

The Cult of Amitābha and the Apotheosis of the Tibetan Ruler

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INTRODUCTION

THE CULT OF AMITĀBHA¹ is often exclusively identified with so-called “Pure Land Buddhism” and treated as an idiosyncratic development of Buddhism in Japan that transformed an Indian religion into a genuine Japanese one.² The rise of the various Pure Land schools is seen in the context of the social, economic, and military hardships affecting the Japanese people during the transition from the Heian (794–1185) to Kamakura (1185–1333) periods.³ The sense of “end-time” marking the decline of Heian Buddhism found its metaphor in the concept of *mappō*, that is, the assumption that people were living in a period that made the practice of the *buddhadharma* almost impossible.

In this presentation, however, I would like to consider the Amitābha/Avalokiteśvara myth and the role it played in creating the ideology underlying the Tibetan concept of the ruler as the embodiment of Avalokiteśvara. In order to provide a textual basis and background for the later discussions, I shall first reflect on the symbolic organization we find associated with Amitābha as given in the *Sukhāvati-sūtras*. Then I shall discuss some non-canonical Tibetan texts that deal in one way or other with the Amitābha myth and suggest an apotheosis of the Tibetan ruler, seen as an emanation or incarnation of Avalokiteśvara. Furthermore, I present for discussion the hypothesis that the mythic core material found in late dynastic or early post-dynastic texts was reworked into a full-fledged dynastic myth in order to acquiesce public unrest and hardship during a period of Tibetan history when local feudal lords and their monastic backers plunged the country into continuous chaos and wars.

References to Amitābha are found in some of the older Mahayana sutras whereby the central texts were translated into Chinese during the second century CE. A more detailed discussion of the relevant texts will facilitate the subsequent deliberations.

AMITĀBHA/AVALOKITEŚVARA
IN THE EARLY SUTRA LITERATURE

In the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka-sūtra*, Buddha Amitābha is mentioned in those parts that are dated into the first century CE.⁴ Already in these passages he is associated with the Western hemisphere. Only in passages that are seen as later is he referred to as presiding over Sukhāvātī.⁵ However, the cult of Amitābha is based primarily upon the larger and smaller *Sukhāvātī-sūtras* as well as the *Amitāyurdhyāna-sūtra*. Another version of this sutra is preserved in the *Mahāratnakūṭa-sūtra*.⁶ The larger *Sukhāvātī-sūtra* was translated into Chinese between 147 and 186 CE.⁷ Thus, the claim made in the *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* that the Indian text may date from the late first century seems plausible.⁸ These data lead us to think that the Amitābha cult, at least in its seminal form, had originated roughly at the same time the Mahayana tradition became manifest, that is, during the first century of the Common Era. The textual nucleus for the development of the Amitābha/Sukhāvātī cult seem to be those *prañidhānas* the later Buddha Amitābha, still in his human embodiment as monk Dharmākara, articulate in the presence of the Buddha Lokeśvararāja. The gist of these forty-eight *prañidhānas* is to establish a sphere of purity and bliss that fosters unencumbered progress on the bodhisattva path toward enlightenment. *Prañidhānas* 18 and 20 seem to form the core of what became the Amitābha and Pure Land cult, that is, the belief that after hearing the name of Amitābha appropriately predispositioned sentient beings will cultivate the strong wish to be reborn in Amitābha's Pure Land. In developing unwavering confidence in the truth and efficacy of these *prañidhānas* the practitioner will experience a spiritual metamorphosis that will result in a mental disposition suitable for a rebirth in Sukhāvātī. The faith of the practitioner is the catalyst for the metamorphosis, while firmly believing that this is not of his or her doing. Rebirth in Sukhāvātī is available only to those whose mental disposition is of a purity compatible with that of the buddha realm. The faith does not obliterate or invalidate the concept of karma; to the contrary, faith produces the karma lead-

ing to the spiritual metamorphosis that becomes the condition for rebirth in the buddha realm. In this context faith becomes the motor for generating the good karma concomitant with purifying mind, speech, and body.

The canonical and extra-canonical texts seminal to the Sukhāvātī and Amitābha cult unfold before the meditating eye of the practitioner a grand scene of otherworldly visions that map a landscape of spiritual experiences. Within this landscape the major players are placed: Amitābha as the source and center of that world, as well as other allegoric *figurae* of Buddhist spirituality, and lastly the practitioner.

I would like now to turn to the canonical texts and summarize the crucial events. In the larger *Sukhāvātī-sūtra* the later Buddha Amitābha is in his previous rebirth as monk Dharmākara linked with the Buddha Lokeśvararāja. The main portion of the sutra is embedded in a frame narrative in which Ānanda admires Śākyamuni's unusual golden complexion as a signifier of his extraordinary accomplishments. The astuteness of Ānanda's questions leads to the narrative of Dharmākara and Lokeśvararāja. Embedded within this narrative is the one that details Dharmākara's future and final embodiment as Buddha Amitābha. Avalokiteśvara is introduced in paragraph 31 when he, arising amidst endless hosts of bodhisattvas, asks what the reason was for the extraordinary smile of Buddha Amitābha. Later in paragraph 34 Avalokiteśvara is confirmed as an outstanding bodhisattva. But, with the exception that he is called "the Buddha-son, glorious, . . . indeed the mighty Avalokiteśvara," nothing points to the effect of Amitābha being the "father" of Avalokiteśvara.⁹ Such a claim is found in some non-canonical Tibetan texts, which I shall analyze now.

AMITĀBHA AND AVALOKITEŚVARA IN TIBETAN NON-CANONICAL TEXTS

The concept of Amitābha being the father of Avalokiteśvara becomes apparent only in the Tibetan versions of this narrative whereby the *Mani bka' 'bum* has to be seen as the *locus classicus*, not because it is the oldest record but because of its influence on the formation of a Tibetan cultural identity. I shall now turn to summarize the symbolic organization as found in these Tibetan texts.

In the *Mani bka' 'bum* as well as in the *Gab pa mngon byung* Avalokiteśvara is established as nirvanic "ancestor" or existential

source of Srong-btsan sgam-po, the ruler whom Tibetan tradition presents as the foremost protagonist in the dissemination of the *buddhadharma* in the Land of Snow. Because the details of this myth have been covered elsewhere;¹⁰ here it may suffice to highlight those events that establish the relationship between Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara. In this myth, Amitābha is the ultimate reality (*dharmakāya*) while Avalokiteśvara is his manifestation as *sambhogakāya* and Srong-btsan sgam-po is his *nirmāṇakāya*. In Amitābha's Pure Land of Sukhāvati Avalokiteśvara is born from a beam of light emanating from Amitābha's right eye. Amitābha realizes the spiritual potential of Avalokiteśvara and prophesizes that he will epitomize the charismatic deeds of all buddhas. Subsequently Avalokiteśvara enunciates the bodhisattva pledge to do everything to assist all sentient beings in actualizing nirvana. But overwhelmed with the task, he begins to doubt the wisdom of his resolution. As a consequence his head bursts into thousand pieces, leaving him "headless." Amitābha as a kind of archetypal "father" puts the pieces back together. But now there are more pieces than before. Before the incident Avalokiteśvara had only one head; but when all the shattered pieces were gathered, they resulted in a pyramid of no less than eleven heads.

One may ask what this narrative tries to communicate. Which theoretical approach would be suitable to unlock this enigmatic narrative? Psychoanalysis, although formulated by thinkers of contemporary Western cultures, tries to expose the organization of the human mind in response to and in interaction with socio-historical and cultural idiosyncrasies that form the context of society. Gananath Obeyesekere has argued, in my opinion effectively, in favor of using psychoanalysis as a tool that permits the scholar to understand the cryptic message that is encoded in the symbolic and mythic narratives or enactments.¹¹ Thus, the Amitābha myth once seen through the lens of psychoanalysis, I suggest, will yield a meaning pertinent to the further discussion of the apotheosis of the Tibetan ruler.

The narrative establishes Amitābha's fatherhood by having Avalokiteśvara born from a ray of light emanating from Amitābha's right eye. The use of light and rays of light to symbolize spiritual or spiritually significant ("pure") birth is well documented in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist texts. For instance, in the tantric meditation rituals (*sādhana*) the disciple is spiritually reborn through a beam of light coming forth from the deity. The images created in these texts are loaded

with sexual undertones. The text establishes, however, a sublimated plane for rendering an event that is otherwise deeply rooted in its own materiality and, thus, “impure.” Thus, Avalokiteśvara’s “birth” is an all male event, begotten by a father alone and in absence of female generative organs. An all male birth obliterates the possibility of an Oedipal dilemma arising, where the brothers not only kill the father due to their sexual desire for their mother but also attempt to destroy each other to enjoy the mother for themselves. As a consequence, the all male birth frees an all male society from carnal yearning and potential violence. It becomes the cornerstone of religions that strive for a mystic transmutation of the self, that is, Buddhism as well as Christianity.

As a mature bodhisattva, Avalokiteśvara failed the bodhisattva pledge by asserting, albeit only temporarily, his own self-interest by rejecting the bodhisattva’s task as too burdensome in light of the corruption of so many sentient beings. In violating the bodhisattva vow, Avalokiteśvara disobeys “the law of the father” as Amitābha predicted that he would excel as bodhisattva. The consequence of this disobedience is the shattering of his head. It is well established that in the language of the unconscious “head” is a displacement of the lower “head,” that is, the male sex organ. The shattering of Avalokiteśvara’s head in response to breaking the law of the father is hinting at a loss of egotistic self-perpetuation, in other words, there is a hint at the castration complex. The narrative lets Amitābha restore Avalokiteśvara’s potency, but only in an altered fashion. His “head” is exaggerated in a bizarre multiplication through which it becomes dysfunctional in a mundane context but extremely apt in fulfilling his spiritual vocation. Where one “head” (reproductive organ) is suitable for the reproduction of an egotistic self, the multiplied “heads” reflect the generative and parenting capabilities of a true bodhisattva. The narrative establishes Amitābha as the primordial father whose “law” (the bodhisattva vow) must be followed by transforming the “impure” drive for self-perpetuation into the great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) that characterizes the bodhisattva. In carrying out this act of metamorphosis the son Avalokiteśvara becomes established as the rightful heir to Amitābha, the father.

By the late twelfth century, this symbolic template was imposed on the political organization of Tibet. This created its national identity by adopting Avalokiteśvara as patron of the Tibetan land whose earthly embodiment was present in king Srong-btsan sgam-po, whom the Ti-

betan tradition credits with introducing Buddhism to Tibet. A parallel development is documented for Japan where Prince Shōtoku, who was paramount in establishing Buddhism as the religion of the Japanese court, became worshiped as an embodiment of Avalokiteśvara.¹² In the Tibetan prayer text attributed to Rāga-asya that encapsulates the Pure Land meditation, Padmasambhava, the eighth-century tantric master accredited with adapting Indian Buddhism to Tibetan beliefs, is presented as the *nirmānakāya*, that is, samsaric, representation of Amitābha.¹³ While in the Japanese context prince and missionary conflate in one personage, in Tibet we have two different personages: Srong-btsan sgam-po as ruler and Padmasambhava as missionary. The bond between ruler and missionary is further documented within the tradition of the *rNying ma* school, which customarily portrays Srong-btsan sgam-po as one of Padmasambhava's disciples. As Amitābha is primary to Avalokiteśvara, his "son," so is Padmasambhava, the missionary, primary to Srong-btsan sgam-po, the ruler. Thus, these narratives that form the foundation for the political ideology of the Tibetan theocratic state present the mythic and supernatural realm as primary and superior to the secular and mundane one. Secular power is an outflow or progeny of the otherworldly one.

Above I tried to make the argument that the foundational narratives of the Tibetan polity as they evolved by the late twelfth century place the supernatural into an *a priori* position. In the following passage I shall discuss the historical situation of Tibet and its mythic representation in more detail.

APOTHEOSIS OF THE TIBETAN RULER IN HISTORICAL AND TEXTUAL PERSPECTIVES

Snellgrove sees Amitābha as "the most famous cosmic Buddha" whose cult "seems to have started in North-West India, and spread across Central Asia to China, Korea, and Japan," while being less popular in India itself and Nepal.¹⁴ Only sporadic artistic and some textual evidence hint at a fledgling cult of Amitābha during the imperial period of Tibetan history (seventh to ninth centuries). An image of Amitābha is incorporated in the hat of the statue of King Srong-btsan sgam-po (r. 618–641), which stands in the Jo-khang temple of Lha-sa, said to have been built during the dynastic period. Tibetan historiographic texts name him as the first of the "religious rulers" (*chos rgyal*) who are

credited with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet. To place an image of Amitābha at such a prominent position, that is, at the crown of the ruler's head, may be seen as indicating that Amitābha is the king's "father" or mythic ancestor. But other evidence may suggest a slightly different situation. Emperor Kao-tsung of China, a "fervent Buddhist, bestowed upon Srong btsan sgampo the title Pao-wang . . . an epithet of the ruler of the West" and "a title of the Buddha Amitābha."¹⁵ This reference may indicate that Srong-btsan sgam-po was seen as an embodiment of Amitābha rather than of Avalokiteśvara.

Furthermore, textual material pertinent to the imperial period needs to be examined as to whether it records Amitābha as a center of religious awareness. The *sBa bzhed*, one of the oldest texts chronicling the events leading to establishing the *buddhadharma* at the Tibetan court, is extant in several versions, each giving a slightly different account of the events leading to the introduction of Buddhism in Tibet. The so far most ancient version has recently turned up in the Tibet Autonomous Region and is now available in a critical, annotated edition and translation.¹⁶ The authors summarize the events leading to the compilation of the text as follows: "Given the role that the dBa's clan played during the disintegration of the Tibetan empire and in the post-dynastic political struggles, we could consider the hypothesis that the *dBa' bzhed* itself could be an early post-dynastic edition of carefully preserved dynastic materials compiled for legitimising purposes."¹⁷ This means that based on this recently discovered manuscript, the text was compiled, most likely as teamwork, in the decades after 842, the year when the last Tibetan king was murdered. The editorial team apparently made use of earlier material that dates from the dynastic era, that is, prior to 842. One of the characteristics of the text is that it presents "a simple linear narrative with some ancient mythological elements, which seem to be largely rooted in the late dynastic period or, at the least, in the immediate post-dynastic period."¹⁸ Among these mythological elements is Srong-btsan sgam-po appearing as emanation of Avalokiteśvara. The *dBa' bzhed* claims that this belief originated among the people of Khotan and was confirmed by two Khotanese monks who came to visit Srong-btsan sgam-po in person. This narrative seems to substantiate the interpretation I suggested of Srong-btsan sgam-po's headgear showing Amitābha. I proposed that this means that Amitābha was seen as the mythic ancestor or origin of Srong-btsan sgam-po, who then becomes identified with

Avalokiteśvara, Amitābha's "son." The *dBa' bzhed* contains only a brief narrative in which the two Khotanese monks see Srong-btsan sgam-po and recognize him as Avalokiteśvara. In contrast to that, the later historiographic texts contain a full-fledged mythology that gives reasons for the exalted status of Avalokiteśvara and his embodiment in the Tibetan rulers, not just in Srong-btsan sgam-po. However, it is important to acknowledge the fact that already by the end of the dynastic period, Srong-btsan sgam-po was seen as a semi-divine ruler by being identified with Avalokiteśvara. At the start of building the temple complex of bSam yas, a Nepalese artisan created the statues for the Aryapalo gling temple. When the temple was consecrated the following occurred:

In the afternoon, at dusk, from the top of the temple a light appeared, which became bigger and bigger and illuminated all of upper and lower Brag dmar, shining like the moon. The mKhan po said: "This is the light of Amitābha's coming. Tomorrow a temple of Amitābha shall be built as an upper storey above the dBu rtse."¹⁹

The importance of the mythological constellation Amitābha/Avalokiteśvara becomes further evident when one considers that the *Sukhāvati-sūtra* is listed among the books housed in the imperial library during the time of Khri-srong lde-btsan (756–797).²⁰

With the rekindling of Buddhism in western Tibet during the tenth and eleventh centuries Amitābha appears in several of the oldest murals, like that of the Alchi Sum-tsek temple (late eleventh century), and rock reliefs, such as those of Shey.²¹ In the earlier Alchi murals of Kashmirian style and in the Shey reliefs (no earlier than the tenth century) Amitābha appears as one of the five primordial buddhas with Vairocana in the center. Only in one of the murals of the later Lotsawa temple of Alchi (twelfth century) is he portrayed in a central position. However, in the so-called Red Temple of Tsaparang (built in the late fifteenth century), the place in the Western Himalayas from where the rejuvenation of Buddhism had started in the late tenth century, only a late mural depicting Amitābha as part of the Medicine Buddhas is extant.²² Thus, archeological evidence in support of an emerging Amitābha cult is inconclusive for the imperial period despite the Amitābha image appearing as part of the hat of Srong-btsan sgam-po's statue. Moreover, images of Amitābha are largely absent from those places where the rejuvenation of Buddhism had begun in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

However, by the early fourteenth century the Nepalese artist Anige was commissioned to cast statues of Amitābha for Hangzhou, which “was an active lamaist centre around the year 1300 AD.”²³ Similar statues were built for Juyong Guan, one of which “stands at the pass of the Great Wall north-west of Beijing” and which was constructed under Xundi, the last Emperor of the Mongol Dynasty.²⁴ For the later deliberations about the beginning of the Amitābha cult in Tibet these data are important.

In summary, one may ascertain the notion that during the imperial period Amitābha was known to the Tibetan aristocracy as nirvanic “ancestor” of the samsaric ruler and that the text that was seminal in the formation of the Pure Land cult, that is, the *Sukhāvati-sūtra*, was available in the imperial library. Whether the royal dynasty and some of the aristocratic families embraced a coherent cult of Amitābha remains, at least for the time being, unknown, although the building of an Amitābha temple or chapel housed on the upper floor of the main temple in bSam-yas may be seen as an indication of such a cult. Furthermore, the oldest extant version of the *dBa’ bzhed* supports the claim that already during the late dynastic or early post-dynastic period, Srong-btsan sgam-po was seen as an emanation of Avalokiteśvara and thereby as “son” of Amitābha.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

As a working hypothesis I suggest the possibility that the cult of Amitābha emerged in Tibet in response to socio-historical changes that threatened the identity of a considerable portion of the society while at the same time the cult of Avalokiteśvara as patron of Tibet provided a symbol of political stability and of end-time redemption when the actual political situation offered nothing of the kind. In the following paragraphs I shall flesh out these arguments and introduce what I see as supportive evidence.

In the Tibetan chronicle *rGyal rabs gsal ba’i me long* (completed in 1368 or shortly thereafter) it is said with regard to the birth of Srong-btsan sgam-po that Amitābha resided on the child’s head.²⁵ This statement needs to be reflected upon within the context of Buddhist iconography. As pointed out previously, when considering the symbolic organization of the Amitābha cult, Amitābha resides on the crown of Avalokiteśvara’s head. In Indian and Tibetan body symbolism, the head

is the most prominent and “purest” point of the body. It is in juxtaposition and antagonistically opposed to “that other end” of the body, the place of excretion. Many Buddhist *sādhanas* describe how the beams of light emanating from the heart of a visualized buddha enter the practitioner’s body through his or her head. Through the crown of the head the human body is linked with the pure spheres where the buddhas and bodhisattvas reside; it is the pure orifice through which, at the moment of death, the mind is expelled into realms of purity according to the *’pho ba* ritual. In contrast, the defilements (mental and physical) are excreted from the lower parts of the body. Thus, what is highly valued is brought into contact with the head; for instance, the books containing the Buddha’s words are placed upon one’s head before they find their proper place on the shelf. In contrast, the lower parts of the body are polluted and polluting. Consequently, sacred books must not be placed on the floor or on a seat. Only when one considers the symbolic values attached to the head in contrast to other body parts does the meaning of this brief statement found in the *rGyal rabs gsal ba’i me long* reveal its cultural implications. The text says in its own cryptic style that by the fourteenth century the foremost of the Tibetan rulers of the period, who became seminal in developing an understanding of national identity, was guided and inspired by the Amitābha/Avalokiteśvara narrative. Furthermore, by receiving Amitābha as his “crown jewel” Srong-btsan sgam-po became identified with Avalokiteśvara, Amitābha’s spiritual son.

The symbolic kinship of Srong-btsan sgam-po with Avalokiteśvara became the central theme in defining Tibet’s role within a Buddhist universe. The fully developed myth represents Srong-btsan sgam-po as embodiment of Avalokiteśvara, a role to be continued in the reincarnations of the Dalai Lamas. As we have seen, late dynastic or early post-dynastic texts contain already some textual snippets that were seminal in the formation of the later myth.²⁶ The fully developed narrative is recorded in texts that cannot be dated prior to the late twelfth century, with the chronicle by Nyang-ral nyi-ma’i ’od-zer (1124–1192) providing the oldest evidence.²⁷ It would lead too far away from the main theme of this presentation to engage in a survey of all available Tibetan chronicles to trace the development of this myth. For the present purpose it may suffice to say that by the end of the twelfth century it became a commonly accepted view that Srong-btsan sgam-po was an incarnation of Avalokiteśvara, thus fulfilling Avalokiteśvara’s pledge

promising to “discipline” the inhabitants of the Land of Snow (Tibet) in the *buddhadharma*. The mythic paradigm functioned then as an overlay imposed on historiographic writing.

What had happened during the last decades of the twelfth century and up to the middle of the thirteenth century in Tibet? The dynastic period had come to a sudden end by 842 with the assassination of the last ruler:

Nothing approaching central authority was restored until 1247, when Sakya Pandita was invested with the right to rule over the Trikor Chuksum (Thirteen Myriarchies) of Tibet by Prince Godan, a grandson of Genghis Khan. The dates 842 and 1247 therefore mark the period of decentralized control in central Tibet, during which time the country consisted of small hegemonies, which were constantly warring against, or allying with, each other as conditions warranted. These small power enclaves, each with its own fortresses, were ruled by men who gradually became clerics.²⁸

After Buddhism as a court religion had vanished in the collapse of the imperial dynasty, the eleventh century witnessed the reintroduction of Buddhism to the Tibetan land. Dedicated individuals, some living in the far west of Tibet (Guge and Ladakh) and some traveling to China in search for Buddhist learning, established Buddhism in Tibet—this time, however, as a religious tradition rooted among a multitude of small principalities from where it gradually gained a foothold among the people. By the late twelfth century monasteries were built that quickly became centers of cultural and political power. In the coming decades this process accelerated, with the monastic centers gaining more influence on the political scene than any one of the secular forces. Eventually, this process culminated in the ascendance of the fifth Dalai Lama to the throne of Tibet in 1642. The mythic paradigm of the imperial dynasty was modeled upon similar paradigms that had lent authority to the dynasties of China, Nepal, and Magadha. A mythological paradigm, blending the concept of the universal monarch (*cakravartin*) with elements of the princely bodhisattva ideal, was created to give divine authority to the rulers of these diverse Asian polities. With the collapse of the imperial dynasty in Tibet and the formation of political centers that were interlocked with the monastic system a need arose to adjust the inherited (and by the tenth century tattered) pre-Buddhist mythic paradigm to account for the change in the political and cultural organization of the country. The Avalokiteśvara myth rendering the great

Bodhisattva as the patron of Tibet and its religious rulers as his embodiments provided an appropriate answer. It displaced older myths of which we have only isolated fragments telling of the first ruler descending from the gods of heaven. Retroactively, the new myth was projected onto the first of the great kings, Srong-btsan sgam-po.

The fate of the ordinary people during these centuries of decentralization and constant warfare is not recorded in any of the accessible sources. We are left to speculate. From similar events recorded in other countries we may, with all necessary caution, surmise that the Tibetan people suffered more hardship during periods of political and military instability and ensuing chaos than at times when a central authority was capable of providing some sense of order and lawfulness. Thus, we may assume that between the collapse of the imperial dynasty by the middle of the ninth century and the rise of the Sa-skyia dominance in 1249 the Tibetan populace was subject to ongoing raids and political chaos. Could one suggest that during these times, which were certainly difficult for ordinary Tibetans, they took refuge in the “father” of their monastic lords (who not always ruled as benignly as their symbolic “ancestor” suggested) in order to find spiritual comfort in times where an earthly one was almost beyond reach? The popularity of the Avalokiteśvara myth as the foundational narrative formulating the apotheosis of the Tibetan ruler seems to support this view.

NOTES

1. The word “cult” is used here in its original meaning indicating the cultivating of a set of spiritual and religious ideas expressed through behavior and acts. It is not meant to identify a marginal and often anti-social religious movement.
2. See Jonathan Z. Smith, ed., *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1995), 866.
3. Araki Michio, “The Schools of Japanese Buddhism,” in *Buddhism and Asian History*, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and M. D. Cummings (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 271ff.
4. J. H. C. Kern, trans., *The Saddharma-Pundarika or the Lotus of the True Law*, Sacred Books of the East 21 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), xxii, 178, and chap. 7; G. P. Malalasekera, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism* (Colombo: Government Press, 1961), 434; P. Schwieger, *Ein tibetisches Wunschgebet um Wiedergeburt in der Sukhāvātī* (St. Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1978), 7.
5. Kern, *Saddharma-Pundarika*, 389, 417.
6. Garma C. C. Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūta Sūtra* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 339–360.
7. F. M. Müller and Bunyiu Nanjio, eds., *Sukhāvātī-vyūha: Description of Sukhāvātī the Land of Bliss* (London: Clarendon Press, 1883), iii.
8. Malalasekera, *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, 453.
9. F. Max Müller, *Buddhist Mahayana Texts*, Sacred Books of the East 49 (1894; repr., Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1968), 48 verse 13.
10. E. K. Dargyay, “Sröng-Btsan Sgam-Po of Tibet: Bodhisattva and King,” in *Monks and Magicians: Religious Biographies in Asia*, eds. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (Oakville, New York, & London: Mosaic Press, 1988), 106ff.
11. Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Works of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxiii.
12. Michio, “The Schools of Japanese Buddhism,” 267.
13. Needless to say, contemporary historical assessment of these narratives cannot substantiate their factual veracity.
14. David L. Snellgrove, ed., *The Image of the Buddha* (Tokyo: Kodansha International; Paris: Unesco, 1978), 134.
15. Christopher I. Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia: A History of the*

Struggle for Great Power among Tibetans, Turks, Arabs, and Chinese during the Early Middle Ages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 25ff.

16. Pasang Wangdu and Hildegard Diemberger, *dBa' bzhed: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet* (Vienna: Verlag der Oesterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000).

17. *Ibid.*, 7.

18. *Ibid.*, 13.

19. *Ibid.*, 65.

20. Marcelle Lalou, "Les textes bouddhiques au temps du Roi Khri-sron-lde-bcan," *Journal Asiatique* 241 (1953): 313–353 (the text is listed under its Tibetan title *bde ba can gyi bkod pa* as no. 196 on p. 324).

21. D. L. Snellgrove and T. Skorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1977), 1:10, 1:52 (table 37), 1:55 (table 42).

22. Jurgen C. Aschoff, *Tsaparang: Tibets Grosses Geheimnis* (Freiburg: Eulen Verlag, 1987), 14–16, table 24.

23. H. Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1975), 23ff.

24. *Ibid.*, 25.

25. See *dbu la sangs rgyas A mi de ba bzhugs pa* in B. I. Kuznetsov, ed., *Rgyal rabs gsal ba'i me long (The Clear Mirror of Royal Genealogies)* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966), 54.

26. See E. K. Dargyay, "Srongs-btsan sgam-po of Tibet: Bodhisattva and King," in *Monks and Magicians: Religious Biographies in Asia*, eds. Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara (Oakville, New York, & London: Mosaic Press, 1988), 101ff.

27. R. O. Meisezahl, ed., *Die grosse Geschichte des tibetischen Buddhismus nach alter Tradition*, Monumenta Tibetica Historica 1.3 (Sankt Augustin, Germany: VHG Wissenschaftsverlag, 1985).

28. Tsepon W. D. Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 54.