

Arts of Asia Lecture Series Spring 2012

The Arts of South Asia & the Himalayas: The Sacred & the Secular

Sponsored by The Society for Asian Art

Vajra Visions: Decoding the Esoteric Art of the Himalayas

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Preliminary Advice

- Remember the *abhaya-mudra!*
- This Study Sheet mirrors the talk *Lightning Lineages* directly
- The terms refer to and mutually reinforce each other
- So go through the list in order
- And don't try to memorize the terms
- Instead, just take note of the terms as they appear during the course of our discussion
- Then, when the powerpoint is posted, you can access the images to which each term refers
- That way, the terms become signposts in a story rather than obstacles to be memorized.

Vocabulary List

Jokhang: First Buddhist temple in Tibet and oldest wood building in the world; built 639 by Songtsen Gampo

Jowo Shakyamuni: Oldest and holiest sculpture in Tibet; installed at the Jokhang by Songtsen Gampo

Songtsen Gampo: Tibetan king who established the Empire; built the Jokhang at Lhasa

Samye: Mandala-shaped temple built by Trisong Detsen to transform his realm into a vajra-dhatu

Trisong Detsen: Tibetan king who re-established the Empire; built the Samye temple

Odantapuri: Indian model for Trisong Detsen's Samye temple

Vajradhatu: the 'realm of Vajras,' a fractal region in politics and art that is 'vajras all the way down'

Padmasambhava: Indian magician who tamed the native goddesses of Tibet to allow Samye to be built

Drakpochey: Fierce form of Padmasambhava

Shakti: Sanskrit for 'power'; Shiva's female counterpart

Prajna: Wisdom; female counterparts of Buddhist deities

Mudra: Seal; female counterpart

Mahisha: Buffalo demon; pan-Indian symbol of death

Durga: Fierce, multi-armed form taken by the Hindu Goddess to achieve what is otherwise impossible

Ardhanarishvara: Male and female fused in this form of Shiva

Narasimha: This manifestation of Vishnu achieves the impossible by working solely in the twilight zone

Kapala: the skull-cup in which the five senses or five poisons are distilled into the nectar of immortality

Yab-Yum: Male/female depicted in sexual union

Chakrasamvara: 'bliss wheel controller,' fierce meditation Buddha

Bhairava: 'the fearsome,' form of Shiva subjugated by Chakrasamvara at Kailasa

Tholing: West Tibetan capital where Rinchen Zangpo and Atisha meet

Atisha: Bengali master who studied 12 years in Srivijaya, Sumatra and sparked Wave Two Buddhism in Tibet; asked by Jangchub Od of Guge in West Tibet to rebuild Buddhist lineages in Tibet

Rinchen Zangpo: West Tibetan master who studied at Vikramashila; commissioned by Yeshe Od of Guge in West Tibet to retrieve Buddhist artists from Kashmir

Tabo: 3D Vajradhatu Mandala established by Rinchen Zangpo in West Tibet

Bakhtiyar Khilji: General who destroyed Nalanda, perhaps thinking it was a fort, in 1203

Sharri: Tibetan word for "Eastern style," i.e. east Indian or Pala style. Prominent during period prior to 1203.

Beri: Tibetan word for "Nepalese style," prominent after 1203 especially in Sakya lineage art

Khubilai Khan: Mongol ruler who became the student of the Sakya lama Phakpa

Phakpa: Sakya lama who became preceptor of Khubilai Khan and ruled in his name

Mahakala: The fierce deity that Phakpa used to help Khubilai Khan magically defeat his enemies

Karma Pakshi: Kagyu order monk who also met with Khubilai Khan

Yongle: Ming Dynasty emperor of China who sought to establish a relationship with Tsongkhapa

Tsongkhapa: Founder of the Gelug order of Tibetan Buddhism, the lineage of the Dalai Lamas

Vajrabhairava: the "terrifier of death" who scares death to death by showing him his own reflection