

Buddhism in the himalayas

[Religion](#), [Buddhism](#)



Organized religions have become a part of one's historical and cultural background. The need for political leaders and gurus to gather the people into one unit, for the maintenance of stability, has paved the way for the pursuit of knowledge; leading to the development of numerous philosophical undertakings and spiritual enlightenment. The proliferation of religious missionaries to the designated countries of contact have created and divided communities; cultivating a new set of belief systems and codes to abide by.

At the onset of the spread of major religions like Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, spiritual fermentation took place as socio-political activities merged with the religious practices of the various cultures present in a community. Throughout history, these major religions will struggle to outlive each other as they compete to gain a stronghold of followers for the preservation of their cultural beliefs. For this reason, many minority groups in a community are most likely to have been isolated or persecuted by the ruling culture.

This was the case with Christianity under the Roman Empire, which accounted for the martyrdom of thousands of Christians who fought for their faith (Tignor et al. , 2008). However, during the rule of Constantine in 312 CE, the tables were turned and Christianity was now the flagship of the new Rome. This pivotal event is the key to the expansion of religions to far-reaching territories, as it conveys universal codes that pertain to the human condition.

It is in this sense that the quest for religious ties was crucial to the progress of a community since morality played a big part in the formation of the people's morale. Religion is said to be the cement that binds people together

in any adversity and it is through this viewpoint that cultures grew and developed, as citizens become more aware of their place in the society. The grounds to which religion has shaped a community can be observed in a number of perspectives, particularly in the way artworks are made in a particular area (Tignor et al. , 2008).

Wherever Buddhism spread, it seemed to rely on a necessary set of ingredients that encouraged it to prosper. The Silk Road was said to have advanced the spread of Buddhism in Tibet as the reach of most Indian missionaries in the mountainous regions of the Himalayas have contributed greatly to the foundation of Buddhism as one of the major religions in the world. It became a vehicle for Tibet to engage in trade with other neighboring countries like Nepal, China, Kashmir, Mongolia and Bhutan. Trade did not only consist of goods, but also of people, knowledge and religion.

As a result, Buddhism was integrated into the livelihood of the Himalayan regions (Kapstein, 2000). The Role of Local Kings in Promoting Buddhism The success of the acculturation of Buddhism in Tibet would not be possible without the welcoming arms of most of the rulers in Tibet, starting with Princess Wencheng and Princess Jincheng. Then King Songsten Gampo established cordial relations with China and Nepal by marrying the Princesses of each country, securing the maintenance of harmony with these neighboring states.

Both Princesses introduced the precepts of Buddhism to the King and its followers, which initially helped the expansion of Buddhism in the local communities. It was only under the reign of King Trhi Songdetsen that <https://assignbuster.com/buddhism-in-the-himalayas/>

officially gave the go signal for Buddhism to take root in Tibet as it was legitimized it as the major practicing faith (Kapstein, 2000). The Padhmasambava statue found in the RMA represented the figure that further brought Buddhism to the Himalayas.

Padhmasambava was said to be a guru who was summoned by King Detsan to Tibet in order to broaden the reach of Buddhism in the local communities. During this time, the ministers who adhered to the Bon religious sect disliked the direction in which Buddhism was heading for so the King administered the help of Padhmasambava to deter the growing power of the ministers. Wherever Buddhist missionaries went, chaos was sure to follow. As a result, civil war broke out between the two religious sects and the spread of Buddhism came to a stand still after the assassination of King Detsan.

Under the guidance of the ministers, Lang Dharma took over and a long line of hostilities occurred across the land as persecution of the Buddhist monks and nunneries were carried out, bringing destruction to the initial monasteries built for worship (HAR 65422). Monasteries were a vital component of the Buddhism faith as it not only serves as a refuge for those who practice the faith or are oppressed, it is also the place where important books and records about Buddhism are stored. Destroying such an establishment would disrupt the solemnity of the faith.

This is the reason why so many Indian and Chinese missionaries were needed in Tibet as rebuilding the monasteries was necessary for preservation of Buddhism. Under the reign of Je Tsongkhapa, the Ganden Monastery was erected amidst the chaos that enveloped the warring local communities. The monastery housed many monks and nuns who had been

driven away by the enemies of the Buddhist religion and was described to be one of the grandest monasteries ever built. It also contained an extensive collection of Buddhist teachings and philosophies from famous gurus and translators who have kept the recorded teachings of Buddha (Kapstein, 2000).

As years past, Tibetan and translators and pilgrims decide to take a journey to India, China and Nepal in search for gurus and more teachings that they could bring back to their homeland. This has led to the visitations of different Buddhist missionaries in Tibet; most notable are Atisa, the Indian scholar and the great translators Rinchen Zangpo and Milarepa. The presence of these three missionaries supported the rebirth of Buddhism in the local communities, after its devastated state during the reign of Lang Dharma.

This was said to be the beginning of the evolvement of the Buddhist tradition (Kapstein, 2000). Emergence of a New Buddhist Tradition The Avalokiteshvara Statue and Painting seen in the RMA depicts the evolution of the images that constitute the image of Buddha to the local communities (HAR 65451 & HAR 40). Both of the artworks show the different adaptations made of the image of Buddha to fit the culture of a particular area. For instance, in China, Avalokiteshavara is referred to as Quan Yin while in Tibet he is known as Chenrayzeg.

When Buddhism started its roots in India, it was known as Teravada Buddhism but by the time it has reached East Asia, it had become Mahayana Buddhism which consisted of slightly different set of beliefs yet still rooted in the Indian precept. When this spread into the Himalayas, it became known as Vadayana Buddhism. From this context, one can see that while the <https://assignbuster.com/buddhism-in-the-himalayas/>

teachings and stories about the Buddha are the same in many different regions, it often takes on the aspects of the local culture (Snelling, 1999).

In reference to the Buddha Shakyamuni painting found in the RMA, one can denote that the painting illustrated different sights that foretold stories of Buddha Shakyamuni's life. A part of the painting features people conversing with each other, while the Buddha is seen with a halo-like appearance as he gives lessons to a group of people (HAR 955). Himalayan art often depicts religious stories of tradition by incorporating Chinese and Western styles. Although the painting was done in Tibet, the stories included in the painting originated from India as that is the main setting of Buddha's representation in the stories.

The solemn presence of nature in the painting such as the mountains, trees, clouds and the wide landscapes demonstrates how Buddhism has interlocked with different cultural systems (Kapstein, 2000). Due to the blending of the Chinese, Indian and Tibetan systems, the results produced three subcategories of Buddhism in Tibet which were the Kadampa, Sakyapa and Kagyupa. All three only differed from the school of origin that they belonged to but they collectively teach the same principles that the great Buddha had taught (Snelling, 1999).

Based on the research given about the historical context of Himalayan art and its special relation to Buddhism, it can be denoted that the artworks emphasize the importance of spiritual life in the Tibetan community. Most artworks depict a sense of other worldliness as it attempts to illustrate the merging of the earthly realms and the divine. Representations of important figures that facilitated the spread of Buddhism are seen as supernatural,

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with the appendage of several arms and a crown of miniature skulls over their heads, having serene stature that signifies respect.

Most often, the artworks illustrate a unisex type of portrayal with a god-like stance, trampling over evil forces. The same can be said about the representations of Buddha, although elements of earth-bound activities suggests that artists attempt to make Buddha seem more approachable to the people. The integration of Buddhism in Tibet's culture has greatly influenced the way they view the world around them, and this in turn provides an outlook into the rooted spirituality that are present in the Himalayan regions. References: Avalokiteshvara statue & painting. HAR 65451 & HAR 40. In The Rubin Museum of Art.

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