

THE RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL
SIGNIFICANCE OF CHENREZIG
IN VAJRĀYANA BUDDHISM –
A Study of Select Tibetan *Thangkas*

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of *thangkas* has earned itself the merit of pioneering Tibetan art in the 21st century. The purpose behind the effulgent images is not to simply lure worshippers with their exuberant colours and designs; it also follows an intricate system of iconometric and iconologic principles in order to beseech the benefaction of a particular deity. As a result, a *thangka* is worshipped as a didactic ‘visual aid’ for Tibetan Buddhist religious practices. Tracing the origin of the artistic and socio-cultural practices behind a *thangka* recreates a texture of Central Asian and Indian influences. The origin of ceremonial banners used all across Central Asia depicts a similar practice and philosophy. Yet, a close affinity can also be traced to the Indian art of *paṭa* painting, which was still prevalent around the eastern province of India around the Pala period.¹⁾

This present paper discusses the tradition of *thangka* painting as a medium for visualisation and a means to meditate upon the principal deity. The word *thangka* is a compound of two words – *than*, which is a flat surface and *gka*, which means a painting. Thus, a *thangka* represents a painting on a flat sur-

¹⁾ Tucci (1999: 271) “*Paṭa*, *maṇḍala* and painted representation of the lives of the saints, for the use of storytellers and of guides to holy places, are the threefold origin of Tibetan *tankas*”.

face with a ceremonial or religious purpose. The apotropaic formula behind it lies between the practitioner and his painting. Giuseppe Tucci recalls it as *mthong gro*²⁾ or mental and spiritual liberation (through the sight of the deity) which can also be seen as an ‘intermediary between man and divinity.’³⁾ It is also observed that not only does a *thangka* transform into a visual apparatus but also animates into a spiritual understanding between the deity and the practitioner. The practice based on visualisation or *sgrub thabs* in Tibetan Buddhism is conducive to the emergence of Tantric Buddhist practices from the 8th century ce, with the coming of Guru Padmasambhava and his tantric teachings from India.

To analyse the visual trope of a *thangka*, the deified representation of Buddha, bodhisattvas and other gods and goddesses alludes to *pratibhāsa* or appearance as a conscious cognitive principle. As ascribed in texts like *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, before an image can be constructed, the artist goes through a purification ritual by the recitation/chanting of mantras or prayers in order to enter a meditative cycle until the deity emerges as a physical-psychological manifestation.⁴⁾ The creation of the worldly or living order of the cosmic balance in the visual form is thus represented or reproduced in the painting ‘as a ritual act.’⁵⁾

While understanding the nuances of rituals and visualisation through a painted form, this paper will also discuss the sacerdotal aspect of Avalokiteśvara or Chenrezig, the bodhisattva or changchubsempa of compassion, also venerated as the patron deity of Tibet. He is ‘revered as an embodiment of pure and absolute compassion for all sentient beings and eternal devotion to their liberation from suffering.’⁶⁾ In Tibetan, the word Chenrezig has an honorific meaning and is the translation of the Sanskrit word Avalokitasvara, wherein *avalokita* is the one who looks in all directions and *svara* is the intermittent sound for help intercepted by the bodhisattva.

²⁾ Tucci (1999: 287).

³⁾ Pal (1996: 183).

⁴⁾ Wallis (2002).

Although, this notion is highly debatable in the modern day context of *thangka* making. The religious and artistic context of recreating a sacred environment has been modified by Tibetan artists in today’s context. The ritualistic paradigm set by monks previously (who were also adept painters) has now been re-established within workshops/studios by modern day *thangka* artists worldwide.

⁵⁾ Bernstorff (2003: 306).

⁶⁾ Huntington, Bangdel, Thurman (2004: 180).

Lokesh Chandra has further discussed this development or rather the canonical shift, from 'Avalokitasvara' to 'Avalokiteśvara' by assessing various Indian and Chinese sources.⁷⁾

BRIEF HISTORIOGRAPHY

Through an exegetical survey of the cult of Avalokiteśvara we find its earliest mention in the text *Mahāvastu*⁸⁾ (3rd century bce), wherein he is the bodhisattva who is meant to overlook (*avalokita*) for the sake of instructing and for the general well-being of the people.⁹⁾ However, a substantial and more individualistic side of Avalokiteśvara emerged in the *Amitāyus Sūtra* of the *Sukhāvatī Vyūha Sūtra* (dated to 100 ce approximately). In the text, Śākyamuni Buddha, while preaching to Ananda, exalts Avalokiteśvara and his bodhisattva-hood. 'The light of a bodhisattva shines a hundred *yojanas*. There are two bodhisattvas who are the most dignified; their majestic light shines everywhere in the universe of a thousand million worlds.' Ananda asked, 'What are the names of those two bodhisattvas?' The Buddha replied, 'One is called Avalokiteśvara and the other, Mahāsthāmaprāpta.'¹⁰⁾

In the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* (dated to 1st-2nd century ce) the twenty-fourth chapter in Sanskrit and twenty-fifth chapter in the Chinese translation, dedicated to the deification of Avalokiteśvara, refer to him as *Lokeśvararāja-nayaka* (one whose master is *Lokeśvararāja* or Amitābha Buddha) and *Samantamukha* (looking in every direction).¹¹⁾ 'This sutra is called the Sutraraaja. Those who write it themselves will obtain the heavens of the thirty-three gods and be waited upon by 84,000 *apsaras*.'¹²⁾ Such is the merit associated for worshipping the *sūtra* and the bodhisattva.

In the *Kāraṇḍa Vyūha Sūtra* (dated to 4th century ce), Avalokiteśvara is hailed as *Arya Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Mahāsattva* as he enters the *avīci*

⁷⁾ Chandra (1988: 18-23). In fact, Lokesh Chandra has presented an interesting analogy with the Indian and Chinese terms i.e. Avalokiteśvara and Kuan Shih Yin, which is also enumerated by Anupa Pande. See, Pande (2004).

⁸⁾ Jones (1949).

⁹⁾ Pas (1995: 346, notes.10); Bhattacharya (1958: 143).

¹⁰⁾ Inagaki (2015: 24). accessed on 22 June 2015 http://www.purelandbuddhism.com/Infinite_life_sutra.pdf.

¹¹⁾ Vaidya (1960); Kern (1963,1968).

¹²⁾ Pande (2004: 10).

hell. He is also represented on a par with Bodhisattva Samantabhadra and also referred to as an emanation of Adi Buddha or the primordial Buddha.¹³⁾ One also finds a mention of him subduing the Hindu god, Śiva, establishing a hierarchical subordination between the two religious sects in a rather inclusivist approach.¹⁴⁾

Just like the thirty-three manifestations of Avalokiteśvara in the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, the *Sādhanamālā* (compiled roughly between 5th–11th century CE) describes fifteen different aspects of Avalokiteśvara in thirty-one *sādhanas* or prayers.¹⁵⁾ The creation of Avalokiteśvara or Chenrezig, through his spiritual father, Amitābha, is later propounded in *Mani Kabum*, a seminal Tibetan text written by King Songsan Gampo in 7th century ce. It recalls the creation legend of how the patron deity of Tibet was formed out of a meditative ray of light from the head of the *dhyani* Buddha, Amitābha.

CHENREZIG – THE QUINTESSENTIAL *CHANGCHUB SEMPA*

Of the myriad forms of Chenrezig, this paper will present a comparative and iconographic case study of his four specific forms culturally significant in Tibetan Buddhism. These are – *Ekadaśamukha* Avalokiteśvara or eleven headed Avalokiteśvara, *Ṣaḍakṣarī* Avalokiteśvara or the Six-Syllabled Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi or a wrathful emanation of Avalokiteśvara and lastly *Rakta* Avalokiteśvara or Red Avalokiteśvara.¹⁶⁾

EKADAŚAMUKHA AVALOKITEŚVARA

The eleven-headed form of Chenrezig is also known as Arya Avalokiteśvara. In a long prayer dedicated to *Arya Avalokiteśvara Ekadaśamukha*, Chenrezig is venerated as *namo avalokite/ mahā sattvāya/ mahā karuṇikāya*. According to *Mani Kabum*, a popular legend for this inherent deification of the multi-headed Avalokiteśvara alludes to how the bodhisattva's head broke into ten pieces when he looked at the sorrow, dismay and evil in the world. Since

¹³⁾ Studholme (2002).

¹⁴⁾ Williams, Tribe (2000).

¹⁵⁾ Bhattacharya (1958).

¹⁶⁾ The various museum collections studied for this paper include National Museum, New Delhi, India; Hermitage Museum and State Museum, Saint Petersburg, Russia and Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, USA.

Avalokiteśvara is an emanation of Amitābha Buddha, his broken heads are placed together by Amitābha Buddha, his spiritual father, by assembling the broken pieces and re-shaping it as a new face.¹⁷⁾ Each level of the three heads indicates that the Ekadaśa is looking at three worlds, the world of desire (*kāmadhātu*), the world of living forms (*rūpadhātu*) and the world without form (*arūpadhātu*); overlooked by Amitābha Buddha himself. The twenty-fourth chapter of *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra* recalls him as *samantamukha* or facing all four directions. This also symbolises Avalokiteśvara's limitless capacity to perceive suffering and to help all beings.

Fig. 1: He is shown seated on a lotus throne with eight hands and eleven heads and a prominent third eye on every tier of heads. His two main hands are folded together in salutation. The remaining six arms are each shown holding standardised attributes. On the right side, he holds a wish-fulfilling jewel, a rosary and he makes *varada mudrā* or boon granting gesture, whereas on the left side, he is holding a bow and arrow, a water pot for ambrosia and making a *vitarka mudrā* or gesture or preaching. The tiered setting of the head is stylistically closer to the *sahasrabhuja-sahasracakṣu* or 1000-armed and 1000-eyed Avalokiteśvara invariably seen in Tibet, China, Japan and Southeast Asia. The eleven heads rise upward in progressive manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, leading up to the fearsome face of a protector deity and, finally, the beatific head of the eternal Buddha, Amitābha.

In the painting, he is surrounded by attendant figures in a typical Newari medium of placing subsidiary forms around the central figure in a compartmentalised manner. On the top register, a row of the five *dhyani* Buddhas in their elemental colours, making their characteristic *mudrās*, are seated for benediction of the bodhisattva.¹⁸⁾ Aesthetically, the *sambhogakāya* or celestial form of the eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara is rendered in the Pala idiom of swaying, rhythmic form. He is envisioned with rich ornamentation of the pronged crown, prominent roundels in the ears, gold bracelets, armbands, string of necklaces, a sacred thread etc. To visually enhance the painting, the artist has also coloured the palms of Avalokiteśvara's hands with *altā* or red water based paint, a practice that is still prevalent in Nepal. With regards to scale, the Bodhisattva is in hieratic injunction with the elaborate shrine. A rich

¹⁷⁾ Chandra (1996: 90–93); Getty (1914).

¹⁸⁾ “The tankas evoke the miracle of the Buddha's preaching and epiphany, and for this reason the gods are represented as if repeating their act of homage.” Tucci (1999: 306).

and ornamental throne with a variety of animal and anthropomorphic motifs can also judge the celestial aspect of *Ekadaśamukha* Avalokiteśvara.

Fig. 2: In a 13th century *thangka* of *Ekadaśamukha* Avalokiteśvara from Khara-Khoto in the Hermitage Museum collection, the iconographic attributes have been exchanged between the right and the left hand sides. An additive of flaming lotus bud has been placed in the upper left arm in place of the rosary. He is shown wearing a deerskin, a reminder of his ascetic nature and the sacred thread. In Nepal, India and China, Avalokiteśvara is paired with two attendants, who are usually Hayagrīva (horse-headed and at times seen in human form) on the right hand side and the youthful figure of Sudhanakumāra on the left. In the Khara Khoto *thangka*, Sudhana is on the right and another male companion is seen on the left.

As mentioned in the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* and the *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*, Sudhana is represented as an acolyte of Avalokiteśvara and in China he is often paired with a nāgakanyā or a dragon girl. Sudhana is then represented in red (symbolic of his unenlightened state) and the dragon girl is depicted in white, but here she is missing. The *Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*, the last chapter of the *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* (written in the 4th century ce), was translated in the later half of the 5th century by a Chinese monk named Bodhi Bhadra and is widely read in China, Japan and in Southeast-Asia until today. According to the text, in his quest for enlightenment, Sudhana reaches Mount Potalaka, Avalokiteśvara's paradise, where he meets the Bodhisattva (the 28th enlightened being among a list of 53 *kalyānamitras* or loyal friends encountered by Sudhana) in order to learn the ways of enlightenment.

As opposed to the glaring red of the Newari style, the handling of the brush and the colour palette is rather soft and more poetic in form. The facial features are distinctly Indian, as is the black *dhotī* along with jewellery and other paraphernalia adorning the central deity and the attendant figures. The treatment of the hair, cascading down softly from the shoulders to the bare arms compliments the smooth and plastic modelling of the limbs.

Fig. 3: The standing form of *Ekadaśamukha* Avalokiteśvara from the reserve collection of the National Museum¹⁹⁾, New Delhi (dating to 18th–20th century ce) iconographically represents him standing on a lotus making *añjali mudrā*. He is holding a rosary in his top right hand, with a *dharmacakra* or wheel of law, and with the third right hand, he performs *varada mudrā* or the

¹⁹⁾ National Museum collection of Tibetan *thangkas* discussed for this paper is in the reserve collection and at present it is under the curatorship of Dr. V.K Mathur.

boon granting gesture. His left hands hold the stem of a white lotus, a water pot with ambrosia and a bow and an arrow. The heads are arranged in a set of five tiers, three heads on three levels from below. On the fourth register is a fearful emanation of Avalokiteśvara himself. Crowning the whole structure is the red-faced Amitābha Buddhā.²⁰⁾ The escalating view of the heads from the base to the top is marked by the brilliance of half-blown lotus buds around his nimbus as a crowning glory to Avalokiteśvara. Every head is adorned with three pronged diadems and prominent roundels in their ears. His body is bejewelled befitting his bodhisattva-hood.

The placement of arms joined at the shoulder indicates a Kashmiri influence that travelled to western Tibet from Alchi and other monasteries around Ladakh during the second transmission of Buddhism in Tibet, especially from the 10th to 12th century ce. The artist has paid attention to the placement of heads and on the upper body proportions of broad shoulders and well fanned-out arms on either side. Although the heads and the main figure are rendered with apt iconography, the drawing is somewhat rudimentary.

Avalokiteśvara stands frontal, with short stumpy legs and a thin waist. He wears a long *dhotī* covering his legs and a patterned short one on top tied in an Indian style, held together by a golden girdle. A green scarf with a golden rim drapes around his shoulders, arms, and knees and finally falls in winding curves on either side. His face is peaceful and alert, gentle and serene with a slight hint of a smile. The tiered faces are rendered in a soft supple manner with heavy lidded eyes casted downwards in meditative contemplation.

ṢADAKṢARĪ AVALOKITEŚVARA

Ṣadakṣarī Avalokiteśvara is also known as the lord of six-syllabled mantra or *Spyan-rasgzigs Phyag-bzhi pa* in Tibetan. As mentioned in *Kāraṇḍa Vyūha* and in the sixth *sādhana* of *Sāadhanmālā*, this form of Avalokiteśvara is a ritual manifestation and deification of the seed syllable, *oṃ maṇipadma hūṃ*²¹⁾ or praise to the jewel in the lotus. In fact, Tibetans believe the Dalai Lamas to be a manifestation of this form of Chenrezig.

Fig. 4: Iconographically, *Ṣadakṣarī* Avalokiteśvara is white in colour, four-armed, holding a lotus in the left hand and a rosary in the right. The other two hands are folded together in *añjali mudrā*. He is attended by two acolytes:

²⁰⁾ Pal (1983: 175).

²¹⁾ Landaw, Weber (2006: 55–57).

Mañidhara on the right – the iconic manifestation of the wish fulfilling *mañi* or gem and the female figure to the left is Śadaḥṣarī mahāvīdyā – the manifestation of supreme knowledge, also known as the mother of six-syllables, in white.²²⁾ On the top register we see the *Dhyani* Buddhas making different *mudrās*.

Below the lotus throne, the space is neatly divided in two tiers. The upper tier is a stylised lotus pond, with celestial beings teeming with animate flora and fauna. The bottom tier represents the world of the guardian deities. In the centre is an emanation of Avalokiteśvara in *lalitāsana* or the posture of royal ease, with attendant figures and wrathful guardian deities. Placed in the similar Newari style, the various other attributes like compartmentalisation, profusion of ornamentation, delineation of forms, attire etc. recalls the aesthetic similitude of the eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara *thangka*.

Fig. 5: A comparative study of the Khara Khoto *thangka* from the State Russian Museum, Saint Petersburg follows similar iconography. He is attended by Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana who represents the pure ideal of disciple-hood in Buddhist art and praxis. A significant iconographic reference, which is missing in the previous *thangka*, is of the seated red figure of Amitābha Buddha on the head of Avalokiteśvara. The bodhisattva sits on an elevated tiered throne, surrounded by a large orange *mandorla* and a rather large blue halo. The six-syllabled Avalokiteśvara is wearing prominent ornaments but without the ostentatious style of the Newari idiom. The sash also, verdant green in colour, adds a rhythm to an otherwise static portraiture. The flesh tone imbued in the Khara-Khoto *thangkas* is more realistic and supple in modelling as compared to the flat, almost pastel, white colour of the Newari style. Further on, there is an attempt towards creating clear space devoid of *horror vacui* of the Newari style.

SRṢṬIKANTHA LOKEŚVARA

Among the various rare manifestation of Avalokiteśvara worshipped in Nepal is (the manifestation of Avalokiteśvara as) Sṛṣṭikantha Lokeśvara or Jig ten wang chug marpo in Tibetan and more commonly known as Red Avalokiteśvara. The earliest reference to this form (of Avalokiteśvara) is first mentioned in the *Kāraṇḍa Vyūha Sūtra*, written between 4th–5th century CE

²²⁾ Bhattacharya (1958: 124–127).

in India. It was later translated into Tibetan around 8th century ce as *Za ma tog bkod bkod pan* by an Indian monk named Jinamitra.

Alexander Studholme mentions in his book the genesis of some of the major gods of Hindu pantheon through Avalokiteśvara. He created the sun and the moon from his eyes, Brahmā from his shoulder, Viṣṇu from his heart, Śiva from his forehead, Sarasvatī from his teeth, Vāyu from his mouth, Pṛthvī from his navel, and Varuṇa from his stomach.²³⁾ Originally, there is a mention of only nine deities for this manifestation, but over time a number of other deities came to be associated with Sṛṣṭikantha Lokeśvara.

Fig. 6: The central image of Avalokiteśvara, generally seen in white, is seen here in a red form as Sṛṣṭikantha Lokeśvara (or the creator lord of the world). He stands on a lotus, making *varada mudrā* (or a boon granting gesture) with his right hand and holding a lotus stalk in his left hand. He wears an antelope skin on his shoulder. On his head, he wears a five pronged crown with an effigy of Amitābha Buddha seated in the centre. A golden-rimmed pink nimbus and an orange body halo surround him. The ornaments adorning his body compliment the delicately incised flowers that decorate the bodhisattva's *dhoti* in minute gold work. A green brocade sash melodiously flows in sinuous curves.

The physical setting of the painting enfolds in a beautifully envisioned fragrant garden of trees in full bloom. Carefully placed outside the aureole of Hindu deities are the Buddhist beneficiary deities and a number of manifestations or various forms of Avalokiteśvara. An important subject of this *thangka* is the visionary moment of creation wherein; Hindu deities are placed on a bed of clouds, being born or emerging out of Sṛṣṭikantha's body. On top of his head is Vajrasattva (the god with the impenetrable essence of a thunderbolt) holding a vajra and a bell. The top register represents various manifestations of Avalokiteśvara with an image of Adi Buddha in the centre.

Emanating around Sṛṣṭikantha Lokeśvara are various Hindu gods and goddesses, as mentioned in *Kāraṇḍa Vyūha Sūtra*, depicted in similar postures in adoration of the central deity. It seems like the iconographic placement of the gods is in disagreement with the textual reference. Some of the prominent gods are, from the right hand side, a white Śiva, who is three-eyed, bearded, adorned with a serpent, crescent moon, and a tiger-skin loincloth, and who holds a *damaru* or a two headed drum and trident in hands. Below him is

²³⁾ Studholme (2002: 39–40).

a four-armed form of the white Moon-god, Candra, followed by Vāyu (in green) holding his attribute, a banner. A four-faced Brahmā is also easily visible on the right. Close to Sṛṣṭikantha Lokeśvara's feet are, Vaiśravaṇa, guardian deity of north with an umbrella as his iconographic attribute.

On the left hand side, the red Sun-god, Āditya is shown in similar posture like that of the moon god. He is accompanied by the white river goddess Sarasvatī holding a crystal rosary. Close to Sṛṣṭikantha Lokeśvara's torso, is Viṣṇu, with a crown of serpent heads. Directly below him is the red fire-god, Agni, with his attributes of a fire-oblation ladle. He is followed by Virupākṣa, the guardian deity of the west direction holding a stūpa and finally the white water-god and serpent-king (*nāgarāja*), Varuṇa. It is proposed that further study in identifying the iconographic details of this form of Avalokiteśvara might reveal more insight into this genre of *thangka*.

At the bottom level, on either side, are White and Green forms of Tara, and are considered to be the emanations and consorts of Avalokiteśvara. They are followed by guardian deities of the realm. These are from right to left, an esoteric form of a six-armed Gaṇeśa and Uṣṇīṣavijaya, goddess of longevity and prosperity, and a wrathful form of Mahākāla, a protector deity in Tibetan Buddhism. On either side of the lower register are two donor families seated under canopy, they are distinctively wearing traditional Newari and Tibetan dresses raising questions about the mixed patronage of this *thangka*.

VAJRAPĀṆI

To observe the multi-faceted forms of Avalokiteśvara, it is imperative to study not only the compassionate and benign forms of Chenrezig but also to analyse the wrathful emanation of Chenrezig in Tibetan Buddhism. Apart from his various hybrid forms or manifestations, the wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara as Vajrapāṇi in Tibetan Art presents a striking case of dual forces. In Tibet, when seen in a wrathful form, Chenrezig transforms into a fierce emanation of Vajrapāṇi who is invoked to remove obstacles and guard against any evil. The epitome of beauty and aesthetics as seen at Ajanta during the Gupta period in the murals of Vajrapāṇi and Padmapāṇi at Cave no 1 underwent a gradual apotheosis during the Pala period and later in Tibetan art wherein he is venerated as a wrathful emanation of a compassionate Chenrezig. Vajrapāṇi then transforms into a deity of fierce determination in the path to realisation.

Fig. 7: The National Museum *thangka*, which is predominantly of Śākyamuni Buddha and his two attendants, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, marks an important juncture for depicting Vajrapāṇi at the bottom centre. In the painting here, he is blue in colour, wears a tiger skin and stands in *ālīḍha* asana or threatening posture, stretching his right hand and wielding a *vajra* or thunderbolt while pointing an index finger with his left hand. He is encircled by a swirling halo of crackling orange fire emanating from his wrathful anger. He is physically guarding the sacred realms of the painting while symbolically protecting the true *dharma*.

Given on the top register is an image of Adibuddha on the right and a monk on the left. Adibuddha is the supreme deity of Vajrayāna Buddhism, the elemental source for the emanation of *dhyani* Buddhas; he is the primal essence of Buddhist faith in Tibet. By that virtue, Chenrezig is an emanation of Adi Buddha, as also mentioned in the *Kāraṇḍa Vyūha Sūtra*. He is deep blue in colour very similar to the eternal, unending sky. As opposed to *thangkas* discussed earlier, there is less distraction of detailing. Gold is scarcely used and applied. Further, a sense of perspective is rendered by dividing the plane into three grounds.

In conclusion, *thangkas* are an important pedagogic tool as it entails a wide variety of stylistic and religious concerns in Tibetan Buddhist practices. The virtue of worshipping Avalokiteśvara in his various manifestations can be manifold but the true ideal of a bodhisattva's *praṇidhāna* is achieved through the cultivation of *upāyakaūśalya* for the wellbeing of others in order to liberate the souls from the karmic cycle of samsaric taint.²⁴⁾ Chenrezig, the quintessential changchub sempa, is a significant deity in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist practices. Beginning from the earliest literary reference to the development of his various iconic forms, Avalokiteśvara as Chenrezig in the Tibetan context has gone through evident diversification with regard to his myriad benevolent and esoteric forms, giving him an equal stature of god-hood in South, Far-east and Southeast Asia.

²⁴⁾ Pande (2014); Snellgrove (1996,2002: 66–76).

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Fig. 1. Ekadaśamukha Avalokiteśvara, Tibet, 11th – 12th century CE, Hermitage Museum, Acc. No. 0006630A2



Fig. 2. Seated
Ekadaśamukha
Avalokiteśvara, Khara-
Khoto, 13th century CE,
Hermitage Museum, 1933



Fig. 3. Standing Ekadaśamukha
Avalokiteśvara, Tibet, 18th–20th
CE, National Museum, New
Delhi, Acc. No.: 48.5/17



Fig. 4. Şadakşarî
Avalokiteśvara, Tibet,
early 12th century CE,
Gifted by John and
Berthe Ford, Walters Art
Museum, USA,
Acc. No: F.120



Fig. 5. Şadakşarî
Avalokiteśvara, Khara-
Khoto, 13th century CE,
State Museum Russia,
Saint Petersburg, 1933



Fig. 6. Rakta Avalokitesvara,
Tibet, 18th–20th CE, National
Museum, New Delhi, Acc. No.:
54.58/35



Fig. 7. Śākyamuni Buddha,
Tibet, 18th–20th century CE,
National Museum, New Delhi,
Acc. No.: 48.5/19