

## Contribution

### Akṣobhya: The Buddha of Steadfastness in Sanskrit Texts and Tibetan and Chinese Art

Shashibala

**A**KṢOBHYA'S (Tib. Mi.hkhrugs) presence in China is witnessed as early as Han times when the first translation of the Akṣobhya-vyuha-sūtra from Sanskrit into Chinese was done by Lokakṣema in 147–86 CE. Thereafter, Bodhiruchi translated it in the eighth century. Akṣobhya is often named *Pu-tung-ching-kang*, *Mi-chi Pu-tung-ching-kang*, and *Pu-tung-ching-kang pi-mi-fo* in Chinese.

As one of the major Mahāyāna deities, he is mentioned in many Mahāyāna sūtras like the Aṣṭa-sāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā translated by Lokakṣema c. 178–98 CE (Taisho 224), Chih Ch'ien in 223–53 CE (Taisho 225), Kumārajīva in 408 CE (Taisho 227), and Hsüan Tsang in 660–63 CE (Taisho 220). The Buddhakṣepaṇa-sūtra was translated into Chinese by Bodhiruchi between 508 CE and 535 CE. There Akṣobhya is referred to as the son of a householder. He also appears in the Sukhāvativyūha-sūtra translated by Chih Ch'ien, and the Lotus Sūtra and Bodhisattvānusmṛti-buddha-samādhi-sūtra translated by Guṇaśhālā in 426 CE. The Daśabhūmika-sūtra translated into Chinese by Dharmarakṣa in 297 CE refers to him as one of the five Buddhas who represent the five stages of enlightenment.

Akṣobhya manifests as a Buddha, as one of the 16 princes,<sup>1</sup> the son of a householder, and as ninth of the thousand sons of King Aranemi. The Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra says that he came from the heaven Abhirati. Over the past many centuries, he has been sculpted and painted in Tibet in many forms. He holds his hand in an earth-touching mudrā in the Pao-hsiang Lou pantheon and 360 Icons. In many types of maṇḍalas, he sits as the central deity. He embraces his *prajñā*/ power in *yab-yum* forms. In the Niṣpannayogāvalī the second maṇḍala is that of Akṣobhya.

Twenty-six main maṇḍalas in Tibetan art were referred to by Abhayākara Gupta of Vikramashila University in the 11th century. He wrote a general manual of tantric liturgy called Vajravali. The maṇḍalas were later detailed by him in the text Niṣpannayogāvalī in 26 chapters. The second maṇḍala, named Pindikritārtha-Akṣobhya-maṇḍala, will be discussed in detail here, presenting a comparative study of it in Tibetan

art and the Sanskrit text of Niṣpannayogāvalī.

The maṇḍalas are painted in accordance with the description given in the Niṣpannayogāvalī which is based on the text named Pindikrama (Tib. Bsdus pahi rim pa). Such a maṇḍala was presented to the former Panchen Lama during his visit to Yung Ho kung. In some maṇḍalas Akṣobhya sits surrounding the main Buddha. In different forms he has different numbers of arms and heads. In his 10-armed form he has five faces.

This article focuses on textual references to Akṣobhya, the sūtras where he is mentioned, his different types of manifestations, emergence of the deity as a Buddha, his pure land/ paradise called Abhirati, representation of the stages of his enlightenment, his relation with other Buddhas, available sculptures, paintings and scrolls in various collections, maṇḍalas of Akṣobhya, the deities sitting in various enclosures of the maṇḍala in the Niṣpannayogāvalī, detailed description in the Niṣpannayogāvalī, initiation of Vajravali-maṇḍalas, his appearance in other maṇḍalas, and symbolism.

A 14th-century Akṣobhya-maṇḍala of Guhyasamāja (tr. esoteric communion) from central Tibet comprises 32 deities (see Fig. 1). Akṣobhya as the central figure is in union with his consort Sparsavajra. Their faces are painted in black, white, and red and in their hands they hold a vajra, bell, sword, wheel, jewel, and lotus.<sup>2</sup>

A similar thangka belonging to the 17th century is that of

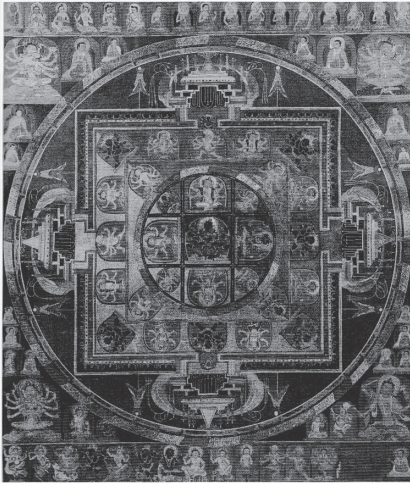


Fig. 1 (See Rhie and Thurman, 1999, p. 433, pl. 771)

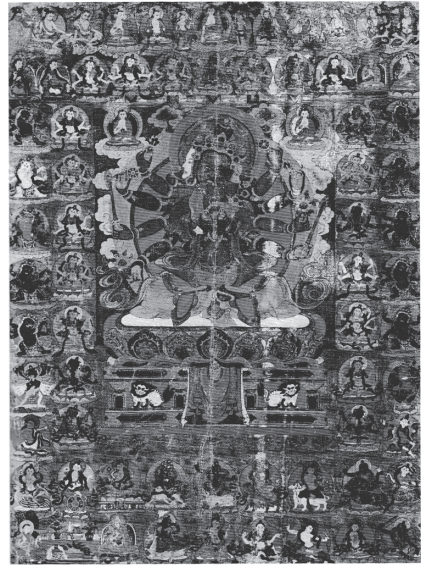


Fig. 2 (See Rhie and Thurman, 1999, p. 371, pl. 136)

Guhyasamāja Buddha Akṣobhya from eastern or central Tibet. Behind his throne in the sky on the two sides of Akṣobhya are two Buddhas in *Dharmachakrapravartana* posture (see Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup>

Akṣobhya's prominent position in the Mahāyāna pantheon makes him popular in Buddhist countries. His images, sculptures, statuettes, and paintings are commonly found in Buddhist countries especially of the north and the east. When represented in a stupa he always faces east. His left hand rests in his lap while the right is in an earth-touching *mudrā* with palm facing inward. A pair of elephants are his mounts and his characteristic symbol is the vajra.

Various other forms of Akṣobhya are found in tantric works, some of them are four-armed, some six-armed, some standing and some sitting, some single and some in *yab-yum*. He is “the paradigm of the Dharma's ability to transmute all the hate of all beings into blue ultimate-reality-perfection wisdom”. The Akṣobhya-vyuha says that he trained himself to be “without anger”, to be unperturbed (*a-kṣobhya*).<sup>4</sup>

## The Name

Sanskrit: Akṣobhya, Chinese: *pu-tang fo*, Manchu: *assan ako fucihi*, Mongolian: *ulu guteliugci*, Tibetan: *mi.bskyod.pa*, Japanese: *Ashuku*, *ashukubi*, *ashukuba*, *fudo mudo* ‘steadfast’, *munu*, *mushinni* ‘without anger’.

Akṣobhya symbolizes firmness of the heart of a Bodhi, which is equal to that of the vajra. The word Akṣobhya means undisturbed, ‘the unshakable’, meaning the adamant state of being, without anger and with steadfastness. It is a depersonalized substitute of Śākyamuni. In the Bhadrakalpika-sūtra (tr. by Dharmarakṣa in 291, K 387), he is called “Buddha without anger”. Absorbed in contemplation, he destroys passions and presides over the divinity who symbolizes the pure heart of Bodhi.

Akṣobhya is one of the five manifestations of cosmic consciousness in its creative principle. His name means he is coincidence of knowledge with the absolute being — *dharmadhātu-jñāna*, primordial consciousness identical with the one being. The attributes held by him and the symbolism behind his iconic representations are steadfastness, truth, luminosity, bliss, and *śūnyatā*.

According to the Sarvarahasya-tantra, “Akṣobhya is the symbol of purification, in the meditative process, namely the visual perception, and corresponds to the second of the five types of mystic knowledge, that is *ādarāśa-jñāna*”.



Fig. 3 10-armed Guhyasamāja Akṣobhya mirror symbolizing the mystic knowledge — *adarsajñāna*. Akṣobhya, in a 10-armed form, holds a mirror in his front arms as his chief characteristic feature, while in the others holding tokens of war like, bow, arrow, and cakra symbolize his power as a protector of the country (see Chandra, 1999, p. 180).<sup>5</sup>

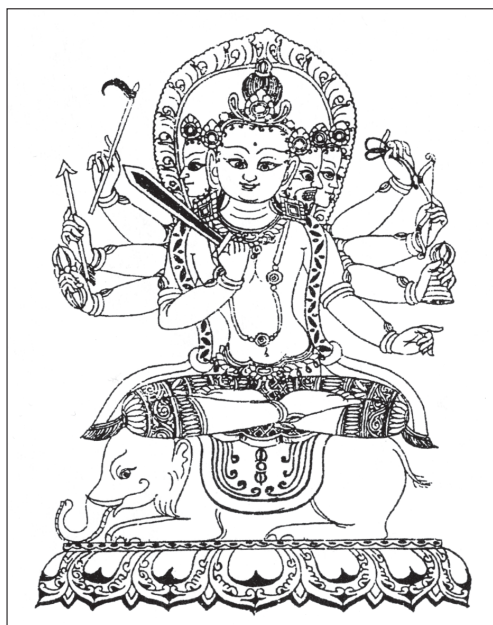


Fig. 4 The Nepalese Buddhists portrayed Akṣobhya sitting on an elephant as his vehicle, as a symbol of strength. This Akṣobhya has four faces and eight arms with some weapons of war such as a sword, vajra, bow, arrow, and goad.<sup>6</sup> He cannot be swayed by defilement or constructive thought. He symbolizes the mind which is firm and unchanging (see Chandra, 1999, p. 180).

## A Monk Turning Tathāgata Akṣobhya

In the Akṣobhya-sūtra, Śākyamuni recounts to Śāriputra, while residing at grdhrakuta/ vulture peak mountain, how Akṣobhya bodhisattva made a vow and he expounds the merits and the splendor of his kingdom Abhirati. When Tathāgata Viśālākṣa was teaching, a monk announced his wish to make the vows of a bodhisattva and to study the way which was quite difficult. But the monk was determined and made a vow never to be angry. He was successful in accomplishing the vow in the course of innumerable periods, and he became the Tathāgata Akṣobhya to reign over that very kingdom. Whoever is born there attains the degree of ‘without regression’.<sup>7</sup>

## Akṣobhya as a Buddha

In the Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā, Sukhāvatī-vyūha-sūtra, and Bodhisattvā-anuśmṛti-sūtra, Akṣobhya appears as a Buddha, along with Maitreya — a disciple of Dīpaṅkara and a Buddha of the future, he is in the opposite direction, east, to Amitābha in the west.

The five Buddhas represent the five stages of Enlightenment:

Akṣobhya	A firm unshakable resolve to achieve enlightenment.
Ratnasambhava	The emergence of a mind for potential light/illumination, symbolized by a jewel.
Amitābha	The infinite light is attained through Samadhi, and hence in <i>samādhi-mudrā</i> .
Amoghasiddhi	Siddhi accomplished as the summum of tantras.
Mahāvairocana	The perfect enlightenment represented by the <i>bodhyagrī-mudra</i> .

Protection and stability of state was paramount. From the 11th to the 13th century, calm and peaceful-looking Buddhas were replaced by the wrathful. Achala took the place of Vairocana, the main Buddha among the Five Dhyaṇi Buddhas, and Trailokyavijaya replaced Akṣobhya. The original guardians of gates were replaced by Acala and Hayagrīva. Acala is seen as a divine protector. In the given maṇḍala of Acala, Akṣobhya is placed in the crown of Acala and on the top register of the painting are the five Buddhas (see Fig. 5). Akṣobhya sits at the center holding his hand in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* (see Fig. 6).<sup>8</sup>

As a Buddha, Akṣobhya in Sambhogakāya form, decked with jewelry and crown is from the Mongolian Kanjur (1717–20 CE) (see Fig. 7).<sup>9</sup>





Fig. 5 (See Debreczeny, 2019, pp. 95 and 97)



Fig. 6 (See Debreczeny, 2019, pp. 95 and 97)



Fig. 7 (See Chandra, 1999, p. 166)

His color is blue, *bīja* is *hūm*, and the mantra is *namo ratna-trayāya/ om kaṅkaṇi-kaṅkaṇi/ rocaṇī-rocaṇī/ troṭaṇī-troṭaṇī/ trāsaṇī-trāsaṇī/ prsatihana-pratihana/ sarvakarma-paripūaraṇī me sarva-sattvānām ca svāhā*.<sup>10</sup>

### As One of the Five Buddhas in 360 Icons

In the *360 Icons of Chou Fo P'u-sa sheng Hsiang Tsan*, authored by Rol.Pahi.erdo.rje, alias Lalitavajra (1717–86) an imperial preceptor of Emperor Ch'ien Lung (1736–95), Akṣobhya is depicted as one of the Five Buddhas whose realm is the center and intuitive knowledge of the spiritual sphere which knows all factors of existence — the transcendent wisdom, *dharmatā-jñāna*. Akṣobhya wears a crown and the ornaments of a bodhisattva, sits in the vajrāsana or dhyānāsana position upon a scalloped pīṭha, which symbolizes meditation and spiritual attainment. His right hand is in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā*, symbolizing

the strength of faith and victory over evil forces and the left is in the *dhyāna-mudrā*, symbolic of spiritual focus and a sanctified state (see Fig. 8).<sup>11</sup>

### As a Prince

In the *Buddhakṣeṣaṇa-sūtra*, translated into Chinese by Bodhiruchi between 508 CE and 535 CE, he is the son of a householder under the name *Pratibhānakūṭa*. In the *Karuṇā-puṇḍarīka* (tr. Dharmakṣema in 414–21 CE, K 126), he appears as *misso*, the ninth of the thousand sons of king Aranemi, who himself is a previous incarnation of *Amitābha*.



Fig. 8 (See Chandra, 1999, p. 163)

### As a Dhyāni Buddha

The Five Dhyāni Buddhas — *Vairocana*, *Akṣobhya*, *Ratnasambhava*, *Amitābha*, and *Amoghasiddhi* — are always engaged in meditation, voluntarily restraining themselves from the act of creation. They are the progenitors of different families of gods and goddesses and are not supposed to pass through the stages of a *Bodhisattva*.

*Śrī-guhya-samāja* supports this as follows: *Vairocana Tathāgata* exclaims in his meditation on the nature of *Bodhicitta*, “My *citta* is devoid of all (notions of) existence, it is un-associated with any *skandha*, *dhātu*, *āyatna*, or with subjectivity and objectivity; it is without origination and is of the nature of void as are all the *dharma*s by nature.” *Akṣobhya* exclaims in turn, “All existence is without origination; there is no *dharma*, neither any essence of the *dharma*s; all this is essence-less like the sky — this is the immutable *Bodhi*.”<sup>12</sup>

These Dhyāni Buddhas are the five presiding deities over the five *skandhas*, namely:<sup>13</sup>

- material element (*rūpa*)
- feeling (*vedanā*)

- conceptual knowledge (*saṃjñā*)
- synthetic compound mental states (*saṃskāra*)
- consciousness (*vijñāna*)-*rūpa-vedanā-saṃjñā-saṃskāra-vijñānam eva ca I pañca-buddha-svabhāvān tu skandhotpatti-viniścitam II*

The five kinds of *jñāna*, according to the Advaya-vajra-saṅgraha, are (i) *suviśuddha-dharma-dhātu-jñāna*, producing (?) Vairocana, (ii) *ādarśa-jñāna*, producing Akṣobhya, (iii) *pratyavekṣaṇa-jñāna*, producing Amitābha, (iv) *samatā-jñāna*, producing Ratna-sambhava, and (v) *krtyānuṣṭhāna-jñāna*, producing Amoghasiddhi. The *dhyana* for creation in general is known as *loka-saṃsāra-jñāna*. All these *jñānas* are said to be possessed by Lord Buddha himself.<sup>14</sup> These five kinds of knowledge are his five kinds of attributes from which proceed five kinds of dhyanas. From the dhyanas emanate five deities known as Dhyāni Buddhas.

The Diamond World Maṇḍala represents the Jewel Tower on the summit of Mount Sumeru, where Mahāvairocana reveals the two sūtras and the Diamond World Maṇḍala a second time for the sake of beings who are still in the section of Felicity. The central portion of the Perfected Body Maṇḍala is bordered by a ‘diamond circle’ made up of three-prong vajras placed end to end. In the four diagonal directions outside this circle of vajras are the heads and upper torsos of the four gods of the Elements: Prithivī (Jpn. *Jiten*, Earth God) in the northeast, Varuṇa (Jpn. *Suiuten*, Water God) in the southwest, Agni (Jpn. *Katen*, Fire God) in the southeast, and Vayu (Jpn. *Futen*, Air God) in the northwest. They spread out their arms and grasp the diamond circle as if supporting it. Within the diamond circle there are five Liberation circles (*gedatsu-rin*), one at the center and one in each of the four directions. Toganoo, citing Śraddhākaravarman’s *Setsu-mandara-byosenkyo* (?) as his authority, says that the Liberation circles take two forms.<sup>15</sup> In one form the central circle, which is the abode of Mahāvairocana, is marked out by jewels; Akṣobhya’s circle in the east is marked out by vajras.<sup>16</sup>

### In the Garbhadhātu-maṇḍala

Information concerning their iconography derives from records of oral instructions given by the Acaryas. Kobo Daishi says that the prototypical painting of the Diamond World Maṇḍala, is based on oral tradition recorded in *Bunpi’s Hizoki*, which describes the images in the Perfected Body Maṇḍala as follows: Akṣobhya Tathāgata is in the eastern circle on the central dais. He is the color of yellow gold. His left hand is a fist,



and his right hand hangs down.<sup>17</sup>

The five Buddhas in the Matrix Maṇḍala symbolize the five conversations and the five kinds of knowledge. The *Bodaishinron* says, Akṣobhya Buddha in the east is the perfection of the Great Round Mirror Knowledge (*ādarśa-jñāna*, *daienkyochi*), also called the Diamond Knowledge (*kongo-chi*).<sup>18</sup>

Great Round Mirror Knowledge (*ādarśa-jñāna*, *daienkyochi*): Just as a mirror impartially reflects changing things but is itself unchanged, this knowledge receives the impressions of all phenomenal entities while remaining forever immutable. Akṣobhya Tathāgata, stations to the east of the maṇḍala.<sup>19</sup>

### Dhyāni Buddhas as Tathāgatas

Akṣobhya is mentioned as a Tathāgata in the smaller recension of the Amitāyus-sūtra which was translated into Chinese between 384 CE and 417 CE.<sup>20</sup> The Five Dhyāni Buddhas are also called the Five Tathāgatas and are in the hierarchy of the Panca-tathāgatas. Akṣobhya, the presiding deity over *vijñāna* is often given the highest place and the first four Tathāgatas are generally marked by the miniature of the fifth Tathāgata Akṣobhya and later again, he in turn is marked by the miniature of the Vajra-sattva. The marking of the first four Tathāgatas by the miniature of Akṣobhya implies that the first four skandhas are nothing but models and modifications of consciousness; they are constructions from consciousness. But the *vijñāna*, as one of the aggregates, is not the ultimate reality. Pure consciousness which is absolutely free from the notions of the *grāhya* and the *grāhaka* is the ultimate reality, and this ultimate principle of void is the Vajra-sattva, and, therefore, even Akṣobhya is marked by the miniature figure of the Vajra-sattva.

### Maṇḍala of Guhyasamaja-Akṣobhya

At the center of the *kuṭāgāra* sits Akṣobhya, looking black and fierce, with white and red faces on the right and left, holding a dual vajra (Tib. *Khro.bohi.rdo.rje*), *cakra*, and lotus in his right hands, and a bell, *cintāmani* jewel, and a sword in his left hands. He embraces a self-reflex *Sparśavajrā*. In the eastern and other directions are Vairocana et al., and in the intermediate directions, southeast, etc., are Locanā et al. (see Fig. 9).

Guhyasamaja prescribes a specific mantra, direction, śakti, and

guardian to each Dhyāni Buddha (see Fig. 10, 11). Akṣobhya is regarded as the second Dhyāni Buddha by the Nepalese Buddhists. His description appears almost everywhere in tantric literature. The Pañcakara section of the Advayavajrasaṅgraha (ADV. P. 40–41) perhaps gives the best description thus: *sūryamaṇḍalastha-nīla-hūṃkāraṇiṣpanno dvibhuja ekamukho bhūsparśamudrādharo, vajraparyāṅkī..... vijñānaskandhasvabhāvaḥ..... vajrakulī..... śiśiramadyahn-akatuśruti ākāśaśabda-cavargo Akṣobhya-viśuddhaḥ.*<sup>21</sup>

**Prajna of Akṣobhya**

The five Tathāgatas have their female consorts. These Dhyāni Buddhas or Tathāgatas are generally described with their own consorts of śaktis.<sup>22</sup>

- Vairocana — Vajradhatvīśvarī
- Akṣobhya — Locanā
- Amitābha — Māmakī
- Ratna-sambhava — Pāṇḍarā
- Amoghasiddhi — Āryatārā

**Abhirati — The Kingdom of Akṣobhya**

The chapter ‘Seeing the Kingdom of Akṣobhya Buddha’ of the Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa says that Vimalakīrti originally came from the kingdom of Abhirati (DBI 156–57). The Abhirati paradise of Akṣobhya is sharply distinct from innumerable other *buddhakṣetras* by the leading role of women in it. Women play a role which is both unexpected and essential in the Akṣobhya-vyūha. Here, Akṣobhya preaches the dharma to women; there is talk of jewels of women (*strīratna*); there is frequent allusion to feminine ornaments; and childbirth is described in unusually profuse detail.<sup>23</sup>

961 Guhyasamāja Akṣobhya  
T. Gsañ-hdus mi-bskyod-pa

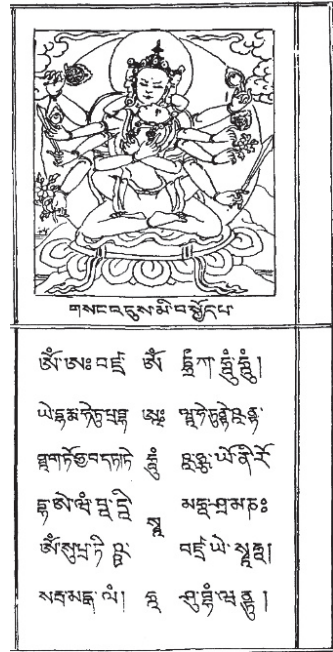


Fig. 9 (See Chandra, 1999)

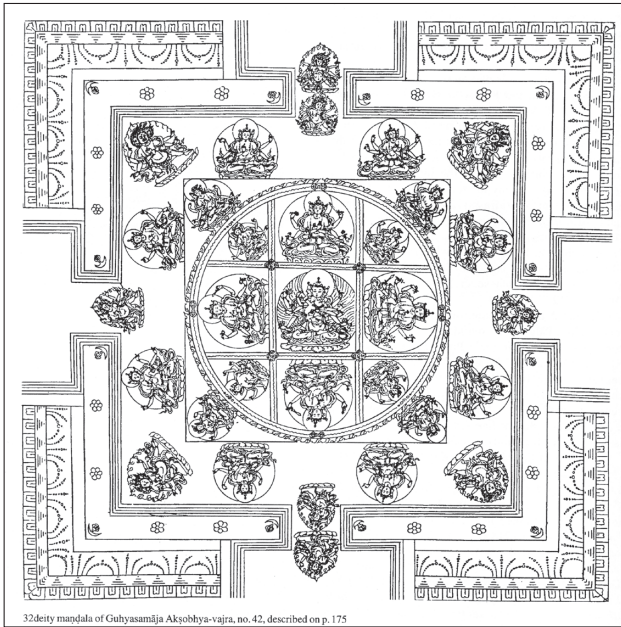


Fig. 10 32-deity maṇḍala of Guhyasamāja Akṣobhya-vajra no. 42 DBI 176 (see Raghuvira, 1999).

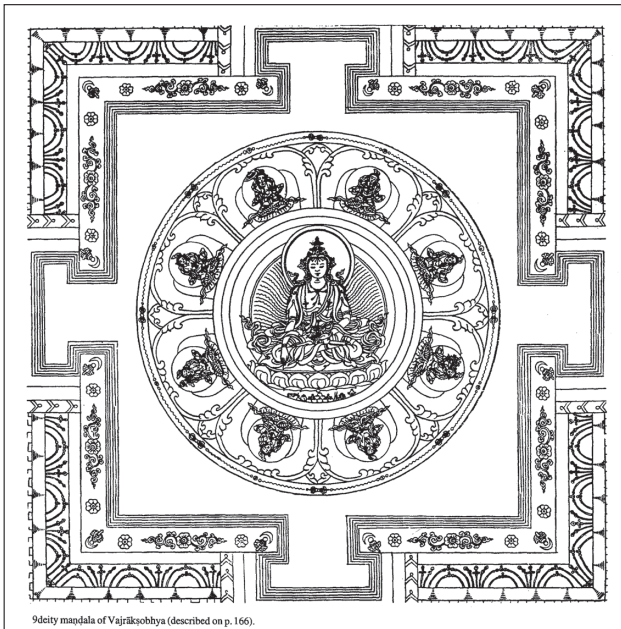


Fig. 11 Nine-deity maṇḍala of Vajrākṣobhya (Narthang pantheon) (see Raghuvira, 1999).

**Akṣobhya Maṇḍala in PIṆḌĪKRAMA-SĀDHANA (Piṇḍikramokt-Akṣobhya-maṇḍala [Maṇḍala of Piṇḍikrama Akṣobhya])**

The Piṇḍikramokta-maṇḍala should be drawn up to kutagara. (Guhyasamaja Akṣobhya DBI 1.172)

Akṣobhya is the principal deity in the Akṣobhya-maṇḍala according to Piṇḍīkrama in the Niṣpannayogāvalī. He is described thus: “Akṣobhya kṛṣṇo raudraḥ sitaraktasavyetaramukhaḥ savyakanaih kulacakrapadmani vamair-ghanta-cintamani-khandgan vibhranaḥ svabha-sparśavajrālingitaḥ”<sup>24</sup> (Akṣobhya is blue in color and looks angry. The color of his right face is white and that of the left is red. He holds in his right hands a vajra [family symbol], a discus, and a lotus. In the three left hands he carries a bell, a cintāmaṇi jewel, and a sword. With the two principal hands he embraces the Pranja sparsavajra by name).<sup>25</sup>

The Four Tathāgatas sit in the four directions — *tasya pūrvādidikṣu Vairocanādayaḥ āgneyādividikṣu Locanādayaḥ* (see Fig. 12).

- Vairocana and others sit in the four directions.
- East — Vairocana, south — Ratneśa, west — Amitābha, north —

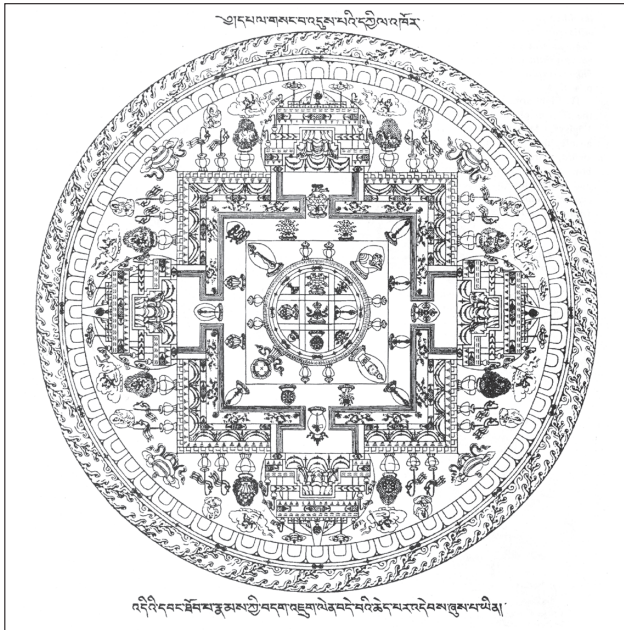


Fig. 12 Piṇḍīkrama Akṣobhya-maṇḍala (see Raghuvira, 1999).

Amoghasiddhi.

- Locanā and other goddesses sit in the four intermediate directions:  
SE — Locanā, SW — Māmakī, NW — Pāṇḍarā, NE — Tārā

### **Akṣobhya in the Maṇḍala of Vajradhātu Vairocana in Niṣpannayogāvalī (19)**

In the Vajradhātu-maṇḍala, Lord Vairocana sits on the pericarp of a multi-petal lotus, astride a lion in the middle of the kūtāgāra — top of Mount Sumeru. In the eastern direction, Akṣobhya sits on the pericarp of a multi-petal lotus on a regal elephant, in *vajraparyāṅka* posture, and he is blue. He holds his hand in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* clasping a blue five-pronged vajra by the middle finger of the right hand and places the left hand facing upwards in the lap. There are four Bodhisattvas in the four directions — Vajrasattva on the eastern petal, Vajrarāja on the southern petal, Vajrarāga on the northern petal, and Vajrasādhu on the western petal.<sup>26</sup>

### **Akṣobhya in the Gobu-Shingan and Vajradhātu-Maṇḍala in Japan**

Rta-sogyara-gobu-shingan, popularly known as Gobu-shingan, is the earliest extant Sino-Japanese representation of the Tattvasaṅgraha drawn by Śubhākarasiṃha (637–735 CE) on a scroll. A copy of The Gobu-shingan was kept at Daigoji monastery but is now unknown. A copy from the National Museum was published by Seigai Omura in *Bukkyo Zuzo Shuko* (佛教圖像集古, 1922).<sup>27</sup>

Akṣobhya in the first maṇḍala of the Gobu-shingan is sitting on a lotus placed upon seven elephants (see Fig. 13). His right hand is in the *bhūmisparśa-mudrā* and the left is holding the corner of his *uttarīya*. The dhāraṇī given under the illustration runs as follows: *Om bodhicittam utpadyāmi Om tiṣṭha vajra. Om vajrātmakoḥam. Bhagavān Akṣobhyastathāgatam.* The first from the right of the three postures in Fig. 14 is vajra-bandha-mudrā, the second bhūmisparśa-mudrā on a lotus, and the last by a gem surrounded by vajras placed upon a lotus seat.<sup>28</sup>

The Vajradhātu-vairocana-maṇḍala comes in the first chapter of the Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṅgraha. Akṣobhya in the mahā-maṇḍala of graphic Vajradhātu has the same hand gesture as in the Gobu-shingan — sitting on a lotus, his animal mount is missing.<sup>29</sup> *Hūm* is written in *siddham* as his seed syllable.



**In the Maṇḍala of Vairocana-mañjuvajra in the Niṣpannayogāvalī (20)**

In the 43-deity maṇḍala of Mañjuvajra, the essence of Vairocana sits in *sattva-paryāṅka* posture on a lunar disc placed over a multi-petalled lotus which is placed on a lion in its nave (*nābhi*). There are four Tathāgatas and their consorts in the eight directions.<sup>30</sup>

In the eastern quarter, Akṣobhya sits in *lalitākṣepa* posture on a solar disc, over a multi-petalled lotus on a regal elephant. He is blue, the middle face is blue, and the right and left faces are white and red. He has eight arms — he draws a vajra near his heart with the middle finger of the right hand and he proudly holds a vajra-bell in the left vajra-fist;



Fig. 13 Akṣobhya in the *guhya-dhāraṇī*-maṇḍala of the Gobu-singhan holds a three-pronged, double-sided vajra upon a vajra which is placed upon a lotus. He is wearing ornaments and a crown. He is sitting on a lotus. Below the illustration he is written *Vajra-vajriṇī: Om vajra-vajriṇī hūm*.<sup>31</sup> Akṣobhya in the first maṇḍala of the Gobu-shingan sitting on a lotus placed on elephants (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 109).



Fig. 14 His symbolic form and hand posture (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 109).<sup>32</sup>



Fig. 15 Akṣobhya in the Guhya-dhāraṇī-maṇḍala of the Gobu-shingan (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 111).

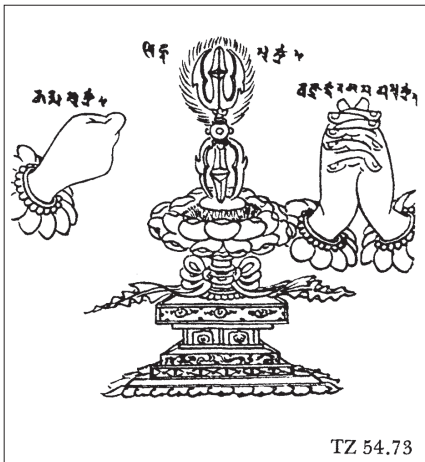


Fig. 16 Akṣobhya in symbolic form and his hand gesture (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 111).

TZ 54.73

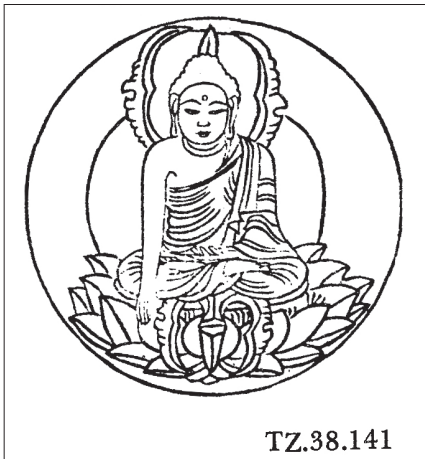


Fig. 17 Akṣobhya in Vajradhatu-dharma-maṇḍala (see Chandra, 1999, p. 159).

TZ.38.141



Fig. 18 Akṣobhya in the samaya-maṇḍala of the Gobu-shingan (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 110).



Fig. 19 Akṣobhya in symbolic form and his hand gesture (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 110).



Fig. 20 Akṣobhya in the samaya-maṇḍala of Vajradhatu (see Chandra, 1999, p. 159).



Fig. 21 Akṣobhya in the karma-maṇḍala of the Gobu-shingan (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 112).

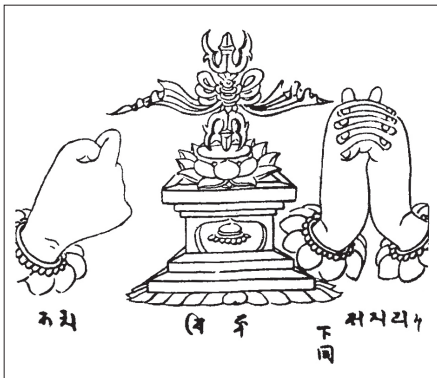


Fig. 22 Akṣobhya's symbolic form and hand gesture (see Shashibala, 1989, p. 112).



Fig. 23 Akṣobhya in the Trailokyavijaya-maṇḍala (see Chandra, 1999, p. 159).

TZ.38.390

in the other right hands he has a sword, goad, and arrow, and in the left ones a breast, noose, and bow. Others are as follows — Ratnasambhava in the south, Amitābha in the west, Amoghasiddhi in the north, Locanā in the NE, Māmakī in the SE, Pāṇḍarā in the SW, and Tārā in the NW.<sup>33</sup>

### In the Maṇḍala of Dharmadhātu-vāgīśvara

In the maṇḍala of Dharmadhātu-vāgīśvara, Mañjuḥṣa sits in *vajraparyāṅka* posture on a lunar disc placed over a multi-petalled lotus in the nave of the *kūtāgāra*. There are eight Uṣṇiṣas and four Tathāgatas in the four arenas around the center. Akṣobhya on a royal elephant, is in the middle of the eastern arena. He is blue and has four faces: the central face is blue in anger and *sṛṅgāra*; the right one is white, wide open and fierce; the back one is yellow and heroic; and the left one is red with fangs on the lip. He has eight arms: the right ones hold a sword, vajra, arrow, and goad, of the left ones one is in *tarjanī-mudrā*, the others hold a bell, a noose, and a bow. He is surrounded by Bodhisattvas Vajrasattva, Vajrarāja, Vajrarāga, and Vajrasādhu. The four Buddhas in the four arenas around the center are: Akṣobhya in the east, Ratnasambhava in the middle of the southern arena, Amitābha in the middle of the western arena, and Amoghasiddhi in the middle of the northern arena.<sup>34</sup>

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- TZ= Taisho Zuzo (大正図像). 1924–34. *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo Zuzo Bu* 大正新修大藏經圖像部 (The Tripitaka in Chinese [picture section]), eds., J. Takakusu and J. Ono, Tokyo: Daizo Shuppan.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For reference see: <https://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/dic/Content/S/221>.
- <sup>2</sup> Rhie and Thurman (1999), 432–33.
- <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 370–71.
- <sup>4</sup> For a detailed analysis of this sūtra see Soper (1959), 167–69.
- <sup>5</sup> Chandra (1999), 180.
- <sup>6</sup> Nagano and Tachikawa (1989), 10.
- <sup>7</sup> Chandra (1999), 155–56.
- <sup>8</sup> Debreczeny (2019), 94–97.
- <sup>9</sup> LC 1991:110..
- <sup>10</sup> Chandra (1999), 165.
- <sup>11</sup> Chandra and Bunce (2002), 166–67.
- <sup>12</sup> Dasgupta (1974), 89.
- <sup>13</sup> Vajra-vārāhi-kalpa-mahātantra, MS, R.A.S.B. No. 11285, p. 10 (A), Dasgupta (1974), 84.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.
- <sup>15</sup> Toganoo (1927), 207.
- <sup>16</sup> Snodgrass (1997), 572–73.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 590.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 594–95.
- <sup>20</sup> Bhattacharyya (1980), 51–52.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>22</sup> Dasgupta (1974), 117.
- <sup>23</sup> Chandra (1999), 157.
- <sup>24</sup> NSP (1949), 5.
- <sup>25</sup> Chandra and Sharma (2015).
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 152–6.
- <sup>27</sup> Shashibala (1989), 12.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.
- <sup>29</sup> TZ 38.6.
- <sup>30</sup> NSP (1949), 164–65.
- <sup>31</sup> Shashibala (1989), 110.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 167–68.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 179–84.

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**Shashibala** currently serves as Dean of the Centre for Indology, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. She graduated from Himachal Pradesh University, and her research focuses primarily on India's cultural influence in Asia. Other specializations include Sanskrit, History of Arts, Buddhism, and cross-cultural connections across political boundaries. She works as Research Professor and Executive Member at the International Academy of Indian Culture in New Delhi, and has taught extensive courses on Japanese Buddhist art and the history of Japanese and Southeast Asian art. She is the author of more than 20 books and 75 articles that were presented at international conferences and seminars. The various exhibitions that she has curated have attracted attention both in India and abroad. Her published books include, *Buddhist Art: In Praise of the Divine* (Lustre Press, 2003) and *Buddhist Art and Thought* (Eternal Tree Books, 2020).