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Introduction to Indo-Tibetan Cosmology

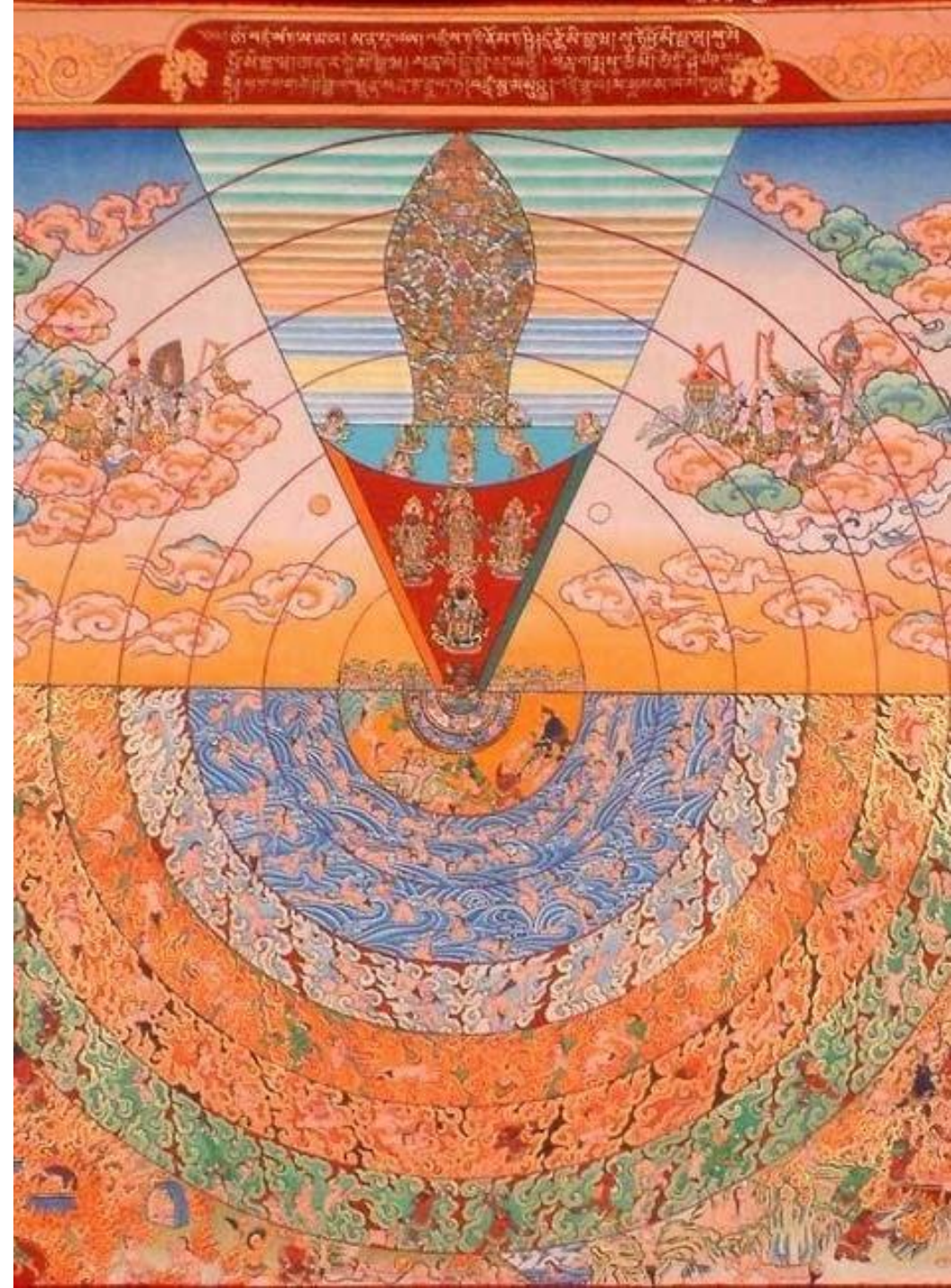
Foundations in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

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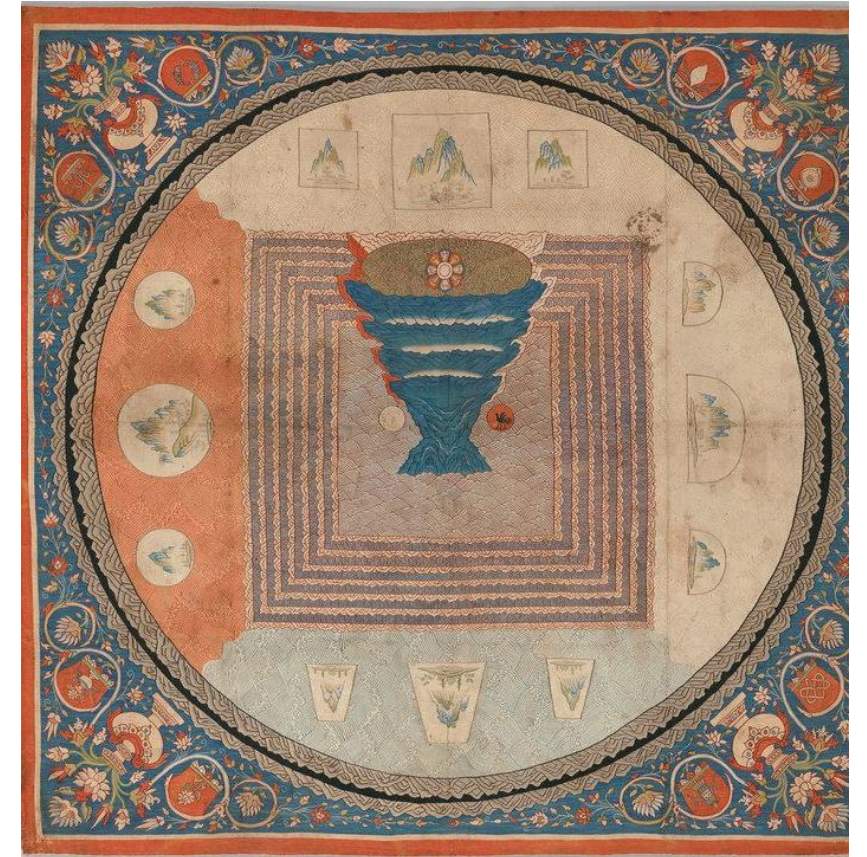
Mount Meru

- Mount Meru is a sacred mountain with five peaks in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist cosmology, considered as the centre of all universes
- Meru (Skt: मेरु), also called Sumeru (Sanskrit) or Sineru (Pāli) to which can be added the approbatory prefix su-, resulting in the meaning "excellent Meru" or "wonderful Meru" and Mahameru i.e. "Great Meru"
- Names in other languages: Tib: རི་རྒྱལ་པོ་རི་རབ་, Rigyalpo
Rirab; Chinese: 須彌山 Xumi Shan; Pāli: Neru;
Burmese: မြင်းမူရ် Myinmo.



Mount Meru in Indian Traditions

- The Suryasiddhanta mentions that Mt. Meru lies in 'the middle of the Earth' ("bhurva-madhyā") in the land of the Jambunad (Jambudvīp).
- Narpatijayacharyā, a ninth-century text, based on mostly unpublished texts of Yāmāl Tantr, mentions "Sumeruḥ Prithvī-madhye shrūyate drishyate na tu" ('Su-meru is heard to be in the middle of the Earth, but is not seen there').
- Vārāhamihira, in his Panchasiddhāntikā, claims Mt. Meru to be at the North Pole (though no mountain exists there).
- Suryasiddhānta, however, mentions a Mt. Meru in the middle of Earth, besides a Sumeru and a Kumeru at both the Poles.
- There exist several versions of Cosmology in existing Hindu texts. In one of them, cosmologically, the Meru mountain was also described as being surrounded by Mandrachala Mountain to the east, Supasarva Mountain to the west, Kumuda Mountain to the north and Kailasha to the south.



Mount Meru in Hindu Traditions

- The Mount Meru of Hindu traditions is described as 84,000 Yojana high (about 1,082,000 km (672,000 mi), which would be 85 times the Earth's diameter), and notes that the Sun along with all the planets in the Solar System revolve around Mt. Meru as one unit.
- One Yojana can be taken to mean about 11.5 km (9 miles) though its magnitude seems to differ over time periods, e.g. the Earth's circumference is 3,200 yojanas according to Vārāhamihira and slightly less so in the Āryabhatīya, but is said to be 5,026.5 yojanas in the Suryasiddhānta. The Matsya Purana and the Bhāgavata Purāṇa along with some other Hindu texts consistently give the height of 84,000 yojanas to Mount Meru which translates into 672,000 miles or 1,082,000 kilometres.
- Mount Meru was said to be the residence of King Padamja, Brahma in antiquity, and is now considered the abode of Lord Brahma and the Demi-Gods (Dev).
- The Puranas and Hindu epics, often state that Surya, i.e. the Sun God, along with all its planets and stars taken together as one unit, circumnavigate Mount Meru every day.
- According to the Epic, Mahabharata, the Pandavas and Draupadi climbed this mountain to attain heaven. Draupadi and the other four Pandavas perished when they were cast off the mountain for wrongdoing. Only Yudhishtira along with his faithful dog climbed the mountain, making him the only one to reach the 'Divine door'.



The Cosmos in Indian Traditions

- "Then was not non-existence nor existence: there was no realm of air, no sky beyond it. What covered in, and where? and what gave shelter? Was water there, unfathomed depth of water? Death was not then, nor was there aught immortal: no sign was there, the day's and night's divider. That One Thing, breathless, breathed by its own nature: apart from it was nothing whatsoever. Darkness there was at first concealed in darkness this. All was indiscriminated chaos. All that existed then was void and form less: by the great power of Warmth was born that Unit. Thereafter rose Desire in the beginning, Desire, the primal seed and germ of Spirit. Sages who searched with their heart's thought discovered the existent's kinship in the non-existent. Transversely was their severing line extended: what was above it then, and what below it? There were begetters, there were mighty forces, free action here and energy up yonder. Who verily knows and who can here declare it, whence it was born and whence comes this creation? The devas are later than this world's production. Who knows then whence it first came into being? He, the first origin of this creation, whether he formed it all or did not form it, Whose eye controls this world in highest heaven, he verily knows it, or perhaps he knows not"

(Rig Veda 10.129.1-7)

Dharma of the four Varna's (Duties of Four Castes)

Castes Using Brain for Occupation



Brahmins

- Priests, Sages, and Spiritual Leaders
- Academicians, Scientists,
- Astrologers, mathematicians

Castes Using Arms for Protection



Kshatriyas

- Emperors, Kings, Rulers
- Generals, Warriors, Soldiers
- Ministers, Administrators

Castes running Economy



Vaishyas

- Merchants, Traders, Shopkeepers
- Bankers, Moneylenders, Accountants
- Doctors, Pharmacists, Perfumist
- Farmers, Oilers, Millers

Castes Using Labor for Occupation



Shudras

- Artisans, Sculpturer, Carpenters
- Hammersmith, Metalworkers
- Construction Workers,
- Farmworkers, Cattle Herders, Milkmen
- Bed Makers, Yarn Makers, Dyers, Printers
- Butchers, Skinners, Shoemakers
- Fishermen, Boatmen. Ship Workers
- Barbers, Domestic Labor, Water Carriers
- Untouchables, sweepers
- Native Hunter, Gatherers

Manu

- The archetypal first man of Hindu mythology, survivor of the great flood and father of the human race.
- Also the legendary author of one of the most famous codes of Hindu religious law, the *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu), composed in Sanskrit and dating in its present form from the 1st century BCE.
- The *Manu-smriti* is a blend of both religious and secular law, and deals with topics such as the sacraments and study of the Vedas (the sacred texts of Hinduism), as well as advice for behaviour, the laws of kings, among other subjects.



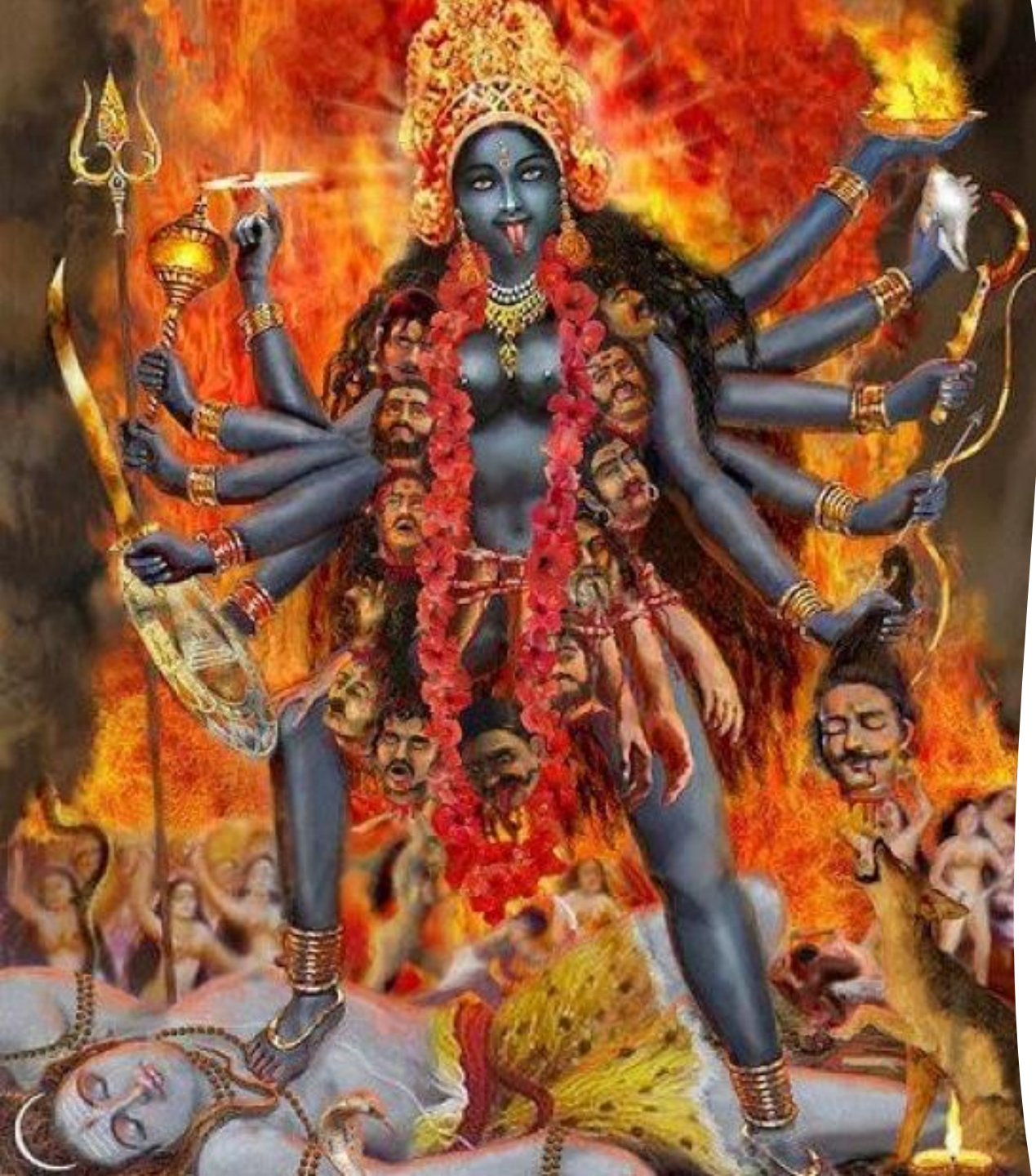
Śiva

- Pan-Hindu deity and there are many Śiva traditions focused on this deity
- his holy seat is Mt. Kailash
- creator and destroyer of worlds
- extends his powers through his divine family
- deity of ambiguity and paradox
- the 'erotic ascetic' (O'Flaherty) - wild-haired ascetic yet simultaneously married householder, husband to Pārvatī and father to sons Gaṇeśa and Skanda



Durgā

- Great pan=Hindu goddess also known as Devī, Sita and Śakti = The great Hindu goddess(es) - expressions of one mahadevī , as portrayed in the Devīmāhātmya (part of the Mārkaṇdeya Purāṇa)
- Great Goddess: prosperous, fierce, passionate, mother, refuge, divine destroyer, benevolent protectress
- Forms: Durgā, Lakṣmī, Amba, Kāli, Pārvatī + many others



Kālī

- The Goddess Kālī – wrathful form of Durgā /Devī, or the Feminine Divine, associated with Tantric practice
- The earliest tantric texts contain mention of Kālī (approx. 7/8th Century)
- The Jayarathayāmala describes forms of Kālī as transcending and superior to male gods such as Śiva, on whose corpse she is depicted as standing.
- Esoteric traditions identify Kālī with states of consciousness connected with the manifestation of the universe and, as with Śiva, there are cremation ground tantric practices associated with Kālī.

Gaṇeśa mūrti drinking milk, Sept. 21st 1995

- Gaṇeśa created by goddess Pārvatī as her son, to protect her as she bathed
- Her husband the lord Śiva cut off his head when he didn't allow entry to the bedchamber, not realising Gaṇeśa was his son
- Seeing grief of Pārvatī, Śiva agreed to repair Gaṇeśa with the head of the first animal which appeared
- this was an elephant
- the deity is known for removal of devotees' obstacles



<https://youtu.be/2MG64rk6qkg>

(4.25 mins)

<https://youtu.be/7sdYIRBISmU>

(Similar milk-drinking from a Śiva mūrti – 1.39 mins)



Radha Krishna Bharadwaj
(temple pandit)

<https://youtu.be/2MG64rk6qkg>



Indo-Tibetan Buddhism

Merging many of the Indian cosmological elements with which Buddhism was framed with indigenous Tibetan worldviews and cultural heritage...



Mount Meru in Buddhist Traditions

- According to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* (philosophical writings), Sumeru is 80,000 *yojanas* tall. The exact measure of one *yojana* is uncertain, but some accounts put it at about 24,000 feet, or approximately 4.5 miles, but other accounts put it between 7–9 miles. It also descends beneath the surface of the surrounding waters to a depth of 80,000 *yojanas*, being founded upon the basal layer of Earth. Sumeru is often used as a simile for both size and stability in Buddhist texts.
- Sumeru is said to be shaped like an hourglass, with a top and base of 80,000 *yojanas* square, but narrowing in the middle (at a height of 40,000 *yojanas*) to 20,000 *yojanas* square.
- Sumeru is the polar centre of a mandala-like complex of seas and mountains. The square base of Sumeru is surrounded by a square moat-like ocean, which is in turn surrounded by a ring (noted as square in shape) wall of mountains, which is in turn surrounded by a sea, each diminishing in width and height from the one closer to Sumeru. There are seven seas and seven surrounding mountain-walls, until one comes to the vast outer sea which forms most of the surface of the world, in which the known continents are merely small islands. The known world, which is on the continent of Jambudvīpa, is directly south of Sumeru.

Mount Meru in Buddhist Traditions

- The dimensions stated in the Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam are as follows...
- The 80,000 yojana square top of Sumeru constitutes the Trāyastriṃśa "heaven" (Devaloka), which is the highest plane in direct physical contact with the Earth. The next 40,000 yojanas below this heaven consist of a sheer precipice, narrowing like an inverted mountain until it is 20,000 yojanas square at a height of 40,000 yojanas above the sea.
- From this point Sumeru expands again, going down in four terraced ledges, each broader than the one above. The first terrace constitutes the "heaven" of the Four Great Kings and is divided into four parts, facing north, south, east and west. Each section is governed by one of the Four Great Kings, who face outward toward the quarter of the world that they supervise.
- 40,000 yojanas is also the height at which the Sun and Moon circle Sumeru in a clockwise direction. This rotation explains the change from day to night; when the Sun is north of Sumeru, the shadow of the mountain is cast over the continent of Jambudvīpa, and it is night in that location; at the same time it is noon in the opposing northern continent of Uttarakuru, dawn in the eastern continent of Pūrvavideha, and dusk in the western continent of Aparagodānīya. Half a day later, when the Sun has moved to the south, it is noon in Jambudvīpa, dusk in Pūrvavideha, dawn in Aparagodānīya, and midnight in Uttarakuru.
- The next three terraces down the slopes of Sumeru are each longer and broader by a factor of two. They contain the followers of the Four Great Kings, namely nāgas, yakṣas, gandharvas, and kumbhāṇḍas.
- Below Sumeru, in the sea surrounding it is the abode of the Asuras who are at war with the Trāyastriṃśa gods.



Tibetan Buddhist Image of the Bhavacakra



Tantric Cosmology - deities of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Cosmos

- In Buddhist Tantric practice meditators identify themselves with deity forms
- The inner and outer worlds are transformed through the correspondence of the inner zodiac with the outer – employing breathing techniques (yogic breathing) to align the subtle body's winds and breaths with deity
- The goal of tantra is to transform the environment into a transfigured universe that represents the world as it is perceived and operated on by that of the particular divine form evoked in meditation
- This is the tantric maṇḍala—the enlightened universe or natural world



Summary - Tantra

- **Tantra** = term for a wide range of esoteric practices known to have been in existence since early first century CE and spanning a wide range of religious traditions in Asian regions
- For Tibetan Buddhists, there are four main schools of tantric practice, all having their own textual traditions
- Tantra is central to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism and its practice is thought to usually require many lifetimes to perfect
- Tibetan Buddhist Tantric practice uses and draws on Buddhist philosophy, and ritual practices: deity yoga—visualisation, mantra and invocations

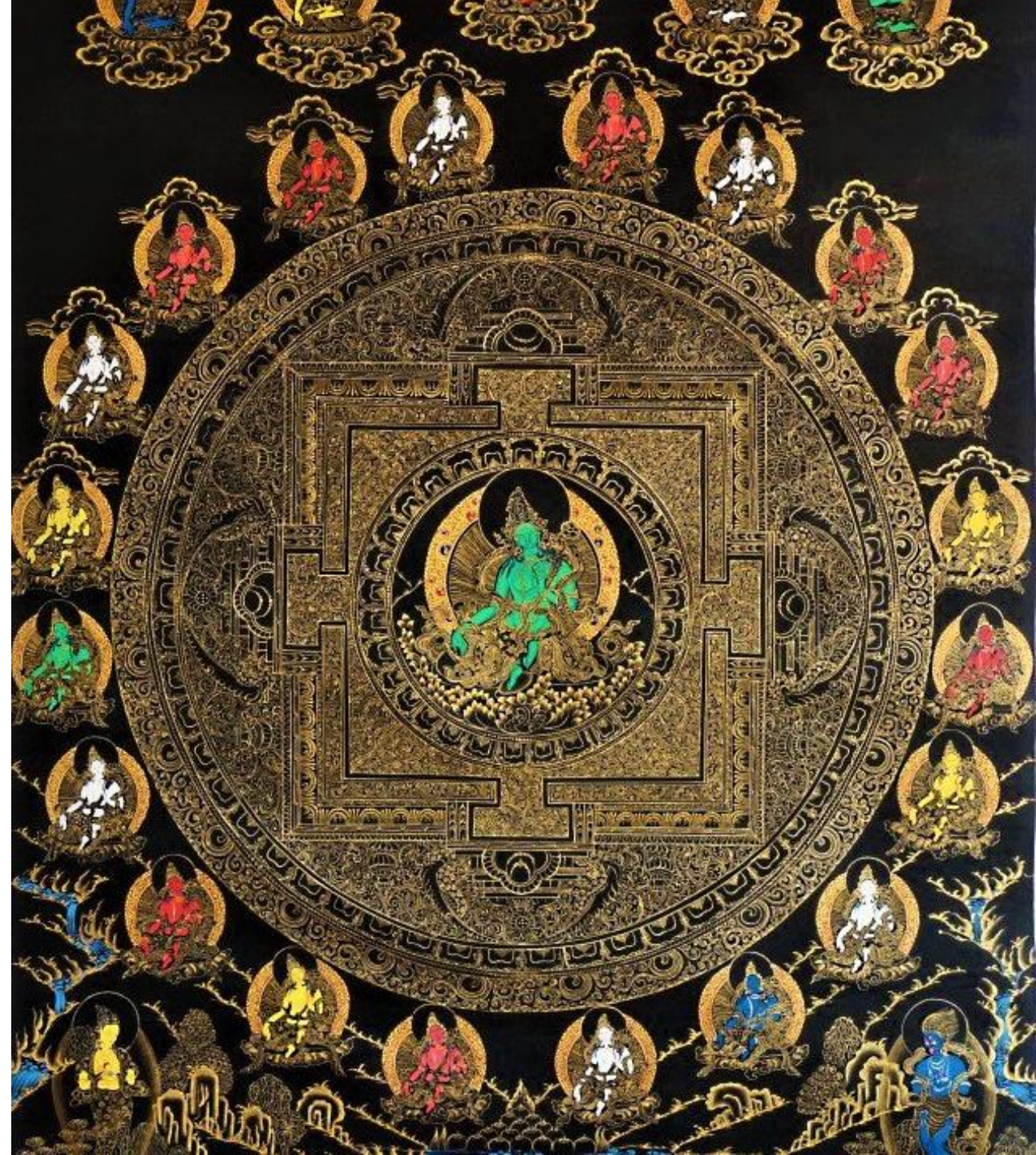


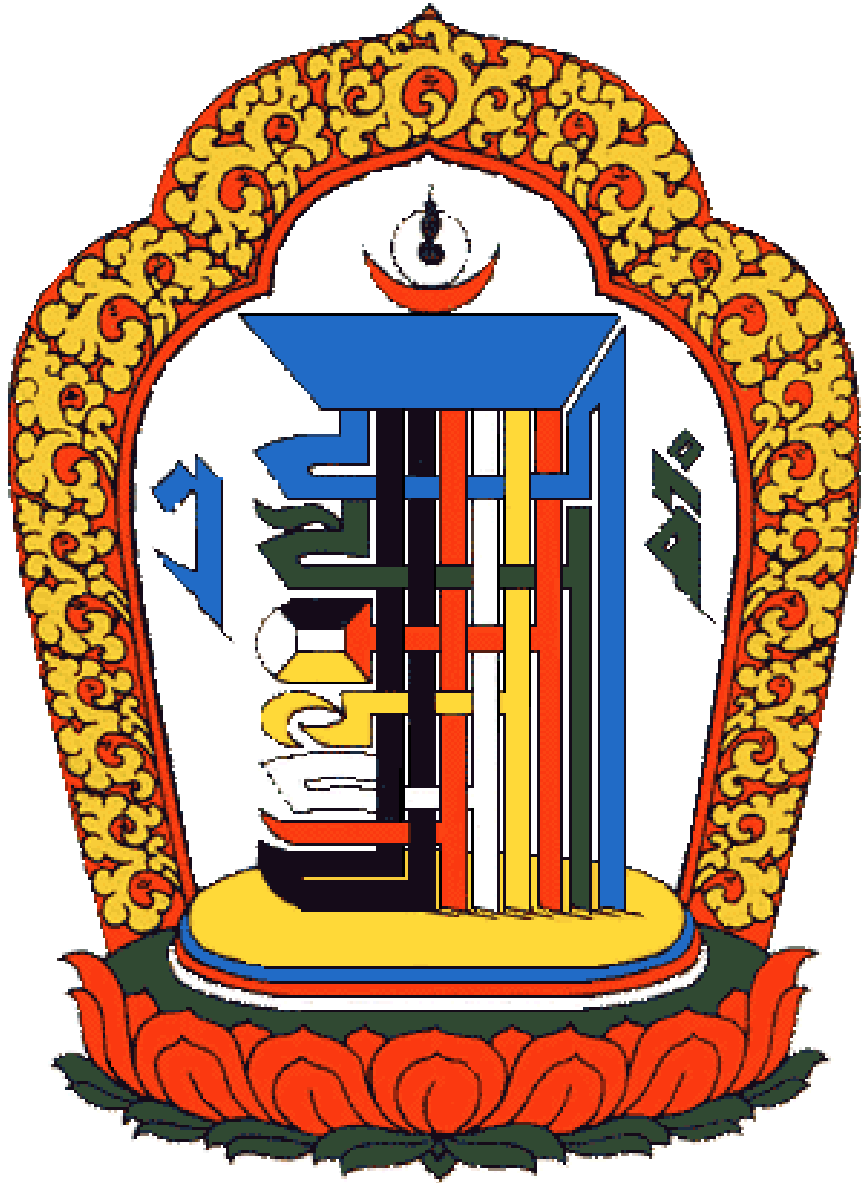
Avalokitesvāra

- One of the most well-known Tibetan Buddhist symbols and popular deities is the 1000-armed 'Avalokiteshvara' (Chenrezig), the bodhisattva of compassion and patron deity of Tibet, who represents the pure power of Enlightened Energy. The thousand-armed Chenrezig has 11 faces and 1000 arms. His Eleven faces are each in their own colour: 4 faces are red, 3 white, 3 green, and 1 black.
- Avalokitesvara, 'One Who Looks With Unwavering Eye' is the most revered Bodhisattvas, represents all Buddha's infinite compassion. His first two hands are joined holding the 'wish-fulfilling jewel'. The second right arm holds the crystal beads(rosary), his second left arm holds golden lotus with stem, his third right and left arm each holds mudra of supreme giving and empowerment vase respectively. He holds wheel of knowledge in his fourth right arm while holding a bow and arrow in his fourth left arm. These implements combined include the 8 principal arms of 1000 armed Chenrezig.
- He is considered to be the paternal ancestor of the Tibetans—giving birth to the race when incarnated as a monastic monkey who gave up his vows for a demoness. He later incarnated as the Tibetan king, Songtsen Gampo who, along with his companion queens, founded the first Tibetan empire. All the Dalai Lamas are considered incarnations of this protector deity of compassion.

Tibetan Deity Yoga: Core Aspects and Process

- Initiatory lineage – coded texts (tantra)
- Purification
- Imagination – Visualisation
- Macro/micro correspondence
- Mandala cosmos
- Union with the divine





Kālacakra

- Deity from the later Buddhist tantric tradition
- The name of this deity means 'Wheel of Time'
- An astrological tradition connected to this deity practice is in practice today across Tibetan cultural regions
- This symbol, using syllables from the core mantra of the deity is said to be highly auspicious and often used as an amulet or protection in temples etc.

The Cosmology of the Kālacakra

- The last Buddhist tantra (c. early 11th century) represents a development of earlier tantric materials and cosmology – said to be taught by the Eighth King of Śambhala
- The ‘outer Kālacakra’ (first of the tantra’s five sections) describes the ‘world systems’, extensively treating cosmological and astronomical topics
- The ‘inner Kālacakra’ (second of the tantra’s five sections) contains detail of the individual, including embryology, abhidharma categories (epistemology) and detail of the cakras and channels of the body, related back to the maṇḍala





‘Lha-gyal-lo- Victory to the gods’