ruler of Tibet, Unites Spiritual and Temporal Power

The next Dalai Lama of great historical consequence was Ngawang Losang Gyatso (1617-1682) the Fifth Dalai Lama, who is referred to as "The Great Fifth," because of his enormous influence. With the support of the Mongols, both the Kagyupa Order and the King of Tsang were defeated politically in 1638, clearing the way for the Fifth Dalai Lama to become ruler of Tibet. The Fifth Dalai Lama was the first ruler to effectively unite both spiritual and temporal power over all of Tibet since the ancient Kings. He was known as a firm but generous ruler, especially to the other lineages of Buddhism, who were encouraged to prosper and build ever greater monasteries and educational institutions. He established monasteries and solidified the institution of the Dalai Lama and his Gelukpa Order as the unchallenged rulers of Tibet.

The Fifth Dalai Lama built up the majestic Potala Palace, the seat of the Dalai Lama's power, an edifice that dominates Lhasa. The Potala is named after the divine palace of Avalokiteshvara. From this point onward, the Dalai Lama was recognized to be a human form of this deity. This association reinforced the Dalai Lamas' unassailable right as leaders of the Tibetan nation. During the reign of the Great Fifth, the patterns that governed Tibet until 1949 were established.

The Manchu Empire and Tibet

Manchu interaction with Tibet began in 1721, when the Manchu emperor of China's Qing dynasty (1644-1911) sent a delegation to Lhasa. The Manchu Emperors were devout Buddhists who followed the Tibetan style of Buddhism exclusively. They looked to the Dalai Lama as their spiritual head, and invited large numbers of Lamas to establish monasteries and centers of Tibetan religion throughout China. Under the Manchus, Tibetan Buddhism became the state religion of China. (See Slides 9, 15, and 18)

With the collapse of the Manchu Qing dynasty in China in 1911, Tibet lost its spiritual control over China. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Tibet was subjected to increasing pressure from a new mechanized, materialistic China hungry for land and for the vast mineral treasures and forests of the Tibetan plateau. For the first time in history, the Chinese army had the means to successfully invade Tibet. With modern airplanes and arms, the walls of mountains surrounding Tibet could no longer hold back the invasion. Resentment against the invasion boiled over in the Lhasa uprising of 1959, which, meeting a quick and bloody end, resulted in the flight of the present Dalai Lama to India and the replacement of the Tibetan government with direct Chinese rule. During the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, there was wholesale destruction of Tibetan religion and culture at the same time that the People's Republic put forth an aggressive policy of assimilation. Now Tibet's rich religious culture exists primarily in exile, preserved in the Tibetan refugee communities all over the world. The Chinese army's "peaceful liberation" of Tibet cost an estimated one-fifth of the population—1,200,00 Tibetans were killed by the Chinese between 1959 and 1969.

Tibet Today

Tibet is a very different country today than it was prior to the middle of the twentieth century. Mao's famous proclamation that "Religion is poison" has translated into nearly wholesale destruction of Buddhist monasteries and those who lived in them. Traditionally a religiously oriented country, culturally and politically, this Chinese attitude continues to devastate the Tibetans and their traditions. Because of aggressive Chinese settlement policies, Chinese now outnumber Tibetans in much of Tibet, and there is one Chinese soldier stationed in Tibet for every two Tibetans. Some things continue on despite the invasion and occupation. Tibetan Buddhists still travel great distances to go on religious pilgrimage, and nomads continue to live much as their ancestors did. Parents still send their children to monasteries to be educated, only now they often chose to brave the treacherous journey across the Himalayas to place their children in one of the vibrant Tibetan monastic centers in India. Between the losses to Chinese bullets (emigration from Tibet is prohibited as a "crime against the Chinese people") and the hazards of trekking over the highest mountains in the world, this takes the lives of about half of the Tibetans who try to escape.

Slide Descriptions

The slides in this packet are intended to introduce the arts of Tibet using the Asian Art Museum's collection, as well as provide contextual images of the landscape, architecture, and people. With only 20 slides, this is a very limited view, and cannot cover the incredible diversity and richness of Tibet. The bibliography lists many books filled with stunning, and sometimes unsettling, images of Tibet from the early 20th century to the present. Also, since the museum's collection is concentrated on the arts of pre-modern Tibet, that has somewhat dictated the focus of this packet. However, connections with the present are noted when it seemed appropriate. We hope these images will encourage further exploration.

General Characteristics of Tibetan Art

- ◆ Tibetans make art out of almost everything—objects for daily use, clothing, homes, furniture, even their animals can be decorated.
- ◆ Virtually all Tibetan art is religious, in the sense that it serves some ritual or spiritual purpose, or it is decorated with religious symbols.
- ◆ Tibetan religious art is always commissioned, rather than purchased from a store. People go directly to an artist and request a work depicting deities that have particular personal meanings. This is one reason why so much Tibetan art is so puzzling, since it is often only the person who commissions the work who knows why those particular deities were combined.
- ◆ Tibetan artists never signed their art works, because the creation of religious works is an act of worship, and the last thing they want to do is bring their own ego into the piece.
- ◆ Every aspect of Tibetan art carries symbolism on a variety of levels—color, shape, placement
- ◆ Most Tibetan art was consecrated (or imbued with its own religious power by a monk) soon after it was made, if not, the object is not considered worthy for an altar, no matter how lovely it is.
- ◆ Many objects are part of an altar, where worshippers make offerings of food, scarves, tea, money or other valuables (see Slide 10 for more on offerings).
- ◆ Many art works are used as an aid to meditation, they help the believer visualize themselves as possessing the particular Buddhist quality represented by the deity they wish to emulate.
- ◆ Ritual objects are handled by monks or lay persons as part of rituals or worship (see slides 10 and 11).

Notes to the reader on accession numbers:

The accession number is the number by which the museum's registrars keep track of the objects. Registrars are like librarians for objects—they maintain all the information about the objects, and manage their storage, handling, shipping etc. Many accession numbers at the Asian start with the letter "B." This stands for Brundage, Avery Brundage, the man who donated a large portion of the museum's collection to the city of San Francisco. The number directly after the B tells you in which year that particular object was accessioned or taken into the collection. The next letter and number indicates the material the object is made of (b for bronze, d for drawing or painting, p for ceramic, s for sculpture, w for weapon, m for miscellaneous) and a sequential number. For example, slide 9 is "b60 b145," which means this bronze object entered the Brundage Collection in 1960, and it is the 145th object taken in that year. From 1988 onwards, acquisitions to the museum are numbered simply by year, for example slide 13 is numbered 1997.17 a-c. It was the 17th item taken into the collection in 1997. The a-c indicates that there are removable parts to this object.

Slide 1



The Buddha Shakyamuni, 1700-1800
Mongolia
Gilt bronze
Gift of Betty and Jack Bogart, 1994.131

How do we recognize this figure as Shakyamuni Buddha?

This is the traditional representation of the Shakyamuni Buddha or the historical Buddha. The statue shows the moment of his enlightenment at a place called Bodhgaya in India, which has become the most holy site visited by Buddhist pilgrims from all over the world.

Representations of the Buddha have several physical characteristics that help us identify him. He is seated in the lotus position of meditation—legs crossed at the ankles with the soles upward—his back is completely straight. He wears a simple, thin monk's robe that covers his left shoulder and arm and exposes the right. At the top of his head is a protuberance that is associated with his transcendent wisdom. His hair is shown as a mass of compact curls. His earlobes are elongated.

Who was Shakyamuni Buddha?

Shakyamuni Buddha is the founder of the Buddhist religion. He lived and taught in India in the sixth century BCE, a time of burgeoning religious and philosophical thought from Greece to China. Born as the crown prince of the great Shakya Kingdom, the young Siddhartha Gautama was groomed to be a king in accordance with the wishes of his royal father. However, when he was about 29 years old, he learned of the deep suffering experienced in life by people. He left his palace life, gave up his fine garments and jewelry in order to find the causes of this suffering and the means to overcome it. After about six years of study, self-deprivation, and deep meditation he finally realized his goal. He had become an enlightened one (a Buddha). After this, he is said to have walked to a deer park in Sarnath (Benares) on the outskirts of Varanasi in India. Here he gave his first sermon, an event which is called the turning of the wheel of Buddhist law (Dharmacakra). The wheel as a metaphor for Buddha's teaching will become a prevalent symbol in Buddhist art.

What does this statue "say"?

Buddhist figures communicate with hand and body gestures. Shakyamuni's right hand reaches down to touch the earth. This gesture represents the moment when he called the earth to witness his transcendence of the realm of Mara, the supreme God of the world (*samsara*), who had tried to distract him from his meditation. In response, the earth trembled and shook to acknowledge Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood. Shakyamuni's left hand rests in his lap in the gesture of meditation, and holds his alms bowl.

How was this sculpture used?

Tibetan sacred art always serves a religious function. This sculpture, like most Tibetan art, may be used in meditation as an aid to visualize one's own enlightenment, as well as that of all other beings. The sacred sculpture gives the practitioner direct access to the Buddha once it is ritually empowered as an embodiment of the Buddha. It may then receive the obeisance, offerings, confessions and prayers of every variety from the practitioner. These sacred images are invited to take a place of honor on a Buddhist altar, whether at home or in a monastery. There they become a focal point for meditation and ritual.

Who was the artists, Zanabazar?

Zanabazar (1635-1723) was an important religious leader and a famous artist from Mongolia who was a descendent of Chinggis (Genghis) Kahn, the great Mongol conqueror. He was Central Asia's version of the "Renaissance Man." He was a linguist (he invented a new Mongolian script), politician, theologian, architect, sculptor, and painter. Histories about him abound with miraculous feats, but there is no question of his artistic magic, which was recognized by Mongolians, Tibetans, and the Manchurian court in China. Although it is difficult to know which works he created, this piece is similar in style to other known works by Zanabazar. His students and their descendants followed his way of modeling and producing this style of sacred art, which has become known as the Zanabazar School.

Why is a Mongolian artwork included in a packet on Tibet?

We have included this piece for two practical reasons: 1) the museum's Tibetan collection contains no sculpture of Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, who is a fundamental starting point for any discussion on Buddhism, and 2) its style is very similar to what would be found in Tibet as it was taught to Mongolian artists by Tibetan artists, and follows the strict and detailed standards of traditional Tibetan Buddhist iconography.

The bottom of this sculpture is inscribed with English? Why?

A steel plate placed on top of the double thunderbolt design under the base is inscribed with the following: "J. Johnson, Quarter Master, 99th Regiment, China Campaign, 1860." Quarter Master Johnson was part of the Allied troops that occupied Beijing and destroyed the summer palace (Yuanming Yuan). There is no doubt this piece was taken at that time.



Bottom view of Shakyamuni statue, 1994.131

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions:

1) How did Buddha's teachings spread?

Examine maps showing terrain and cities of Asia to find Varanasi in India (near where the Buddha gave his first sermon). Discuss or research the following questions:

- ◆ How was it possible that his words traveled over the high Himalayan mountains to Tibet?
- ◆ Where else did Buddhism travel to? (virtually all of Asia and, recently, the US and Europe)
- ◆ How did it get there? (discuss trade routes—overland and by sea, immigration, foreign occupation causing refugees to flee to other countries, pilgrimage, traveling monks inbound and outbound from India, the transmission of ideas through texts translated into many languages, the impact of the Buddhist arts that were traded in sharing of ideas, the popularity of Buddhism in contemporary western society, etc.)
- ◆ What other kinds of things were exchanged through trade? (writing, technologies, silk, metals, language, etc.)
- ◆ Consider ways that trade and immigration in the US has changed American culture over the past 200 years.
- ◆ How has China's invasion of Tibet changed Tibet and India (where a large exile community resides)?

2) Discussion Topic: To restore or preserve?

Oftentimes artworks are altered by people through time. For, example, oil paintings have been “touched up,” broken ceramics pieced back together using parts from newer, and less valuable pieces, inscriptions are added to Chinese scroll paintings. In this case, a metal plate was added more than 100 years after this sculpture was made. Conservators in museums work with the curators to decide how to treat works that have been altered. They might decide restore a work to its original condition, or they may decide to preserve it as it is. Restoring a work may involve filling in missing areas, or removing a coat of paint that was added by someone else. Preservation means the conservators will try to prevent any more changes happening to the object. Sometimes, they opt for a combination of both strategies.

Should the museum remove this plate or leave it there?

What are the reasons for keeping it, and reasons for removing it?

Stage a debate on this issue.

Sources

Patricia Berger and Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Kahn* (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, 1995): pp. 79-80 and 261-3.

Slide 2



Avalokiteshvara

19th Century

Tibet

Colors and gold on cotton

Gift of the Friends of Robert Davis

1988.34

Who is the central figure in this painting?

The main image in this painting is Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. He is the principle patron deity of Tibet. He sits on a lotus throne upon a lunar disc. This god takes many forms, such as the Dalai Lamas of Tibet, to bring salvation to the living beings of the world. In this painting he has four arms and is white in color. His upper hands hold prayer beads and a lotus; the lower ones, poised in a hand gesture of prayer, clasp the wish-fulfilling jewel at his heart. This jewel embodies the *bodhicitta*—the altruistic aspiration to attain highest Enlightenment in order to thereby save all beings from misery and establish them in perfect happiness.

What is a bodhisattva?

A bodhisattva is a person, either human or divine (occasionally animal) who has abandoned all selfish concern and seeks only the ultimate liberation and happiness of all living beings. The bodhisattva understands that as long as he or she remains trapped in the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) because of greed, anger and ignorance, there is no way that others can truly be helped. Therefore, driven by concern for the welfare of others, a bodhisattva pursues the spiritual path to Buddhahood, which involves:

- 1) the perfection of generosity—giving to others with the pure motivation to help them
- 2) the perfection of morality—avoiding all harm to others, and engaging in activities that benefit others
- 3) the perfection of patience—never giving way to anger, and accepting the harm perpetrated by others
- 4) the perfection of effort—persevering with enthusiastic efforts in all virtuous activities
- 5) the perfection of concentration—training the mind to hold its objects with a calm, clear mind free of all distraction
- 6) the perfection of wisdom/the realization of ultimate reality—seeing things as they actual are without the overlay of dualistic conceptual processes.

In Buddhist art, a bodhisattva may appear in divine form wearing crowns and jewels, as an ordinary human, or even as a animal. Avalokiteshvara is one of the most popular of the hundreds of bodhisattvas commonly depicted in Buddhist art. Many, like Avalokiteshvara, appear in a variety of distinct forms. (See also Slide 15)

What are “peaceful” and “wrathful” deities?

To those who seek help, both spiritual and mundane, Buddhas and bodhisattvas typically appear in peaceful, benevolent forms. To those beings whose minds are set on evil, who stubbornly engage in actions that harm others, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas appear in powerful, wrathful forms to subdue them and lead them to virtue. On a psychological level, the wrathful deities represent the powerful, dynamic processes of Buddhist meditation that can destroy the underlying causes of all misery—greed, hatred, and delusion, etc.

The Bodhisattva of Compassion is a peaceful deity. He emanates beauty and benevolence. However, in the lower right of the painting is Vajrapani (number 4 in the diagram on next page), a wrathful deity, who embodies the sacred power of the Buddhas. Vajrapani is deep blue in color, has bulging eyes, sharp fangs, fiery hair standing on end, and stands on a golden sun disc. His right hand shoots out in a threatening gesture and wields a *vajra* (see Slide 10). This attribute gives him his name meaning “vajra in hand.” Vajrapani is a great protector of Buddhism. His ferocity is a comfort to believers and terrifying to demons who seek to harm living beings and destroy their paths to salvation.

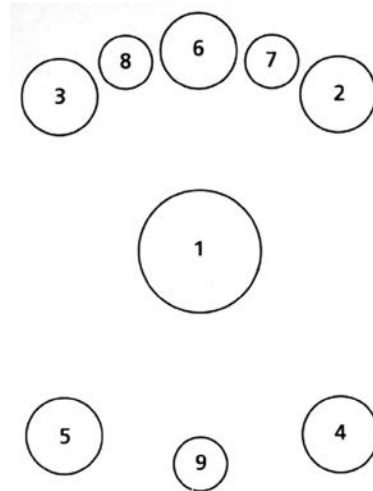
In the lower left of the painting sits Manjushri, the God of Supreme Wisdom (5). He holds the Book of Wisdom and the flaming sword that cuts the roots of ignorance, and severs the sprouts of misery. He is a semi-peaceful deity and sits on a lotus throne on a lunar disc. The three deities together—Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani—are the Three Great Protectors (Tibetan: *rig sum gonpo*) representing Wisdom, Compassion, and Sacred Power respectively.



White Tara (3)



Tsongkhapa (6)



Manjushri (5)



Vajrapani (4)

Who are the Green and White Taras?

Above Avalokiteshvara are the Green and White Taras, goddesses of compassion and wisdom. White Tara (3) has a third eye in the forehead as well as eyes on her palms and feet. Green Tara (2), extends her right leg downward. Both Taras hold the stems of lotuses that blossom above their shoulders. Their right hands are lowered with the palm upward in the gesture of bestowing boons and gifts. The Taras are both the objects of prayer and veneration because of their ability to bestow such things as longevity, merit, wisdom, protections from every fear, and spiritual attainments, from the mundane up to supreme enlightenment.

The two goddesses have historical significance also. Songtsen Gampo, the Tibetan king who was the first royal patron of Buddhism in Tibet in the seventh century, married two princesses—Bhrikuti, from Nepal, and Wen Cheng from China. These two women helped bring Buddhism to Tibet, and the Nepalese princess introduced the practice of Tara to Tibet. The two queens are worshiped as manifestations of the Green and White Taras.

Who is pictured at the top of this painting?

Above the Green and White Taras are three seated lamas. The central one (6) is Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), the founder of the Gelukpa order of Tibetan Buddhism (see slide 9). Tsongkhapa is a human disciple of Manjushri, and like the God of Wisdom pictured below, he has a sword and book supported by lotus blossoms at shoulder level. He is accompanied by his two chief disciples—Gyal Tsab on his right and Khedrup on his left. Tsongkhapa's presence in the painting indicates this work belongs to the Gelukpa order.

What are the objects below the main image?

The group of five objects below the main image (9) is known as the Offering of the Five Senses: the mirror stands for sight, the silk beneath it for touch, the fruit for taste, the conch shell for smell, and the pair of cymbals for sound. This is a typical offering presented to peaceful deities. For wrathful deities, the offering consists of a skullcap heaped with ears, eyeballs, nose, tongue and a heart of demons.

Paintings like this may have been hung behind the altar in a temple in the home or monastery. Real offerings of tea, fruit, flowers, pure water, butter and barley sculptures called *torma* would be made as well. (See Activity 2 for how to make your own *torma*).

How is a traditional Tibetan tangka mounted?

A tangka is a painting of a Buddhist deity, done for religious purposes and made according to strict codes of iconography. A tangka must be framed in silk brocade and consecrated in a ceremony by a qualified Lama. It has a pole running across the bottom edge and a cord to hang it at the top. There is usually a yellow silk covering that is hung over the front to provide the deities with privacy. This is folded and draped at the top when on view.

This format allows tangkas to be rolled up to be carried from place to place or to be rotated according to annual rituals or festivals. Paintings like this traveled easily with traders, itinerant monks, and nomads.

Paintings, small sculptures, and texts copied onto palm leaves or printed books were the teaching tools used by the monks who brought Buddhism to Tibet and virtually every corner of Asia. Once Buddhism took root, local artist/monks began to depict Buddhist subjects to further their own studies and gain merit.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Looking Exercise

Before telling the students anything about this painting (or use any slide in this packet), ask them to look and describe what they see. They will enjoy discovering the details. Ask them to look closely and be thorough in their descriptions. They should notice the difference between peaceful and wrathful figures. After discussing, tell them a bit about the deities and what they represent. Ask them to discuss the images more with the new knowledge they have. Was the artist successful in portraying peaceful versus wrathful? How so or not?

2) Body Language

Discuss the hand and body positions of the figures and what they communicate. Talk about other forms of body language or visual communication one sees in the US, in magazines and newspapers, on TV. Discuss the use of symbols in this painting—the lotus, the sword, the book, etc..

Source

Terese Bartholomew, "A Tibetan Thangka: The Four-Armed Avalokiteshvara," *Triptych* (November/December, 1990): pp. 8-9.

Slide 3



The Potala Palace
Lhasa, Tibet
Photo by Terese Bartholomew

This is the Potala Palace located in Lhasa. It is perched upon a hill called Marpo Ri, which commands a view of the entire city. This hill was where the kings of Tibet lived beginning with Songtsen Gampo in the seventh century. The Fifth Dalai Lama moved his headquarters here from Drepung Monastery in the mid-seventeenth century, and since that time the Dalai Lamas of Tibet resided there (until the exile in 1959 of the present Dalai Lama). This became both the spiritual and political seat of authority. After the construction of the Norbulinka summer palace in the late 18th century, the Dalai Lamas split their time between the two palaces, spending winters at the Potala and summers at the Norbulinka.

What does Potala mean?

Potala derives from the word for the Pure Land or paradise of Avalokiteshvara (the bodhisattva of compassion) which is also "Potala." The Dalai Lama's are believed to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara, so the naming of the Dalai Lama's palace after that of Avalokiteshvara seems logical.

What's inside?

Part palace, part fortress, part treasure-house, part temple, part tomb, part administrative center, it is a titanic building of over 900 feet long, with countless rooms. Over the centuries it became the repository for Tibetan culture. Store rooms were filled with priceless tangkas (religious paintings on silk), vast libraries, religious statues made of precious metals, and endless other things.—Hicks, p. 36

In 1959, the Chinese invaders tried first to destroy it with bombs, but it is so strongly built, with walls 26 feet thick at the base, that they gave up and instead removed the precious contents and turned it into a headquarters of the army.

The red buildings at the center are the Potrang Marpo, the red palace, where religious services took place. The Potala was also the seat of the Tibetan government until the Chinese take-over. Among the many rooms are some impressive throne rooms where the Dalai Lamas would receive official guests. It even houses the stupas, which contain the mummified remains of bodies of the former Dalai Lamas (see Slide 5 for more on stupas). The Potala has become a symbol of Tibetan nationhood.

What was it like to live in this palace as the Dalai Lama?

Famous stories about Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, tell of his adventures in the Potala. Since his position prevented him from mixing with the people of Lhasa like other boys his age, he explored the city from the roof-top of the Potala by spying on the people below with telescopes and binoculars. (Harrer, p. 185) He lived in the Potala from the age of 4 in 1939 until the age of 24 in 1959, when he left his country for exile in India. For first hand accounts of the Potala, see Readings 1 and 2.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

- 1) Read and discuss the descriptions of the Potala by the Dalai Lama and Heinrich Harrer (the Austrian mountaineer who escaped a British prison in India to Tibet in 1943; *Seven Years in Tibet*, starring Brad Pitt, tells of his adventures). (Readings 1 and 2.) Have the students write a descriptive passage of their own about an extraordinary place they have visited, or one they imagine. They should try to give the reader a visual picture of the place and the people in it.
- 2) Compare The Potala with other great buildings and monuments, such as the pyramids in Egypt, the Vatican, the Forbidden City in Beijing, the US Capitol, PacBell Park, San Francisco City Hall, etc. Discuss the functions of the buildings—are they seats of government? religious institutions? How does the way they are built and decorated convey ideas? Does the building look like it was meant to defend attack or does it look inviting?

Sources

Gyatso, Tenzin (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho), Dalai Lama XIV. *My Land and My People: The Original Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet* (New York: Warner Books, 1997): pp. 31-34.

Harrer, Heinrich, *Seven Years in Tibet*, fifth printing (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1968): pp. 223-224.

White, Stephen, "The Flowering of Tibetan Architecture," in *White Lotus: An Introduction to Tibetan Culture*, ed. Carole Elchert (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1990): pp.139-154.

Slide 4

Mandala, 1700–1800
Tibet
Colors on cotton
The Avery Brundage Collection
B60D50

What is a mandala?

A mandala is a schematic diagram that portrays the sacred environment of a particular deity. The deity in the sacred space is a direct reference to the presence of the divinity in the world. The mandala is used by practitioners as a guideline for meditation. It helps people visualize the way in which they will restructure the world in a manner to bring about universal salvation. Mandalas can be three-dimensional, but the most common form is painted in colored sand or pigments in two-dimensions. They consist of a complex of circles, enclosures, auspicious signs, and a vast central platform, from which the deity sends forth his powers of salvation.

Which deities are depicted here?

The center of this mandala shows Cakrasamvara (pronounced "Chakra-some-vahra") in a militant pose, firmly embracing his partner, Vajravahri. Cakrasamvara is a powerful god (wrathful deity or *yidam* see Slide 14 for a discussion on *yidam*) of Buddhism and he is immensely popular in Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal. Depicted above are the first three lineage holders of the Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism—

Buddha Vajradhara (middle), the Indian Mahasiddhas Tilopa (left), and Naropa (right).

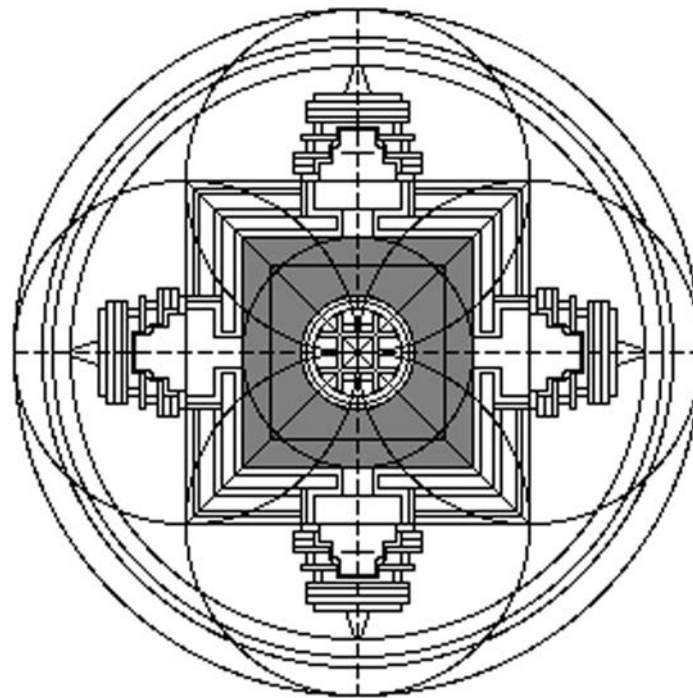
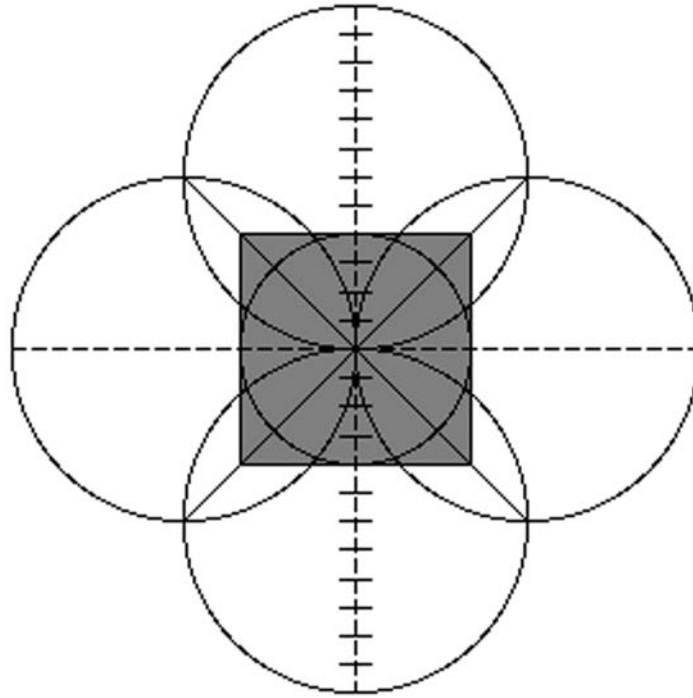
Vajradhara is a Buddha who is revered as the quintessential teacher of the Tantras. Mahasiddhas are often very ordinary persons who had the fortune to meet with a qualified Tantric teacher (lama) and reached enlightenment in that very lifetime through the energetic application of Tantric technology (Vajrayana practices). Among the Mahasiddhas were men and women, scholars, kings, wives, farmers, and even thieves, drunks and outcasts. The Eighty-four Mahasiddhas all came from India. Tibet has its own Mahasiddha tradition that continues to the present day. Famous Tibetan Mahasiddhas include such women as Yeshe Tsogyal, Trashi Tseringma, Machig Labdron, Achi and contemporary women such as Drikung Tashi Dolma. Of the thousands of male Mahasiddhas, some of the more famous are Milarepa, Ra Lotsawa, Drom Tonpa, Je Tsongkhapa, Rigdzin Chodrak, and contemporary Mahasiddhas such as Ngakpa Yeshe Dorje.

How to look at a mandala

Below the mandala are tantric offerings, the guardian Mahakala, and the dancing skeletons known as Masters of the Cemetery. These latter are worldly protectors of Buddhism, as are the figures in the outer most ring of the mandala known as the Eight Great Cemeteries, which represent *samsara* in its transitional phase towards enlightenment at the center. After passing through this level, one must pass through fires of purification and the other levels as one nears enlightenment in the center of the mandala.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

- 1) Mandala extension activity. View the video listed in the Bibliography on the sand mandala created at the Asian Art Museum in 1991 (*Sand Painting: Sacred Art of Tibetan Buddhism*) and discuss.. Compare the mandala with the uses of other kinds diagrams (e.g. building plans, maps, computer instruction manuals). Are they easy to use? What functions do they serve?
- 2) Make your own mandala. Draw your own mandala, using the proportions on the next page, or model it after the slide. Mandalas are not only painted, they are also fabricated out of metal, and constructed of sand. Sand mandalas are created by monks out of sand colored with pigments and ground precious stones. This process takes many days, even weeks and its construction is often part of a ritual or sacred festival. Once the mandala and the ritual or festival is completed, the mandala is deconstructed by the monks and the sand is poured into a nearby river, lake or ocean in a ritual to spread its blessings and sacred powers to the beings of the world. A sand mandala activity kit is available from the Smithsonian Institution.



Basic proportions and preparatory drawing of the *Guhyasamaja* mandala.
Source: <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/george/mandala.html>

Slide 5

Stupa (Tibetan: chorten), Gyantse Kumbum
 Built around 1440
 Photo by Frank Hoch

This photo shows a monk in front of the stupa of Gyantse Monastery with a river valley and mountains in the distance. Gyantse is the largest stupa in Tibet. Although not all stupas do, this one represents a three-dimensional mandala (see Slide 4). The name Kumbum refers to the 100,000 Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, saints, teachers, divine and wrathful images inside the 73 chapels contained within the stupa.

What is a Stupa?

A stupa should be erected at the crossroads so that whoever places garlands or perfumes or lamps there, or rejoices in speech or thought, will have lasting benefits and joy.

—Maha Parinibbana Sutra

Stupa (Chorten in Tibetan) means a “support for worship.” In the era following the passing from this world of the Buddha Shakyamuni, his followers needed a manifest, physical support for their worship of his complex and abstract doctrine. The stupa was taught by the Buddha to embody the nature of his enlightened mind. As a result, stupas became revered as sacred places and became the destination of religious pilgrims and the sites of ritual activity throughout the Buddhist world.

The Buddhist stupa/chorten may contain actual physical relics—a fingernail, bone fragment, or even a hair of an enlightened being. It may contain other ritual objects such as paintings, gilded images of Buddhas or deities, clay votive images, sacred texts, or any consecrated object that is associated with the Buddha or some other holy person in whose memory the stupa was erected. Some stupas, such as those built for the Dalai Lamas in the Potala Palace (see slide 3 and Reading 3) contain the mummified body of the Lama.

Stupas may be several hundred feet high, such as those in Sarnath, India and Kathmandu, Nepal, or small enough to fit on a family altar such as the one in the museum's collection (see the Sri Lankan example below) . Stupas for the altar can be found alongside a gilded image of the Buddha and a volume of sacred text. These represent the Buddha's three faculties: mind (stupa), body (image), and speech (text).

How does one worship at a stupa?

Stupas are revered by Buddhists as embodying the mind of the Buddha. To show their respect, pilgrims walk around the structure clockwise, with their right shoulder closest to the stupa. This act is known as circumambulation. It brings the worshipper merit, increases faith, and inspires them with the power to follow the Buddhist path more skillfully and effectively.

What is the symbolism of the stupa?

The stupa is a highly symbolic structure with many meanings. They are built according to strict rules of proportion. Most stupas are painted white, although those used indoors as reliquaries are often made of gold and covered with gems.

The three main elements of a stupa are the base, dome, and crowning parts. Taken as a whole the structure evokes the physical presence of the Buddha—the base is his throne, the dome his body, the square on the dome his face (can you see the eyes painted on Gyanste Kumbum?) the spire his crown. Its square base represents the earth, and the dome symbolizes water. The spire represents fire. At the top, joined symbols of the moon and sun represent the union of compassion and wisdom, and the upper-most flame represents highest enlightenment achieved through the perfect union of compassion and wisdom.

Inside the Gyantse stupa there are six floors that contain chapels filled with murals and sacred statues. One does not enter the base of the dome where the ritual offerings are ensconced.



Miniature Stupa, approx. 1800-1900, Sri Lanka, bronze. *Gift of Subash Kapoor*, F2000.15.A-B



Bodnath Stupa in Kathmandu, the largest stupa in Nepal.



Dharmekh Stupa at Sarnath, India. This is the site where the Buddha gave his first sermon after attaining enlightenment.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Burial Practices and Beliefs

Have students read the passage about “The Golden Stupa” by Gyeten Namgyal (Reading 3). Review Slide 16 and discuss. Do comparative research on burial practices. Students can compare any two or three practices, including contemporary American ones. Try to understand the reasons for practices, so that research is not just about how bizarre practices that are unfamiliar can seem.

Source

Beatrice Newbury and Iona Spens, “The Stupa,” in *Cho Yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture No. 6* (Dharamsala, India: Department of Religion and Culture, Central Tibetan Administration of H.H. the Dalai Lama, 1994) pp. 11-19.

Slide 6

Ushnisha-Sitatapatra (The Goddess of the White Umbrella)
 1800–1900
 Tibet
 Colors on cotton
The Avery Brundage Collection
 B76D10

Who is the Goddess of the White Umbrella?

The Goddess of the White Umbrella is one of many powerful female deities. She manifests her power with her thousand heads, arms, and legs. She has eyes on the palms of each of her hands and soles of her feet, and each head has three eyes. Standing triumphantly within an aureole blazing with the fire of wisdom, the goddess tramples the enemies of spiritual attainment (such as anger, greed and delusion) with her numerous feet. In Ushnisha-Sitatapatra's primary hands are the white umbrella of protection and the wheel of the Dharma (the Buddha's teaching). Her other hands brandish various weapons and form a halo around her. In front of the goddess are three Mahakalas (enlightened beings who protect those on the path to Buddhahood). Above her is a small image of Buddha Shakyamuni in his form as the Lord of Nagas (serpent divinities).

What do the demons under her feet represent?

Demons in the Buddhist sense are the bad qualities within all living beings that hinder our path to

Buddhahood, such as greed, hatred, and pride. Buddhists have compassion for all beings, even the demons, who must be subdued and brought back into the fold. Every being in the universe will eventually attain enlightenment, including the most evil. For all Buddhists, there is no ultimate evil, only delusions represented by demons, who need to be guided back on the Buddhist path. Representations of demons also assist in the meditation on one's own inner demons that need subduing. The meditator seeks to become like the deity and subdue these inner demons.

What are the steps involved in traditional Tibetan tangka painting?

This thangka and the others in this packet are painted in the traditional style where the proportions of the figures, their poses, attributes, and colors are strictly governed by the rules and customs given in Buddhist texts. It is in the subtleties of the images, their expressions and details, and in the backgrounds of paintings (landscape and flowers, etc.) that artists need to use more original expression. Paintings were often done by a workshop of artists. The master drawing and final gold work and outlining is done by the artist and the apprentices fill in the colors and supply repetitive details such as stitching in the robes and leaves on the trees.

First, fine cotton or linen cloth is stretched over a wood frame. Several backing coats of a chalk-like substance mixed with glue are applied to the cloth and polished down so it is smooth. Grid lines are drawn to ensure the design aligns with correct proportions established in Buddhist texts. The design is then drawn on the grid.

After tracing the design, the colors are applied. These are primarily blue, white, yellow, and red (See Appendix 2 for some of the symbolism of these colors). These main colors are mixed to achieve all the colors needed by the artist. Colors were created by grinding precious stones of the color desired. Shading is done next. Gold is often added to show respect for the deities in the painting.

The final, and according to some, the most important step, is the eye opening ceremony. The eyes of the deity are painted in while prayers are recited. The three syllables *om*, *ah*, and *hum*, which symbolize body, speech, and mind respectively, are written onto the back of the tangka where the crown, throat, and heart of the figure is on the reverse.

The painting is then mounted onto a backing and framed by a silk brocade border; the brocade was usually imported from India, where Moslem artisans dyed and wove the raw silk. The silk may have originated from China and Japan. (Cabezón and Tendar in Elchert, pp. 134-136).

Sources

José Ignacio Cabezón and Geshe Thubten Tendar, "The Tangka According to Tradition," in Carole Elchert, ed. *White Lotus: An Introduction to Tibetan Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1990): pp. 133-138.

Marylin M. Rie and Robert A.F. Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: The Sacred Art of Tibet* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991): 385-6.

Slide 7



Monks Reading Buddhist Texts

Photo from Tomasevic, Nebojsa, ed. *Tibet*. New York, San Francisco, and St. Louis: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1981.): p. 182.

These monks are seated in the library of their monastery reading Buddhist texts, that are similar to the one in Slide 8. They are surrounded by hundreds of books. The pages of traditional Tibetan books are not bound, but consist of loose sheets wrapped in decorative and protective cloth when not in use. The Tibetan alphabet is modelled after an ancient Sanskrit script from India. It consists of five vowels and thirty consonants. The Tibetan language is of the Tibeto-Burmese language group and is unrelated to any Indian or Chinese language.

What is written in these books?

The Buddhist canon (the ancient collection of sacred writings commonly accepted as authentic) contains three divisions or “baskets” (*Tripitaka*). These are the laws and ethical teachings (*Vinaya*), the dialogues of the Buddha (*Sutra*), and the technical teachings on philosophy, cosmology, epistemology and psychology (*Abhidharma*). Included in these scriptures are life stories of the Buddha’s in many lives before his enlightenment, the life stories of bodhisattvas and other holy persons. There are texts on meditation, healing, ritual, philosophy and the many arts and sciences of Buddhism. Sutra is the word used for Buddhist scriptures that present extended teachings and dialogues given by the Buddha to his disciples. The word derives from the Sanskrit term meaning “thread.” The English word suture, for the stitching used by doc-

tors, derives from this same word. The three “baskets” of teaching were translated in whole or in part into the languages of the different places where Buddhism took root. These include various Indian languages, both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic, Tibetan, Nepalese, and languages of Central Asia, China, Korea, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, etc. Over the last hundred and fifty years, many of the more famous scriptures have been translated into English, as well as into French, Russian, German and other European languages.

One of the reasons why Tibet is so important for students of Buddhism is that only the Tibetan language preserves nearly the entire body of the Buddhist canon. There are some 7436 volumes of scriptures in the Tibetan canon. Only around 1100 were ever translated into Chinese, and many less were translated into any other language. The original Sanskrit texts of most of the Buddhist canon were destroyed by the Moslems during their invasion and occupation of India from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries.

Who wrote them?

The one hundred and eight volumes of the *Tripitaka*, the three “baskets” of the Buddha's own teaching, were written down by the disciples of the Buddha. In the centuries that followed, several thousand volumes of commentary on these texts were written by the great bodhisattva teachers of India and Tibet. These commentaries were primarily by monks, but also include nuns and lay persons.

What benefit is there to gained by reading them?

Buddhist texts, along with relics, and icons are the primary objects of Buddhist devotion. In other religious traditions, the book is also of paramount importance—Judaism has the Torah, Christianity the Bible, Islam the Koran, Sikhism the Guru Granth. One can gain merit and spiritual insight through reading texts, copying them, and translating them. Through the Buddha's teaching and all the thousands of texts written in subsequent years, one can learn the path to become a Buddha, to overcome all misery, and to bring salvation to all beings. Buddhism has greatly contributed to the literary traditions of the world. In many cultures, the importance of being able to read texts to gain spiritual merit has raised literacy rates and encouraged the translation of texts from different languages. Thus Buddhism was a globalizing force long before the Internet united the people of the world. Many would argue that with the international popularity of teachers like the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhism continues to bridge different communities across the world. The Dalai Lama, a consummate scholar of Buddhism, has and continues to write commentaries on the Buddhist canon to inform and inspire modern students of Buddhism.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Discussion: the Power of the Book

Discuss the power and importance of the book and writing in different cultures. In Buddhist countries Buddhist texts are very important. What are the important texts in American society today, and 200 years ago? What are literacy rates of the countries you have studied? What is the relationship between literacy and one's standard of living? What are some strategies for increasing literacy rates?

2) Listening Activity: Traditional Chanting and New Sounds

Sutras are often chanted by monks as part of meditation or rituals. Play tapes of traditional Tibetan

chanting, listen quietly and then discuss. Play pop artists' songs that borrow traditional Tibetan instruments and chants as part of their fusion sound. How has the prayer been changed by the pop artist? Research pop artists' involvement with the Tibetan cause (e.g. Beastie Boys). How are they involved? Do you think fans understand this when they buy their music?

Suggested cd: *Mantra Mix: Tibetan Refuge Benefit Album* featuring Kula Shaker, Philip Glass, Madonna, Moby, Natalie Merchant, Sinéad O'Connor, etc. and two tracks of traditional chants by the Dalai Lama and the Namgyal Monks. Released by Narada World, 2000. (www.narada.com; www.mantramix.com)

There are many cd's of traditional Tibetan music. Look for cd's by the monks of Drepung Loseling as well as Gyuto Monastery. Suggested cd: The Gyuto Monks - Freedom Chants from the Roof of the World. Released by Rycodisc, 1989. RCD 20113.

Slide 8



Buddhist text about the bodhisattva Manjushri (“Jam dpal mchen chod, Namasangiti), approx. 1000-1100 Tibet

Gold on indigo paper
 Gift of Lobsang C. Tamang and Cynthia E. Berman
 B86D5

This Tibetan manuscript is one of the oldest objects in the museum’s Tibetan collection. It consists of twenty-two loose pages. The text is written in *U-chen* script, in pure gold ink, which has been applied on a ground of lapiz lazuli painted on indigo-dyed paper.

What is written in this text?

This is the *Manjusri Nama Samgiti* or “Chanting the Names of Manjushri” sutra, which is important to all the orders in Tibetan Buddhism. It is 160 verses long and inspired many lamas to write commentaries. Some verses from chapter 8 follow:

[27] Leader as best of great healers, supreme extractor of thorns; paradise tree with every single medicinal herb, great enemy of defilement-sickness.

[29] The sole great umbrella in the world, having the circle of love and compassion; glorious lotus lord of dance, great pervading lord with jewel umbrella.

[30] Great king of all Buddhas, maintaining the embodiment of all Buddhas; great yoga of all Buddhas, the instruction of all Buddhas. (Wayman, pp. 94-5)

How did this ancient text come to San Francisco?

According to the donors this manuscript was given to the famous Indian teacher Atisa by a Tibetan named Rinchen Zangbo (958-1055) of Western Tibet. Atisa left it at the Shalu Monastery, located south-east of Shigatse in southern Tibet. When China invaded Tibet in 1959, only two monks from Shalu escaped and they took the manuscript with them. In 1958 it was given to the donor, Mr. Tamang, who was a monk at the time. After he emigrated to the US, he donated the text to the Museum so that it could be preserved and enjoyed by others.

What is the U-chen script?

The Tibetan language is spoken in Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal and in parts of northern India including Sikkim. There are two principle forms of Tibetan writing, *U-chen* and *U-me*. *U-chen* is a printed form used traditionally in carved wood blocks, and now for computer fonts. *U-me* scripts are cursive scripts used for official documents and personal letters. While *U-chen* has one basic form, there are a large variety of *U-me* scripts, some being very different and quite obscure. Although Tibetan belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group, the *U-chen* script was modeled on an ancient Sanskritic alphabet known in sixth- and seventh-century India. Tibetans developed their writing system, which is an alphabet like Hebrew and Roman script as opposed to a pictographic script like Chinese, in around the seventh century. It is said this was done in order to be able to translate Buddhist texts into Tibetan. The Tibetan Emperor Songtsen Gampo (died 650 CE) sent a delegation to India led by Thonmi Sambhota. After studying the Indian writing system, Thonmi Sambhota adapted the script for Tibetan based on that Indian alphabet.











It consists of thirty basic letters, including the vowel *a*, and four extra vowel sounds on the Indian model for *i*, *u*, *e*, and *o*. Spoken Tibetan has changed over the centuries but the writing system has not, so written and spoken Tibetan are quite different. For example the word for “eight” is written as *brgyad* but is pronounced “gyay”, or the name of Tibet’s great Emperor Songtsen Gampo would be literally transliterated into written English as Srong-btsan-sgam-po. This presents a challenge to those who wish to speak Tibetan as a foreign language, but it is advantageous to scholars who want to read ancient texts. Once they learn to read Tibetan, they have access to Tibetan texts of any time period. Tibetan is a monosyllabic language, meaning that every syllable has a meaning. The extra letters, while not pronounced, are essential to distinguishing the meaning of the written word. (Snellgrove, p. 75)

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Explore the written and spoken Tibetan language (see examples on next page). Use travel guides on Tibet, e.g. Lonely Planet or search online:
www.dharma-haven.org/tibetan/language.htm www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9594/tibet.html

Source

Alex Wayman, trans., *Chanting the Names of Manjusri* (Boston & London: Shambala, 1985): 94-5.

 0	 1	 2	 3	 4
 5	 6	 7	 8	 9

Top: The Tibetan numbers 0-9.

Right: The Tibetan consonants.

Both are in the U-chen script. The English transcription of the consonants shows how they are spelled, but does not represent the most common pronunciation, which is the Lhasa dialect.

Source: www.geocities.com/Athens/Academy/9594/tibet.html

 ka	 kha	 ga	 nga
 ca	 cha	 ja	 nya
 ta	 tha	 da	 na
 pa	 pha	 ba	 ma
 tsa	 tsha	 dza	 wa
 zha	 za	 'a	 ya
 ra	 la	 sha	 sa
	 ha	 a	

Slide 9

The Abbot Tsong Khapa, founder of the Gelug Order
 Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)
 China
 Gilt bronze
The Avery Brundage Collection
 B60 B145

Would you spend money on a portrait of your teacher?

The Tibetans have a long history of making portraits of living or deceased Lamas, or individuals who were great religious teachers. These include Buddha Shakyamuni, as well as his followers, and important Lamas and practitioners. These images are often commissioned by the followers of the pictured Lama. In Tibet, as in many other Buddhist countries, the lineage from teacher to student is sacred—the students are empowered with the special knowledge of the teacher and may go on to be teachers themselves. They hold their teacher in the highest respect and will worship the teacher's memory after their death. Living lamas are portrayed seated on a cushion, whereas those who are not living are portrayed seated on lotus thrones to indicate their transcendence of the world and their entrance into a pure realm. The type of hat they are shown wearing often identifies the lineage they belong to, but the identities of most lama portraits are unknown. This piece is an exception. Since Tsongkhapa was so famous, his iconography, such as his hand gesture, book and sword attributes, and hat) makes him easy to identify.

What is a lama?

The lama is honored as a spiritual teacher in the highest sense. He is the means whereby the student gains access to the realm of enlightenment. In Buddhist culture, the lama (Guru in Sanskrit) is seen as more kind than the Buddha himself to an individual student. The Buddha is the teacher of the entire world system. However the student failed to learn the Buddha's lessons in his or her innumerable former lives on this and other planets. So now, in this life, if an individual has the fortune to meet with an authentic lama, he or she now has the chance to gain access to the Buddha and his teachings, and thereby attain the state of perfection, Buddhahood. Therefore the lama is held in the very highest esteem.

Who was Tsongkhapa?

Tsongkhapa (1357-1419) was the founder of the Gelukpa order of Tibetan Buddhism, the lineage the Dalai Lamas of Tibet belong to. Gelukpa means "Those Who Follow Virtuous Works." Tsongkhapa is remembered as a great reformer of Buddhism. He stressed the importance of the monastic lifestyle, following vows of poverty and celibacy, the study of texts, and the discipline of debate in the education of monks. (See reading 7 in which the Dalai Lama describes the art of debating). He gained many followers because he distanced himself from the political intrigues of some of the other Buddhist lineages at the time.

How do we know this is Tsongkhapa?

Tsongkhapa is traditionally shown in monk's robes, and the yellow cap of the Gelukpa order. His attributes, which are supported by flowers over his shoulders, are the book of profound transcendence and the sword of wisdom. His hands are in the gesture of teaching the Buddhist law.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Portraiture

Define the term "portrait." Compare this portrait with portraits from other portraits from the 18th century (China, Japan, Italy, England, Russia, etc.). Look at a few pictures from each culture you are comparing. Are there differences in how people are portrayed? What are the conventions (standards that most artists follow within a certain tradition)? Consider the following questions:

- Are the portraits realistic likenesses of a person or are they idealized? If so, how? How can you tell?
(In Tibet, faces are not individualized, but are idealized.)
- Who are the sitters?
- Consider the pose, clothing, accessories, facial expression
- If you are looking at paintings, how does the setting and background effect the portrait?
- What were the portraits used for?
- Were they made during the life of the sitter or after (posthumously)?

Slide 10

Thunderbolt and bell, 1403-1424
 China
 Ming dynasty, reign of the Yongle emperor (1403-1424)
 Gilt bronze
Gift of Margaret Polak
 B85B3.a and B85B3.b

What are these ritual objects?

The *vajra* (Tibetan: *Dorjie*) and bell (Sanskrit: *ghanta*; Tibetan: *drilbu*) are the most important ritual objects of Tibetan Buddhism. Most every lama has a pair and knows how to use them. They represent “method” (*vajra*) and “wisdom” (bell). Combined together they symbolize enlightenment as they embody the union of all dualities: bliss and emptiness, compassion and wisdom, appearance and reality, conventional truth and ultimate truth, and male and female, etc.

What is meant by method and wisdom?

Method indicates the compassionate activities of the bodhisattva that relieve living beings of their miseries. It is the skillful means that brings about the elimination of ignorance, greed, cruelty, etc. in living beings and causes them to follow the path to enlightenment. Wisdom is the direct insight into ultimate reality; it is the wisdom that realizes emptiness. By combining method and wisdom, the bodhisattva accumulates merit and insight and eventually attains Buddhahood.

What is the symbolism of the Vajra and bell?

Most *vajras* have five prongs that symbolize the five wisdoms that are attained through the transcendence of five *kleshas* (greed, anger, delusion, pride and envy). The hub between them signifies emptiness. This one has eight prongs plus the central hub. *Vajra* is a Sanskrit word, in Tibetan it is called a *dorje*. It is related to the word for diamond, and appears to be similar to the thunderbolt weapon carried by the Vedic god Indra, and the Olympian Zeus. As a thunderbolt weapon it destroys both internal and external enemies. As a diamond it symbolizes the indestructible and all-penetrating mind of enlightenment.

The sound of the bell calls to mind the empty nature of all things. That is, according to the Buddha, nothing whatsoever can exist independently, all phenomena are empty of true or inherent existence. By being profoundly aware of the empty nature of all things, we become free of attachment and aversion, and are liberated from the painful cycle of birth and death (*samsara*).

The bell is also a musical instrument. Its sound, together with other sacred instruments such as the hand-drum (*damaru*), are played in rituals as musical offerings to the Buddhas and other gods.

How are they used?

The *vajra* and bell are often seen represented in the hands of deities in art, and in practice are held in the hands of the monks during rituals, the *vajra* in the right hand, the bell in the left. They are moved in prescribed movements. When the arms are crossed this symbolizes that the two are united—representing enlightenment. The sound of the bell is considered by Tibetan Buddhists as the most beautiful music. This music is presented as one of eight offerings to the deity that is invoked during the ritual.

What are the eight offerings presented in rituals?

When Tibetans Buddhist begin meditation, they will invoke the presence of the deity, bow, and make offerings. For peaceful deities like Slide 2, the offerings are as follows:

- 1) pure water for the deity to drink
- 2) water for the deity to wash with
- 3) scented oil for the deity to be anointed with
- 4) flowers
- 5) incense
- 6) butter lamps
- 7) food
- 8) music, played on the ghanta (bell) and the damaru, a small two-faced drum with clappers attached by string, played by twisting back and forth in the hand

For wrathful deities like Slide 18, the offerings are comparable but made from the body parts of demons (see discussion of wrathful deities in Slide 6 and Slide 12). These offerings are only symbolically presented, with colored water etc.:

- 1) blood of demons to drink
- 2) blood of demons to wash with
- 3) ointment made from the bodily fluids of demons
- 4) ears, eyes, nose of demons arranged like flowers
- 5) incense made from demon body parts

- 6) lamps made from oils of demons
- 7) demon flesh to eat
- 8) music, played on thigh-bone trumpets, damaru drums made from skulls, cymbals, and the ghanta

What is Sino-Tibetan art?

This thunderbolt and bell were cast for the Chinese Emperor Yong-le (1403-1424) as a gift for a distinguished lamas of Tibet. The Emperor possibly wished to gain merit for the commission. This and other gifts like it show the relationship between the Tibetan lamas and the Manchu Emperors of China (Ming dynasty). Known as the priest-patron relationship, this was one way that ideas and artistic styles spread between Manchu controlled China and Tibet. Artists working in China in imperial workshops were ordered to make Tibetan style objects for either the personal use of the emperor or to send to important lamas in Tibet, who were often considered to be their spiritual teachers.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Discuss the concept of origins, e.g. Sino-Tibetan

Have you ever thought about the origins of hip hop music or blue jeans? What about where you came from. Do you or anyone you know identify themselves as Chinese-American or Irish-American or African-American? This bell and thunderbolt may have been made in China, but they are classified as Tibetan objects because the form, style, and use are Tibetan. Museums usually classify objects by place, but object like this complicate matters. There is a comparable situation in Japan, where Korean-style ceramics were made by Korean potters in Japan for Japanese consumers. Which department do you think these objects belong to—their country of manufacture or the country that used them, or should they be hyphenated?

Sources

The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *Selected Works*, second printing (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1994): p. 42.

Pratapaditya Pal, *Tibet Tradition and Change*. (New Mexico: The Albuquerque Museum, 1997): pp. 166-8.

Dan Martin in Valrae Reynolds, *From the Sacred Realm: Treasures of Tibetan Art from The Newark Museum* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel Verlag, 1999): pp. 133-139.

Slide 11



Prayer Wheel
Tibet
18th century
Silver
The Avery Brundage Collection
B60 B158

What is a prayer wheel?

Prayer wheels are an example of Buddhist technology. This technology allowed the faithful to multiply the number of prayers they expressed by millions. This is because prayer wheels are filled with copies of *mantras* (sacred spells associated with particular deities) such as the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, “om mani padme hum.” The mantra is printed on very thin tissue paper as many times as possible, in some cases numbering in the millions. The paper is wrapped around a spindle and covered with a protective cylinder. In recent years, microfilm technology has allowed billions even trillions of prayers to be invoked with just one turn of the wheel.

Prayer wheels range in size from small hand-held wheels to large wheels set into the wall of a building, like moveable pillars. They are made to be turned by hand, wind, water or fire power. When part of a temple, people will circle the building clockwise and turn the wheels as they walk. Thus they gain the benefit of circumambulating the sacred building as well as the prayers sent up by the prayer wheel.

How and why is it used?

Prayer wheels are used by many Tibetans everyday, sometimes for hours on end. Worshippers turn prayer wheels to accumulate merit, to help all beings in the world and to purify their *karma* (intentional actions). They are part of a meditation practice. According to Lama Zopa, Rinpoche, “To benefit sentient beings, the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas manifest in the prayer wheel to purify all our negative karmas and obscurations, and to cause us to actualize the realizations of the path to enlightenment.” (www.dharma-haven.org/tibetan/benefits-of-prayer-wheels.html).

Turning a prayer wheel with millions of *mantras* inside is the equivalent of saying those millions of mantras, but it is achieved in a fraction of the time (see also a similar concept in the use of prayer flags, Slide 19). Multiplication of benefit is also achieved by prayer wheels powered by wind and water. Whatever wind or water that touches the wheel will become blessed by the wheel and than can purify whatever else it touches of negative karma.

Pilgrims are often seen making their journeys with prayer wheels in hand, or as part of their pilgrimage, they will turn prayer wheels at the monasteries they are visiting. With every turn of a prayer wheel, the deity whose mantra is therein inscribed emanates from the wheel in bodies as numerous as the mantras. For example, if there are one million Manjushri mantras in the prayer wheel, then one million emanations of Manjushri will go forth with each turning of the wheel, and proceed to benefit the beings of the world. However, the benefit of spinning the wheel with a concentrated mind is said to be one hundred thousand times greater than spinning it with a distracted mind.

Lamas of Tibet have a profound respect for the pilgrims of their country who have little material wealth or education. Theirs is often seen as some of the most inspiring expressions of faith and compassion, even if they do not understand the meanings of the prayers they recite.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Virtual Prayer Wheel

Have students check out the electronic prayer wheels available on the Internet at www.dharma-haven.org/tibetan/benefits-of-prayer-wheels.html



A pilgrim turns her prayer wheel. Photo (detail) by Lisa Kristine, Migration Photography, 1998.

Slide 12

Novice Monk in Prayer Room

1998

Photo by Lisa Kristine, Migration Photography

What is the life like in a Buddhist Monastery?

Long before dawn the deep sound of a conch-shell horn drifts through the sleeping monastery. Tsering, a young monk, rubs his eyes and scrambles out of bed. There is no heat or electricity, so he shivers for a moment in the early morning air. He quickly puts on his heavy robes in the dark. Leaving his cell, Tsering joins the other monks. Each monk wears a maroon robe and has short-cropped hair, just as Tsering does.

The day always begins in the prayer hall. Yak-butter lamps glow in the dark room as several dozen monks chant mantras. Cymbals and drums accompany the sounds of their chanting voices. Sometimes the sessions last for three hours! During the prayer session Tsering passes out a bit of breakfast to the older monks. It consists of yak-butter tea and some tsampa [roasted barley flour]. (Kalman, p. 24)

Traditionally, Tibetan families sent at least one of their sons or daughters to a Tibetan monastery or nunnery. This was partly to ensure the education of their child, for monasteries were the institutions of higher education in Tibet. But also it was to bring merit to the family and the community at large. Prior to 1959, it is estimated nearly a quarter of the population was part of the monastic community. The monas-

teries were complete cities, containing housing for the monks or nuns (they lived in separate institutions), kitchens, libraries, hospitals, and work rooms to make religious arts. (See Kendra, pp. 22-23 to learn about the state of Tibetan education under Chinese rule).

Rising before dawn every day, monks and nuns do not have an easy life. They spend hours in religious study and meditation, but also must help do the daily chores of the monastery. Anyone can join a monastery. Boys can join at age seven and girls can at age ten. Some will chose to spend the rest of their life there. Others will leave to study in other monasteries or go on pilgrimage. Yet others will leave the monastic life altogether to marry and raise a family.

What must you give up to be a monk or nun?

Monks and nuns follow set rules of behavior and practice. Monks make 250 vows and nuns make 350. Like all Buddhists, monks and nuns follow these five fundamental promises, called the Five Precepts:

1. Not to harm or kill any living thing.
2. Not to steal or take anything that is not given.
3. To control sexual desire (ethical sexual activity for lay Buddhists, no sexual activity for monks and nuns).
4. Not to tell lies.
5. Not to drink alcohol or take drugs.

In addition to these, fully ordained monks take some 250 vows. Fully ordained nuns take over 350 vows.

What else can we see in this room?

Notice the chest in the center of the picture. It is similar to the one in slide 13. On top of it is a *torma*, an offering made from butter mixed with ground barley that is colored and sculpted into elaborate forms. For more on this type of offering see Slide 13 and Activity 2.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Discuss the monastery life.

What do you think of the rules? Which are easy to follow and which would you find difficult to follow? You may want to watch the film *Little Buddha*, which tells the story of an American boy recognized as the reincarnation of a high Tibetan lama and his journey to join his monastery.

Slide 13

Torgam, 1700 – 1800
Tibet
Painted wood
Museum Purchase
1997.17 a-c

What is this?

This black cabinet was once stored in the *gongkhang* of an unknown temple in Tibet. Forbidden to the uninitiated, the *gongkhang* is a special room set aside for the worship of wrathful deities, where only the initiated monks of the monastery or nuns of the convent could enter. It might be seen in a room similar to that seen in Slide 12.

What is this used for?

The *torgam* is used for storing cone-shaped dough offerings made of butter and roasted barley flour called *torma*. (See activity 2). This chest was intended to hold offerings to wrathful deities. The offerings would have sharp and pointed decorations, while those for peaceful deities are more gentle and rounded.

Why are wrathful deities traditionally hidden from the uninitiated?

In Tibet, wrathful deities are never on display to the general public, but are kept in the *gongkhang* as this chest was. This is because it is so easy to misunderstand their meaning and intent. If taken too literally

wrathful deities, with their necklaces of skulls and flayed skin jackets, appear evil and frightening to the uninitiated. This is incorrect. Wrathful deities are protectors and just as benevolent as peaceful ones. Initiates learn that demons represent the bad elements within oneself, such as greed, hatred, delusion. The wrathful deities give hope that each of us can subdue the demons within.

Why are flaming skulls, flayed skins, and eye balls part of the decoration?

If you look closely, you will notice this chest is decorated with flaming skulls and is festooned with intestines hung with flayed skins of demons in human and animal form, eye balls, and organs. Inside are more paintings of wrathful deities, animal skins, and weapons. Because this chest is used in the worship of wrathful deities, it is literally covered with horrific decorations. The skins and body parts are those of destroyed demons. There are skull cups holding the wrathful offerings of the five senses (eyes for sight, tongue for taste, nose for smell, ears for hearing, and heart for touch.), the wild ass belong to the terrifying goddess Palden Lhamo (see Slide 14), and severed body parts. The top of the cabinet is painted to resemble the ocean of blood upon which Lhamo would ride, with body parts floating amid the waves. The flayed skins and body parts, as well as the other offering to wrathful deities, are highly symbolic in nature and require extensive training and meditation to fully appreciate. This is why they are reserved for the eyes of initiates only. It was understood that the ordinary, uninitiated person would be filled with erroneous thoughts if they were to encounter such objects as these outside the proper ritual and intellectual context. (See the sections under Slide 2 and 14 on wrathful deities).

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

- 1) Make your own tormas.
See activity 2.



Monks preparing a “magic weapon” *torma*.

Slide 14

Palden Lhamo
 Qing dynasty (1644-1911), 18th century
 Sino-Tibetan
 Gilt bronze
 approximately 15 x 11 inches
 Accession Number B60 B162

Who is Palden Lhamo?

Palden Lhamo is one of the more wrathful female deities of Buddhism. Among her many roles, she is the special protector of the city of Lhasa, the Gelukpa Order, and the Dalai Lamas of Tibet. She was invited to Tibet in around the eleventh century from India. Legend has it that she was once the queen of the demons of Sri Lanka. She vowed to kill her only son if he did not promise not to lead the people of Lanka to greater violence and cannibalism. The flayed skin of her son used as the saddle blanket on her mule shows that he did not agree to his mother's request. She rides across a sea of blood. Around her waist is a belt hung with severed heads. She holds a scull cup in her left hand. These images of violence are understood by initiates as sacred symbols of inner transformation in a compassionate religious culture that shuns every form of action, thought or word that might be harmful to other living beings.

Fierce figures like this symbolize the determination needed to overcome the obstacles within the self. The devotee would concentrate on transforming the anger and energy of Lhamo into the creative energy needed to transcend the human ego and achieve the unity of wisdom and compassion.

Who are the figures on either side of her?

Near the head of the mule is the lion-headed *dakini* (see Slide 18). At the other end is a makara-headed *dakini*. Each of these *dakinis* (enlightened female divinities) is a goddess in her own right with a fascinating history of heroic deeds.

Why is this called Sino-Tibetan?

Like slides 10, 15 and 18 this object was made in Manchu-controlled China, but its form and style is Tibetan. The Manchu (Qing dynasty) emperors of China favored the Gelukpa Order of Tibetan Buddhism, therefore images of Palden Lhamo were common in China during this time. The Asian Art Museum has several Sino-Tibetan objects dating especially from the Qianlong era (1736-1795). The Qianlong emperor stated in 1792 that, “By patronizing the Gelukpa we maintain peaceful relations with the Mongols. This being an important task we cannot but protect this (religion).” In addition to wanting to impress the Mongols, who were devout followers of Tibetan Buddhism, the Qianlong emperor also had genuine personal devotion to Tibetan Buddhism. He had a close relationship with his venerated Tibetan religious teacher, the great Lama Rolpay Dorje (1717-1786), and took an interest in the many Buddhist art objects created in his palace workshops. (Bartholomew, “Sino-Tibetan...”, p. 92.)

Sources

Bartholomew, Terese, “Sino-Tibetan Art of the Qianlong Period from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco,” *Asian Art Museum: Selected Articles from Orientations* (San Francisco and Hong Kong: Asian Art Museum and Orientations Magazine. Ltd.): 92-103.

Slide 15



Samantabhadra
 China, Chengde, from the Xumifushou Temple
 Approximately. 1779-1780; Qianlong reign (1736-1795) of the Qing
 dynasty (1644-1911)
 Colors on cotton
 56 1/2 x 27 3/4 inches
 Gift of Katherine Ball
 Accession Number B72 D67

Who is Samantabhadra?

The central deity, Samantabhadra, was one of the eight bodhisattvas. He carries the *vajra* (Slide 10) and moon disk on two lotus blossoms that rise up on either side of him; a jeweled mandorla surrounds his elaborate throne. Behind him on a pale green and blue ground float clouds above a Chinese style landscape.

How can we recognize this figure as a Bodhisattva?

Advanced bodhisattvas (see also Slide 2) such as Samantabhadra are beings on the path to enlightenment who have chosen to remain in the world to help others win happiness and liberation from misery. They are worshipped in their own right, and are a favorite subject in Buddhist art throughout much of Asia.

What are the other symbols in this painting?

Before the throne, the so-called Offering of the Five Senses appears on a lotus blossom springing from the water below: a mirror (sight), cymbals (sound), conch (smell), fruit (taste), and a piece of silk (touch). Before Samantabhadra sit the female deities, White Tara and Green Tara. (See slide 2) Above Samantabhadra, Amitayus, holds his attribute, the vase containing the water of life, from which a tree grows. Amitayus and White Tara are worshiped for long life; Green Tara grants all wishes. They form a powerful triad for the granting of longevity, an appropriate motif for a birthday gift, which was the motivation for commissioning this painting .

This painting hung in a replica of a Tibetan temple in China. Why was this building built?

In 1779 the Qianlong emperor of China received word from the sixth Panchen Lama in Tibet that he would arrive in China the following year to celebrate the emperor's seventieth birthday. Delighted and flattered, the emperor ordered a temple to be built in the style of Tashilhunpo (pronounced Xumifushou in Chinese), the seat of the Panchen Lama located in Shigatse, Tibet. The temple complex, built at the emperor's summer retreat in Jehol (present-day Chengde), northeastern Hebei province, was sumptuously furnished with Buddhist sculptures, thangkas, and ritual paraphernalia.

This painting was among those objects. A long Chinese inscription on the back states that it was one of six scrolls hanging on the east and west walls of a building called "The Source of Ten Thousand Laws," located behind the main temple complex. This building was where the Sixth Panchen Lama's relatives and attendants stayed. This inscription allows us to trace the painting's history and date it precisely.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) The Use of Color

Examine the use of color in the paintings in this packet. Describe the palette. How are colors used to make things stand out? Conduct your own experiments juxtaposing colors to create different effects. What other artistic techniques do you notice? How does the use of gold effect the work? Discuss the symbolisms associated with the main colors used in Tibetan art (see Appendix 2). What associations do you make with certain colors?

Source

Bartholomew, Terese, "Sino-Tibetan Art of the Qianlong Period from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco," *Asian Art Museum: Selected Articles from Orientations*. San Francisco and Hong Kong: Asian Art Museum and Orientations Magazine. Ltd. Pages 92-103.

Slide 16

Human Skull Ewer
Tibet
18-19th century
Human skulls, repousse copper
Accession Number B60 M454

What is this?

This is a ritual water ewer made from two human skulls and copper decorated with elaborate repousse. It is an extremely unique object even in Tibet. It would have been used to make offerings in ritual, most likely to wrathful deities (see Slide 10 for more on offerings).

Where did the skulls come from?

These skulls most likely came from the body of a high lama. In the Tibetan view, their use is not morbid at all. There is no sense that bones are dirty or taboo. They are merely a part of life. It was a way of honoring the lamas by using their skulls this way. The object becomes associated with that person and takes on a sacred quality.

How could they use skulls this way?

As discussed under Slide 13, this type of object would have never been shown to the uninitiated. This is

because it may be misinterpreted as a violent image. The Chinese when they invaded pointed to objects like this as confirming the need to liberate Tibetans from a barbarian religion with strange practices. In the west, it is also difficult to understand the use of a human skull in making a ritual object.

Westerners usually want a dead body to be disposed of as quickly as possible. Buddhists have a very different view. For them, even after the heart stops beating there is a continued subtle consciousness in the person for a period of two to three days, or in the case of a high lama it could be up to two weeks. After death, survivors will look for signs that the subtle consciousness has finally left the body, before they dispose of the body. At this point the body has nothing to do with the person who was in it. It is merely inert matter that should be disposed of, or better yet, recycled.

The traditional burial practice in Tibet is known as sky burial. Once the subtle consciousness has departed for the next life, the old body is fed to wild animals, primarily vultures. This is partly practical—wood is too scarce for cremation, and the ground is too hard for burial—but also is seen as benefitting other creatures. In an ultimate act of compassion, the deceased feeds other creatures with his or her body.

Slide 17



Mahakala Brahmanarupa
 Ngor Monastery, Tibet
 18th century
 Colors on cotton
 21 3/4 x 14 1/3 inches
 Accession Number B63 D4

Who is this deity?

Mahakala Bramanarupa is one of over 70 different deities of the Mahakala type. These are wrathful deities particularly adept at quelling monsters and overcoming demons, whether they be outer, inner or secret. Some deities, such as Avalokiteshvara (the god of compassion shown in Slide 2) have their own Mahakala form. Here Gonpo takes the guise of a *brahman* to appear in the world of ordinary beings. This Mahakala is from the Sakya Ngor Monastery located to the southwest of Lhasa where he is honored as one of their patron deities.

Brahman refers to the priestly caste in the traditional Hindu system, which stressed purity. Although no longer accepted today, traditionally caste was linked to one's skin color—the high caste *brahmins* had light skin, lower castes had dark skin. The Buddha strongly objected to this concept, and stressed the importance of a person's heart and mind over their external characteristics determined by birth. In the Buddhist concept, you were of a high caste if you had pure altruistic motivation. You were of a low caste if you were harmful to others. By showing a dark skinned *brahman* in such close proximity to corpses and other impurities, this manifestation of the deity aggressively confronts the racism of the traditional

caste system, and conveys the message that one cannot be polluted by death or outward appearances. In Buddhism the only pollution rests within.

This painting is related to Kublai Khan. How?

According to legend, in the thirteenth century, Phakpa (1235-80), the great lama of the Sakya order, went to Mongolia to convert Kublai Khan to Buddhism. Actually he went as a hostage to the Mongol court to solidify Tibet's surrender to the Mongols. Kublai Khan already knew something about Buddhism and he questioned Phakpa on a particular text with which the lama was not familiar. Phakpa stalled by asking if they could continue the conversation the next day. That night, Gonpo appeared to him in this form (as Mahakala Brahmanarupa) and placed before Phakpa a copy of the text. Thus fortified with the answers, Phakpa was able to convert the Khan and won for Buddhism a powerful supporter. Tibet's surrender to the Mongols and Mongolian support of Tibetan Buddhism helped ensure the safety of Tibet from Mongolian invasion, which China was not spared (Kublai Khan proclaimed the Yuan dynasty in China in 1272). As a result, this deity is especially revered by the Sakyapa Order and the Ngor Monastery, which is home to an important lineage of the Sakyapa. This painting can be directly traced to the Ngor Monastery by an inscription on the back that states it was once stored in the "Zil-non House" of the monastery.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

- 1) Why might a powerful deity like Mahakala take on an ordinary human form like Bramanarupa?
- 2) Why might a powerful emperor like Kublai Khan take on a pacifist religion like Buddhism?

Sources

Bartholomew, "Tibetan Tangkas Relating to the Abbots of Ngor and Shalu in the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco," *Asian Art Museum: Selected Articles from Orientations* (San Francisco and Hong Kong: Asian Art Museum and Orientations Magazine, Ltd.): pp 28-31.

Slide 18

Lion-Headed Guardian (Simhavaktra Dakini)
 Sino-Tibetan
 18th Century
 Lacquered wood
 Height 56 inches
 Accession Number: B60 S600

Who is this deity?

Simhavaktra Dakini, the ferocious lion-faced guardian of Vajrayana Buddhism, is a female “sky-walker” who guides human beings along the right path. This powerful spirit can remove physical hindrances and spiritual obstacles such as pride and ego. When she is portrayed alone, like here, she dances gracefully; her right leg is raised and bent, and her left leg would usually be planted on a prostrate demonic figure, which in this case is missing. Originally she would have held a chopper (a curved, chopping knife) in her right hand and a bowl made from a human skull in her left. These are also missing. She is naked except for jewelry (originally inset with semiprecious stones), a tiger skin is wrapped around her waist, and a demon skin is knotted around her shoulders.

Together with Makaravaktra Dakini (a crocodile-headed dakini), Simhavaktra attends Palden Lhamo (see Slide 14), the only female goddess among the Eight Guardians of the Dharma who protect the teachings of the Buddha. She is a special inner protectress of various lineages including the Gelukpa Order and its two leaders, the Dalai and Panchen Lamas.

Who was this made for?

The size and quality of this piece indicate it was an imperial object made for the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) court in China. (See other Sino-Tibetan objects, Slides 10, 14, 15, 16, 18). Many images of Lhamo were made during Manchu's Qing dynasty, when Tibetan Buddhism was China's state religion and the Gelukpa order was in favor with the Manchu emperors.

Sources

The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. *Selected Works*, second printing. San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1994. p. 44.

Bartholomew, Terese, "Sino-Tibetan Art of the Qianlong Period from the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco," *Asian Art Museum: Selected Articles from Orientations*. San Francisco and Hong Kong: Asian Art Museum and Orientations Magazine. Ltd. Page 38.

Slide 19



Prayer Flags in Western Tibet
1998
Photo by Lisa Kristine, Migration Photography

What are prayer flags?

The word for prayer flag in Tibetan is *lung-ta*, which means “wind horse.” Prayer flags are seen all over Tibet and Nepal and wherever Tibetan Buddhism is honored. They are hung high in the air where they will flap in the unceasing wind. With each flap, the prayers are sent out to the enlightened ones throughout the universe in order to bring health, longevity, prosperity, and ultimate enlightenment to all the beings of the world.

Like the prayer wheel (Slide 11), these are a means to multiply the number of prayers going out. Also, like prayer beads and prayer wheels, they work best when used properly—accompanied by sincere prayers for all living beings, with a highly focused mind.

What is depicted on them?

They often feature the image of a horse carrying a load of flaming jewels, surrounded by auspicious symbols, mantras and prayers. The most common are mantras invoking the three principle deities—Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, and Vajrapani, representing Wisdom, Compassion, and Sacred Power respectively. They may also contain prayers for the Four Immeasurables:

- 1) may all living beings without exception have happiness and the causes of happiness

- 2) may all living beings be free of misery and causes of misery
- 3) may those who are happy never lose their happiness but have even greater happiness
- 4) may all living beings abide in equanimity, free of attachment and aversion

Prayer flags are printed on cloths of five main colors (white, blue, green, yellow, and red), which carry many layers of symbolism. For example, each refers to a an element, a direction, one of the Five Buddhas, one of the Five Aggregates, one of the Five Wisdoms, etc. These color symbolisms are present in all Tibetan art. (For a partial list see the Appendix 2)

How are they made and used?

Prayer flags are made by printing carved wood blocks onto pieces of colored or white fabric. Each color is symbolic of an element, a direction, and a sense power and various other things. This complex system of color symbolism pervades Tibetan sacred art (see Appendix 2). They are strung up at the top of mountain passes and over streams and houses. Besides sending prayers to the Buddhas and other deities, they function to purify the surroundings and pacify malevolent spirits. Through time prayer flags become tattered by the wind and bleached by the sun. Once they are deemed no longer useful because the prayers are too faded or tattered, they will be taken down and ceremonially burned.

Discussion Points/Teaching Suggestions

1) Design and make your own prayer flags.
Using linoleum blocks and the drawings of Tibetan symbols in Appendix 1 to design your own prayer flags. Once the blocks are designed and cut, cut pieces of colored fabric and print the flags with black ink. While working, consider the symbols and prayers and what they mean to you. Once printed, string your flags up in the classroom.

Slide 20

Bön Image of Kunzang Gyalwa Dupa (Kun
 bzang rgyal ba 'dus pa)
 Western Tibet
 14th century
 Brass inlaid with silver
 13 1/8 inches high
 The Museum General Acquisitions Fund
 B84 B1

The swastika attribute and meditation pose—with soles of the four feet facing upward—identify this very rare Bön image, the first artifact of this religion to be acquired by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

What is Bön?

Bön, an indigenous Tibetan practice, is thought to have predated Buddhism and has coexisted with it through the centuries. Bön emphasizes the divine nature of kings and natural phenomena, and practices elaborate rituals for the dead and ancestors. Though its followers, called Bonpo, were persecuted by Buddhists in the eighth century, Bön continued to flourish in outlying regions and was especially popular among nomads of northern Tibet.

Bön returned full force in the eleventh century, absorbing many facets of Buddhism. Buddhism also assimilated some Bön beliefs and practices; converted native Bön gods and subduing demons who were then entered the Buddhist pantheon as worldly protectors.

Bönpos believe their religion was once a universal faith practiced all over the world. Thus they call their religion *yungdrung bon*, meaning eternal, unchanging. On the surface, many Bönpo practices are indistinguishable from Buddhist ones, because they both share the same cultural heritage—they both use prayer wheels and flags, they both circumambulate sacred places, they both employ sacred phrases or mantras. They differ in their sacred history, their founding mythology, and texts.

Which Bön deity does this represent?

This statue represents the Bön god of wisdom, a tranquil divinity who is always invoked first in formal rituals. This image came from western Tibet or northwestern Nepal. He has five faces and ten arms. Two of his hands are in front of his feet, and the two main hands hold disks inscribed with the Tibetan characters *ah* and *ma*, which represent skillful means and wisdom. The remaining six carry the wheel, *swastika* (a Bön symbol of indestructibility), umbrella, bow and arrow, noose, and what seems to be a flower. Like Buddhist images, he sits in meditation upon a lotus throne supported by a square pedestal and is guarded by a dragon, garuda (bird), elephant, lion, horse, and peacock; the last four are the Bön animals that symbolize the four directions.

The following invocation to this deity was written by the scholar Sherap Gyaltzen (1356-1415):

Kuntu Zangpo Gyalwa Dupa—
 His body shines like fire-crystal.
 Of his five faces, the face in the center is white,
 That to his right is yellow, that to the left is green;
 The face at the crown of his head is red,
 That of his top-knot is deep blue.
 Of his ten hands, the first pair is joined at the breast
 In the gesture of mental equipoise;
 On his right and left palms are the disks of the sun and the moon
 On which the syllables *A* and *MA*,
 The symbols of Skillful Means and Wisdom.
 To the right, the next three hands hold, from the top downwards,
 Royal banner, swastika and wheel;
 On the left, the three hands hold
 Bow and arrow, noose and hook.
 The last pair make the 'earth-touching' gesture of enlightenment.
 His four legs rein the cross-legged posture.
 He is adorned with the thirteen ornaments of a peaceful deity—
 Thus one should visualize him.

(Kvaerne, p. 30)

Sources

The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, *Selected Works*, second printing (San Francisco: Asian Art Museum, 1994), p. 41.

Per Kvaerne, *The Bön Religion of Tibet: The Iconography of a Living Tradition* (London: Serindia Publications, 1995): p. 30 and 59.

Reading 1

The Potala Palace and the Norbulinka as Described by the 14th Dalai Lama, excerpted from *My Land and My People: The Original Autobiography of His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet*. (New York: Warner Books, 1997), pp. 31-34.

(See Slide 3)

It is said to be one of the largest buildings in the world. Even after living in it for years, one could never know all its secrets. It entirely covers the top of a hill; it is a city in itself. It was begun by a king of Tibet 1,300 years ago as a pavilion for meditation, and it was greatly enlarged by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century of the Christian era. The central part of the present building, which is thirteen stories high, was built on his orders, but he died when the building had reached the second story. But when he knew that he was dying, he told his Prime Minister to keep his death a secret, because he feared that if it were known that he was dead, the building would be stopped. The Prime Minister found a monk who resembled the Lama and succeeded in concealing the death for thirteen years until the work was finished, but he secretly had a stone carved with a prayer for a reincarnation and had it built into the walls. It can still be seen on the second story today.

The central part of the building contained the great halls for ceremonial occasions, about thirty-five chapels richly carved and painted, four cells for meditation, and the mausoleums of seven Dalai Lamas—some 30 feet high and covered in gold and precious stones.

The western wing of the building, which is of later date, housed a community of 175 monks, and in the eastern wing were the government offices, a school for monk officials, and the meeting halls of the National Assembly—the houses of Parliament of Tibet. My own apartments were above the offices on the top story—400 feet above the town. I had four rooms there. The one which I used most often was about 25 feet square, and its walls were entirely covered by paintings depicting the life of the fifth Dalai Lama, so detailed that the individual portraits were not more than an inch high. When I grew tired of reading, I often used to sit and follow the story told by this great and elaborate mural which surrounded me.

But apart from its use as office, temple, school, and habitation, the Potala was also an enormous storehouse. Here were rooms full of thousands of priceless scrolls, some a thousand years old. Here were strong rooms filled with the golden regalia of the earliest kings of Tibet, dating back for a thousand years, and the sumptuous gifts they received from the Chinese or Mongol emperors, and the treasures of the Dalai Lamas who succeeded the kings. Here also were stored the armor and armament from the whole of Tibetan history. In the libraries were all the records of Tibetan culture and religion, 7,000 enormous volumes, some of which were said to weigh eighty pounds. Some were written on palm leaves imported from India a thousand years ago. Two thousand illuminated volumes of the scriptures were written in inks made of powdered gold, silver, iron, copper, conch shell, turquoise, and coral, each line in a different ink.

Down below the building there were endless underground storehouses and cellars, containing government stocks of butter, tea, and cloth which were supplied to the monasteries, the army, and government officials. At the eastern end was a prison for wrong-doers of high rank—corresponding perhaps to the Tower of London. And on the four corners of the building were defensive turrets where the Tibetan army used to keep watch. . . .

In the Potala, each year began with a ceremony on the highest roof before sunrise on New Year's Day (a

bitterly cold occasion, when I was not the only one who thought with longing of the tea ceremony later in the morning) and religious activities continued day by day throughout the year until the great Dance of the Lamas the day before New Year's Eve. But in the spring, I myself and my tutors and attendants and some of the government departments moved to the Norbulinka, in a procession which all the people of Lhasa came to see. I was happy to go to the Norbulinka. The Potala made me proud of our inheritance of culture and craftsmanship, but the Norbulinka was more like a home. It was really a series of small palaces, and chapels, built in a large and beautiful walled garden. Norbulinka means "The Jewel Park." It was started by the Seventh Dalai Lama in the eighteenth century, and successive Dalai Lamas have added their own residencies to it ever since. I built one there myself. The founder chose a very fertile spot. In the Norbulinka gardens we grew a radish weighing twenty pounds, and cabbages so large you could not put your arms around them.. There were poplars, willows, junipers, and many kinds of flowers and fruit trees: apples, pears, peaches, walnuts, and apricots. We introduced plums and cherry trees while I was there.

Reading 2

Visiting the Dalai Lama at The Potala Palace in 1947, excerpted from Heinrich Harrer, *Seven Years in Tibet*, fifth printing (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1968): pp. 223-224.
(See slide 3)

When my second Tibetan New Year Festival in Lhasa came around I attended all the ceremonies of the festival from the beginning. Tens of thousands of people flocked into the town and Lhasa looked like a great encampment. This year they celebrated the “Fire-Pig-Year.” . . .

At this New Year’s Festival the High Chamberlain informed us that we were on His Holiness’ (The Dalai Lama’s) reception list. Although we had seen the young God several times and had been honored by his smiling recognition during the procession, we were greatly excited by the prospect of appearing before him at the Potala Palace. . . .

On the appointed day we put on our fur coats, bought the most expensive scarves we could find in the town, and in the midst of a gaily-clad crowd of monks, nomads, and women in their festal garb, climbed up the long stepway to the Potala. As we climbed, the view over the city became more and more impressive. From here we looked down on the to the gardens and the villalike houses. Our road led us past countless prayer wheels which the passers-by kept in movement. Then we passed through the great main gate into the interior of the palace.

Dark corridors, their walls decorated with paintings of strange protecting deities, led through the ground-floor buildings to a courtyard. From there steep ladders, several stories high, took one up to the flat roof. The visitors climbed them carefully and silently. Up above, a dense crowd was already assembled, as everyone has the right to receive the Great One’s blessing at the New Year.

On the roof there were a number of small buildings with gilded roofs. These were the apartments of the Dalai Lama. With the monks leading the way, a long sinuous line of believers moved slowly toward a door. We two came directly after the monks in line. When we came into the hall of audience we craned our necks to get a sight of the Living Buddha over a forest of heads. And he, too, momentarily forgetful of his dignity, looked up eagerly to get a glimpse of the two strangers of whom he had heard so much.

In the posture of the Buddha, leaning slightly forward, the Dalai Lama was sitting on a throne covered with costly brocade. For hours he had to sit and watch the faithful filing by and bless them as they passed. At the foot of the throne lay a mountain on money bags and rolls of silk and hundreds of white scarves. We knew that we must not hand over our scarves directly to the Dalai Lama; an abbot would take them from us. When we found ourselves standing with bowed heads before the Presence. I could not resist the temptation to look up. An eager, boyish smile lit up the charming face of the Dalai Lama and his hand raised in blessing was laid for an instant on my head. Everything happened very quickly: in a moment or two we were standing before a somewhat lower throne on which sat the regent. He, too, laid his hand on us in blessing and then an abbot placed red amulet scarves on our necks and we were asked to sit down on cushions. Rice and tea were served and, obedient to the custom, we threw a few grains toward the altar as an offering to the gods.

Reading 3

Excerpt from Gyeten Namgyal, as recounted to Kim Yeshe, "A Tailor's Tale," *Cho Yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture*, No. 6. Dharamsala, India: Department of Religion and Culture, Central Tibetan Administration of H.H. the Dalai Lama, 1994. Gyeten Namgyal served the 13th and 14th Dalai Lamas as a tailor in the Potala Palace. This passage described his involvement with the making of the stupa for the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933. (See Slides 3 and 5)

The Golden Stupa

Eighty of the one hundred and thirty tailors of the Sokhang [the tailor's guild] were selected to make the brocade decorations for the stupa, which was to be placed in the Potala with the Mausoleums of the other Dalai Lamas. Kalon Trimon was the man responsible and Lukhangwa was in charge of the work. We made a very elaborate ceiling frieze using Russian brocades which, after the Chinese Tagshun brocade were among the best. To the east and west of the stupa was a brocade curtain with floor to ceiling sized representations of the sixteen dragons, which stood for the Sixteen Arhats, eight facing from each side. We were given an extraordinary brocade representing a single dragon, which had been used at Tengyeling as a carpet. Since we couldn't bring ourselves to cutting it, we decided to use it as a namten, or canopy, to line the ceiling. Hanging these decorations required much climbing and scaffold walking. As I was young and lightfooted, I did most of it. It was all completed in thirteen days.

The design of the very elaborate ceiling frieze included appliqué brocade representations of the Three Great Kings of Tibet. I was already considered the best among the Sokhang tailors and was looking for a chance to show off my talents. I boldly went to see Trimon and requested that he allow me to make the Three Kings by myself. My request was turned down, and I was instructed to do it with several other tailors, mainly Chenmo Phutsok.

Phutsok usually directed the work, but never really executed anything on his own. He remained a few days and fidgeted with Songtsen Gampo's wheel before gradually slipping away. I was left to direct the work and was determined that it be something original. I went over to the Tsuglakhang during a break in the work and stood before Songtsen Gampo's statue, requesting his inspiration. The next morning when I awoke, the roundness in the King's face struck me as the prevalent feature and I made it in relief, something which had never been attempted before. This frieze greatly impressed Lukhangwa and contributed to his awarding me the title of Chenmo. I was twenty-two.

The construction of the stupa and preserving Gyalwa Rinpochey's [the Dalai Lama's] remains took about a year. Both were closely overseen by the Regent, Reting Rinpochey, and Trijang Rinpochey. The mummifying process was done in the Potala, in the traditional manner, all the body fluids being extracted with salt. After the drying was completed, the remains were covered in gold. Fourteen people went inside the golden stupa after the remains had been placed there and I was fortunate to have been on of them, since I was assigned to arrange the robes. Among this number were Reting Rinpochey, Taktra Rinpochey, Trijang Rinpochey, Ling Rinpochey, and Gyalwang Tulku. Just before the remains were dressed, it was noticed that a protrusion in the shape of an Avalokiteshvara statue had naturally emerged from Gyalwa Rinpochey's shoulder. This caused quite a stir and all fourteen lamas and officials filed into the stupa to see it. I was lucky also to catch a glimpse of it before it was covered.

The outside of the stupa was elaborately decorated with jewels, gold, coral, turquoise, and dzi. Many officials donated their sojin, the long earring they wore from their left ear, and these were set into the stupa at regular intervals. I had just bought a new sojin, which had belonged to Chensey Kalsang, Gyalwa Rinpochey's retired attendant. It was very beautiful and I proudly wore it on special occasions. A tray was brought forward and when I saw all the sojin lying on it, I thought mine was more beautiful and deserved to ornament the stupa. I ran home to get it and added it to the others. Since I was present during the work, I made sure it was placed where I wanted it, first on the right, on the front of the stupa.

When the work on the stupa was finished, I was summoned to Phembo, a day's journey north of Lhasa, to make a kigyu for the monastery there. A kigyu is a huge tangka, several storeys in height, which is hung outside monasteries on special occasions. While I was making the kigyu, a messenger came from Lhasa to tell me to return there immediately, as I had just been awarded the title of Chenmo. There were three other chenmos at the time, but they were quite old and did not do much active work. The title had been awarded to me in recognition of my skill, both in the private work I have executed for Kalon Trimon and for my work on the stupa, which had much impressed Lukhangwa. The awarding of the title was accompanied by an auspicious ceremony at the main Sokhang office in the Tsuglakhang. All my colleagues came to offer me auspicious white scarves. After that, I went home, where all my friends and relatives did the same. I then went to pay my respects to Reting Rinpochey who received me in his house in Lhasa. Rinpochey told me that I had served Gyalwa Rinpochey well and that the new incarnation [of the Dalia Lama] would soon be coming to Lhasa and that I would also be serving him. This made me feel very happy.



Unfurling the great tangka (Kigyu) at Drepung Monastery in 1992. Photo by Terese Bartholomew.

Reading 4

Seven Things You Didn't Know about Tibet

by Donald S. Lopez Jr.

1. "Shangri-La" is a fictional name for Tibet. James Hilton invented the name in his 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, which was made into a film by Frank Capra in 1937. "Shangri" has no meaning in Tibetan; "La" means "mountain pass." The name is apparently a garbling of Shambhala, a mythical Buddhist kingdom in the Himalayas. "Shangri-La" quickly came into common usage as a place where all that is good and true is preserved. After US planes bombed Japan in the famous 1942 Doolittle Raid—immortalized in the film *Thirty Seconds over Tokyo*—news reporters asked President Roosevelt where the planes had taken off from. He replied, "Shangri-La." Roosevelt later authorized the presidential retreat in Maryland, now known as Camp David; its original name was Shangri-La. Today, Shangri-La is the name of a chain of resort hotels and so is associated with beaches and free drinks.
2. The most widely read book about Tibet was written by an Englishman who claimed to be a Tibetan lama, despite the fact that he had never been to Tibet and did not speak a word of Tibetan. *The Third Eye* by T. Lobsang Rampa was the publishing event of 1956. It purported to be the autobiography of a Tibetan lama who, at the age of eight, underwent the operation of the third eye, in which a hole was drilled in his forehead to allow him to see auras. Such a procedure was not known in Tibet. A private detective eventually tracked down the author of the book, Cyril Hoskin, the unemployed son of an English plumber. *The Third Eye* was a bestseller in Europe and America. One enthusiastic reader even attempted to perform the operation on himself using a dentist's drill. Mr. Hoskin went on to write eighteen more books as T. Lobsang Rampa, with sales of over four million copies. (The "T." is for "Tuesday.")
3. Tibetans have never heard of their famous religious text *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. What is known in the West by that title is a short Tibetan work, the *Bardo Thodol*, meaning "Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State." It is a mortuary text, read over a dead or dying person to help him or her escape from rebirth or, if that's not possible, to have a good rebirth in the next life. It is an example of a genre of similar texts used in one of the four sects of Tibetan Buddhism. It became the most famous Tibetan text in the West after Walter Wentz, a wealthy American Theosophist, traveled to India in the 1920s, and commissioned a translation. Wentz then added his own commentary, transforming the Tibetan mortuary text into a Theosophical treatise. The text has lived on through several reincarnations, including one by Timothy Leary that uses the Tibetan text as a "flight plan" for an acid trip. Leary's book (*The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*) is best remembered for the line "Whenever in doubt, turn off your mind, relax, float downstream," which was lifted by John Lennon for the song "Tomorrow Never Knows" on the Beatles' 1966 album, *Revolver*.
4. Here is something for the initiated: The most famous of all Buddhist mantras, *om mani padme hum*, does not mean "the jewel in the lotus." It means instead, "O Jewel-Lotus." Nineteenth-century European scholars of Sanskrit misread a vocative ending as a locative ending, thus thinking that the jewel (*mani*) was in the lotus (*padme*). The mistranslated mantra took on a life of its own, probably because of its sexual symbolism; for instance it has been the title of scores of books, many of which have nothing whatsoever to do with Tibet or Buddhism. The mantra is actually a prayer, calling upon the bodhisattva of compassion—of whom the Dalai Lama is the human incarnation—who is depicted holding a jewel and a lotus in two of his one thousand hands. One of his epithets is thus (Mr.) Jewel-Lotus, so the mantra could be roughly translated, "O, Mr. Jewel-Lotus. Please give us a hand."

5. The most common Western name for Tibetan Buddhism, "Lamaism," is considered a disparaging term by Tibetans. At the end of the nineteenth century, both England and Russia wanted to add Tibet to their empires. Europeans typically justified colonialism by portraying the colony as a culturally deficient land that needed to be saved from itself. So Tibet was depicted as an irrational place with superstitious people living under the yoke of corrupt and evil priests. The religion of these priests, Westerners claimed, was not an authentic form of Buddhism and so did not deserve the name, instead they called it "Lamaism." Western scholars depicted true Buddhism as a religion of reason and restraint, filled with deep philosophy and free from the confines of ritual. In fact, such a pure form of Buddhism never existed in Asia, and was to be found only in the libraries and lecture halls of Europe and America.

6. Because Tibet never became a European colony, it remained—and for many, continues to remain—a land of mystery for the West. In the nineteenth century, it was fashionable to account for the whereabouts of anyone who could not be located by saying that he was in Tibet. Some claimed, for example, that Jesus had spent his lost years there. Madame Blavatsky, the founder of the Theosophical Society, said that the "Mahatmas," masters who preserved the ancient wisdom of Atlantis, lived in Tibet. And in "The Adventure of the Empty House," Sherlock Holmes accounts for his whereabouts during the years following his apparent death after plunging, with Professor Moriarty, over the Reichenbach Fall, by telling Watson, "I traveled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa, and spending some days with the head lama. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend."

7. Tibet was not a non-violent society, even after the Dalai Lamas assumed secular control in 1642. The fifth Dalai Lama assumed secular power over Tibet only through the military intervention of his Qoshot Mongol patron, the Gushri Khan, whose troops defeated the Dalai Lama's rival, the king of Tsang. Tibetan armies fought wars against Ladakh in 1681 and against the Dzungar Mongols in 1720, and made numerous armed incursions into Bhutan in the eighteenth century. Tibetan troops fought against invading Nepali forces in 1788-1792 and 1854, against Dogra forces invading Ladakh from Kashmir in 1842, and against the British in 1904. The ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth Dalai Lamas all died young, with some or all rumored to have been poisoned, and the thirteenth Dalai Lama survived an assassination attempt by his own regent. Many Tibetan monks fought bravely against the Chinese invaders in the 1950s.

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Reading 5

Monastic Education as described by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in *Freedom in Exile: The Autobiography of the Dalai Lama* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990): pp. 25-26.

My afternoon studies began soon after lunch. The first hour and a half consisted of a period of general education with my Junior Tutor. It was all he could do to hold my attention. I was a very reluctant pupil and disliked all subjects equally.

The curriculum that I studied was the same as that for all monks pursuing a doctorate in Buddhist studies. It was very unbalanced and in many ways totally inappropriate for the leader of a country during the late twentieth century. Altogether, my curriculum embraced five major and five minor subjects, the former being logic; Tibetan art and culture; Sanskrit; medicine; and Buddhist philosophy. This last is the most important (and most difficult) and is subdivided into a further five categories: Prajnaparamita, the perfection of wisdom; Madhyamika, the philosophy of the Middle Way; Vinaya, the canon of monastic discipline; Abidharma, metaphysics' and Pramana, logic and epistemology.

The five minor subjects are poetry; music and drama; astrology; metre and phrasing; and synonyms. Actually the doctorate itself is awarded on the basis only of Buddhist philosophy, logic and dialectics. For this reason, it was not until the mid-1970s that I studied Sanskrit grammar; and certain subjects, such as medicine, I have never studied other than in an informal way.

Fundamental to the Tibetan system of monastic education is dialectics, or the art of debating. Two disputants take turns in asking questions, which they pose to the accompaniment of stylized gestures. As the question is put, the interrogator brings his right hand up over his left foot on the ground. He then slides his right hand and stamps his left foot on the ground. He then slides his right hand away from the left, close to the head of his opponent. The person who is being asked questions remains passive and concentrates on trying not only to answer, but also to turn the tables on the opponent, who is all the time pacing around him. Wit is an important part of these debates and high merit is earned by turning your opponent's postulates to your own humorous advantage. This makes dialectics a popular form of entertainment even amongst uneducated Tibetans who, though they might not follow the intellectual acrobatics involved, can still appreciate the fun and the spectacle. In the old days, it was not unusual to see nomads and other country people from far outside Lhasa spent part of their day watching learned debates in the courtyard of the monastery.

Reading 6

The testimony of Agya (Ajia) Rinpoche at the hearing on religious freedom in China organized by the Commission on International Religious Freedom in Los Angeles on March 16, 2000.

Dear Committee Members:

I am pleased to respond to your request for information regarding religious freedom in China. This is the first time I speak publicly about Tibet under Chinese rule since I left Tibet and have been living in the United States. My public statement before you will be less detailed than this written statement.

My name is Ajia Lousang Tubten Juimai Gyatso. I am the Abbot of Kumbum Monastery, one of the most important monasteries in Tibet. In addition to being the Abbot, I held many political positions at the central and the provincial level. By the time I fled from Tibet in 1998, these political appointments included: Committee Member of the CPPCC (Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference), Deputy Chairman of the Qinghai People's Political Consultative Conference, Deputy Chairman of the Chinese Buddhist Association, President of the Qinghai Buddhist Association, Deputy Chairman of the Chinese Young Man League, and Deputy Chairman of the Qinghai Young Man League. I was about to be appointed to higher political positions when I left.

I would like to explain to you why I had to leave Tibet. I will begin by explaining how I became the Abbot of Kumbum Monastery. When I was a very young child, living with my family in our tribe of Mongolian herdsmen, I was recognized as the reincarnation of a highly revered lama of the Gelukpa or Yellow Hat sect of Tibetan Buddhism. This is the sect to which our spiritual leaders, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and the Panchen Lama belong. Kumbum Monastery is the birthplace of the founder of Gelupa Buddhism, and is over four hundred years old. The Abbot holds a very high place in the organization of Tibetan Buddhism and the Monastery is a large, famous one. I am the twenty-first reincarnation of the original Abbot of Kumbum Monastery. When the twentieth abbot died, a search was made for his reincarnation. When I was identified and recognized, I was brought into the Kumbum monastery and I began what was to be a lifetime of study and training to prepare for my role as an important leader in Tibetan Buddhism. All this was interrupted when I was about eight years old, a little boy studying in the monastery.

In 1949, the Chinese government had claimed Tibet as part of China and started a campaign to "liberate" Tibet. This proclaimed "peaceful revolution" was indeed comparatively peaceful until 1958. However with the introduction of so-called "Democratic reform" in 1958 everything changed.

All the monasteries were closed and their treasures were looted and destroyed. High Lamas and leaders were imprisoned and sometimes tortured. Monks were forced to marry and to lead "productive lives." Mass military oppression was used extensively. In Qinghai, the province of Tibet, where Kumbum Monastery is located, innocent herdsmen, women, and children were massacred. My own family's tribe of thousands was forced out of our ancestral homelands at gun-point and marched hundreds of kilometers to a remote, barren environment. Many people starved. Hundreds of thousands of Tibetans died as a direct result of these official actions. Among them were my own father and other members of my family. The following year this "peaceful revolution" moved into central Tibet and our spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama was forced to flee the country. He has since remained in exile in India.

One day in 1958, all the monks in the Kumbum Monastery were asked to attend a meeting. The Chinese cadres and members of the Chinese Peoples Liberation Army threatened our monks with guns and ropes and began shouting and agitating the crowd of Chinese who had gathered. Approximately 500 monks were immediately arrested. That same day, my teacher, my house manager, and everyone in my residence was arrested and my house was made into "Number One Public Canteen." The property of the Monastery belonged to the Buddhist people of Tibet but was confiscated by the Communist Chinese. I was driven from my Monastery home to live on my own. At eight years old, I was expected to provide entirely for myself. Fortunately, an old monk from our Monastery took me in as his foster child.

As the young abbot of this major Monastery, I became its youngest 'reform object'. I was forced to attend the local Chinese school. My consecrated monk's robe was now an illegal garment and was cut into pieces to provide material for my student uniform. I was very frightened to be forced out of the world of my Monastery so abruptly and to be subjected to such harsh treatment.

I now know that during this period of oppression, which extended for a number of years, in the Qinghai Province alone, more than 600 monasteries were reduced to less than 10. Hunger, famine, and death were everywhere. In the early 1960's there were a few years when the violent repression eased and I was allowed to engage in religious study. But, in 1966, under Mao Zeidong's Cultural Revolution, there was complete oppression of the Tibetan culture across the nations of China and Tibet. Almost all of the remaining monasteries were physically destroyed, scriptures were burned, and our objects of worship destroyed. Monks were forced to lead lay lives and to marry and violate their vows of celibacy. During this time, from age fourteen to thirty, I was forced to labor on the farms near Kumbum under very harsh conditions. Other monks and I were forced to do things against our wishes and to say things we did not believe.

Fortunately, after 1980 the situation improved. While there was nothing like true religious freedom, the brutality toward our people did ease. For the first time since the Dalai Lama's escape from Tibet, a group of representatives from the government-in-exile of His Holiness the Dalai Lama were permitted to make an official visit to Tibet. The Panchen Lama and many prisoners were released, some monasteries were reopened, and some monks were allowed to return to their religious practice. Our Monastery received considerable funds from the government for renovations. Tibetans in our country and all over the world were relieved and hoped for more positive progress. I was very thankful for the changes, although I was well aware of the control the Chinese continued to exert over me and over all the monasteries and religious practices.

In recent years, the execution of Chinese religious policies in some areas of Tibet has created fear that our country may be returning to the terrible years of the Cultural Revolution. For instance, starting in 1998 our Monastery was required by law to teach socialism. This involved Chinese officials living in residence at our monastery and imposing political study on our monks. More important, we were required to denounce His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. I was required to lead my entire Monastery in this denouncement. This was extremely difficult because to criticize our spiritual leader is a sin in our religion. When policies like this were put into place, I knew I could no longer be a truthful leader to the monks of our Monastery. If I was obedient to Chinese demands in order to preserve my Monastery, I could not be faithful to the very beliefs for which the Monastery stands.

Here I want to point out a very important element in the politics of religious freedom in China. There is a constitution in China that states that all people have the right to choose their religion. But unlike other

provisions of the Chinese constitution, where laws have been enacted to guarantee rights provided by the constitution, there are no laws at all to protect this so-called guarantee of religious freedom. Since there is no law, the policy makers can dictate whatever they like, and when religious freedoms are crushed there is no avenue for appeal. The policy makers are the "foxes guarding the hen house" of religious freedom. Sometimes, certain practices would be permitted, and then there would be a change of policy which made the same practices prohibited and punishable with no recourse at all. This very difficult climate of uncertainty was one of the factors that forced me to leave my country. It is my urgent wish that China will enact a religious law according to the constitution.

My personal conflict became more critical in 1989 when the Panchen Lama died and the effort began to find his reincarnation. Next to the Dalai Lama, the Panchen Lama is the most important spiritual leader in Tibetan Buddhism. All Tibetans eagerly awaited recognition of the Panchen Lama's successor. We hoped his reincarnation would have the same qualities as the former Panchen Lama, who was a strong defender of our religion and outspoken with the Chinese government. I was part of the "committee" formed by the Chinese government to search for the reincarnation of the Panchen Lama. Historically, it has been an important part of our tradition to have the Panchen Lama's reincarnation chosen by the Dalai Lama and the Dalai Lama's reincarnation chosen by the Panchen Lama. Jaya Rinpoche, the teacher of the deceased Panchen Lama, requested that the Chinese government allow him to assist in the search for the Panchen Lama's reincarnation. He also requested that the search team be allowed to consult the Dalai Lama so that the recognition of the new reincarnation would be conducted according to the wishes of the Tibetan people. The government said that it was granting all requests made by Jaya Rinpoche and a search committee was established. But year after year passed and the government took no action. The committee could operate only as directed by the government because it was not a religious committee but a government committee. Jaya Rinpoche passed away. Chadrel Rinpoche, acting abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery near Lhasa, took over as head of the committee.

In 1995 the search committee was ordered to appear immediately in Beijing to discuss a serious charge—the government's claim that one of the committee members, Chadrel Rinpoche, had committed treason by consulting the Dalai Lama to choose the reincarnated Panchen Lama. Although we had all understood that there was government permission for the committee to communicate with the Dalai Lama, we were ordered to join together to criticize Chadrel Rinpoche and support the government in putting him in prison. We were also ordered to denounce the Panchen Lama nominee approved by the Dalai Lama and to choose a new nominee. In this instance I could not be silent. I opposed this proposition and made a statement asking the government to free Chadrel Rinpoche and keep the Dalai Lama's nominee. I was then threatened and told to return quietly to my province and demonstrate my loyalty to the Chinese government. Later, all committee members, including myself, were ordered to go to Lhasa for the golden urn ceremony that the government had decided would be the method of choosing the Panchen Lama's reincarnation. I had no wish to go, for I did not believe in this Chinese government supervised process of choosing the reincarnation. It was common knowledge among people involved with the process that for whatever reasons, the selection of Gyaltzen Norbu as the reincarnated Panchen Lama, was predetermined by Chinese authorities. When the time came, I was sick in a hospital. Even so, I was forced to leave the hospital and to appear in Lhasa against my wishes. Subsequently I submitted my resignation from the committee, which was denied.

Had I remained in Tibet I would have been forced to denounce the Dalai Lama and my religion and to serve the Chinese government. This meant also participating in government practices that went against my religion and my personal beliefs. As Abbot of the Kumbum Monastery, I would have been forced to

help the government have its choice of the Panchen Lama accepted by the Tibetan people. This would violate my deepest beliefs. It was at this point that I knew I must leave my country. So in the end I chose to follow my teacher's guidance. He had advised me that when I turned fifty years old I should leave political life and concentrate on my religious studies. The only possible way I could follow his advice was to escape from what had become almost total Chinese control over my life.

In conclusion: when I was a boy I led a lonely life, for my teachers and assistants were imprisoned and our Monastery was closed. As a young man I worked hard in the fields as a forced laborer and was not allowed to follow my calling as a monk. As an older man, even with the power and good fortune afforded me by my position with the Chinese government, I was forced to do and say things that were painful to my spirit. I did these things for a time because this was the only way I saw to serve our people and preserve our tradition. But our people are suffering because they do not have true freedom to practice our religion and uphold our traditions. Under these conditions, I could not remain. I had to leave.

As you know from recent events in Tibet which have again brought international attention ... I am concerned about the possible consequences of my speaking out here in America. The other monks and my close personal relations in my country do not share in the same rights and freedoms afforded in the United States.

It is of course my wish that the Chinese government will allow true religious freedom in Tibet. It is my prayer that His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, will return to our country for the benefit of both the Chinese and the Tibetan people. I pray that I may find ways to assist my country in achieving this religious freedom. My testimony today is my first public statement since I left Tibet. I accepted this invitation because it is time for me to begin telling the truth of my own story, so that I can begin to help my people in ways that are available to me here in America.

I thank you very much.

Activity 1

Deconstructing “Shangri-la”

Level: High School

Purpose: To discuss how our perceptions of other cultures, in this case Tibet, are subjective and colored by myths.

Readings/Film:

- 1) Donald S. Lopez, Jr., “Seven Things You Didn’t Know About Tibet” (Reading 5)
- 2) *Lost Horizon*, book and feature length film directed by Frank Capra in 1937
- 3) *Frontline: Dreams of Tibet*. Show No. 1604. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 1997. VHS, color, Running time: 60 minutes.
- 4) *The Original Seven Years in Tibet: The True Saga of ‘Kundun’ Heinrich Harrer’s Remarkable Himalayan Trek*. Directed by Hans Nieter, 1957. VHS, color, Running Time 79 minutes.

Suggested Lesson:

1. Find out what students know about Tibet
2. Review Tibet’s location in the world with relation to neighboring countries, especially India, Nepal, Mongolia, China
3. Watch *Lost Horizon*, and/or other films and discuss.
4. Read and discuss “Seven Things You Don’t Know About Tibet” by Donald S. Lopez, Jr.
5. Discuss what preconceptions the students had about Tibet have been changed.
6. Assign a research project about Tibet using the Internet, books, film. Ask students to think critically about these materials. Ask them to consider how the identity of the author might influence their approach and ideas.

Activity 2

Making Torma—Butter and Roasted Barley Flour Sculptures

Level: Elementary & Middle

Purpose: To create a sculpture in the style of Tibetan torma (see Slides 12 and 13)

Materials: white, red, green, blue, yellow colored Playdoh (an approved substitute)

Butter and roasted barley flour sculptures are a uniquely Tibetan concept and are usually made by teams of monks in preparation for a religious festival. They are made by mixing a dough of barley flour and butter, and sculpting it on a form of wood and leather. Then they are painted in brilliant, symbolic colors. They are given as offerings to the deities. After the ceremony they are destroyed, like a sand mandala would be. The destruction is to remind us of the impermanence of things and help us overcome our attachment to things of this world, even those we love the most. (www.buddhanet.net/tibart.htm)

Torma sculptures take many forms. Some look like stupas, others take the form of Palden Lhamo's mule, others look like mandalas, others are abstract floral offerings, others are like flaming daggers. Students can take their inspiration from a Tibetan art work they have seen or create their own.

1. sketch/plan your idea
2. mold the base with white Playdoh
3. add decorations with colored Playdoh
4. use toothpicks to attach decorations



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Features informative articles about Tibetans and their way of life, tangka painting, wood carving arts, Tibetan opera, and a well known folk tale.
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Guidebook that contains short, pithy sections on geography, society, religion, art, and culture, and gives a sense of contemporary Tibet.
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Art catalogue with essays on art history, Tibet today, and the exile community in New Mexico.

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Catalogue from the most extensive collection of Tibetan art and everyday objects in the US; includes essays about history and religion, everyday life, structures of power, architectural settings, and fascinating photographs from the early 1900s onwards.

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Exhaustive exhibition catalog with in-depth essays on religion, culture, and art of Tibet.

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A well-respected history of Tibetan culture with several translations of Tibetan poems and myths.

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A well-illustrated book featuring essays by Tibetan scholars and one Chinese scholar on history, geography, customs and rituals, ethnic minorities, Tibetan Buddhism, and architecture.

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Magazine for young people, this issue focuses on life in the Himalayas (Nepal and Tibet) with articles on the sherpa, a Nepalese folk tale, the Dalai Lama, mandalas, etc.

Video and Film

(Note: there are hundreds of films on Tibet, here are a few we watched and can recommend. Some are available from Le Video in San Francisco)

Compassion in Exile: The Story of the 14th Dalai Lama. Lemle Pictures, 1992, 60 minutes

Using historical footage and interviews with the Dalai Lama, this documentary examines the life of the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso.

Frontline: Dreams of Tibet. Show No. 1604. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation, 1997. VHS, color, Running time: 60 minutes. Available from PBS (www.pbs.org; 800/424-7963)

Documentary about the mythologizing of Tibet by westerners and recent Hollywood fascination with Tibet and its effect on politics within Tibet and internationally. Web site with extended interviews and information accompanies this video (www.pbs.org)

Heart of Tibet: An Intimate Portrait the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Directed by David Chorniack, 1991. VHS, color, Running time 60 minutes.

Introduced by Jimmy Carter, features interviews with Dalai Lama during a visit to Los Angeles to perform the Kalachakra.

The Lost Horizon. Directed by Frank Capra, 1937.

Classic black and white film of about a mythical Shangri-la paradise nestled behind desolate snow covered mountains found by plane-wrecked westerners.

The Original Seven Years in Tibet: The True Saga of 'Kundun' Heinrich Harrer's Remarkable Himalayan Trek. Directed by Hans Nieter, 1957. VHS, color, Running Time 79 minutes.

Fascinating 1957 British documentary featuring Harrer and footage he took in Tibet in the 1940s, including Chinese invasion and flight of the Dalai Lama. Also includes some silly re-enactments that reveal fantasies about Tibet from that time.

Robert A.F. Thurman on Tibet. New York: Mystic Fire Video and Tibet House New York, 1999. VHS, color, Running time about 4 hours. Available from Mystic Fire Video (www.mysticfire.com; 800/292-9001)

Three-part lecture series on Tibetan history, religion, and culture by Robert Thurman, professor of Indo-Tibetan Studies at Columbia University.

Sand Painting: Sacred Art of Tibetan Buddhism, Live from the Asian Art Museum with the Monks of the Namgyal Monastery. Produced by Sheri Brenner, 1991. VHS, color, Running Time: 30 minutes. (Available on loan from the Asian Art Museum, Education Department, 415-581-3663 or resourcecenter@asianart.org)

Watch the sand mandala being made.

Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion. New Yorker Films, 2004, DVD, 104 minutes.

An excellent comprehensive documentary of the recent history of Tibet. Due to some graphic descriptions, this program is recommended for high school students.

Internet Sites

(There are too many to list, just start searching! Here are a few we found useful.)

Lama Arjia Rinpoche's web site (<http://www.arjiagegeen.com/>)

Buddhanet (www.buddhanet.net)

Frontline: Dreams of Tibet (www.pbs.org)

Nova: Lost Treasures of Tibet (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/tibet/>)

Learn about Tibetan imagery and symbolism through the restoration of centuries-old monastery paintings.

Himalayan Art (www.himalayanart.org)

Beautiful website featuring a vast database of Himalayan art works with informative descriptions and search search engine. Great for the serious art history student.

The Government of Tibet in Exile (www.tibet.com)

Exhaustive web site of the Dalai Lama's administration in exile with full texts of official documents, news articles, and information on Tibetan culture.