
The pantheon of northern Buddhism in its Tibetan version astonishes one with the diversity of form in comparison with pantheons of other world religions. As one gets familiar with the contents of the pantheon embodied in the works of the traditional fine art, the astonishment increases as the

“holy images of Buddhism are thousands of characters which possess a variety of different attributes, heads, arms, legs, etc.” (p. 18).

Besides, one character can act in a hundreds of different hypostases. Thus, there are 108 appearances of bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara\(^1\) or bodhisattva Mañjushrī. That is why traditional Tibetan art has been mostly studied by specialists in religions, ethnographers, historians of religion but not specialists in art. They have been diverted by the many-sidedness and complexity of Buddhist images represented in painting, sculpture, monumental art which has complicated their identification in various collections.

However, these were the Tibetan masters and their apprentices who were first of all concerned about the diversity and the complexity of identification of artistic images determined by Buddhist dogmatics and the necessity to depict exactly the characters of the Pantheon. To control the correctness of the created images samples were created or albums of xylographic drawings of originals were used necessary for the master to create a certain image. These were not only Buddhists who aspired to reproduce sacred images exactly. The same refers to the Christian “Siyan original” or “Erminiya”. Among the most famous Tibetan albums of xylographic drawings which were spread on a huge territory were the “300 burkhans” and the “500 burkhans” — the unified originals of the Geluk school, whose authors in Beijing were Rolpe-dorje, Changcha Hutuhta II (1717—1786) and in Tashilunpo Tanpe-nima, Panchen Lama IV (1781—1852), the highest hierarchs of this Buddhist school. It is commonly assumed that the albums of xylographic drawings and sādhana collections (iconographic texts) were used as compulsory manuals for masters who created works of Buddhist art in the Tibetan tradition.

Naturally, for European researchers of Buddhist art such albums and sādhana collections served as the main auxiliary material. Albums and sādhana are published, new sources are introduced. This intensive work which has been done since the end of the 19th century is reflected in the Bibliography (97 entries) of the edition, the review of which is brought to our readers’ attention.

For the first time Andrey Terentyev turned to the problem of identification of the characters of Buddhist pantheon in the Tibetan tradition as early as in the 1970s. As all researchers before him, he started with the search for the analogue of the necessary image in all available publications. However, the laboriousness of the identification process forced A. Terentyev to search for a more productive and available technique of image identification which would allow even amateurs to recognize Buddhist characters quickly and correctly. He developed and published his technique of Buddhist characters’ identification basing on the well-ordered use of iconographic elements distinguished by the observer of the image\(^2\).

In the basis of this technique lies a peculiarity typical of human mentality: when looking at an anthropomorphic image the eyes first of all, at least for a second, focus on the face, and then can focus on any object depending on what attracts attention. That is why A. Terentyev chooses a character’s head, more precisely headdress as the first element of his iconographic description, and then follow the other constituting elements of description: poses, gestures, vehicles, attributes.

This technique was developed a quarter of a century ago. The problem of pantheon characters’ identification is still actual. The edition consists of the introduction, three parts (Part I — “Elements of Buddhist iconography, indexes of iconographic elements”; Part II — “Identification of Buddhist Images”; Part III — Appendix: “The Iconographic group of eighty four mahāsiddhas, “Pantheon of Kālacakra-tantra””), and selected bibliography (97 entries). In comparison with the previous publications this edition was replenished with indexes of iconographic elements in four languages (Sanskrit, Tibetan, Russian and English,


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