The Spiritual Buddhist Arts and the Ashtamangala of Tibet

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Abstract

The paper aims to describe and analyze pieces of evidence of the influence of ancient Tibetan Buddhist art on Tibetan culture. The Ashtamangala symbol appears in the design of printed furniture and various complex murals in the Buddhist architecture. The Tibetan Plateau artists apply the painted Ashtamangala symbols to represent the arts of soul. The findings revealed that religious elements are prevalent in many historic artefacts developed before the mid-twentieth century, and commonly found in, for example, thangkas (Tibetan Buddhist painting on fabric), murals, and miniature bronze sculptures, and

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big statues made of clay, plaster, and wood. These findings imply that the Tibetans believe in the connection between the myth of the Ashtamangala and Buddha's life and his power. The most prevalent interpretations of each symbol include the Precious Parasol (PP), the White Conch Shell (WCS), the Two Golden Fish (TGF), the Knot of Eternity (KE), the Vase of Great Treasures (VGT), the Victory Banner (VB), the Lotus Flower (LF), and the Dharmachakra (DHA). Every symbol reflects the spiritual and vigorous arts and culture of the Tibetan.

Keywords: Ashtamangala, Buddhist art, spiritual, Tibetan Buddhism

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อบรรยายและวิเคราะห์หลักฐานที่เกี่ยวข้องกับอิทธิพลของพุทธศิลป์ทิเบตอันเก่าแก่ที่มีต่อวัฒนธรรมทิเบต สัญลักษณ์อัษฎมงคลปรากฏอยู่ในการออกแบบเครื่องเรือนที่พิมพ์ออกมาและภาพจิตรกรรมฝาผนังอันซับซ้อนในสถาปัตยกรรมพุทธ ศิลปินที่ราบสูงชาวทิเบตประยุกต์การวาดภาพสัญลักษณ์อัษฎมงคลเพื่อเป็นตัวแทนของศิลปะแห่งจิตวิญญาณ จากการศึกษาพบว่า องค์ประกอบทางศาสนามีพบอยู่ทั่วไปในงานศิลปะทางประวัติศาสตร์ส่วนใหญ่ที่พัฒนาก่อนกลางคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ยี่สิบ มักพบในวัตถุข้าวของต่าง ๆ เช่น ทังกา (ภาพวาดพุทธศิลป์ทิเบตบนผืนผ้า) จิตรกรรมฝาผนัง ประติมากรรมสำริดขนาดจิ๋ว รูปปั้นดินเผาขนาดใหญ่ที่ทำด้วยดินเหนียว ปูนปลาสเตอร์ และไม้ การค้นพบนี้บ่งบอกเป็นนัยว่า ชาวทิเบตเชื่อมโยงตำนานของอัษฎมงคลเข้ากับพุทธประวัติและพลังของพระองค์ การตีความที่แพร่หลายที่สุดของแต่ละสัญลักษณ์ ได้แก่ ฉัตรอันวิจิตร เปลือกหอยสังข์สีขาว ปลาทองคู่ เงื่อนสัญลักษณ์แห่งนิรันดร แจกันแห่งสมบัติ ธงชัย

ดอกบัว และ ธรรมจักร ทุกสัญลักษณ์สะท้อนถึงวัฒนธรรมทางจิตวิญญาณและความแข็งแกร่งทางศิลปะและวัฒนธรรมของชาวทิเบต

คำสำคัญ: อัษฎมงคล พุทธศิลป์ จิตวิญญาณ พุทธศาสนาแบบทิเบต

Introduction

The Spiritual Buddhist Art was created with an aim to transmit the Buddhist philosophy through material objects that connect the world of the spiritual and the mundane. Tibetan Buddhists were open to the world after the political revolution in China conquered Tibet in the 1950s (Smith, 2019), which was the decade of Tibetans' migration to Nepal, India, and Western countries such as America, Canada, Germany, and England and their arts were brought along with them. The uniqueness of Spiritual Buddhist can be found in drawings representing the spiritual life of Tibetan Buddhists. The abundance of Tibetan Buddhist symbols encapsulates the traits of Buddha's enlightenment mentality that manifests as the absolute awareness of knowledge and compassion.

This analysis investigates the intricate symbolism found in Tibetan art, so many of these symbols predate the existence of ancient India and its introduction of Buddhism to the society. The symbolic meanings at numerous levels of complexity are included in the history of these ancient symbols as well as their incorporation into Mahayana Buddhism and Vajrayana Buddhism through Indian Vedic history (Lopes, 2019).

The Ashtamangala of Tibetan or the Eight Auspicious Symbols is the main topic of this study as it is one of the most complicated metaphysical systems ever created. Attempting to express symbolic meaning in a simple and obvious manner seems to be no easy

undertaking. The most excellent reference source and previous study is the Glossary of key Tibetan terminology in *A Handbook of Tibetan Culture* (Brown, 2020; Coleman, 1995; Deng, 2016; Jenkins, 2019; Liu, 2019).

The Spiritual Buddhist Arts

Buddhism entered Tibet in the seventh century and remained there until the end of the eighth century. It had been declared the state religion. During the persecutions of the invaders, the influence of Buddhism declined from the ninth to the tenth century and was revived in the late tenth century (Kværne, 2020). It gradually became dominant as it introduced the so-called "later dissemination of the Buddhist faith" (Coleman, 1995). Many Tibetan monks traveled to the birthplace of Buddha in India (Coleman, 1995). Indian experts were welcomed to give lectures and offer lessons in the first few hundred years during this new enthusiasm and Tibetans commenced studying the Indian faith (Coleman, 1995).

Tibet's great geographical territory has been influenced by its neighbors, India, Kashmir, Nepal, northern Burma (Myanmar), China, and Central Asia (Kotan). This can be seen in the diversity of Tibetan Buddhist art. However, in the late eleventh and the early twelfth century, the Indian Pala became the artistic inspiration. From the thirteenth century onward, Nepalese painters were responsible for painting the thangka and making sculptures for Tibetan donors. Nepalese arts were evident in the painting of peace displayed in Buddhist and spiritual handicrafts (Zhang, 2021). In the fourteenth and the fifteenth century, Nepalese art was finally integrated into the Tibetan art (Brown, 2000).

Buddhists make different kinds of sculptures and paintings as a form of meditation. The worshipper's idea toward the divine is supported or strengthened by the external appearances or images. Images are also commissioned for a variety of reasons, including celebrating a birth, encouraging wealth, wellness, longevity, honoring, and promotion. People believe that contribution to a respectful portrait bestows merit that will lead to the enlightenment on both the donor and the recipient. Laypeople are also encouraged to seek the enlightenment through images in temples and domestic shrines.

1. Architecture

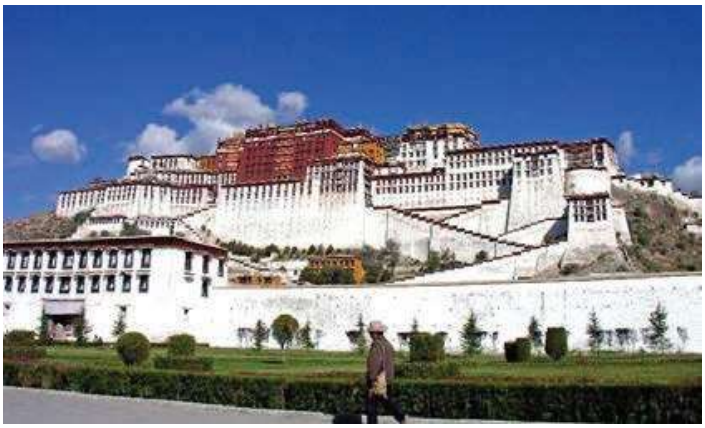
The Tibetans have been preeminent in architecture. Tibetan workers built numerous temples along the path from Tibet to Nepal when they migrated. Most villages have at least one small Buddha hall or temple. The scenario of Tibetans looked unique and illustrated their nation even outside of the motherland. The artworks were completed by hand from the base to the top of the building. The outstanding colors, such as carmine, contrast sharply with the white interior to represent spiritual art. Decades later, the spiritual art gradually declined in the twentieth-century industrialization due to the prevalence of modern machines and printing modernization.

All Tibetan architects have exceptional senses when it comes to construction and utilizing the natural features of the land. The few remaining shrines and tiny monasteries left after the Chinese Communist rule exhibit such architectural mastery. This highlights the tremendous artistic loss caused by the Chinese Communist rule and the subsequent demolition of religious structures during the aggression in 1959 (Pallis, 1967). The Larunggar Monastery was the largest Tibetan

Buddhist institution with nearly 40,000 monks, including visiting monks, nuns, and students. With its destruction, 11,500 monks and nuns were forced to leave the monastery (Agnihotri, 2020).

Tibetan architecture, inspired by Tibetan people's emotions and mindsets, is a cultural phenomenon. It is also influenced by Tibet's unique natural environment (Van der Linden, 2021). Tibetan architectural elements express the harmony between humans and nature that can only be accomplished by a hardy ethnic group living on the plateau for a long period (Hung, 2021). The palace construction is yet another watershed moment in Tibetan architectural history. It progressed through three stages of development, i.e., castle art, palace art, and art combining palace and monastery art (Pakhoutova, 2021). The well-known Potala Palace and the Yumbulagang Palace are two excellent examples of Tibetan palace architecture.

Figure 1
Potala Palace



Source: Jarvis (2006)

2. Paintings

Paintings generally depict natural figures and characteristics that symbolize the root of Tibetan art. They also portray Tibet's religious history and enigmatic images of the supernatural. The temple's inner wall murals are covered with religious historical scenes and symbols of the supernatural, particularly one showing the circle of life or Mandala. Early Tibetan murals show a distinct style of Buddhist art. Their pureness and perfection are akin to those of India's cave temples. In 1948, the great scholars, Anakarika Govinda and Li Gotami, saved one of the world's priceless record, the tracings of paintings in the historic temples in Tsaparang, Western Tibet (Xue et al., 2021).

The thangkas are paintings on rolls of colored papers coupled by fabric in Chinese patterns depicting the outstanding spiritual art of Tibetan painting branches (Ma et al., 2021). They show the greater demand for surface expression in human forms through shaping in suitable line and color refinement. This type of painting has been steadily declining since the turn of the century following the decreasing demand of buyers. In later decades, thangkas are produced for marketing or trading. Lama was taught mural paintings and increasing thangkas products that changed the spiritual art into the monastic practices through intended meditation. Most famous interior paintings are spiritual art done by Lama as a form of spiritual exercise (Zhu, 2021).

Figure 2

Thanka: The Spiritual Print of Tibet

Note: An original photograph by Author, March 25, 2018

3. Woodwork

The woodwork is usually a part of architectural construction of the building found in, for example, pillars and window frames. Many home items also apply this woodwork technique. The most notable one can be seen in the building of small folding tables known as *chogtse*. Chests and cupboards in Tibetan homes (Figure 3) are also generally decorated with exquisite woodwork in floral designs. Outside and within the home, similar decorations may be found on friezes and pillars. *Tsampa*, Tibetan roasted barley flour, is usually stored in jars with painted lids. Other smaller objects include stools, tobacco boxes, altars, and women's cosmetic boxes and incense boxes called *gurner* (Figure 3). The woodwork is ingrained in the way of life as every Tibetan has a wooden tea bowl kept in the pocket of the belt above the sash. Also typical is a wooden tea bowl kept in the pocket of the belt

above the sash on their waist. These tea bowls are wonderfully crafted and fetch great sums when made of very exquisite figured wood. They are crafted and mounted in silver line or decorated with Ashtamangala. Recently, it has been done in the Mongolian rather than the Tibetan style and more popular in the country's northeastern regions.

Figure 3

Tibetan incense box, *gurner*, with Eight Ashtamangala Symbols craving and painting decoration

Note: A photograph by WorthPoint (n.d.)

Finally, sturdy wooden carved boards cover the Buddhist texts to protect and reprove two sides of the text before its being wrapped in silk or cotton. The boards are carved wood; some decorated or highlighted with gilding, whether handwritten or printed. The blueprint is carved from sturdy wood to print scriptures of Buddhist doctrine. To make numerous copies, they must be printed from wooden blocks. It is often encased between gorgeously carved boards depicting intricate figure compositions with Buddhas in prominent locations. Many of these carvings must have been lost in the destruction of books by the Chinese Communist rule as part of their anti-religious campaign. However, a few specimens gathered by foreign tourists have found their way into museums.

4. Metalwork

Metalwork plays an important role in Tibetan daily life. A big teapot is used by every Tibetan family and at the temple from dawn to dusk. The handle and the body feature flowers, tiny spots, and vine patterns (Kasdorf, 2018). Numerous small teapots are embellished with fine silver bands. This combination of metals is a favorite Tibetan crafting technique. The spout is usually fashioned with integrated jaws or bones of sea animals. Metal handwork is also found in a handle piece of furniture or items such as a pocketknife, container, utensil, and ware.

Similarly, copper or silver teacups are designed and generally have lids to fit with Chinese porcelain or jade cup. There is an engraving characteristic of Tibetan art in various types of knives and weapons, such as hilts and sheaths. That is categorized in various styles and is made of metalwork. Tibetan men often carry long dagger-like knives, versatile tools used for cutting meat and hunting while traveling. Eastern Tibet's Khambas, noted in the history of warriors with a strong sense of locale and personal independence, wielded a large bladed sword.

Ashtamangala (བཀྲ་ཤིས་ རྟགས་ བརྒྱད་)

Ashtamangala or eight auspicious Buddhist symbols have several religion signs, including ones from Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The signals or "symbolic attributes" (Tib. *bkra shis rtags brgyad*) are comprised of eight parts. These include a parasol, a pair of golden fish, a treasure vase, a lotus, a white right-spiraling conch shell, an endless knot, a banner of victory, and a golden wheel. There is an early claim in Indian history that the eight auspicious symbols are the hornet signs for the monarchy. The symbols are used in custom or dressing and sacred items such as crows, rings, necklaces, staffs, potteries, thrones, mirror frames, banners, lamps, and palace

ornaments. They are also found in Hindu traditional handwriting and painting such as in the body paint and the sacrifice tools. It was popular to add these symbols in the rite and ceremony for god worship.

Similar eight auspicious symbols accepted in Jainism include *swastika, shrivastava*, *nandyavart*, *vardhamanak*, *bhadrasana*, *kalash*, *minyugal*, and *darpan*. The golden wheel is replaced by a pair of fly whisks (Skt. *chamara*) in the Nawar Buddhism (a new sect that appeared in the eighteenth century in India), forming a variant of Ashtamangala in Nepal (Karunaratna, 1980; Robert, 2003).

According to the Vajrayana myth, the earth goddess *sthavara (*Tib. *Sayi Lhamo)* offered a vase of treasure full of elixir to Buddha. Later, Brahma and Indra saw the Buddha's enlightenment and offered a golden wheel and white conch shells. They are frequently depicted on the left and right sides respectively of the Buddha's Enlightenment Throne in the painting. Buddha footprints were always shown as early Buddhist aniconic portrayals of his footprints. The eight emblems of good luck are the endless umbrella (*chattra*), the knot (*shrivastava*), the lotus (*padma*), the flask (*kalasha*), golden fishes (*matsya*), the banner (*dhvaja*), the conch (*shankha*), and the wheel (*chakra*). These eight symbols can be seen in the surfaces of familiar items (Figure 4), such as metalwork, wall panels, carpets, and silks of the highest quality among other sacred and profane Buddhist items. The eight symbols are held in the claws of a pair of dragons on a gorgeous Chinese brocade pattern (Figure 5). They are also usually painted on the ground in strewn flour and magnificent colors to welcome visiting religious dignitaries and guests to the celebrations or Buddhist functions at the monasteries.

Figure 4

Ashtamangala on the door

Note: A photograph by Christopher J. Fynn (2015)

Figure 5

Ashtamangala in The Claws of a Pair of Dragons in Chinese Brocade Pattern

Note: A detail of a photography by The Metropolitan Museum of Art (n.d.) showing the back and the sleeves of the Dragon Robe from Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Wanli period (1573-1620)

1. The precious parasol (PP) (Skt. *chatra*; Tib. *gdugs*) (Robert, 2003)

PP is a historic emblem of both protection and kingship. It symbolizes protection from the heat of suffering in both the body and the mind as its shadow connotes the protection from the scorching heat of the sun, which is a metaphor of the evil within, for example, desire, sensuality, grabbing, and anger. Other references to PP include protection from sicknesses, negative energies, and evil spirits. The royal parasol (*chattra*), a huge parasol (*atapatra*), and victory banner (*dhvaja*) are part of the combating chariots in the ancient Indian warfare. The umbrella was originally made of silk stretched over a permanent frame with spokes. The modern folding umbrella or parasol, with bamboo spokes and an oiled paper canopy, was invented in China around the fourth century.

The parasol was a symbol of secular riches or the monarchy. The bigger the number of parasols carried by bearers in an opulent dignitary retinue was, the higher position in his society. Early Indian Buddhism embraced the emblems of the thirteen royal umbrellas as a metaphor for Buddha's dominion as the chakravartin or universal king. The Buddha's or Tathagata stupa's conical spire is comprised of thirteen piled umbrellas. Early non-figurative representations of the Buddha often depicted his footprints, throne, parasol, and Bodhi tree. Honor and respect are naturally represented by a parachute rising above the head. The myth claims that the king of the Nagas presented Buddha with an umbrella decorated with gold and jewel illuminating the realm of *chattra*, wonderfully tinkling bells, and a sapphire handle. In Vajrayana Buddhism, Buddha is frequently depicted with an intricate and huge umbrella (*atapatra*) that represents goddess *Sitatapatra* (Tib. *gdugs dkar*).

Buddhist descriptions of a thousand-spoked umbrella have a symbolic affinity to the Hindu thousand-petalled lotus (*Sahasrara Padma*) at the crown *chakra*, with its axle-pole representing the central channel. The Tibetan parasol is fashioned by a spoked wooden frame with a dome-shaped silk cover and suspending silk pendants or valances after the royal Indian and Chinese predecessors. Its purpose is to protect against the heat rather than the rain. In English, parasol and umbrella mean to hold off the sun and a little shade, respectively. The Sanskrit term *chattra* means mushroom, pointing towards the parasol's capped mushroom and stem shape (Hyytiäinen, 2008). A traditional Tibetan parasol's structure is comprised of a thin round timber frame with eight, sixteen, or thirty-two thin curving ribs. White, yellow, or multicolored silk passes through the center of a long wooden pillar ornamented with metal lotuses, vases, and gems from the circular edge of the frame silk and skirts with eight or sixteen silk pendants that are folded or pleated. The pendants are usually fashioned from folded silk brocade strips stitched together in a single (Geary & Shinde, 2021), double or triple valance design, and they hang to the same level as the pleated skirting. Parasols in the shapes of octagons and squares are also widely used. They symbolize the eight noble paths and four noble truths. A square parasol invariably crowns the sedan chair in which dignitaries and important lamas are carried in procession (McGirk, 1995). As they are spiritual leaders and representatives of the Tibetan people, they shall use both the material categories of the silk and peacock-feather parasols in their ritual ceremonial occasions.

2. The white conch shell (Skt. *shankha*: Tib. *dung dkar*)

Early Hinduism categorizes the conch into male and female. The male or *Purusha* is a thicker-shelled and globular-shaped conch and the female or *Shankhini,* a longer and thin-shelled conch. The fourfold caste division is also used as the classification criteria for

conches: the smooth white conch represents the *Brahmin* caste, the red conch the *Kshatriya* or warrior caste, the yellow conch the *Vaishya* or merchant caste, and the dull grey conch the *Shudra* or laborer caste (Haluwalia, 2021). Since time immemorial until nowadays, India's rare white conch shell has been used as the first horn trumpet in several necessary functions to send out the sound of victory.

The conch shell was chosen as a symbol of religious sovereignty and the truth of Dharma by Vedic Brahmanism and subsequently Buddhism. One of Buddha's thirty-two major signs is three conch-like curves on his throat representing Buddha's deep echoing voice. Conch shells can also be found on the feet, palms, arms, legs, chests, and foreheads of persons who have been favored by the gods. In the Himalayan region and on the Tibetan Plateau, ancient conch shells have also been discovered because this elevated area was once an ocean. The marine conch is a spiraling white shell with a thick crust and a wide frontal hole that belongs to the Strombidea species of gastropod mollusks (Liverani et al, 2021). The Vamavarta is a left-spiraling conch with a left-opening. The auspicious blowing horn is made by cutting off the tip of the right-spiraling white conch (Tib. *dung dkar g.yas'khyil*). As a Tibetan ritual instrument, the right-hand whirlwind thus generates a sound that symbolizes the proclamation of the Dharma (Weber, 2017). Usually, the conch shell used in a ritual must be decorated with a metal mouthpiece and a decorative metal casing in copper, bronze, silver, or gold. Conch shell earrings and finger rings are worn by certain *siddhas* or *yogins* as they are believed to possess astrological properties related to an affinity with the moon's planetary influence. The ears of elephants were frequently adorned with hanging conch-shell earrings, *shankhakila* or conch spikes. The Sanskrit word *kundala* means both earring and spiral coil, and is derived from the same root as *Kundalini*, the coiled serpent goddess.

3. The two golden fish (TGF) (Skt. *suvarnamatsya*; Tib. *gser-nya*)

The Sanskrit term *matsyayugma* means the pair of fish. It originates from the ancient pre-Buddhist symbols of India's two main sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Yamuna. The two golden fish symbolize the moon and the solar and the breathing rhythm alternating between inhalation and exhalation. In Buddhism, golden fish also symbolize happiness as they have complete freedom in the water. They represent fertility and abundance because they can reproduce quickly. The fish normally swim in pairs, and in China, the pair of fish signifies spousal loyalty. Fish are stable food in China, so a pair of fish is a traditional bridal present. The Hun word *yu* is a homophonic pun implying both fish and enormous wealth. Two golden fish are frequently represented as carp, which are revered in East Asia for their majesty, magnitude, and longevity.

At sacred lakes, such as Tsho Perna in northwest India, which is believed to be the birthplace of Padmasambhava, the giant golden carp eagerly accept food from the pilgrims' hands. The pair of fish is a common auspicious symbol found in the Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist tradition. In Buddhist art, the two golden fish represent mercy, congeniality, gregariousness, and compromise, but in Hinduism, they represent *yoni* or the female sexual organ.

4. The knot of eternity (KE) (Skt. *shrivatsa*; Tib. *dpal be'u*)

Shrivatsa is a Sanskrit word that means the Beloved Shri, the name given by Vishnu to Lakshmi. It is originally an eight looped knot, but it is generally transmitted in the form of an auspicious triangular sign or the majestic curl of Vishnu. Krishna is Vishnu's eighth incarnation or *avatara* who wears the Shrivastava on his chest. Vishnu's devotion is symbolized by Lakshmi's insignia on his heart because she is the goddess of wealth and fortune. This hair curl is

also known as *nanayavarta*, which means coil of bliss. It is shaped like a swastika or Greek hooked cross. The *naga* symbol, which depicts two or more entwined snakes forming an iconic knot shape, is another early Indian form of the unending knot. Buddha's infinite wisdom and compassion are symbolized by the eternal knot, which has no beginning or end. As a secular symbol, it represents the basic fact of life as continuity or dependent origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*).

The relevance of the knot is explained by the positive form of Tibetan belief. It is coherent between *mantra* and *yantra* with symbolic happiness, especially in the Tantric sect of Mahayana in the mid-age of Buddhism. The *nandyavarta*, based on the lunar *swastika,* is believed to lead to happiness and other positive emotions such as delight, comfortableness, joy, and exultation. With an S shape, as well as Indian and Chinese ideal remarks as Buddha, the symbol is mostly on the center of the chest of the Buddha images and often interlaces each other as a knot. In Chinese tradition and belief, the knot symbol represents longevity, love, care, harmony, and continuity. As a symbol of the Buddha's mind, it represents his endless compassion and wisdom, and in the controversy of Dhamma, it represents the knots of the twelve links of dependent origination or *Paṭiccasamuppāda*.

5. The vase of great treasures (VGT) (Skt. *nidhana kumbha*; Tib. *gter gyi bum pa*)

The vase of great treasures or the inexhaustible treasures, also known as the precious gold vase, is a replication of a typical Indian or Tibetan earthenware pot with a flat base, round body, narrow neck, and fluted top. A typical Tibetan treasure vase is an extremely ornate gold vase with lotus petal designs radiating from its various components and a single burning diamond or cluster of jewels projecting from the upper entrance.

The gold sacrificial vase (Tib. *gter chen po'i bum pa*) was adorned with a multitude of valuable gems. The vase of treasures, a symbol of wealth deities, must be decorated with a silk ornament from the Divine Realm around its neck, and have its mouth wrapped. It is sealed with the root of a wishing tree, which contains the water of immortality and yields a variety of valuable goods, and has the virtue of naturally occurring manifestation like a sacred vase of limitless treasures. Vases of prosperity are constantly put on temples and mountain trails, or buried at fountains to attract fortune and foster environmental harmony. The treasure vase, triple pennants, hanging tassels, banners, and flags are all depicted in the artwork. Three golden treasure vases support flagstaffs adorned with diamonds and draping silk valances in the upper half of the drawing. The triple pennant (Tib. *phan rtse*) insignia, hung above a treasure jar, is usually put above the outside wall in the geometric mandala arrangement, along with the victory banner and parasol, as an auspicious symbol. The three gems are the three *Yanas*, which represent the three aspects of body, speech, and thought; victory over the three kingdoms is represented by the triple pennant. On ritual objects like the Damaru, Khatvanga, trident, and triple banderole, triple pennants are frequently shown. When nine pennants are depicted, they may represent the nine *Yanas.* These comprise the three common *yanas* of the *shravaka, pratyekabuddha,* and *bodhisattva* (or Mahayana); the three outer *yanas* of *kriya, charya* and *yoga tantra;* and the three inner *yanas* of *anuttarayoga, mahayoga* and *atiyoga* (Kimura, 1978). A jeweled pole with two triple pennants, separated into nine colorful portions, is hanged in the first vase on the left. An intricate circular hanging banner of silk valances is seen in the second center design of a double-handled treasure vessel (Skt. *pataka*; Tib. *ba dan*). The dissolving point, sun and moon emblem, and the insignia of the triple-eyed gem, with four gold-mounted diamonds radiating below, crown the peak of this banner. A circular frieze of silk

valances hangs from this jeweled finial, with four groups of triple pennants radiating in four directions. Hanging diamonds strung on gold chains hang below the valances.

6. The victory banner (VB) (Skt. *dhvaja*; Tib. *rgyal mtshan*)

In Sanskrit, *Dhvaja* means flag, banner, ensign, or blazon. It is a victory banner or insignia (Mohapatra, 2020). The first victory flag was employed in ancient Indian battles as a military standard and on the chariots of famous soldiers. The victory banner is an ensign of the champion. Krishna's chariot had a garuda-topped banner, Arjuna's a monkey device, and Bhishma's a palm tree insignia. The *dhvaja*, also known as Shiva's banner, has a symbol of the lingam, or sign of his erect phallus as the giver of seed. The *dhvaja* was also the name given to the *khatvanga* (Surpi, 2021), a skull-topped staff carried by *Shaivite Kapalika* or skull-bearing ascetics. Early Buddhism embraced the victory banner as a symbol of enlightenment and Buddha's victory over the devil's army full of demon warriors wearing their *dhvaja* insignia. The flag of victory is thought to symbolize the eleven techniques of eliminating defilement in Tibetan Buddhism. The Buddha's teachings lead to the growth of knowledge, wisdom, compassion, meditation, and ethical vows, the abandonment of false, beliefs and spiritual ambition, skill, and sacrifice, and the oneness of the three meditations. A list of eleven distinct variants of the victory banner is described in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as having the power to prevail over the evil. The *dhvaja* was used as a military standard or banner in ancient Indian battles and many of them were designed to terrorize the adversary. The *Makara* is a victory banner comprised of several figures, such as crocodile, tiger, wolf, otter, goose, cat, peacock, frog, snake, scorpion, and tortoise (Tadvalkar, 2015). An early Buddhist emblem is in the ornamentation of the stupa where four *Makaradhvajas* are placed in the four directions to symbolize Buddha's victory over the four *Maras*. The four *Maras* (Skt. *chaturmara*; Tib. *bdud bzhi*) are the demons, namely the *Mara* of five aggregates (Skt. *skandhamara*; Tib. *phung po' i bdud*);

the *Mara* of emotional defilements (Skt. *kleshamara*; Tib. *nyong mongs pa'i bdud*); the *Mara* of death (Skt. *mirtyumara*; Tib. *chi bdag gi bdud*); and the *Mara* of divine pride and lust (Skt. *devaputramara*; Tib. *lha'i bu' i bdud*) or the demon of desire and temptation (Robert, 2003, p. 13).

The victory banner is supposed to be raised at top of Mount Meru. In terms of the mandala, this represents the Buddha's victory over the entire universe. An early form of the Mount Meru's victory banner of the ten directions is described as a triple pennant. The crescent moon and sun are at the peak of this victory banner's jeweled handle. The triple pennant is made of colored silk and carries the symbols of the three victorious creatures of harmony. It hangs below the crescent moon's jeweled support. *Dhvaja* is considered an attribute of several deities in Vajrayana Buddhism, particularly Vaishravana (Tib. *rnam thos sras*) and the great protector king of the north. Vaishravana is associated with Kubera, the *yaksha* spirits's monarch, as a wealth deity, whose warlike form carries a victory banner and a jewel-spitting mongoose symbolizing the acquisition of wealth through victory. Vaishravana's secret form wields a victory banner fashioned from a tiger's head and skin. As a symbol of triumph over fury and hostility, a tiger skin apron is usually included in victory banners. In Buddhist ceremonies in Tibet, flags are typically fashioned of cylindrical wooden handles embellished with small, jeweled parasols and vertically adorned with layers of silk curtains, colorful cloth strips, jeweled ornaments, and silk scarf. The traditional triangular copper tip is hammered on the top of pillars and the victory banner into the monastery's four corners and the temple's roof to signify the Buddha's triumphant *dharma* that extends to all four directions and his victory over the four devils. A succession of hanging aprons of beaten metal descends from the parasol, ringed by *repousse* nets of hanging diamonds on the roofs of protector chapels or tiny temples. In the Nyingma or Bon traditions, a little victory sign hanging with black silk from a smacked copper frame and a trident is also on exhibit regularly.

7. The lotus flower (LF) (Skt. *padma*; Tib. *pad rna*; *chu-skyes*)

The lotus blossom is an emblem of beauty, love, and compassion. It displays its beauty and aroma, attracting and nourishing bees to make honey. Tibetan art is full of flowers motifs (Wang, 2021) which surround deities and bloom widely on the landscape as symbols of the heavenly realms. In the traditional arts of China and Tibet, the chrysanthemum represents autumn, the plum bloom winter, the peony spring, and the lotus summer. Stylizations of these four flower motifs are also used in the Tibetan art. They result in various hybrid forms of leaves and flowers that look like an artistic rather than a botanical representation (Tin, Anh, & Thien, 2021). The five lotus varieties are also symbolic representations of various flowers, including daisies, pomegranates, hollyhocks, jasmines, poppies, gardenia, wild rose, saffron, oranges blossoms, peach blossoms, plum blossoms, and magnolias. The exotic Indian flower species are all popular flowers that inspire visionary innovation such as the wild orchid, *ashoka,* coral, white and yellow *champaka,* or frangipani. Small Tibetan alpine flowers, such as the blue Himalayan poppy, safflower, and flower of Tara, are also painted as meadow flowers. Affiliations with specific flowers are also assigned to some deities. The goddess Vajravarahi, for example, wears a red *karavira* (oleander) flower garland around her neck, which was traditionally worn by a deceased king. Flowers of the white *champaka* or *naga (nagakesara)* tree are an attribute of Maitreya. The delicate flowers of the *udumbara* or glamorous fig tree, and the blue *utpala* lotus, are attributes of many deities such as Tara and Avalokiteshvara.

The pink lotus *(padma)* is the most common hand-held lotus, but lotus of other colors such as scarlet *(kamala)*, white *(pundarika)*, and blue *(utpala)* are also available. A single leafed stem is held between the fingers of a deity or a lama to support hand-held lotuses. Just below the lotus root, this stem splits into three. The fully blossoming lotus is on

the center stem, a fruit with abandoned leaves on the right stem, and an unopened bud on the left stem. These three stems represent the Buddhas of the three times: the fruit of the past (*Dipankara*), the open blossom of the present (*Shakya*), and the potential bud of the future (*Maitreya*). Flowers, clouds, water, rocks, and sky are typically shaded with meticulous gradations in a skillfully painted thangka. Long periods are required to achieve the most delicate shading of these components. If a painted flower has been shaded a hundred times, it is thought to be perfect.

8. The Dharmachakra (DHA) (Skt. *chokra*; Tib. *'khor-lo*)

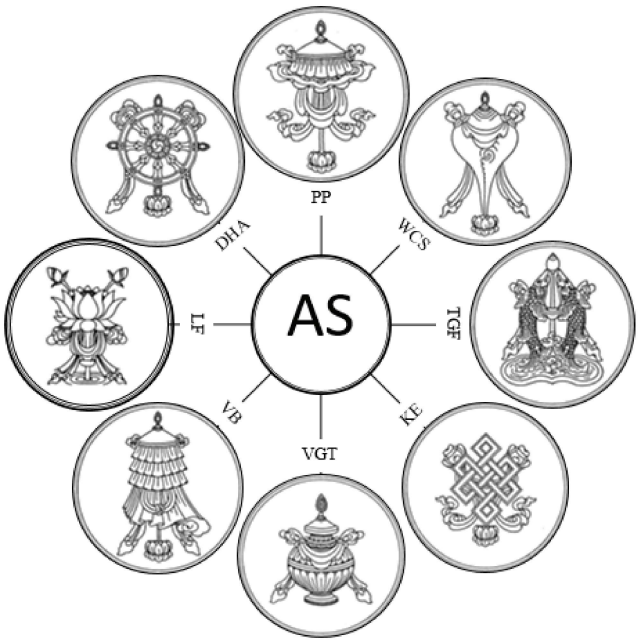
The wheel represents creation, sovereignty, protection, and the sun in ancient Indian culture. It first appears as a solar symbol on clay seals discovered at early Indus Valley or Harappan archaeological site. The six-spoked wheel, known as *Sudarshana Chakra* in Vedic Hinduism (Mitkari, 2019), is Vishnu's major attribute. It compares Vishnu to the sun and the central hub around which the phenomenal universe's wheel of creation and preservation revolves. The wheel, like the revolving wheel of the sky, depicts mobility, continuity, and change that always move forward. A wheel of Indian sharp blades was rolled into the enemy's lines, slung on a rope as a violent rotating weapon, or flung like a discus as an ancient Indian weapon. The radiating poles of a cart or chariot wheels and the blades of the wheels are made of six, eight, or twelve spokes.

Buddhism utilizes the wheel as a symbol of the Buddha's teachings and refers to it as a *Dharma Chakra* or The Wheel of Dharma. *Chakravatin* or spinning the wheel represents an ability to cut through all obstacles and illusions. *Dharmachakra* (Tib. *chos kyi 'khor-lo*) means the wheel of dharma or wheel of spiritual transformation in Tibetan. The wheel's dynamic rotation mirrors the rapid spiritual transformation revealed through Buddha's teachings. It also symbolizes the rotating weapon of change (Le, 2021) that destroys the devil,

especially one of human minds such as desire, passion, libido, and lust. In addition, it represents the conquest of all obstacles and deceptions. Buddha's first discourse was the first turning of the wheel of dharma, revealing *dharma* of the Four Noble Truths, which include the reality of suffering, its origin, and its end as well as the truth of the Noble Eightfold Path, which leads to the cessation of suffering. His subsequent discourses at *Rajghir* and *Shravasti* are the second and third turnings of the wheel of *dharma*. The center of the wheel symbolizes moral discipline, the spokes analytical insight, and the rim contemplative concentration. The Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path of the Aryas or virtuous creatures, which encompasses appropriate knowledge, thought, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration, as well as the eight directions, is represented by the eight prongs (Figure 6).

Figure 6

The Tibetan Eight Auspicious Symbols



Note: Reprinted from Beer, R. (1999). *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. Shambala Publications.

Conclusion

This paper aims to describe and analyze the Art and Ashtamangala in Tibetan culture by looking at several pieces of historical and spiritual art. All of the arts and crafts have been influenced by the religious root that has long been integrated to the Tibetan minority's lifestyle. This can be seen in the Tibetan Buddhist artefact such as the thangka, and the religious practices, sacred rite, palace, painting, woodwork, and metalwork.

The Ashtamangala, originating in the Buddhist background that illustrates Buddha's life and his teaching, merged into Tibetan life as an element of their spiritual part. The secular and ritual ceremony directly influences the enlightenment in life. Ashtamangala points to the know-how as hornet signs linking Buddha, Deva, and human beings. It may suggest a belief in the supreme power of god and an ideology for happiness of both the present and the after- death world, or even reincarnation within Samsara until nirvana.

The Ashtamangala is used in custom or dressing and sacred items such as crows, rings, necklaces, staffs, potteries, thrones, mirror frames, banners, lamps, and palace ornaments. Tibetan Buddhists employ the Ashtamangala in their household and public art. Although various sources may describe the symbols differently, the overall explanation can be summarized as follows: the parasol, white conch shell, two golden fish, treasure vase, victory banner, lotus symbol, and *dharmachakra*.

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