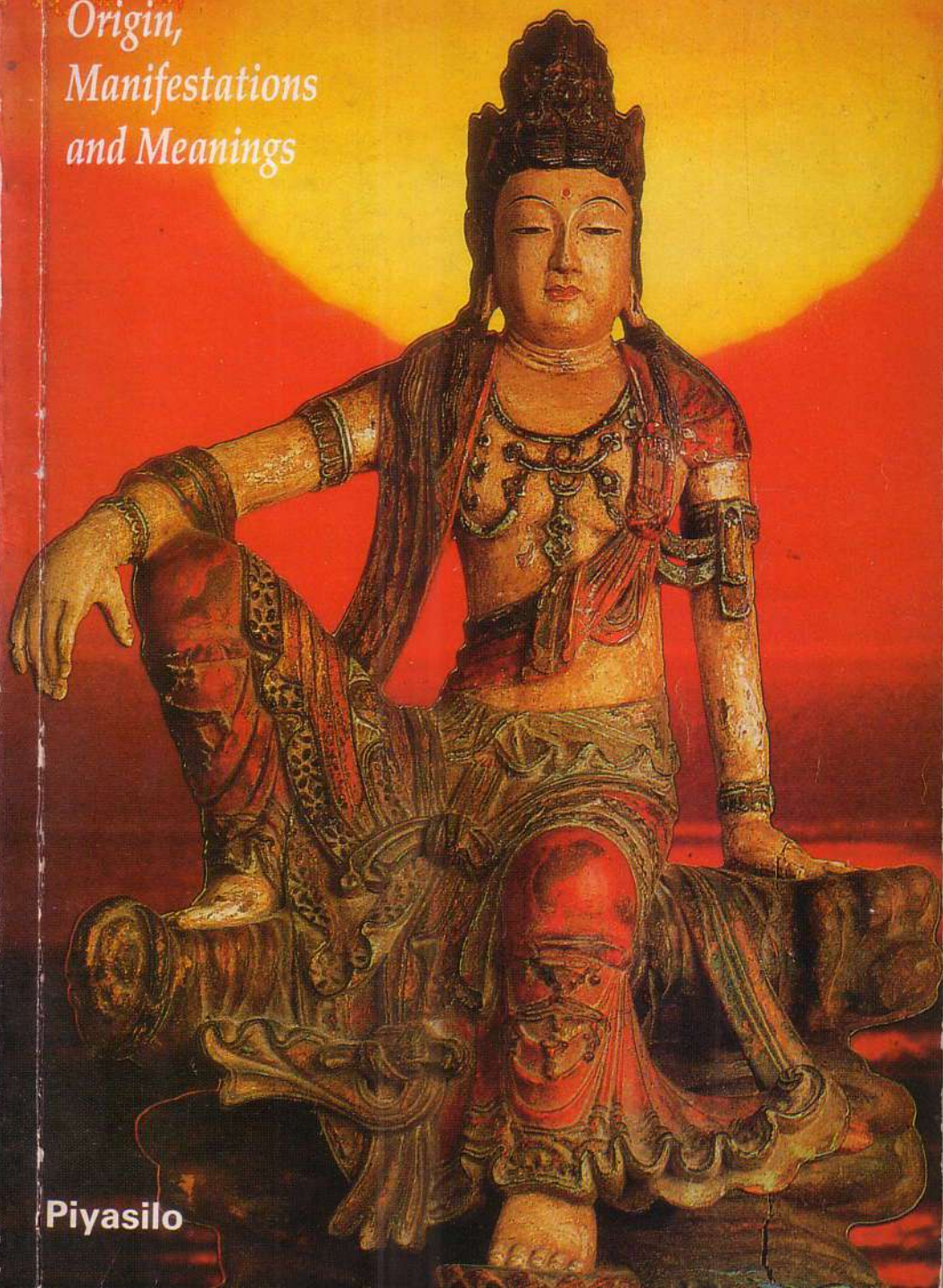


# AVALOKITESVARA

*Origin,  
Manifestations  
and Meanings*



Piyasilo

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Buddhist Roots Series No. 1

# **AVALOKITEŚVARA**

## **Origin, Manifestations & Meaning.**

by

**Piyasīlo**

**Dharmafarer Enterprises**  
for

**The Community of the Dharmafarers**  
2nd revised edition  
1991a

## THE BUDDHIST ROOTS SERIES

This series hopes to help the local Buddhists cultivate a broad and unified historical perspective of Buddhism and become more aware of its cultural and spiritual depths. It attempts to show that while Buddhism can (and has to) be rooted in tradition, its truth nevertheless transcends all barriers. The main objective of this series is to understand and alleviate our present state of cultural rootlessness (where it exists) and sink our Buddhist roots in the fertile ground of the Dharma so that we live in a Sangha-spirited community.

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- (1) The Origin and Meaning of Avalokiteśvara (1987b); 2nd revised: Avalokiteśvara: Origin, Manifestations & Meaning (1991a)
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## PREFACE to the 2nd revised edition

The first edition of this book has been out of print for about four years. This new edition sees some minor revisions and corrections previously overlooked. With an improved desktop publishing system, we have been able to add the various diacritical marks for the Pali and Sanskrit terms. The latest revised reconstruction of the Great Compassion in Sanskrit is mentioned in the later part of the book.

The late appearance of this book is partly due to my commitment to a number of research projects and partly due to tragic religious politics that has strangled the FOBM, which the Dharmacarīs and I have subsequently left. The Community of the Dharmafarers is now all on its own - as it should have been all along. We shall continue to work with even greater dedication to Dharma studies, training, practice and propagation, now that we are less likely to be distracted by religious politics. The Third Decade of the Dharmafarer work has just begun. We hope you will be a wholesome part of this new era of Dharma work.

We record with gratitude the generosity of those who have donated towards defraying part of the cost of the production of this book, especially Mr. Wong Hui Beng, who dedicates the merit of his wholesome deed to the late Md. Low Guat Teen @ Low Eng Chye. Despite his busy schedule, Jayamangala Lim has assisted in the electronic update of the first few chapters. To those who have requested for the reprint of this book and those who have waited for it, I hope it has been well worth their patience, as it is my pleasure writing it.

Piyasīlo

'Samantamukha'

30th July 1991

Guanyin's Enlightenment Day.

## PREFACE to the 1st edition

This book seems to have grown of its own accord. The author was writing his latest book entitled *The Buddha's Teachings* (a 1987 free quarterly publication for the Dharma Stewards of our Society). The twenty-third chapter of the book on 'Wisdom' grew to such an extent that at least five other small books resulted from it! One of these books is *The Five Buddhas* (a study of the symbolism of the Mandala). Its section on Amitabha's Mandala has a chapter on Avalokitesvara which became so long that the author decided to set aside a separate title for it - that is, the present book.

An attempt has been made here to cover every relevant area of the subject. The main objective, how-ever, is to provide a meaningful and beneficial under-standing of Avalokitesvara as a spiritual reality in Buddhism. Some details (especially with regards to iconography) have been omitted because it would make the book too bulky and also because they can be found in other literature.

The author concedes that he has not been able to explain intellectually every facet of this fascinating Bodhisattva (especially with regards to the Great Compassion Mantra). But then, one has to understand that one has to be *more* than an intellectual to understand Avalokitesvara - one must also be able to feel.

Guanyin's Birthday Festival  
18th March 1987  
Damansara Buddhist Vihara II



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## AVALOKITEŚVARA

In times of toil and trouble  
When most-needed friends abandon me,  
You, O Heeder of Cries, are always by my side  
With a thousand arms to bring comfort and joy  
To help me burn out the karma of the past,  
And plant the seeds of Buddhahood.

Like selfish scholars who study people,  
Too busy to be friends, unless paid or pressured,  
Who make friends, not to help them,  
but to use them

To write about, to speak about,  
For the sake of gain and honour in the world,  
The Buddhists today, too, honour only those  
With power, status, title, wealth, foreignness.

Like professional scholars looking for theories  
So that they are reborn as well-quoted books,  
With theories to be disproved again and again  
By born-again scholars all over again  
To create new world-views,  
Perhaps a better weapon or better war:

With awards and gifts, and crowds to please,  
The Buddhist leaders silently declare  
Before the foolish and faceless assembly:  
'You are mine! You shall serve me! I am lord!'





O Heeder of Cries, Your eyes of wisdom  
Look upon me with compassion  
When the Buddhists and religionists reject me  
As one unworthy even to set their eyes upon,  
For I have nothing to offer them  
But my foolish and local ways.

Our two human eyes only see  
what we want to see.

Our two human ears only hear  
what we want to hear.

Only Guanyin eyes see beyond human eyes,

Only Guanyin ears hear the silent cries.

Let us stop being Buddhists and religionists,

But be humans who hear and see

And heed the cries of the world.

If you do not like this poem,

then it is about you.

But if my words move you, you are the writer.

Not a poem is this, but dry tears of ink

In this ocean of words and cycle of lives.

P91031



## THE ORIGIN OF AVALOKITEŚVARA

### Meaning of 'Avalokiteśvara'

Avalokiteśvara is the most popular of Buddhist deities whose worship ranges from Sri Lanka in the south to Lake Baikal in the north, from Japan in the east to the Caucasus in the west. His popularity is rapidly growing all over our modern world - especially in Europe and North America. He is, in fact, the best example of Buddhist **symbolic adaptation**, that is, the Buddhist response to the religious challenges and needs of the times. This is attested by the innumerable forms that Avalokiteśvara has taken all over the Buddhist world (and influencing even other religions, especially Taoism).

Scholars have differed on the meaning of the word 'Avalokiteśvara' which could be analyzed in at least two ways, as (1) *avalokita* + *iśvara*, and (2) *avalokite* + *śvara*. The first half of the word comes from the Sanskrit root √LOK (to see) [cf English 'look'], with the prefix *ava* (down, off, away) - which could mean 'to look down (from above)' in the sense of surveying the world.

The relevant dictionaries give the following meanings of *avalokita*:

- M. Monier-William, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*: 'seen, viewed, observed';
- F. Edgerton, *Buddhist-Hybrid Sanskrit Dictionary*: 'act of looking; a look, a gaze';
- R.C. Childers, *Dictionary of the Pali Language* (under *oloketi*): 'a look, a glance';
- *Critical Pali Dictionary* (under *apalokita* (1)): 'looked at, gazed at (by turning around)'; under *apaloketi*, defines *avalokayati* (quoting the *Saddaniti*) as '(1) to look

towards, to look back; (2) to look after (with tenderness, or respectfully)';

- PTS *Pali-English Dictionary* (under *apalokita* (3)) gives it as an epithet of Nirvana, S 4:370.

If the second part of the word is interpreted as *iśvara* ('Lord'), then the two terms *avalokita* and *iśvara* together mean 'The Lord who surveys'. This is the more popular sense taken by Western scholars. [See *Ency Bsm*, sv 'Avalokiteśvara' for further discussion.]

### Guanyin

The Chinese translate the word *Avalokiteśvara* in at least two ways: the figural and the literal. A popular Chinese term for *Avalokiteśvara* is the literal translation *Guanzizai* (the Lord who responds) which is the equivalent of the Sanskrit name. His full Chinese title is *Daci dabei jiuku guanshiyin cizhang wang pusa* (The All-loving All-compassionate Self-born Saviour, the Bodhisattva who responds to the cries of the world).

The earliest and most common Chinese term, however, is the figurative form *Guanshiyin* which is usually abbreviated to *Guanyin*. In the compound, *guan* means 'to regard' (in the sense of responding to a call), and *yin* means 'sound or voice' (*śvara*; that is, the sound of prayers and cries for help). The term *Guanyin* therefore is translated usually as 'One who responds to the cries (of the world)' (the parenthesis being a translation of *shi*, 'world').

One possible explanation of how this second figural meaning came about is that of metathesis (transposition of syllables) in the word *avaloketi* (CPD: 'to look at, regard') making it *avalokite*. Other examples of metathesis are: *na + agata* ('not come') > *anâgata* ('future'); *rasmi* ('ray of light') > *raṁsī*. One problem here is that *avaloketi* is not found in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit which uses the form *avalokayati*.



### **Samanta.mukha**

The term Guanshiyin is favoured by Kumārajīva who used it throughout his 5th-century translation of the Saddharma.puṇḍarīka Sūtra, especially the Samanta.mukha Parivarta which, in fact, is the source of another epithet of Avalokiteśvara. Here, *samanta.mukha* is usually translated as 'universal door' (Chin *pumen*; *mukha* literally means 'mouth' or 'face'). This epithet evokes Avalokiteśvara's uninterrupted awareness and response to the sorrows of the world. For this reason, it has been chosen as the Dharma Name (Pumen) of the Dharmafarer Community in PJ.

It is a popular Chinese Buddhist practice to install huge Guanyin images on high ground, especially hills (e.g. Bukit Bendera in Pulau Pinang, Malaysia). Some scholars have suggested that this is a result of the influence of the worship of the hill-god. However there is no conclusive evidence for this. Moreover, in ancient Chinese philosophy, mountains (regarded as 'dragons') are auspicious places - what better spot to erect a sacred image. This practice is also reflective of the meaning of *Avalokita* which means to 'look down (from on high)' in the sense of compassionate and caring survey.

### **Popularity of Avalokiteśvara**

The Japanese adopted the Chinese name of Avalokiteśvara (Guanyin) and Nipponized it to 'Kannon' or 'Kwanon' (the former is usually preferred). The Tibetans call him 'Spyan-ras-gzigs' (Chenrezig, 'with a pitying look'). His Mongolian name is 'Niduber ujegci' ('he who looks with the eyes'). In Sri Lanka (where he is often mistakenly taken for Maitreya, the future Buddha), he is known as 'Natha' ('Lord' or 'Refuge') or 'Natha-deva', probably an abbreviation of his full title of Lokeśvara.natha ('the Lord who is the refuge of the world'). In the Theravāda countries of southeast Asia (especially Siam and Cambodia), he is invariably known as Lokeśvara ('Lord of the world').

Avalokiteśvara in fact appears to be the only Mahāyana deity accepted by the Theravāda Buddhists, or most of them (even in Burma). One of the reasons for this is that he is the embodiment of the Buddha's Compassion. In early Mahāyana, Wisdom (*prajñā*) and Compassion (*karuṇā*) form the two 'wings' of the Buddha's Enlightenment: His realizing and teaching of the Dharma is the 'Wisdom' aspect while His life and actions are the 'Compassion' aspect.

At first, the Wisdom aspect was considered more important than the Compassion. This approach reached its climax in the *Prajñāpāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) literature (between 100 BC to 150 CE). Later on, these ideas were personified and transformed into Bodhisattvas (e.g. *Prajñāpāramitā* and *Mañjuśrī*). The latter was in fact treated as the most important Bodhisattva.

### Symbolic Adaptation

As time passed, Compassion was emphasized and Avalokiteśvara, its embodiment, became the supreme means of attaining spiritual liberation. It was around this time that Avalokiteśvara went through the process of 'symbolic adaptation' by assimilating the characteristics of rivaling brahminic gods but maintaining intrinsic Buddhist qualities - thereby neutralizing the influence of Hinduism on the Buddhists. (In fact, the Hindus were also doing the same thing; and in the end, they successfully absorbed Buddhism into their religion - until the recent Buddhist revival in India, that is.)

The fact that Avalokiteśvara is not mentioned in the earliest texts proves that he was conceived by Buddhists in the face of growing trials and tribulations. Once the Avalokiteśvara doctrine had evolved Symbolic Adaptation which caused more and more people to turn to Buddhism.

### Scriptural archetype

How is it that the majority of Buddhists today and for the last two millenia so easily accept Avalokiteśvara? Why



did Avalokiteśvara arise in the first place? The following factors provide some important answers to both the questions:

1. **Scriptural archetype.** The doctrine that Avalokiteśvara is a personification of the Buddha's Compassion is based on the Buddhist Scriptures (including the Pali Canon). It is said that the Buddha, rising in the morning from the attainment of great Compassion, surveys the world (*mahākaruṇā samāpattito vuṭṭhāya lokam volokento*, D 2:37, DhA 1:21 2:367, P 1:126).
2. **The Buddha's protean quality.** In the Mahā.parinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha says that He appears to the eight assemblies (nobles, brahmins, householders, recluses, the Four Heavenly Kings, the devas of the Thirty-three, Maras and Brahmas) looking and sounding like them to teach the Dharma, rousing, edifying and gladdening them without His being recognized at all (D 2:109). Avalokiteśvara shows the same characteristics.
3. **The Buddha's power over time.** On at least two occasions the Buddha showed His control over time. The first example is when the Buddha conjured up a holographic sequence of an extraordinarily beautiful nymph to Khemā, the queen of Bimbisāra, and let her 'see' the nymph pass through youth, maturity, senility and death in a brief moment (DhA 4:168 f). The second example is found in the Mahā.parinibbāna Sutta, where the Buddha hinted His capability, resulting from His attainment of the fourfold Path of Accomplishment (*iddhi.pāda*), for living out the *kalpa* (meaning either the normal human life-span or a world-period) to Ānanda (D 2:103 117).
4. **The Buddha's transcendentality.** 'Since a Tathāgata, even when actually present is incomprehensible, it is inept to say of him...that after dying that the Tathāgata is, is not, both is and is not, or neither is nor is not' (S 3:118; cf M 1:488). To Doṇa the diviner of footprints, the

Buddha, in answer to his questions, declares that His destiny cannot be classified into any worldly category (god, heavenly minstrel, yaksha or human being) but the term 'Buddha' would fit Him best (A 2:38). The Buddha's powers are quite beyond the understanding of the mind of the unenlightened. Avalokiteśvara, insofar as he is a positive spiritual force for countless Buddhists through the ages, is an inalienable aspect of that Supreme Mind.

5. **The hominization of the Buddha.** The over-humanizing and demythologizing of the Buddha has made Him look like a helpless Dharma teacher. 'He is dead - in Nirvana. He cannot help you; you must help yourself!' This is prescribing the right medicine at the wrong time. As a result, the desperate lay Buddhists (especially the Theravāda) have to turn to the Hindu devales (Sri Lanka), nat-worship (Burma), the earth-deity shrine (Siam) and the 'Four-faced Buddha' (Malaysia and Singapore). The last-named is a recent innovation introduced by Siamese monks which proves very popular with the materialistic.

### **The 'Middle' of the Middle Way**

Avalokiteśvara should not be dismissed as a 'Hindu' god invented by desperate monks to save a dying religion. He represents the answer to a pressing need and a living experience of the common people for whom Buddhism is more than just Scripture and scholarship, or worse than that, religious commercialism and spiritual apathy.

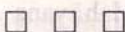
While the Theravāda tend to over-emphasize the human aspect of the Buddha, the Mahāyana are inclined to deify Him. In the Avalokiteśvara doctrine, however, which is accepted by both schools (at least in principle, as the embodiment of Compassion), we have both the aspects - human and divine - merged together in a spiritual balance. Avalokiteśvara not only 'answers' prayers but also appears in popular folk legends in human forms (showing that the



local people have accepted him into their culture - this is known as 'indigenization'). Here we can truly say that Buddhism is a religion of the people, by the people, for the people!

Avalokiteśvara provides a direct channel of 'communicating' with the Buddha especially where the simple daily needs of the faithful are concerned. The Avalokiteśvara worship removes the need for priesthood and monastic parochialism. This approach is vital for the revival of Buddhism where many of the monks are becoming priests and intercessors through their dispensation of 'blessings' and exclusivism.

The faithful need only to directly invoke Avalokiteśvara in any of his innumerable forms. One needs only say out one's troubles and like a Supreme Counsellor, Avalokiteśvara is always there with an attentive ear. If the prudish scholastic thinks that this smacks of theistic overtones, he should be reminded that the Avalokiteśvara meditation also comes in the form of visualisation method with the realization of nonselfhood leading to insight (*vipassanā*) as its goal.



## DEVELOPMENT OF THE AVALOKITEŚVARA DOCTRINE

### History

Although it is not exactly known when the worship of Avalokiteśvara started, it is believed to be as early as the 2nd century BC when the doctrine evolved to stem the rising influence of brahminical deity worship and Hindu revival. Though the name *Avalokiteśvara* does not occur in the earliest texts, there are two discourses entitled *Avalokita* (another name for Avalokiteśvara) in the Mahāvastu (Mvst 2:278 ff).

Though scholars have discounted the two Avalokita discourses as interpolations [Ency Bsm, under *Avalokana Sūtra*], the beginnings of the Avalokiteśvara concept are found in the Mahāvastu (2nd cent BC - 4th cent CE) where the Buddha's life, personality and deeds (as against His words and teaching) are more prominently featured. We are beginning to see the Buddha as an embodiment of Great Compassion.

Another early Mahāyana work, the Divyavadana (150-50 BC) mentions a 'six-syllabled mantra' (*ṣaḍakṣarī vidyā*, Divy 613) which probably refers to 'Om mani padme hum', Avalokiteśvara's mantra. He is not directly mentioned in the Lalita-vistāra, a work of the Sarvāstivāda (translated into Chinese in 308), but in its introductory chapter, there is listed the name of 'Mahākaraṇācandī' (the Moon of Great Compassion) which could refer to him. [See C. Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, 2:13ff.]

Later Mahāyana texts like the Saddharma.puṇḍarīka, the Sukhāvatī Vyūha and the Amit'āyur.dhyāna Sūtras, Avalokiteśvara is given a status higher than most other Bodhisattvas. The Saddharma.puṇḍarīka Sūtra devotes the whole of Chapter 24 (Samanta.mukha Parivarta, 'the



Universal Door' chapter) to Avalokiteśvara reflecting the universality of his Compassion. The Amit'āyur.dhyāna (or Aparimit'āyus) Sūtra (first translated in Chinese in the 2nd cent) mentions Avalokiteśvara as a 'son of the Buddha' (sect 31, 34) together with Mahā.sthama.prāpta, both of whom together emanate the radiance that pervades Sukhāvati. In the Amit'āyur.dhyāna Sūtra, they are mentioned, with the Buddha Amit'āyus, as the rulers of Sukhāvati.

### China

Avalokiteśvara is generally known to the Chinese as Guanyin whose worship was probably introduced into China late in the 1st cent CE. By about the 6th century, he was worshipped throughout the country. Representations of Avalokiteśvara before the Sung dynasty (960-1126) are distinctly masculine in appearance. But after that period the Bodhisattva was invariably worshipped as a feminine (though *not* female) deity. The transformation is not so much sexual as it is symbolic: for, to the Chinese the feminine represents the *yin* (a quasi-homonym of his Chinese name). In other words, the embodiment of Compassion is regarded by them as feminine (eg motherly) in form.

Those not familiar with Buddhist hagiology are often confused by the problem of the sex of Guanyin who is often represented dressed in white flowing robes with long hair arranged in a high chignon on the crown. The form of the figure is distinctly feminine except that 'she' has rather a masculine chest! This is as far as the humanization of Guanyin goes - we should not forget that 'she' is the embodiment of Compassion, which is beyond sexuality! Some people have, in keeping with the philosophy of the yin-yang balance, suggested that Guanyin is androgynous, which here has to be taken in the spiritual sense (as in the nature of angelic and higher divine beings).

Amongst the English-speaking Buddhists, Guanyin is often known as the 'Goddess of Mercy' which is a misnomer

probably adopted through subliminal influence of the Catholic religion (which worships Virgin Mary). Moreover, Guanyin is not a goddess, he is a Bodhisattva who, according to Buddhist hagiology, ranks very much higher than any heavenly being. The term 'Mercy' suggests that Guanyin 'forgives' the wrongs of his worshippers - which is simply not the case. The right word here is 'Compassion', that is, Guanyin is one filled with the heart of Great Lovingkindness (*daci*) which moves him to Great Compassion (*dabei*) which is lovingkindness in action.

### Japan

The worship of Avalokiteśvara was probably introduced into Japan from Korea soon after Buddhism first reached the country. This is generally believed to be the time of the empress Suiko (593-628). Others hold that his worship was introduced a hundred and fifty years after Buddhism came to Japan.

The earliest known images of Kannon are at the Horyuji in Nara and dated back to the mid-7th century. The name 'Kannon' is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese 'Guanyin' who is also popularly regarded as feminine. She is widely worshipped in the country except by the Shinshu sect.

### Tibet

In Tibet, Avalokiteśvara is known as Chenrezig and is the most popular Bodhisattva there mainly because he is regarded as the supreme guardian of Tibet and Buddhism till the appearance of Maitreya. His worship was probably introduced there just before the 7th century, for by that time he was proclaimed as incarnate in king Srong-tsan-sgam-po (c 608-650). The belief in incarnate lamas began to develop in the 14th century when the first Dalai Lama, Dge-'dun-grub-pa (1391-1475), the founder and abbot of Tashi-lhunpo (central Tibet), was installed. Both he and his successors are



considered to be the incarnation of Avalokiteśvara.

The Mani-bkha-hbum, a historical work attributed to Srong-tsan-sgam-po, says that Padmapāṇī (Avalokiteśvara) arose from a white ray of light that issued from Amitābha's right eye after his deep meditation. Thereupon Amitābha blessed him and he uttered the Six-syllabled Mantra: 'Om mani-padme hum'.

### Sri Lanka

There is evidence that Avalokiteśvara was worshipped in Sri Lanka as early as the 9th or 10th century. He is known to the Sinhalese as Nātha which is an abridgement of his fuller title Lokeśvara Nātha. When Natha worship was at its height during the 15th century, the famous learned monk poet Totagamuve Sri Rāhula was an ardent devotee of his. The village of Totagamuve which is close to Hikkaduwa in the Galle district of south Lanka seems to have been the main centre of Nātha devotion.

Nātha is worshipped by the Sinhalese even to this day. His special shrine, Nātha Devale, is situated to the west of the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy. There is also evidence which show that important ancient royal ceremonies, such as the choosing of the king's name and the investment of the sword, took place at this shrine. The discovery of Natha in the form of Siṃhala-dvīpe Ārogya-sālā Lokanātha (Lokanatha of the Hospitals of Lanka) shows that he is also worshipped for his healing power. Paranavitana, in his article in the *Ceylon Journal of Science* [Sect G, vol 2, p 52ff] mentions a manual on iconometry (symbolic measurements of images) gives eight forms of Nātha. His feminine counterpart, Tārā, is also known in Lanka.

### Southeast Asia

Avalokiteśvara is almost invariably known in south-east Asia as Lokeśvara. He was widely worshipped during the 9th and 10th centuries. His image is often seen at Bantay

Chmar and Angkor Thom, and at Nak Pan. In Champa, he is represented with one head and rarely more than eight arms. In Khmer, however, he may be depicted as having as many as sixteen heads and arms holding various Tantric and other symbols.

In Champa and Khmer, Lokeśvara is usually depicted standing bare-chested in contrapposto [with hips, shoulders, and head turned in different directions] with a short dhoti drawn tightly round the waist and secured by an ornate belt. He wears jewels on his neck, ears, arms and ankles. His hair is arranged into a high chignon tightly held in place by a *mukuta* (head cover) with a crown over them. Just above the crown, on the chignon is depicted the Buddha Amitâbha from whom he emanates. He is sometimes depicted with a third eye, but which is seldom seen in Tibet or Nepal, and never in East Asia.

Lokeśvara is very popular in Thailand, especially during the 8th and 9th centuries (the Śrīvijaya period). He is depicted as having two, four or six arms and looks very similar to the Khmer Lokeśvara. In his two right hands, he bears a rosary and a lotus; and on his left hands, a scripture and a lotus. Some superb images have been discovered in Chaiya, south Thailand. In fact, most of the ancient finds are images of Bodhisattvas (especially Avalokiteśvara) rather than of Buddhas. They are made either of stone or bronze and often large in size. The Avalokiteśvara images are always represented either as a young ascetic or a young prince. [J. Boisselier, *The Heritage of Thai Sculpture*, Weatherhill, 1975: ch 5.]

### Indonesia

Tantric Buddhism was found in Palembang in Sumatra during the 7th century. Early inscriptions bearing invocations to Mañjuśrī and Avalokiteśvara have been discovered. Several images of Avalokiteśvara dating back to the 8th and 11th centuries have been uncovered in Palembang.



In 775, the mahārāja of Srivijaya erected a sanctuary in honour of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara in the form of Padmapāṇī and Vajrapāṇī. By the beginning of the 11th century, Srivijaya-Palembang was important enough as a centre of Mahayana to be known in both Nepal and Tibet.

### Malaysia

Not much research has been done on the presence and significance of Buddhism in Malaysia. However numerous Buddhist artifacts in the form of Buddhist inscriptions, images and ruins have been discovered. Buddhist bronze statues dating from the 5th and 6th centuries have been dredged up in modern tin-mines at the following places:

Pengkalan, Kinta valley near Ipoh (Perak);  
Tanjung Rambutan, Kinta valley (Perak);  
Bidor, Batang Padang district (Perak); and  
Sungai Siput, Kinta Valley (Perak).

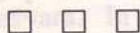
[For summary, see H. G. Quaritch Wales, *Archaeological Researches on Ancient Indian Colonization in Malaya*, JMBRAS, 1940, vol 18, pt 1, pp 50-52.]

Votive tablets, impressed with an image of Avalokiteśvara, have been discovered in Perlis. At least some of these tablets were made locally. One of them has been dated in being from the 12th century. (A. Lamb, 'Mahāyana Buddhist Votive Tablets in Perlis', JMBRAS 37,2 1964:47-59). Religious relics have also been discovered in the Bujang valley in Kedah. In recent times, archaeological discoveries reflecting Tantric beliefs have been made at Bongkissam in Sarawak (T. Harrisson & S. J. O'Connor, 'Excavations of the prehistoric iron industry in west Borneo', *Southeast Asia Data Paper* no 72, Cornell Univ, 2 1969:308).

### Singapore

The kings of ancient southeast Asian kingdoms (e.g. those of Palembang, Singhasari and Srivijaya) were regarded as divine or as Bodhisattva or kept to Hindu-Buddhist ideas of kingship. Professor C. G. Berg has suggested that the origin of the name of Singapore is connected with Bhairava (Tantric) Buddhism of the Majapahit empire. O. W. Walters, however, while agreeing to the Buddhist significance of the name of Singapore, prefers to link this event with the Palembang kingdom (because Singapura was not known by this name in Majapahit). [See O. W. Walters, *The Fall of Srivijaya in Malay history*, OUP, 1970:133 & n 31.]

The lion (as we saw in Ch 5) bears a deep Buddhist symbolism which could be interpreted in terms of kingship (e.g. the Malay word 'singgasana', meaning 'throne' comes from the Sanskrit term, *siṃh'āsana*). There is a form of Avalokiteśvara known as the Simhānada ('Lion-roar').





## MANIFESTATIONS OF AVALOKITEŚVARA

### Classification

There are two main reasons for the immense popularity of Avalokiteśvara. Firstly, he is said to be the Bodhisattva who rules during the interim between Sakyamuni's Parinirvana and the advent of Maitreya. Secondly, he is believed to answer the prayers of those in any kind of difficulty. The myriad forms that he has assumed in various cultures all over Asia attest to the power of Buddhist faith. Devotees of Avalokiteśvara in many lands have testified to various miraculous events and effective cures.

There are at least two ways of classifying the various manifestations of Avalokiteśvara: the numerical method and the historical method. The first has been followed by J. Deniker in *The Gods of Northern Buddhism* (tr A. Getty, Tuttle, 1962). We shall here look at the second, more common, method (e.g. as used by Alicia Matsunaga in *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*, Sophia Univ, Tokyo, 1969).

### Identification of Images

The problem of identifying Buddhist images has always given some difficulty to the scholars, what more the lay devotee! This interesting field, however, is well studied by a host of international scholars such as the following:

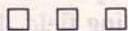
- L.A. Waddell, *Tibetan Buddhism* (W.H.Allen, 1895);
- A. Grunwedel, *Buddhist Art in India* (London, 1901);
- A. Foucher, *Etudes sur l'iconographie Bouddhique de l'Inde* (1900 1905), and
- J. Deniker & A. Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism*.

Other scholars in this field included J. Burgess, A.K. Coomaraswamy, D. Seckel, N.K. Bhattasali, R. Banerji, B. Bhattacharyya, J. Boisselier and J.-M. Beurdeley.

It was A. Foucher who first emphasized the *sādhana* (guide to visualization practice) to collate and identify Buddhist images. He also did some study of the *Sādhana-mālā* (composed between 5th and 11th centuries) which is a very important ancient work on Buddhist iconography (published in volumes 26 & 41 of the Gaekwad's Oriental Series). It contains 312 *sādhana*s and descriptions of numerous Buddhist deities. Another iconographic work is the *Sādhana Samuccaya*. Both these works were incorporated and translated by B. Bhattacharyya (*The Indian Buddhist Iconography*, Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, 2nd ed 1958; minor rev 1968). Another relevant work is the *Nispanna.yoga.vālī* which deals with twenty-six kind of *Maṇḍalas*.

We cannot possibly deal with all the forms of Avalokiteśvara in these works, but the most important and universal manifestations will be listed and detailed wherever possible as follows:

- (1) The 15 manifestations from the *Sādhana-mālā*;
- (2) The Avalokiteśvara of the Six Realms;
- (3) The 32 manifestations (Chinese);
- (4) The Guanyin of Eight Sufferings; and
- (5) Other forms of Guanyin.





## THE FIFTEEN MAIN MANIFESTATIONS (SĀDHANA.MĀLĀ)

The Sādhana.mālā describes thirty-eight Sādhana of Avalokiteśvara in fifteen main manifestations. In other words, most of the manifestations have more than one Sādhana which describe the variations of that particular manifestation. All the fifteen figures but one bear the image of Amitābha on the crown. The fifteenth, however, bears the images of all the five Celestial Conquerors (on the Five-Wisdom Crown).

### (1) Ṣaḍ.akṣarī Lokeśvara (The Six-Syllable Lokeśvara)

Colour: White                      Arms: Four  
Gesture: Clasped (*añjalī*)      Symbols: Rosary and lotus  
Companions: Mañidhara and Ṣaḍ.akṣarī Mahāvidya.

The Six Syllables here refer to the mantra, 'Oṃ mani-padme huṃ'. As a sound symbol, a mantra does not need to be translated or to have a logical or rational meaning. It is just a rhyme or jingle that helps one remember and concentrate. However, it is possible to translate the Six Syllable Mantra quite safely as: 'Oṃ, the Jewel in the Lotus, Huṃ!' The six syllables themselves can be interpreted in many ways depending of which aspects of the Dharma one is thinking of, for example: the six realms, the three level of training (OM = moral conduct, MANI-PADME = mental development as calmness and insight, and HUM = wisdom), and the three doors of action.

### (2) Simhanāda Avalokiteśvara (or Lokeśvara) (The Lion-roar Avalokiteśvara)

Colour: White

Vehicle: Lion

Gesture: Prayer (*namahkāra*)

Posture: Royal ease  
(*rājatīla*)

Symbols: Skull-cup (*kapāla*);

(a) Sword on Lotus;

(b) Trident (*triśula*) entwined with a snake.

The Simhanāda Avalokiteśvara seems to unify the qualities of both Avalokiteśvara and Mañjuśrī. He is represented as seated sidewise on a roaring lion which is crouching and looking up at him. This manifestation is popular in China and Tibet. As a Lokeśvara (Lord of the World), he is represented in princely raiment and bejewelled.

### (3) Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara

Colour: White

Symbol: Lotus

Gesture: Giving

Posture: Graceful (*lalita*) or  
Half-crossed (*ardha.paryāṅka*)

Companions: Tārā, Sudhana Kumara, Bhṛkūti, Hayagrīva.

The Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara appears as a sixteen-year-old smiling youth who wears the matted hair crown (*jaṭa.mukūṭa*) with an image of Amitābha on it, and is seated on a moon-disk over a double lotus throne. His right hand is in the giving gesture, and the left holds a lotus. A stream of nectar flows from his hand, and Suci.mukha (Pure Mouthed) waits below looking up. He is easily identified by the four companions who appear on both his sides.

### (4) Lokanātha Avalokiteśvara (The Refuge of the World)

Colour: White

Symbol: Lotus

Gesture: Giving

Posture: Graceful

His gestures are exactly those of Khasarpaṇa. On his



matted hair (to the front) is the figure of Vajradharma, the destroyer of all diseases. In some forms, Amitābha appears on the crown.

(5) Hala.hala Avalokiteśvara ('Avalokiteśvara of the Poison')

Colour: White	Symbols: Trident and snake (r);
Faces: Three	Skull-cup on lotus (l)
Hands: Six	Posture: Graceful
Companion: Prajñā	

This form is rare in India. The ones found in Nepal do not follow the Sādhana. His first right hand is in the giving gesture while the second holds a rosary and the third an arrow. The first left hand carries a bow, the second a white lotus and the third touches the bosom of his Prajñā (feminine Wisdom aspect) who sits on his left lap.

The word 'Halahala' is derived from the Mahā-bharata (where 'Kalakuta' is used) which is the name of the poison said to have emerged during the churning of the sea of milk, and enveloped the universe, blazing like a smoky fire. This manifestation reflects the ecological awareness of the early Buddhists and Oriental philosophy generally - where heaven, earth and man should be in harmony. In other words, this Avalokiteśvara form represents the natural intuition in human beings (indeed all beings in their natural state) to keep the atmosphere and the universe in balance and pollution-free. [See also (11) below.]

(6) Padma.nartteśvara ('The Dancing Lord of the Lotus')

There are 3 forms of this manifestation with:

- Eighteen arms: white, a double lotus in all hands; dancing in the half-crossed-legged posture (*ardha. paryāṅka*);
- Two arms: red, with an animal as vehicle, and Prajñā

Sucimudra is depicted dancing on the right;

- Eight arms: red, seated on a moon-disk over a double lotus; dancing in the half-crossed-legged posture.

It is sometimes said that dancing is the first natural means of social communication. The dance as an art, either in itself or as a drama, is an important form of religious expression, for dancing involves movement, expression, time (rhythm), and sound (music, song, etc) expressing an emotion or idea, telling a story, or simply taking delight in the movement itself - all of which are symbolic of the cycle of life and the universe.

Performances reenacting episodes from the Buddha's life and the Scriptures (e.g. the Jatakas) and celebrating religious festivals are found in every country where Buddhism is well-rooted (eg the Kandy Perahera dancers and the Tibetan 'devil' dancers). Performances invoking the Buddha's blessings are especially popular and numerous in Japan and Korea.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, Zen Buddhism was a common source of Japanese inspiration for the No dance, for the tea ceremony, for ink painting, for art of the rock-and-sand gardens and for other arts form cultivated by the samurai (military ruling class). Masked puppet plays in Korea are often 'social comments' based on Buddhist themes and performed as prayers for the dead.

The Padma.narttesvara Avalokiteśvara is the Bodhi-sattva of Dancing, the patron 'saint' of Buddhist dancers. He epitomizes the use of skilful means of the visual and performing arts in the transmission of the Dharma to the world.

(7) Hari.hari.hari.vahāna ('Avalokiteśvara of the Three Divine vehicles')

Colour: White

Arms: Six



This is a very rare and interesting image not found in India and very rare in Nepal. There are four levels in the image: on the lowest is a lion, the first vehicle on the lion is mounted a garuda, on whom sits Lord Vishnu (with his symbols: conch, discus, mace and lotus) bearing Lokeśvara on his shoulders. All the three vehicles are known as 'Hari'; hence the name. The image represents the power of Lokeśvara over the animal, the human (re-presented by the half-human garuda) and the divine.

(8) Trailokya.vasaṅkara ('Subduer of the three Worlds')

Colour: Red Eyes: Three

This manifestation is also known as the Uddiyana or Oddiyana Lokeśvara after the great mediaeval centre of Tantric learning where he was popularly worshipped. Oddiyana is probably modern Vajrayogini in the Pargana Vikrampur, Dacca, in east Pakistan.) He is decked in royal regalia, wearing a matted hair crown, seated on a red lotus in the half-crossed-legged posture, and carrying a noose and a goad stamped with a vajra.

(9) Rakta Lokeśvara ('The Red Avalokiteśvara')

There are two forms of this manifestation, both of which are red in colour:

- The four-armed: He is accompanied by Tārā and Bhṛkūti; in his four hands are the noose, the goad, the bow and the arrow; he stands under the Asoka tree blooming with red flowers.
- The two-armed: He wears a matted hair crown with an image of Amitābha; carries a red lotus in left hand and opens its petals with the right. He is very similar to Vajra-dharma (except that the latter rides a peacock). The

colour red, the colour of the setting sun (in the west), is sacred to Amitābha.

(10) Maya'jala.krama ('Avalokiteśvara Who Escapes the Net of Illusion')

Faces: Five

Arms: Twelve

Colour: Blue

Posture: Bowman (*pratyaliḍha*)

This manifestation originally appears in the Mayajala Tantra; hence the name, and is the only wrathful form of Lokeśvara known in India. He stands in the bowman's posture, left foot forward and the right drawn back, on the sun's orb. Two of his right faces are white and red; two on the left are yellow and green; and they each bear a pair of fearsome fangs. In his right hands, he bears the hand-drum (*damaru*), the pike (*khatvaṅga*), the goad, the noose, the vajra and the arrow. In his left hands are the raised index finger, the skull-bowl, the red lotus, the jewel, the discus, and the bow. He wears the six-bone ornaments with a garland of heads around his completely bare but beautiful body.

Wrathful forms of Buddhist images represent those which ward off evil qualities. The wrath symbolizes unrelenting positive energy that does not compromise with evil. The various symbols are instruments of destroying and keeping away evil. The 'wild' nature of the image represents the need for intuitive (as against intellectual) wisdom (gained through meditation) in our spiritual quest for Enlightenment.

(11) Nīla.kanṭha ('The Blue-throated Avalokiteśvara')

Colour: Yellow

Symbol: Skull-bowl of jewels

Gesture: Samādhi

Posture: Diamond (*vajra.paryāṅka*)

Companions: Two jewel-headed cobras (on either side).

This manifestation is almost identical to that of



Amitābha except that the former bears an image of the latter on his matted hair crown and wears the sacred thread of deer-skin across his body. He wears tiger-skin without any ornaments. He sits on black antelope skin spread over a red lotus. Two of his hands are in samādhi gesture; two others bear a skull-bowl filled with various gems. The two cobras gaze up at him from either side.

There is a dark blue (or grey) spot on his throat said to be the result of drinking up of the world's poisonous evils. The blue throat of Nīla.kaṇṭha is a symbolic adaptation to the Hindu story of Siva who is said to have saved the world from destruction by swallowing the poison that came out of the serpent king Vasuki's mouth while the gods and demons were churning the ocean of milk together. The poison remained in Siva's throat without harming him. [In the Mahābhārata myth, the poison known as Kalakuta arose from the ocean itself. See (5).]

(12) Sugati Saṁdarśana ('Avalokiteśvara Gazing at the Heavens')

Colour: White

Arms: Six

He looks peaceful, decked in ornaments and jewels, and wearing the matted hair crown and sacred thread across his body. He stands on the moon-disk over a lotus. His three right hands show the giving and the fearless gestures, and bear the rosary. The left hands bear a lotus, a water-pot and the trident.

(13) Preta Saṁtarpita ('Avalokiteśvara Quenching the Hungry Ghosts')

Colour: White

Arms: Six

He stands gracefully on the moon-disk on a lotus wearing the matted hair crown and the sacred thread. The

first pair of arms in the giving gesture, the second pair bearing a jewel and a book, and the third pair holding a rosary and the trident (*tridaṇḍr*). This manifestation represents the spiritual help that Avalokiteśvara renders towards the Hungry Ghosts and is similar to the Avalokiteśvara who appears in Six Realms [see below].

(14) Sukhāvati Lokeśvara

Colour: White

Arms: Six

Faces: Three

Posture: Graceful (*lalita*)

Companion: Prajñā

Stone and bronze images of this manifestation are popular in Nepal but not elsewhere in the northern Asia. He sits in the graceful posture on the lotus surrounded by Vajratārā, Viśvatara, Padmatara and the rest. A pagoda (*stupa* or *caitya*) appears above them. One of his right hands is in the posture of shooting an arrow, the other two bear a rosary and the giving gesture. Two of his left hands bears a bow and a lotus, and the third is placed on the lap of Tārā.

(15) Vajra.dharma ('Diamond Truth Avalokiteśvara')

Colour: Reddish white

Symbol: Lotus

Vehicle: Peacock

He wears the Five-wisdom Crown and is seated on a moon-disk over a lotus on the back of a peacock and exudes a delightful loving look. His left hand bears a sixteen-petalled lotus and with the right causes it to bloom against his chest. He is said to move within the sacred area of his shrine (*caitya*). This image represents the attractive and happy aspects of the Buddha Dharma. The distinguishing mark of this manifestation is the peacock, his vehicle as well as that of Amitābha. □



## EARLY MANIFESTATIONS OF AVALOKITEŚVARA IN EAST ASIA

### Avalokiteśvara of the Six Realms

In his 'Zhiguan' [T 46:156], the Grand Master Zhiyi (538-597), founder of the Tiantai school of Chinese Buddhism, discusses the six manifestations (*yinghuashen*) of Avalokiteśvara in the Six Realms [see the author's *The Buddha's Teachings*, ch 8]. This is one of the earliest attempts at a classification of Avalokiteśvara manifestations and which sets a precedent for other classifications, eg the thirty-three manifestations of Guanyin and the Guanyin of the Eight Sufferings. The various manifestations of Avalokiteśvara in the Six Realms according to Zhiyi are as follows:

- (1) The All-compassionate Avalokiteśvara (Dabei Guanshiyin) - the hell-beings;
- (2) The All-loving Avalokiteśvara (Daci Guanshiyin) - the hungry ghosts;
- (3) The Fearless Lion Avalokiteśvara (Shizi Wuwei Guanshiyin) - the animals;
- (4) The Universally Shining Great Light Avalokiteśvara (Da-kuang puzhao Guanshiyin) - the asuras;
- (5) The Heroic Leader of Devas and Human Avalokiteśvara (Tianren Zangfu Guanshiyin) - the human beings; and
- (6) The Deeply Profound Great Brahma Avalokiteśvara (Da-fan Shen yuan Guanshiyin) - the devas.

In the Japanese tradition, the list is slightly different - the first two forms are transposed, that is, the All-compassionate (*daihi*) Kannon appears amongst the hungry

ghosts while the All-loving (*daiji*) Kannon amongst the hell-beings. Sculptures of these six Kannon were popular during the mid-Heian period. In 1024, Fujiwara regents, held a special ceremony for such a dedication.

Not much details are given of these manifestations and it is difficult to make out their devotional aspects. They were listed by Zhiyi in the way of 'symbolic adaptation' so that the local Buddhists could understand and accept the Avalokiteśvara doctrine at a time when there were many Chinese schools of Buddhism.

### Origin of the Thirty-three Manifestations

In the course of time, there evolved in different parts of China the popular tradition of worshipping the manifestations of Guanyin in sets of seven, eight, fifteen, twenty-five, twenty-eight, thirty-two, thirty-three, and forty. All these forms, of course, are the same compassionate ideal of the Buddha. Amongst the most popular of the sets is the Thirty-three Forms (*sanshisān xiāng*) of Guanyin which are modelled on the image of Padmapāṇī with almost no variation amongst them.

During the Sui (581-618) and the Tang (618-907) dynasties there evolved the Thirty-three Manifestations (*sanshisān huāshēng*) of Guanyin which is based on the Universal Door Chapter (*samanta.mukha parivarta*: Chin ed Ch 25; Sans ed Ch 24) of the Saddharma.puṇḍarīka Sūtra where the Buddha declares to the Bodhisattva Aksyamati (Inexhaustible Mind) that Avalokiteśvara teaches the world by appearing in a form suitable to the audience. A total of thirty-three manifestations are mentioned, and listed here:

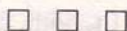
- |                                 |                      |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| (1) Buddha                      | (5) Śakra (Indra)    |
| (2) Pratyeka Buddha             | (6) Iśvara           |
| (3) Śrāvaka (Buddha's disciple) | (7) Maheśvara        |
| (4) Brahma                      | (8) Heavenly general |



- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| (9) Vaiśravaṇa                 | (22) Brahminee                 |
| (10) Earthly king              | (23) Youth (or boy)            |
| (11) Rich man (or elder)       | (24) Maiden (or girl)          |
| (12) Householder               | (25) Deva                      |
| (13) Official                  | (26) Naga                      |
| (14) Brahmin                   | (27) Yaksha                    |
| (15) Bhikṣu (monk)             | (28) Gandharva                 |
| (16) Bhikṣuṇī (nun)            | (29) Asura demon               |
| (17) Upāsaka (layman)          | (30) Garuda                    |
| (18) Upāsikā (laywoman)        | (31) Kinnara (birdlike deva)   |
| (19) Rich woman (elder's wife) | (32) Mahoraga (giant serpent)  |
| (20) Female householder        | (33) Vajrapāṇī (or Vajradhara) |
| (21) Woman official            |                                |

The figure 'thirty-three' here is symbolic of 'innumerable' as in the Heavens of the Thirty-three (*tāvatisa*). In her book, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*, A. Matsunaga remarks that 'In many respects such a view approximated the Sīṅgalovāda Suttanta where deity worship was transformed into gratitude towards one's benefactors.' (p 130).

Also mentioned in the 'Universal Door Chapter' of the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra are some of the dangers and difficulties from which Avalokiteśvara delivers his devotees. From such a rich and free scriptural tradition evolved the Thirty-three Manifestations of Guanyin to assist the devout Buddhists cope and live happily in their daily lives.



## Chapter 6

# THE THIRTY-THREE MANIFESTATIONS OF GUANYIN

### (1) The Guanyin of the Willow (Yangliu Guanyin)

The Red Willow or Tamarisk (*Chiyang*) is also known as the Guanyin Willow (*Guanyin liu*). The willow is not only a Buddhist symbol of meekness (represented by its supple and drooping long leaves), but the bark and leaves of certain species are prescribed as remedies for goitre, dysentery, rheumatism and bruises. In this manifestation, Guanyin is said to have made a vow to cure illness. [See C. A. S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motives*, Kelly & Walsh, Shanghai, 1941; repr Tuttle, 1974; under 'Willow'; & W. Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols*, R. & K. Paul, 1986.]

### (2) Dragon-head Guanyin (Longtou Guanyin)

The dragon is a Chinese conception derived mainly from the lion figure. Hence the dragon is regarded in China as the lord of the beasts. Here Guanyin rides on the head of the dragon which symbolizes superhuman power. While the Chinese dragon is believed to be celestial (resident in the sky), the Indian naga is terrestrial (resident in the bowels of the earth and water). In both cases, they represent the 'heights and depths' of the spiritual and creative life. Art and religion go intimately together! For the true Artist evokes a religious feeling in himself and his work. [Compare 'the analogy of the deep pool' for the 2nd Absorption, in the author's *The Buddha's Teachings*, 1991b:ch 27.]





(1) Guanyin of the Willow  
(Yangliu Guanyin)



(2) Dragon-head Guanyin  
(Longtou Guanyin)



(3) Sutra-bearing Guanyin  
(Chijing Guanyin)



(4) Circle of Light Guanyin  
(Yuanguang Guanyin)

## (3) Sutra-bearing Guanyin (Chijing Guanyin)

The Sutra is a 'threading together' of the Buddha's teachings, that is, a Discourse. Guanyin is here represented as a Śrāvaka ('listener') or Buddha's disciple who hears the Dharma and attains Enlightenment. He is here identified by a Sutra scroll which he bears.

## (4) Circle of Light Guanyin (Yuankuang Guanyin)

The 'circle' here represents completeness. 'The circle of light' therefore symbolizes the all-embracing compassion of Guanyin. All deeply spiritual people have a powerful circle of light around them signifying their energy and wisdom. [See ch 3]

## (5) Playful Lion Guanyin (Simha.kṛdita Avalokiteśvara; Shizi Youxi Guanyin)

The playfulness here means (1) the appearance of a transcendental truth (Dharma, represented by the lion) into human history, (2) the accessibility of Guanyin to anyone who invokes him, and (3) the enjoyment of what one is doing. The playful lion symbolizes the taming of the animal within ourselves. All these aspects refer the Guanyin's Compassion to all living beings. In other words, in the spiritual life, both work and leisure are as enjoyable! Sometimes this manifestation is simply called 'the Playful Guanyin' (Youxi Guanyin).

## (6) White-robed Guanyin (Baiyi Guanyin)

This is Pāṇḍara.vāsinī, the Prajñā (feminine wisdom aspect) of Amitabha. Originally, she appears in the Garbha-dhātu Maṇḍala robed in white, seated on a lotus and holding a closed white lotus in her left hand. According to the





(5) Playful Lion Guanyin  
(Shizi Youxi Guanyin)



(6) White-robed Guanyin  
(Baiyi Guanyin)



(7) Guanyin Reclining on a Lotus  
(Lianwo Guanyin)



(8) Guanyin Looking at the  
Waterfall (Longjian Guanyin)

Commentary on the Mahā Vairocana Sūtra, Pāṇḍara.vāsinī is white (sometimes light red) because she resides in the Enlightened Mind. In her original form she is also called the 'Mother of Avalokiteśvara' (Chin. Guanyinmu).

(7) Guanyin Reclining on a Lotus (Lianwo Guanyin)

The lotus represents our Buddha-nature which lies dormant (reclining) within ourselves. The reclining posture represents the passing away of the historical Buddha Sakyamuni, but Avalokiteśvara now continues His work until Maitreya (the future Buddha) comes.

(8) Guanyin Looking at the Waterfall (Longjian Guanyin)

He sits on a rock and gazes (that is, contemplates) at the waterfall which represents the stream of consciousness or impermanence.

(9) Giver of Medicine Guanyin (Shiyao Guanyin)

He is here represented as a universal healer of sufferings, both physical and mental.

(10) Guanyin of the Fish-basket (Yulan Guanyin)

This is based on the legend of a Chan Buddhist and his daughter Lingchou who is believed to be a manifestation of Guanyin carrying a bamboo basket.

(11) Virtuous King Guanyin (Dewang Guanyin)

Here, he is represented as Brahma, the 'king of merit', for through his enormous merit he was born in such a high level.





(9) Giver of Medicine Guanyin  
(Shiyao Guanyin)



(10) Guanyin of the Fish-  
Basket (Yulan Guanyin)



(11) Virtuous King Guanyin  
(Dewang Guanyin)



(12) Moon in Water Guanyin  
(Shuiyue Guanyin)

## (12) Moon in Water Guanyin (Shuiyue Guanyin)

He gazes contemplatively at the moon in the water. The bright disc of the moon in the water represents the concentrated mind. The moon's reflection in the water symbolizes the illusory nature of worldly existence.

## (13) One-leaf Guanyin (Yiye Guanyin)

He floats on the water on a single leaf (like Bodhi-dharma on a single reed). His meditation here represents the 'earth kasina' where earth can be projected anywhere - even in water. In this way, he is able to save and protect those who fall into the depths of the ocean (as promised in the Saddharma.puṇḍarika Sūtra).

## (14) Blue-throat Guanyin (Qingjing Guanyin)

This is Nīla.kaṇṭha, already described in chapter 4 (no 11).

## (15) Guanyin of Powerful Virtue (Weide Guanyin)

His virtue has the power to reach out to all living beings.

## (16) Life-extending Guanyin (Yanming Guanyin)

Here he grants long life.

## (17) Guanyin of Boundless Treasure (Zhongbao Guanyin)

This manifestation is based on the Saddharma.puṇḍarīka Sūtra regarding Avalokiteśvara's vow to help sea-going travellers in quest of treasure who are cast by a storm onto a rakshasha-infested island. The treasure here





(13) One-leaf Guanyin  
(Yiye Guanyin)



(14) Blue-throat Guanyin  
(Qingjing Guanyin)



(15) Guanyin of Powerful Virtue  
(Weide Guanyin)



(16) Life-extending Guanyin  
(Yanming Guanyin)

also symbolizes the Three Jewels (reminiscent of the Ratana Sutta of the Pali Canon).

(18) Guanyin of the Rock Cave (Yaohu Guanyin)

He sits upon a rock at a cave-mouth to protect beings from poisonous snakes that frequent such caves.

(19) Guanyin who Calms (Nengjing Guanyin)

He grants calm seas, protects sailors and sea-going travellers, and saves the shipwrecked.

(20) Anu Guanyin (A-nou Guanyin)

Anu is an abbreviation of Anavatapta (Pali *anotatta*) where Queen Mahā Māyā was brought to and cleansed during her dream of the Bodhisattva's conception. It is one of the most famous lakes in the Buddhist Scriptures and it is said that its waters can purify one of one's human defilements. The *Sāmañña-phala Sutta* Commentary compares the second Absorption to a deep pool [See the author's *The Buddha's Teachings*, 1991b:ch 27.]

(21) Guanyin of Fearlessness (Amoti Guanyin)

He has three eyes, four arms (two of them playing a lute with a phoenix-head), one foot on a lion, the other pendant. This manifestation of Guanyin appears amongst the hellbeings to save them.

(22) Parnasabari Guanyin (Yeyi Guanyin)

This manifestation is found in the Parnasabari Dhāraṇī [Nanjio 973; T 20:448a]. He protects against pestilence, insect pests, illness and grants a healthy long life.





(17) Guanyin of Boundless Treasure  
(Zhongbao Guanyin)



(19) Guanyin Who Calms  
(Nengjing Guanyin)



(20) Anu Guanyin  
(A-nou Guanyin)



(23) Vaidurya Guanyin  
(Liuli Guanyin)

## (23) Vaidūrya Guanyin (Liuli Guanyin)

This manifestation is based on the Saddharma. puṇḍarīka Sūtra which says that if one who is to be decapitated were to invoke his name, one would be saved. There is a Northern Wei (386-534) account of Sun Jingde, a Guanyin devotee, who was captured by enemy soldiers, but the night before his execution a Buddhist monk appeared in his dream instructing him to recite the Vaidūrya.rāja Sūtra a hundred times.

He awoke and did as instructed. The next morning, the executioner struck his neck thrice with a sword but the sword broke each time! He was released and when he reached home he found that the Guanyin image there had three sword marks on its head! (Vaidūrya is a kind of gem called cat's eye.)

## (24) Tārā Guanyin (Tuolo Guanyin)

This is a manifestation of motherly love. She is blue-white in colour, robed in white and bearing a lotus in both hands. (Tārā will be dealt to some detail below under Aryatārā.)

## (25) Guanyin of the Clam (Geli Guanyin)

This Guanyin is depicted seated on a clam shell. Legend has it that the Tang emperor Wenzhong (826-836) loved to eat clams to such an extent that the fishermen were oppressed by his courtiers who were ordered to get the clams. One day the emperor was given a huge clam but as he was preparing to eat it, the clam opened itself and he saw a human apparition in it. The monk whom he consulted explained that it was a manifestation of Guanyin. The emperor then gave up eating clams, and decreed the building of temples and images of Guanyin all over his empire.





(24) Tara Guanyin  
(Tuolo Guanyin)



(25) Guanyin of the Calm  
(Geli Guanyin)



(26) Guanyin of the Six  
Watches (Liushi Guanyin)



(28) Malang's Wife Guanyin  
(Malangfu Guanyin)

## (26) Guanyin of the Six Watches (Liushi Guanyin)

In ancient India, the day was divided into six four-hour watches. The six watches here represent a whole day, meaning that Guanyin continuously watches over his devotees throughout the day without any break, which effectively covers the rest of one's life.

## (27) Universally compassionate Guanyin (Pubei Guanyin)

Guanyin's Compassion is not limited in any way covering all directions. In the meditation of the Positive Emotions (*brahma.vihāra*), this is known as 'breaking the barriers'. Even the evil and seemingly incorrigible is within the range of her Compassion for the Buddha-nature exists in every living being.

## (28) Malang's Wife Guanyin (Malangfu Guanyin)

This is another feminine manifestation. She carries a lotus in her right hand, and a female skull in her left.

Around 817, during the Tang dynasty, there lived in China a beautiful country girl who was sought after by many eligible youths. To choose the right husband, she announced that she would marry the one who could commit to memory the Guanyin (Universal Door) Chapter of the Saddharma. puṇḍarīka (or Lotus) Sutra in one night. Twenty of the men who returned the next day could do so.

Then she set a new requirement that her future husband should be able to memorize the Diamond Sutra by the next morning. Now there were ten men left, whom she challenged to memorize the whole of the Lotus Sutra within a period of three days. Only a youth named Malang succeeded.

But on the wedding day, the young girl was taken ill and died. Shortly after she was buried, an old monk called





(29) Anjali Guanyin  
(Hezhang Guanyin)



(30) Guanyin of Oneness  
(Yiru Guanyin)



(31) Guanyin of Non-duality  
(Buer Guanyin)



(32) Lotus-bearing Guanyin  
(Chilian Guanyin)

at her house and instructed her family to exhume her body. When the coffin was opened they found golden pieces of bones. The monk announced that the dead woman was a manifestation of Guanyin and then he vanished on the spot. From that day on, the people in the district became faithful devotees of Guanyin.

(29) Añjali Guanyin (Hezhang Guanyin)

The hands that are put together in worship does not grasp at worldly things. This gesture represents the lotus and is symbolic of detachment. When water is poured over the lotus, none of it will stay on. The hands in such a gesture are also held at the level of the heart symbolizing open-heartedness.

(30) Guanyin of Oneness (Yiru Guanyin)

This Guanyin rides upon a cloud, flies through space, and subdues thunder, symbolizing that he is one with the whole universe. The ultimate Truth is all one - the Truth of the Dharma Realm (*dharma.dhatu*).

(31) Guanyin of Non-duality (Buer Guanyin)

Though things appear in this world as a duality: good and evil, joy and sorrow, beautiful and ugly, and so on, all these are in the mind. The conditioned mind looks at only those things it wants to and filters away others or is simply blind to them. The enlightened mind see every-thing as they really are. Even the Ultimate Truth (Dharma language) and the Conventional Truth (worldly language) are no more different. The Original Buddha (*penfo*) and the Emanated Buddha (*zhifo*) are not different in the eyes of the enlightened.

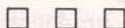


## (32) Lotus-bearing Guanyin (Chilian Guanyin)

The lotus here represents Guanyin's original Bodhisattva vow. This manifestation is also known as Padmapāṇī. [See the author's *The Five Buddhas*, ch 7.]

## (33) Water-sprinkling Guanyin (Sashui Guanyin)

Sprinkling water (*abhiṣeka*) and pouring of water (*dakṣiṇa*) are very symbolic acts in Buddhism. The first symbolizes not only the consecration of a king, but the entrance into a new spiritual life (especially when one commits oneself to Buddhist life and work). The second represents the sharing of merits with other beings, especially one's deceased relatives. Water also symbolizes purity, for example, in the story of the Buddha just before His Enlightenment when He touched the earth and a great flood arose washing away Mara's evil hosts.



## OTHER MANIFESTATIONS OF AVALOKITEŚVARA

### (1) Ārya Avalokiteśvara (Sheng Guanyin; Jap. Sho Kannon)

The term 'Ārya' translates as 'noble' as in the Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path meaning the truth or teaching that is both universal and beneficial for all beings. The title is later prefixed to Avalokiteśvara's name to distinguish the original form from the later manifestations. This is the non-Tantric form embodying the Buddha's Compassion.

He has a single face and two arms sometimes clasped together in *añjali*. He is depicted either seated or standing on a lotus seat. Sometimes his left hand is shown holding a lotus and the right in the giving gesture, or the left holding a vase (*kamaṇḍalu*) and the right in the fearless gesture.

### (2) Cintāmaṇi.cakra Avalokiteśvara (Ruyilun Guanyin, Jap. Nyoirin Kannon).

This is one of the earliest manifestations of Avalokiteśvara and appears (e.g. in Japan) in both the Tantric and non-Tantric forms, that is, with the human number of limbs and with numerous limbs. He is found as early as 605 in Japan during the time of empress Suiko. However only the non-Tantric forms are found in Chinese Turkestan and China.

In the Guhya-samaja Tantra (c 300), he appears as an emanation of the Buddha Ratnasambhava of the Five Celestial Buddhas. Here he bears his distinguishing mark, the Wish-fulfilling Gem (*cintā.maṇi*). The earliest forms have only two arms, but later ones may have as many as twelve. The Gem represents the Enlightened Mind in which all wishes are fulfilled; but for the common world-ling, it represents the



granting of material benefits (which can serve as skilful means towards Enlightenment).

### **Cintamaṇi.cakra in East Asia**

In China and Japan, *Cinta.maṇi.cakra* is often depicted as seated by the sea when he is known as the 'moon and water' Avalokiteśvara (Shuiyue Guanyin, Jap. Suigetsu Kannon). In this form, he usually wears a high head-dress, often with a jewel on the forehead (otherwise he bears no other jewels). He is usually bare-chested with a long garment hanging loosely from the waist to the ankles. Sometimes his shoulders are covered, and his head leans on the right hand which may bear an unopened lotus.

In the Japanese Tantric form, Nyoirin Kannon has six arms and is seated in the royal ease posture (the right knee raised, the left leg in the lotus posture). His head rests on his normal right hand with the elbow sometimes on the right knee. His normal left arm is in the giving gesture. The right lower arm holds the Wish-fulfilling Gem against his chest, while the left is in the teaching gesture and holding an unopened lotus. The third right arm hangs down holding a rosary while the left is raised balancing a wheel on the index finger (hence his name). Though Tantric in nature, this form is characteristically Japanese and evokes a sense of inner peace and intense joy.

The *Padma.cintāmaṇi Dhāraṇi Sutra* (Ruyilun Tuoluoni Jing) was rendered into Chinese by the following translators:

- Ratnacinta - between 693 and 706 (T 1083);
- Sikṣānanda - between 700 and 704 (T 1082);
- Bodhiruci - 709 (T 1080);
- Yijing - 710 (T 1081); and
- Dānāpāla - Northern Song dynasty (960-1126) (T 1403).

- (3) The Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara (Ekādaśa.mukha Avalokiteśvara, Shiyimian Guanyin, Jap. Juichimen Kannon)

The earliest mention of such a manifestation is made in the Samantamukha Parivarta (Pumenpin, Universal Door Chapter) of the Saddharma.puṇḍarika or White Lotus Sutra, the earliest Chinese translation which was made in 255; three others were done in 265 (Dharmaraksha), in 286 and in 335. But only those of Dharmaraksha (290 - same as the 265 edition?), Kumarajīva (405-406), and Jñānagupta and Dharmagupta (601-602) survived. The Samantamukha Parivarta is Chapter 24 in the Sanskrit text and Chapter 25 in the Chinese. The term *samanta.mukha* means 'facing all around' in the sense of showing uninterrupted compassion to all beings every where.

This eleven-faced manifestation is mentioned in the Āryāvalokiteśvara Ekādaśa.mukha Nāma Dhāraṇī Sūtra translated between 564 and 572 by Yasogupta of the Northern Zhou dynasty as 'Shiyimian guanshiyin shen zhou jing' (Nanjio 327; T 20:149) and in 656 by Xuanzang as 'Shiyimian shen zhou jing' (Nanjio 328). The Tibetan translation, attributed to Silendrabodhi and Ye-ses-de, occurs twice in the rGyud (Tantra) section of the Kanjur under the title of '(Hphags-pa) Spyān-ras-gzigs dhan-phyug shal bcu-gcig-pa she-bya-bahi gzuns' (The Peking Tibetan Tripitaka, ed. D. T. Suzuki: 8:373, 2:524).

### The Three Tiers Symbolism

One of the characteristic depictions of this manifestation is that of the six-tiered [representing the Six Realms] - above the main face are three faces of compassion, followed by three more wrathful ones, then by three faces with a pair of fangs each, and after that one laughing face, and finally topping them all is that of a Buddha (usually



Amitâbha). The three compassionate faces look at virtuous beings and help them. The wrathful faces help evil beings who need more patience and skilful means. The fanged faces symbolize the transformation of the animal nature in us into the spiritual when we enter the Buddhist life.

The three levels of three faces are also said to represent the three worlds: the Sense-worlds, the Form Worlds and the Formless Worlds, all over which Avalokiteśvara's Compassion extends. The single laughing face looks at the illusory world and transforms it into true Reality. The Buddha face on the crown represents the Mahayana Path that leads all beings to Enlightenment.

### The Meaning of the Eleven Faces

It is probable that this form evolved in India during the 5th century as a Symbolic Adaptation of the Vedic god Rudra who is said to be eleven in number or have eleven heads. An early image of Avalokiteśvara with eleven faces and four arms was discovered in the Kanheri stupa in India.

In Buddhist iconography and psychological symbolism, the eleven faces represent the eleven directions (the four cardinal points, the directions in between, the zenith, the nadir and the centre) meaning the whole universe. The centre symbolizes the starting-point of the Positive Emotions (Lovingkindness, Compassion, Altruistic Joy and Equanimity).

According to A. Matsunaga, the most common meanings of the symbolism of the eleven faces are as follows:

- (1) The eleven stages to Enlightenment;
- (2) The ten Perfections (*pārami*) and the Tathagata;
- (3) The twelve links of Dependent Origination (includes the Bodhisattva's own face);
- (4) The eleven faces of Skilful Means (*upaya*) and one true face representing Absolute Truth; and
- (5) The eleven ignorances (*avidyā*) of sentient beings

illuminated by the light of wisdom.

(*The Buddhist Philosophy of Assimilation*, p 123f)

**Sahaśra.bhuja Sahaśra.netra Āryāvalokiteśvara Ekādaśa,  
mukha.nāma Dhāraṇī**

The Āryāvalokiteśvara Ekādaśa.mukha Dhāraṇī Sūtra (Discourse on the Eleven-faced Arya Avalokitesvara) contains a popular dharani (mantra for meditation) of the same name, said to have been recited by Avalokitesvara in the presence of the Buddha. It comprises two parts: the first comprises preliminary salutations to the Three Jewels, the Buddha Vairocana, all Buddhas and Avalokiteśvara. The second section contains the dharani proper.

*Namo Ratna.trayāya*

*Nama Ārya-j/ñāna.sāgarāya Vairocana.vyūha,rājāya*

*Tathāgatāya*

*Nama sarva.tathāgatebhyah Arhatebhyah*

*Samyak.sambuddhebhyah*

*Nama Āryāvalokiteśvarāya Bodhisattvāya Mahā.sattvāya*

*Mahā.karuṇikāya*

*Tad yathā:*

*Om dhārā dhārā dhṛtī dhṛtī dhūrū dhūrū itī vete cale  
cale prācale prācale kuśume kuśume varā itī mīt cīt jolā  
mapanaye svāhā.*

The parentheses are missing in the Sanskrit and reconstructed from the Tibetan version. This is the dharani that is sung at the start of the Dharmafarer Sevenfold Puja.

For the devout Buddhists, the invocation of this manifestation acts as a panacea and averts epidemic diseases, wards off evil and calamities, keeps away bad dreams, prevents untimely death by water or fire, counteracts the effect of poison, and secures wealth, security and happiness. Furthermore, the devotee who mindfully recites the dharani





(1) Ārya Avalokiteśvara



(3) The Eleven-faced  
Avalokiteśvara



tāmāṇi.cakra  
valokiteśvara

will see the Buddhas at the moment of death and be reborn in Sukhavati.

- (4) The thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara (Sahaśra.bhuja Avalokiteśvara, Qianshou Guanyin, Jap. Senju Kannon)

Sometime before the 7th century onwards this manifestation was popular in Central Asia and is later than the previous manifestation. This form may bear in the crown up to five hundred faces with eleven being the most popular. The first image of this manifestation was brought into China during the early Tang dynasty (618-626). Around 709, Bodhiruci translated the Sahaśra.bhuja Śaśra.netra Āryāvalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Dhāraṇī Sūtra ('Qianshou qianyan guanshiyin pusamu tuoluoni shen jing', Nanjio 319; T 20:96), the principal sutra related this manifestation. The Chinese Buddhists also call this manifestation by the name of 'Qianbi' (Thousand-shouldered) and 'Qiankuang' ('Thousand Lights'), the latter referring to the eyes in each palm.

There are several versions of the legend regarding the origin of the eleven heads of this Avalokiteśvara. The common elements boil down to this: Avalokiteśvara descended into the hells and liberated the beings there and conducted them to Sukhāvati (the paradise of his Celestial Buddha, Amitābha). He discovered to his dismay, however, that for every being he saved, another immediately was reborn there in his place. In his utter grief and despair, his head split into ten pieces. Amitābha caused each piece to become a head, and placed the heads on the body of Avalokiteśvara (who was after all his own emanation) in three tiers, with the tenth head on the top and his own image above them all. As a result, Avalokiteśvara now has twenty-two eyes and eleven brains to help him in his work of relieving the world of suffering!



### The Thousand Eyes

This eleven-headed manifestation may have from six to a 'thousand' arms and an eye in each of them. The main arms usually are twenty-two appearing in different gestures (e.g. *añjali* and *dharmacakra*, and *dhyāna*), and bearing different symbols (e.g. the ambrosia vase, the rosary, and the Dharma wheel). The thousand arms sometimes appear in the form of an aura behind the image and bear symbols like a book, a vase, a vajra, a begging-bowl, a wheel, etc. One of the hands is usually in the giving gesture. The Vedic gods Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva are sometimes represented at the feet of the image.

The meaning of this myth is that in one's efforts to do good and help others, one often meets with seemingly insurmountable odds that may initially devastate one's energy and hope. But those very disasters are serendipity, a blessing in disguise. For the true Buddhist work is not a glory-seeking, pleasure-based and ego-boosting venture, but demands Skillful Means (the arms), Vision (the eyes), and above all Mindfulness (the faces). A beautiful towering image of this manifestation in Italian marble stands in the Great Compassion Hall of the Great Enlightenment Dhyana Temple (Phor Kark See) on Bright Hill in Singapore.

- (5) The horse-headed Avalokiteśvara (Hayagrīva, Matou Guanyin, Jap. Bato Kannon)

The term 'Hayagrīva' literally means 'the horse-necked one' and is one of the most wrathful manifestations of Avalokiteśvara, usually depicted with a horse-head in his dishevelled hair. Before being represented as a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, he existed in his own right as an emanation both of Amitābha and of Akṣobhya. The Chinese call him 'Matou Mingwang or Fennuchi Ming-wang'. His special emblem is the *uttara.bodhi* ('Incomparable

Enlightenment) gesture - the fingers of both hands are clasped together with the exception of the thumbs and the index which are extended outwards and touches at the tips. (It is also known as the *padma*, or lotus, gesture.)

In the Tibetan pantheon, he is one of the 'Eight Terrible Ones' (drag-gshed) who are Dharma protectors. It is mentioned in the *Sadhana.mala* that he accompanies the Lokanatha manifestation of Avalokiteśvara along with Tara, and is also found in the retinue of Khasarpaṇa Avalokiteśvara together with Sudhana Kumara, Bhṛkūti and Tārā.

The horse is one of the Seven Jewels of the Universal Monarch (*cakravartī*) and the Tibetan 'Wind-Horse' (*lungta*) [ch 5]. Just as the Horse Jewel is capable of running to and subduing all the four corners of the earth, Hayagrīva conquers the oceans of birth, decay, disease and death. He is sometimes identified with the Avalokiteśvara who appears among the animals and hence is regarded as their protector. His incessant neighing is said to ward off demons and he is venerated by horse dealers. He is also said to be manifested in the Tibetan ritual dagger (*phurbu*, lit. 'peg' or 'nail') which has his head crowning the hilt. It is used symbolically during rituals to 'kill' demons and destroy evil forces.

### Other Forms of Hayagrīva

One of the earliest mentions of Hayagrīva is in the *Mahā.Vairocana Sūtra* (*Dapiluzhena Chengfo Shenbian Jiachi Jing*, T 18:1) translated in 724. In his simplest manifestation, he appears with dishevelled hair out of which protrudes a horse's head wearing a crown of skulls, and under a belt of heads hangs a tiger-skin. He brandishes a sword in his right hand and holds a lasso in the other. Other forms of the manifestation are:

- One head and four arms. The upper hands bear a mace (sometimes crowned by a skull) and a flower; the lower hand holds a wheel (or lasso) against the chest; the right



hand makes a mystic gesture; and he step to the right on a lotus throne.

- Three heads, four arms and four legs. His upper hands hold a vajra and a flower, the lower ones draws a bow. He steps to the right on demons. He is dressed in a manner similar to the previous form. This is the form believed to be invoked by Atiśa (982-1054), the Indian Buddhist reformer whose teachings formed the basis of the Kadampa sect of Tibetan Buddhism.
- Three heads, six arms and eight legs. He bears all the symbols mentioned in the other two forms, but from his dishevelled hair appears three horses' heads. Usually he is depicted with a third eye, bearing garuda wings and garbed in the skins of a lion and an elephant. The upper arms hold the double vajra and the sword, the next pair bears a mace and a pike (*khatvanga*). The lower arms embrace his light-blue Prajñā, and hold the skull-bowl in the left, while the right is in a mystic (abhaya-like) gesture.

All the fearsome aspects of Hayagrīva are intended to represent in concrete symbols all that living beings fear. In a sort of 'reverse symbolism', the very things which one fears are sublimated to protect one. After all there is nothing to fear but fear itself. This is the basis of Hayagrīva's symbolism.

#### (6) Cuṇḍā Avalokiteśvara (Zhunti Guanyin, Jap. Juntei Kannon)

Cuṇḍā is the only feminine Bodhisattva in this set of seven manifestations. Before becoming a manifestation of Avalokiteśvara, she was a Bodhisattva in her own right - as the embodiment of the Cuṇḍā Dhāraṇī (Nanjio 344, T 20:185; one of the twelve which appears in the Nispanna Yogavali under the Maṇḍala of Dharma-dhatu Vagīśvara), first translated by Divakara around 685 during the Tang

dynasty.

The twelve Dhāraṇī (as manifestations) look alike for they all appear as two-armed bearing a double vajra in the right hand and special symbols in the left. Cuṇḍā's left hand usually holds a rosary from which a water-pot (*kamaṇḍalu*) hangs. In other Maṇḍalas, Cuṇḍā may have up to twenty-six arms.

According to B. Bhattacharyya, the first mention of her name is as Candra in the Mañjuśrī Mūlakalpa (c 200) and as Cuṇḍā-vajri in the Guhya-samaja (c 300) [*Indian Buddhist Iconography*, p 221]. Her popularity is attested in at least two ways:

1. That two other translations were made, one by Vajrabodhi (c 723; Nanjio 345, T 20:173), and the other by Amoghavajra (Nanjio 346, T 20:78); and
2. That there are a number of forms of her name: Cundi, Cundra, Candra, Canda, Cundra and Cuṇḍāvajri. Cuṇḍā is also an emanation of Vajrasattva and is the only feminine Bodhisattva who bears his image in the head-dress. She is also known in Java where two images of her are found on the outside panels of the Chandi Mendut, one standing bearing eight arms and the other is seated and four-armed.

### Cuṇḍā as Avalokiteśvara

The first mention of Cuṇḍā Avalokiteśvara is in the Karaṇḍa Vyūha (Dacheng Zhuangyan Baowang Jing; Nanjio 782, T 20:47) where we find her Mantra: 'Om cale cule cunde śvāhā'. In this form, she is also known, like Prajñā.pāramitā, as the Mother of the 700,000 Buddhas of the three worlds (Koṭi.śrī or Śapta.koṭi Buddha.mātrī Cundi.devī).

It is this mother aspect which appeals to the Buddhists of East Asia where her most popular form is that with a



single face, three eyes and eighteen arms. In Japan, she is rarely represented in a statue form, but more popularly found in mystic paintings. In the Garbha.kośa Maṇḍala, she is depicted in the second sector (sarvajña pariṣad, 'the Omniscient Assembly') bearing eight or eighteen arms, and is the 'Mother of the Lotus Sector' (that is, the fourth Assembly which comprises twenty-one forms of Kannon).

Her two normal hands are held against the breast in the lotus gesture (*padma* or *uttara.bodhi mudra*): her ring and little fingers are clasped together with the second fingers upright and touching each other. Two upper hands bear a sword and a banner while the two uppermost ones bear the orbs of the sun and the moon (representing eternity).

(7) Amogha.paśa Avalokiteśvara (Bukong Juansuo Guanyin, Jap. Fuku Kenjaku)

*Amogha* (lit. 'not void') means 'not in vain, unfailing' and *paśa* means 'lasso, noose, or rope'. He is the manifestation of various Bodhisattva skills, especially his ability to save all sentient beings without any exception. The special skilful means here are the four Conditions of Welfare (*saṅgraha.vastu*): generosity, positive speech, beneficial action, and philosophy of equitableness (or fair equality).

Remains of his image have been found at Mathura in India. His worship is based on the Amogha.paśa Hṛdaya Sūtra, the first chapter of which was translated in 587 by Jnanagupta of the Sui Dynasty (Bukong Juansuo Zhou Jing). His popularity is vouched by the numerous Chinese translations:

Xuanzang (659) - Bukong Juansuo Shenzhou Xin Jing (Nanjio 316; T 1094)

Bodhiruci (Tang) - Bukong Juansuo Shenzhou Jing (partial);

Ratnacinta (693) - Bukong Juansuo Tuoluoni Zhizaiwang Chou Jing (Nanjio 313, T 1097);

Li Wuchan (700) - Bukong Juansuo Tuoluoni Zhou Jing (Nanjio 314, T 1096);

Bodhiruci (c 707) - Bukong Juansuo Shenben Chenyen Jing (tr of Amogha-paśa Kalparaja Sutra; Nanjio 317, T 20:227);

Amoghavajra (Loyang: 720-774) - Bukong Juansuo Biluzhenafu Dakuanting Kuangchenyen (Jing) (Nanjio 1002, T 1002); and

Danapala (Northern Song) - Shengguanzhizai Pusa Bukong Wang Pimi Xin Tuoluoni Jing (Nanjio 987, T 1099).

Amogha.paśa is sometimes regarded as an emanation of Maitreya or Kṣīti.garbha, who themselves are emanations of the Buddha Vairocana. Amogha.paśa is also one of the six manifestations of Avalokiteśvara mentioned in the Amogharāja Kalparāja (Nanjio 317 ch 1, T 1092).

It is said that Avalokiteśvara received a prophecy (*vyākaraṇa*) called the Amogha.paśa Hṛdaya.rājani Dhāraṇī Mantra in the last of the ninety-one world-cycles of his last birth. The devotee who recites this Mantra before his image on the eighth day of each lunar month is assured of twenty kinds of benefit in this life and eight at death. The Mantra is recorded in the Sahaśra.bahu Sahaśra,r-akṣa Avalokiteśvara Sūtra translated by Amoghavajra (Jinkang Tingyuqie Qianshou Qianyen Guanzhizai Pusa Xiuxing Yikui Jing; Nanjio 1383, T 1056).

His most popular form in Japan is the one with one head, three eyes and eight arms. In the Garbha.dhātu Maṇḍala, Amogha.paśa occupies the outermost sector of the Avalokiteśvara section. In the four-armed manifestation, the two upper hands hold a rosary (right) and a lotus (left); the two lower ones hold a lasso (left) and a water jug or the vajra (right). In the six-armed form, the normal hands are held together in the lotus gesture (*añjali*) against the breast.

Amogha.paśa made a late entrance (from the 8th century) into the Japanese pantheon. In ancient times, he is not worshipped by the Shingon sect but is now more



commonly venerated especially by the Tendai sect. There are Japanese images depicting him with a monastic staff (*khakkhara*) in one of his upper hands and in one form wearing the Five-Wisdom Crown with the monastic staff in his right hand. In Japan, his special emblem seems to be the monastic staff rather than the lasso. The Candi Yago (eastern Java, latter half of 13th cent) houses Amogha.paśa as the main image, depicted with eight arms.

(8) Avalokiteśvara of the Eight Sufferings (Ba Nan Guanyin)

There is a form of Padmapāṇī with eight faces which is said to be the Avalokiteśvara of the Eight Sufferings. This manifestation also forms a group of its own with eight different forms each representing one of the sufferings mentioned in the Buddha's first discourse: birth, old age, disease, death, parting with what one loves, meeting with what one does not love, not getting what one desires, and the ills of the Five Aggregates.

For the simple folks, these eight manifestations are invoked against the very things they represent. This form of expressive spirituality, without resorting to an Almighty Creator, has given Orientals (not necessarily Buddhists) centuries of psycho-social stability. One has only to compare the pristine innocence and simple joy of the unevangelized Oriental mind (and of the so-called pre-Christian 'pagan' or 'heathen' nature-religions) to the guilt-ridden conscience and narrow self-righteousness of the evangelist.

For the informed Buddhists, these manifestations represent objects for constant reflection so that they are not fooled by the world and its wiles. They give them the spiritual strength to face the worst that can happen and yet calmly enjoy the best that life has to offer. The 'eight winds' of life (*loka.dhamma*: gain and loss, honour and dishonour, happiness and sorrow, praise and blame) does not shake or shiver the true Buddhist. □



(4) The thousand-armed  
Avalokiteśvara



(5) The horse-headed  
Avalokiteśvara



(6) Cunda Avalokiteśvara



(7) Amogha.paśa Avalokiteśvara



## THE GREAT COMPASSION MANTRA

One of the most often recited of Buddhist prayers is popularly known as the Great Compassion Mantra or Dhāraṇī. It is found in the Dhāraṇī Sūtra, of which at least two Chinese translations are known:

**Bhagavaddharma** (Tang, ?650-661) - Qianshou Qianyan Guanzizai [or Guanshiyin] Pusa Guangdayuanman Wuai Dabeixin Tuoluoni Jing (Nīla. kaṇṭha(ka) Sūtra or Sahaśra.bahu Sahaśra,r-aksa Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva Mahā.purṇa. praṭihata Mahā.karuṇika.hṛdaya Dhāraṇī Sūtra);

**Vajrabodhi** (Tang, ?731-736) - Qianshou Qianyan Guanzizai Pusa Guangdayuanman Wuai Dabeixin Tuoluoni Zhouben (Nīlakaṇṭha nāma Dhāraṇī); and possibly those by:

**Zhitong** (Tang, 627-649) - Qianyan Qianbi Guanshiyin Pusa Tuoluoni Shenzhou Jing (Nīlakaṇṭha(ka) Sūtra); and

**Bodhiruci** (Tang, 709) - Qianyan Qianbi Guanshiyin Pusamu Tuoluoni Sheng Jing (Nīla.kaṇṭha(ka) Sūtra).

### Popularity and Efficacy

Though the Mantra is very popular amongst Chinese-speaking Buddhists, the original Sanskrit is lost and it is survived only by the Chinese translations. A number of attempts have been done at reconstructing the Sanskrit version. In 1980 the author collected some of these transliterations into a mimeographed booklet. The following five versions have been listed:

(A) The romanized Mandarin of Gold Mountain Monastery, USA;

- (B) A Sanskrit reconstruction by the author;
- (C) D. T. Suzuki's reconstruction;
- (D) A version found in a Hong Kong Buddhist booklet; and
- (E) A version found in an Indonesian Buddhist booklet.

The last two seem to be derived from the same source (but it is likely that E is based on D). The latest revised reconstruction of the Mantra is found in *The Pūjā Book*, vol II (Piyasīlo, 1991d)

The only exhaustive English commentary on the Mantra that the author has come across is the translation of the Mandarin by Ven. Hsuan Hua in his *The Dharani Sutra* (Sino-American Buddhist Association, 1976). John Blofeld observes that Ven. Hsuan Hua 'has in fact extracted a meaning from every character, but perhaps to be taken as a list of psychic or yogic correspondences rather than as a translation.' [*Bodhisattva of Compassion*, Shambala, 1978: p 108].

Traditional Buddhists believe that if the Mantra is mindfully recited 108 times daily for a thousand days, it would influence even the ten directors of king Yama's court. This is a colourful way of saying that when your mind is concentrated on a positive thought, you would not face hellish suffering. After all, if one spends most of the three years doing mindful recitation of the Mantra very little room is left for the inclination to kill, steal, or break any of the Precepts!

### The Rebus of Eighty-four Symbols

The popularity of the Dhāraṇī is attested not only by the number of translations mentioned above but also by its numerous printings done by pious devotees for free distribution. (A free copy is almost always available for the asking in any Chinese Buddhist temple.) It is perhaps the only Buddhist text that has been put into rebus or logogram [character or sign representing a word] so that the illiterate



could recite the Dhāraṇī.

A traditional total of eighty-four logograms have been conceived and are here listed with translation and explanations (based on Chinese commentaries) where relevant [the logogram is described in square brackets]; those with an asterisk '\*' are either reconstruction, or obscure word/s, or term/s best left untranslated:

- (1) *Namo Ratna.trayāya* - 'Homage to the Three Jewels'.  
[Guanyin standing on a lotus with a rosary in his hand.]

One should recite the Dharani calmly, with a clear and concentrated mind and with faith.

- (2) *Namo Ārya* - 'Homage to the Noble...' [Ruyilun Pusa (Cintā.maṇī.cakra Bodhisattva).]

Be determined in keeping to the Dharma and generating the Will to Enlightenment (Bodhicitta).

- (3) *Avalokiteśvarāya* - 'Lord who heeds the cries of the world'. [Chibo Guanshiyin Pusa (Guanyin bearing an almsbowl).]

- (4) *Bodhisattvāya* - 'The Bodhisattva'. [Bukong Jiansuo Pusa (Amogha.paśa Bodhisattva).]

He appears with a large 'army' to save sentient beings.

- (5) *Mahā.sattvāya* - 'The Great Being'. [Pusa zhongzi zisong zhou.]

Amogha.paśa reciting a Mantra.

- (6) *Mahā.karuṇikāya* - 'Of Great Compassion'. [Maming Pusa (Bodhisattva Aśvaghōṣa).]

- (7) *Om* - (The universal mantric sound, the source of all sounds.) [Zhu guishen he zhangding song zhou.]

All suffering spiritual beings will put their palms together when listening to the Dharani.

(8) *Sarva abhayah* (vl *Sarva, r-abhaye*) - 'May all be without fear!' [Si Datian Wang (Cātum.mahārājika).]

(9) *Sudhana.dāśya* (possibly *Saddharma.dāśya*) - 'Seeing the Sublime Truth'. [Guishen (A follower of the Four Celestial Kings).]

(10) *Namo sukrtvā* (vl *sukrtemama*) *imaṃ Ārya* - Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna.

(11) *Avālokiteśvara.garbha* - 'The womb (source) of Avalokiteśvara'. [Yuanman Baosheng Lushenafu (a manifestation of Vairocana).]

(12) *Namo nīlakanṭha* (vl *nara.kindhi*) - 'Homage to the Blue-throated One'. [Vairocana Buddha]

(13) *Śri mahābhadrāśrāme* - 'The Holy Great One who rejoices in the auspicious'. [Yangmingtou Shenwang, the Goathead Deva raja (Mara's relative).]

(14) *Sarv'artha.subham* - 'All beneficial and beautiful'. [Ganlu Pusa (Bodhisattva of the Dew).]

(15) *Ajeyam* - 'Invincible'. [Flying Yaksha Celestial King.]

(16) *Sarva.sattva.nāma.varga* - 'A gathering of all those known as 'beings'. [The Powerful King, Bhagavata.]

(17) *Mahā.dhātu* - 'The (four) great elements'. [Junzhali Pusa (Bodhisattva Kuṇḍali?).]

(18) *Tad yathā* - 'That is thus:...'. [Arhat with long tongue.]



- (19) *Om avaloke* - 'Om, He is one who surveys down below...' [Guanshiyin Pusa with palms together looking stern, but full of compassion.]
- (20) *Lokite* - 'He surveys...' [Mahā.brahma Devarāja.]
- (21) *Kalate* (vl *Karate*) - 'The Shaven-headed One' (Kṣiti-garbha?). [Ruler of the devas (with smiling face).]
- (22) *Hari* - 'Charmingly beautiful'. [Maheśvara Devarāja (Lord of the Thirty-three).]
- (23) *Mahā.bodhisattva* - 'The Great Bodhisattva'. [Shixin Jeng Wuzhalianxin Satuo.]  
The Bodhisattva is one whose mind is firm and does not wander.
- (24) *Sarva sarva* - 'All! All!'\* [Bodhisattva Ratnakūṭa.]
- (25) *Mālā mālā* - 'Garland! Garland!'\* [Youthful Pāṇḍara. vāsinī with a Wish-fulfilling Gem.]
- (26) *Masi mahā.hṛdayaṃ* - (possibly *Masi masi hṛdayaṃ*), 'Masi Masi, the heart!'\* [White-haired Amitābha.]
- (27) *Kuru kuru karmaṃ* - 'Kuru Kuru, the Deed!'\* [Kongsheng Pusa (Bodhisattva 'Empty Body').]
- (28) *Kuru kuru vijayati* (vl *Dhuru dhuru bhajyate*) - 'Kuru Kuru, He succeeds!'\* [Yan Jun Pusa (Adamant Bodhisattva).]
- (29) *Mahā.vijayati* (vl *Mahā.bhajyate*) - 'He succeeds greatly'. [Dali Tianjiang (Great Strength Heavenly General).]

- (30) *Dharā dharā* - 'Those who uphold (and) those who do not'. [The Great Person (maha purusa) practising asceticism.]
- (31) *Dharin* - 'The upholder (or, bearer)'. [Shiziwang bingyan songdu (A lion-king).]
- (32) *Suraya* (vl *śvarāya*) - 'Courageous'. [Cuisui Pusa.]  
A Bodhisattva holding a golden pestle for subduing Mara's relatives.
- (33) *Cala cala* - 'Shake! Shake!']\* [Pili Pusa.]  
Thundercrash Bodhisattva holding a golden wheel.
- (34) *Mama bhramara* - 'My "black bee"' (a name for the curl on the forehead representing the 'Third Eye' or Divine Eye). [Great Evil-subduing Vajra (holding a golden wheel).]
- (35) *Muktir* - 'One who is free'. [Bodhisattva of all the Buddhas with palms together.]
- (36) *Ehi ehi* - 'Come! Come!']\* [Maheśvara Devarāja.]
- (37) *Chinda chinda* - 'Break! Break!']\* [Jiana Mojiang Tianbing (Devā.rāja).]
- (38) *Harṣaṁ prachali* (probably *Harṣaṁ Pracari*) - 'Going above in happiness'. [Guanshiyin Pusa carrying bow and arrow.]
- (39) *Bhāsa bhāsaṁ* (probably *Bhāsa.basyam*) - 'Speaking and explaining'. [Three-eyed Earth Guardian holding bell in left hand.]



- (40) *Preṣāya* - Amitābha, Guanshiyin's teacher.
- (41) *Hulu hulu mālā* - 'Hulu hulu, garland'. [Babu Guishen Wang.] King of the eight kinds of suffering spiritual beings.
- (42) *Hulu hulu hr̥th \** - [Sibi Zhutian.] Four-armed deva.
- (43) *Sara sara \** - [Shuoluo Shuoluo Pusa.] Bodhisattva Sara Sara.
- (46) *Bodhiya bodhiya* - '(For) Enlightenment, Enlightenment'. [Guanyin helping various beings.]
- (47) *Bodhāya bodhāya* - '(For) Wisdom, Wisdom'. [Ānanda.]
- (48) *Maitreya* - 'The Loving One' (the future Buddha). [Great Cart Bodhisattva.]
- (49) *Nīla.kaṇṭha* - 'The Blue-throated One'. [Bodhisattva Nāgārjuna.]  
He holds a golden knife in one hand and expounds the Abhidharma.
- (50) *Darśinī* (possibly *Darsiniya*) - 'Worthy of being seen'. [Ratnadhvaja (holding up an iron fork).]
- (51) *Payamana\** - (Doubtful meaning: 'Drinking'? Possibly *Bhaya.mana*) [Bodhisattva Golden Light Pennant.]
- (52) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Santou shansheng jiafu ailong.]  
A three-faced divinity.
- (53) *Siddhāya* - 'For accomplishment'. [Bodhisattva Sāriputra.]

- (54) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Guanyin standing on a huge turtle on the Ganges.]
- (55) *Mahā.siddhāya* - 'For great accomplishment'. [Bodhisattva Radiant Light.]
- (56) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Mahā.maudgalyayāna (with robe on monastic staff).]
- (57) *Siddha.yoge* - 'The one yoked to accomplishment'. [Bodhisattva of all the Devas.]
- (58) *śvarāya* - 'The Lord'. [Amitābha Buddha helping the deities.]
- (59) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Ashena Pusa (holding bowl high).]
- (60) *Nīla.kanṭha* - 'The Blue-throated One'. [Bodhisattva Mountain Sea Compassion helping Hinayana saints.]
- (61) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Bodhisattva Candana.]
- (62) *Varāhānanaya* - (possibly *Varananaya* 'To the beautiful-faced woman', or *Vara.vahanaya* 'With a blessed vehicle.') [Bodhisattva Ratnamudrahasta.]  
He holds a golden axe.
- (63) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Juxiluo Pusa.]  
A Bodhisattva wearing straw sandals walking on the waves.
- (64) *Simha.śira.mukhāya* - 'To the one whose head and face is like a lion'. [Bodhisattva Bhaiṣajya.rāja.]  
He is wandering around healing beings.



- (65) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Yuanman Pusa.]
- (66) *Sarva.mahā.siddhāya* - 'For every great accomplishment'. [Bodhisattva Bhaisajya.samudgata.]  
He is wandering around healing beings.
- (67) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Sāriputra, Bodhisattva of Great Wisdom.]  
The Sutras are tied around his waist.
- (68) *Cakra.siddhāya* - 'For the wheel-like accomplishment'. [Tiger-roar Celestial General.]  
He holds a battle-axe.
- (69) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Zhutian Mowang (Māra King of all the heavens).]
- (70) *Padma.hastāya* - 'To the one with a lotus in the hand'. [Lingxiangtian Pusa (Bodhisattva Spiritual Fragrance Heaven).]  
He holds a Wish-fulfilling Urn.
- (71) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Bodhisattva scattering flowers.]
- (72) *Nīla.kanṭha.vikārāya* - 'To the dreadful-looking Blue-throated One'. [Bodhisattva Puṇḍra.]
- (73) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Bodhisattva Tārā as a girl.]
- (74) *Mahā.ṛṣi.sankaraya* (vl *Mavari.samkarāya*) - 'To the great caring seer'. [Bodhisattva Samadhi.dhyāna.]  
He sits cross-legged holding a precious lamp in each hand.
- (75) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Bodhisattva Mahā.kaśyapa.]  
He holds a rosary in his hand.

- (76) *Namo Ratna.trayāya* - 'Homage to the Three Jewels'.  
[Bodhisattva Ākāśa.garbha.]

He sits on a rock holding a flower.

- (77) *Namo Ārya* - 'Homage to the Noble...'. [Bodhisattva Samanta.bhadra.]

He sits cross-legged on the precious 'hundred' elephant.

- (78) *Avalokite* - 'Who surveys (the world)'. [Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī]

He sits on a lion with his right hand in the 'emptiness' gesture.

- (79) *śvarāya* - '(Responding to) the voices (of the world).  
[Guanyin Pusa.]

Here he appears as Bodhisattva Thousand Leaves Golden Lotus, the Bodhisattva who frees one from attachment to visual forms.

- (80) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Guanyin Pusa.]

Here he appears as the Bodhisattva who frees one from attachment to sounds.

- (81) *Om siddhyantu* - 'Om, let it be accomplished!' [Guanyin Pusa]

Here he appears as the Bodhisattva who frees one from attachment to smells.

- (82) *Mantra* - (Sound symbol). [Guanyin Pusa.]

Here he appears as the Bodhisattva who frees one from attachment to tastes.

- (83) *Padāya* - 'Of a line of verse'. [Guanyin Pusa.]

Here he appears as the Bodhisattva who frees one from attachment to touch.



(84) *śvāhā* - 'Well-said'. [Guanyin Pusa.]

Here he appears as the Bodhisattva who frees one from attachment to the mind.

### Sound Poetry

While it is possible to translate or explain some of the words, it will be noted that most of them do not have any meaning, but are simply sound-symbols (denoted by an asterisk '\*'). Therefore, to look for them in a Sanskrit dictionary would be futile. They belong to the category of 'sound poetry' which appeals to the depth of one's heart like children's nursery rhymes and stories, folk songs, and folklore.



## GUANYIN IN CHINESE MYTHOLOGY

### Mythology and Legend

A myth is a basic form of religious symbolism and a kind of symbolic communication. It contains specific accounts regarding superhuman beings and extraordinary events or situations in a time that is altogether different from that of ordinary human experience. In other words, this is an attempt at communicating higher principles or spiritual values (as against social norms and materialistic priorities). Mythology preserves and transmits principles and values which a society hold as ultimately real and which gives meaning to their present circumstances to be able to cope with them.

The concept of time in a myth is the eternal cosmic stage (such as that of the Saddharma.puṇḍarīka Sutra). When an aspect of mythology manifests itself in time, it is called a legend. The protagonists of legends are usually great religious founders but may be persons of great quality or virtue. Being a part of mythology, the truth of legends is not questioned because they are meant to be instructive, not historical. One such legend is the well-known Chinese account of Avalokiteśvara's as Miaoshan.

### THE MIAOSHAN LEGEND

The legend goes that in the eleventh year of the Jintian ('Golden Heaven') era (that is, 2587 BC), there was a king Miao Tohuang or Miaochung, ruler of Xinlin, who had three daughters (Miaojing, Miaoying and Miaoshan) but no sons. It is said that when Queen Pota conceived Miaoshan she dreamt of a heavenly pearl which changed into a blazing sun which fell down at her feet.



[It will be noticed that there is a discrepancy with regards to the dates - the Buddha was born in 623 BC. This being a legend, no explanation has been given for it. One possible explanation is that this is an ancient pre-Buddhist legend which was later influenced by Buddhism.]

The disappointed king found suitable husbands for his daughters so that he might have an heir to the throne. The youngest, Miaoshan, however, refused to marry, saying that she preferred to dedicate her life towards Buddhahood.

### **Miaoshan's Renunciation**

After renouncing the world, she retired to the nunnery of White Sparrows. The king used every means he could to make her change her mind, employing increasingly horrific threats and techniques reminiscent of those used on young Temiya in the Jatakas. When all attempts failed, the exasperated king had the nun Miaoshan dismembered (like Khantivadi in the Jatakas) but it is said that the limbs regenerated themselves that very day! Then the furious king had the nunnery razed to the ground. But, according to one account, a sudden shower put out the blaze. In the end, the king ordered the nun Miaoshan to be beheaded. But the executioner's sword broke into pieces when it struck her neck. The king then had her to be strangled with a silken cord.

Suddenly a great windstorm arose and obscured the whole sky. Then a beam of light appeared and surrounded her [cf Manifestation (4) of the Thirty-three, ch 6.] Suddenly, the local tutelary god, in the form of a tiger, bounded forth from the forest and took her away on his back into the mountains.

### **Miaoshan's Enlightenment**

It is said that she was reborn in the hells where her

purity and compassion liberated all beings there from their sufferings. The Chinese legend goes on to say that this alarmed the Registrar of the Living and the Dead who immediately reported the matter to king Yama. (For without the hells, there would be no justice on earth when the evils go unpunished!)

King Yama, of course, ordered Miaoshan to return to the human world. On her return, the Buddha Amitābha appeared to her on a cloud and instructed her to retire into solitary meditation on the island of Putuo Shan some three thousand miles away. The Buddha gave her a heavenly peach which would not only sustain her for a year without need for food or water, but also give her eternal life.

### Putuo Shan

The local tutelary god, in the form of a tiger, carried her with wind-like speed to Putuo Shan island where she dwelt in the Xuan-ai Cave and practised meditation for nine years. At the end of that period, she attained Enlightenment and the young boy Huan Shancai (the 'Golden Youth') became her first acolyte.

One day, Miaoshan through her divine eye, saw that some fishermen had caught the third son of a Dragon King of the Sea who was wandering the seas in the form of a fish. Miaoshan immediately sent Shancai to purchase the fish from the market where he was put on sale. [Cf Manifestation (10) of the Thirty-three, ch 6.]

After the fish was freed into the sea, the Dragon King was extremely grateful and sent through his grand-daughter, Longnü (the 'Jade Maiden'), a light-emitting crystal so that Miaoshan could read the Scriptures in the dark. Longnü was so inspired on looking at Miaoshan that she sought permission to become her acolyte, too. In due course, Miaoshan converted her parents and continued helping other beings, postponing her own final Nirvana.



### Other Versions of the Legends

According to one account, it is said that the king suffered from a terrible incurable disease as a result of burning the nunnery down. The disease could only be cured by a concoction made from a hand and an eye of a *putianjen*, 'one who is never angry'. Miaoshan of course obliged her father who was healed as a result of the sacrifice. When the king discovered the identity of the donor, he was shocked into contrition and converted to Buddhism.

Another account says that Miaoshan's father was an Indian raja who was blind. In order to convert her father, she employed a skilful means. Appearing as a stranger, she informed the raja that his sight would be restored if he swallowed an eyeball of one of his daughter's.

None of the horrified daughters would consent to sacrifice an eye. Miaoshan then conjured up one and gave it to the raja. When the raja's sight was restored, Miaoshan spoke to him of the futility and vanity of the world where even children would not help their own parents.

Thus is the version of the Miaoshan that is the simplest and the one most often quoted by Western scholars. This legend is the basis for the most common manifestation in Chinese paintings of Guanyin which are often found on the altars of Buddhist homes. She is depicted (usually standing on a lotus or a wave) holding a flaming jewel in her hand which are in meditation or praying gesture. She is accompanied by her two acolytes with Longnü usually on her right and Shancai on her left.

### GUANYIN GIVER OF CHILDREN

In his book, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art* (vol 1 pp 105 124), Fenollosa describes the painting of a feminine Guanyin by the 7th century artist Yen Lipen. Foucher is also of the opinion that the feminine manifestation of Guanyin was

in existence by that time. We know for certain, however, that by the Tang dynasty, the Songzi Guanyin (Guanyin Giver of Children) was being worshipped by those wishing for children.

There are two distinct forms of feminine manifestations of Guanyin. The more ancient one is Indian in form and wearing princely garments and jewels. She is usually depicted seated cross-legged or sidewise on a lion with either leg pendant. Her hands are either in the meditation, the giving or the fearless gesture.

The second form of the feminine Guanyin is more simply dressed totally in white (including her shawl) with few ornaments. She looks motherly and smiling. This is the manifestation based on the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sutra where it is mentioned (in chapter 25) that Guanyin will grant children to those who are in need of them. She holds a child in her arms, but it is not hers; she readily gives it away to anyone who needs one.

### Later Forms of Songzi Guanyin

Later forms of Songzi Guanyin often show a vase (sometimes carried by Longnü) and a dove. (In fact, it is the presence of this bird that immediately identifies a feminine manifestation of Guanyin in China.) Sometimes, she is represented standing on a dragon. Shancái is usually represented standing beside her in a worshipping gesture.

In one of her hands, there is usually a rosary of pearls (which is sometimes held in the dove's beak). She also sometimes holds the willow branch which may be in a vase (which would otherwise contain heavenly ambrosia). In some representations, she pours the heavenly ambrosia in great stream out of her vase.



### Chinese Ideals

To the Chinese (including non-Buddhists, in many cases), Guanyin represents spiritual virtues, but also the ideal of feminine beauty. Beautiful (and especially virtuous) young girls are often said to be 'Guanyin-like'. Similarly, the willow, with which she is associated, has a gentle supple long leaves.

Even though Chinese culture is patrilinear where sons are favoured over daughters, mothers are accorded great respect in the family. Filial piety is regarded as a primary social virtue in both Buddhism and Confucianism. Guanyin represents the mother figure of the Chinese society. She exemplifies patient concern and unconditional love.

### Guanyin and Taoism

When Buddhism was more established in China, it became bitter rivals with Taoism. (Confucianism was state-sponsored and as such did not feel the threat of a 'barbarian' religion.) At one point, the desperate Taoists even invented a story that when Laozi disappeared from China, he went West, and that the Buddha was a manifestation of Laozi!

The Taoists went further to outrival Buddhism by assimilating the latter's liturgy and meditation methods. By the 4th century there was a clear Buddhist influence upon the literary style of Taoist scriptures and the philosophical expression of the great Taoist masters. At one point they set up monastic community called *kuan* as a reaction against the Buddhist system.

One of the most interesting development is their adoption of Guanyin through the local cult of the goddess Niang-niang. In early times, there were two forms of the goddess, the northern China variety (Taishan Niangniang) regarded as a protector of land-dwellers, and the southern

variety (Tianhou Niangniang) who was the guardian of sea-farers.

The child-giving Guanyin of the Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sutra is similar to the Taishan Niangniang. The Guanyin of the Avatamsaka Sutra, known variously as Nanhai Dashi (Guanyin of the Southern Ocean), Cihang Dashi (Guanyin of Ocean-bound Compassion), and Putuo Dashi (Guanyin of Putuo Island), was similar to the Tianhou Niangniang. In due course, both forms of Niangniang merged into one and today it is possible to find in a Niangniang shrine, a child Guanyin flanked by Eye Light Niangniang (Yanguang Niangniang) on the right and by Smallpox Niangniang (Douzhen Niangniang) on the left.

### Meaning of the Guanyin Legends

In various Guanyin legends (especially the Miaoshan story) are buried innumerable morals and principles that serve as guidelines and inspiration for personal development and social stability. Only some of the simpler and relevant meanings will be mentioned here.

- (1) **The position of women.** While Guanyin symbolizes the ideal of Chinese womanhood, Miaoshan represents the woman who suffers in a man-dominated world. Ultimately, her own virtues redeem her and she brings spiritual benefits to those very people who torment her.
- (2) **The difficulty of doing good.** The Miaoshan legends show that sometimes one has to go through trials and tribulations before gaining spiritual development. In a sense, one is being 'tested'. If one is true to one's ideals, then all these difficulties are serendipitous or 'blessings in disguise'.
- (3) **The good will receive help.** If one is pure at heart, help will come from various, even unexpected, sources. The tiger helping Miaoshan represents our animal nature



transformed into our Bodhicitta which is in turn represented by Amitabha appearing on a cloud.

- (4) **A balance of emotion and reason.** The common masses are not so much interested in religious philosophy as in religious action. Through Guanyin, the simple folks find that they could cope with their day-to-day domestic and social difficulties more easily without recourse to superstitious magic and costly rituals. Above, they are given an avenue of emotional expression - a psychological safety-valve free of the guilt and terror of theistic system.
- (5) **The universality of truth.** Guanyin appears in almost every conceivable form. Miaoshan's nunnery is burnt down (Fire) by the king but she survives. A great windstorm (air) arises during her execution after which a tiger from the forest (Earth) carries her off. Lastly, she is instructed by Amitābha to spend retreat on an island (Water). In other words, a spiritual person is at peace with and is assisted by Nature herself.

