

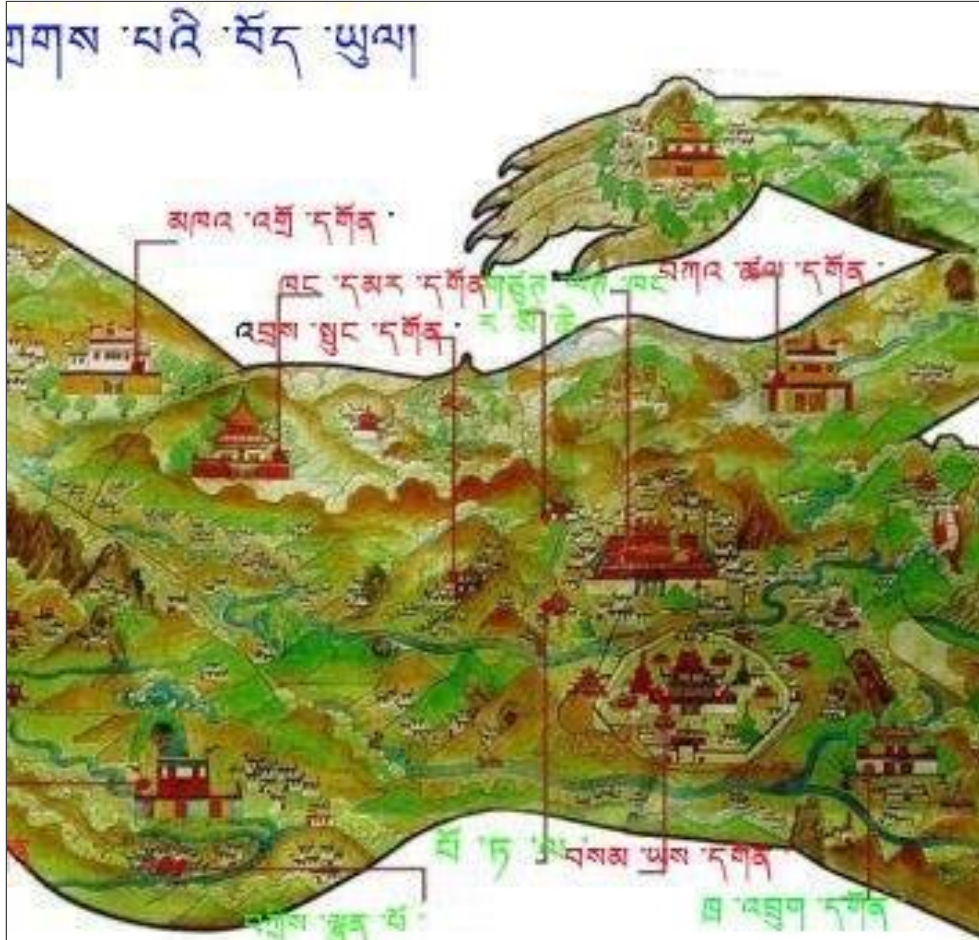
Tibetan Buddhism and the Ecological Self

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The Ecological Self

Some notions of an ecological self that have parallels in Tibetan Buddhist concepts of self are as follows:

The self...

- is part of wider ecological systems.
- is porous and permeable--multiple.
- is a concept that breaks down the distinction between inner and outer worlds.
- is interdependent—relational.
- when conceived of as interdependent leads to compassion.



The Ecological Self is part of wider ecological systems

- This can be related to the Indo-Tibetan cosmology underlying all Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice
- Rebirth, as fundamental to this cosmology, places all life on equal footing.



The Ecological Self is porous and permeable--multiple.

- Buddhist philosophy posits a non-self.
- an idea of the self (or the non-self!) as interdependent with all that exists, circulating in a fluidly interconnected cycle of life is intrinsic to Buddhist thought and teaching.
- The concept of selves, persons having no inherent nature or intrinsic substance lends itself to permeability and the multiplicity of selves across rebirths.



The Ecological Self is a concept that breaks down the distinction between inner and outer worlds.

- Tibetan Tantric Buddhist thought shows the individual mind-body complex as inseparable from all that lives
- All things and events exist in interdependence.
- The way in which this is taken into account in Buddhist Tantric practice is that meditators do not just identify themselves with the deity. They also imaginatively transform their environment into a transfigured universe that represents the world as it is perceived and operated on by that particular divine form.
- This is the tantric maṇḍala.



The Ecological Self is interdependent—relational.

- With the later Buddhism of the Mahāyāna, the Buddhism which spread to Tibet, notions of interdependence were further developed by thinkers such as Nagarjuna (2nd Century CE), whose work is credited with a highly influential philosophical argument that the whole of existence is characterised by Śūnyata (emptiness/voidness/lack of intrinsic existence).
- As can be seen from the image, he taught *nāga* (Tibetan: 'le' - ལེ་ *klu*) along with human students and this was not 'para' normal, but normal within context of Indo-Tibetan understandings of identity and existence.
- Śūnyata is the idea that no phenomena exist as independent realities in their own right – i.e. **nothing exists independently, in and of itself, but only in relation to other things**
- Everything is a conceptual construct, void of any intrinsic existence, only relative to its causes and conditions
- The true nature of phenomena is somewhere between existence and non-existence
- The 'self' is also illusory and impermanent

This perception and experience of self can retrospectively be called ecological.



The Ecological Self, when conceived of as interdependent leads to compassion.

‘May I always be an object of enjoyment
For all sentient beings according to their wish
And without interference, as are the earth,
Water, fire, wind, herbs and wild forests’

Nagarjuna, *The Precious Garland, Buddhist Advice for Living and Liberation*



Buddhism and the Ecological Self in Tibet

- Indigenous religious traditions in Tibet, as far as can be determined from sources, focused around local deities who were embodied in landscape and the ritual specialists who engaged with them in shamanic and animistic ways.
- These perceptions underly an existence that is understood as relational on a Tibetan Buddhist worldview.



Tibetan Indigenous Relationship with the landscape/environment

‘...people, at any rate in earlier times, felt a strong connection, verging on partial identity, with locality, and they felt that they were in a sense out there in the physical landscape as well as within their material bodies, that they were in a sense projections or children of the powers of the landscape.’

(Samuel, *Introducing Tibetan Buddhism*, Taylor and Francis 2012, pp. 190-1)