



Wall mural depiction of Padmasambhava—the Lotus Born—and his 8 manifestations (within top floor of Taktasang monastery)



Padmasambhava's Life Story



Item: Padmasambhava - (Main Form)

<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/90161>

Tibetan:

Chinese: 莲

(item no.



པད་མ་འབྱུང་གནས།

花生大士

90161)



Origin Location Tibet

Date Range 1700 - 1799

Lineages Nyingma

Material Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton

Collection Private

Notes about the Central Figure

Classification: Deity

Appearance: King

Gender: Male

TBRC: [bdr:P4956](#)

Interpretation / Description

Padmasambhava, Guru Rinpoche (Tibetan: pe ma jung ne. English: Lotus Born) the principal founder, along with Shantarakshita and King [Trisong Detsen](#), of Buddhism in Tibet. This unique painting depicts [Padmasambhava](#) surrounded by his life-story in chronological order, according to the Treasure (Terma) Tradition of the Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism. This composition is very unusual and rare. It is more typical to see paintings depicting

Padmasambhava surrounded by his principal [Eight Forms](#) in a non-chronological order. The different visual forms are used to highlight the important life events in the biographies of Padmasambhava. This painting depicts more than eight forms. (See a page of [detail images](#), the [Padmasambhava Outline Page](#) and [Padmasambhava Iconography Sub-sets](#)).



[1] Birth and Childhood. The life-story begins at the top right of the painting and moves clockwise around the central figure. Padmasambhava is portrayed as a small child, white in colour, born atop a pink lotus in the middle of Dhanakosha lake, in the Kingdom of Orgyan.

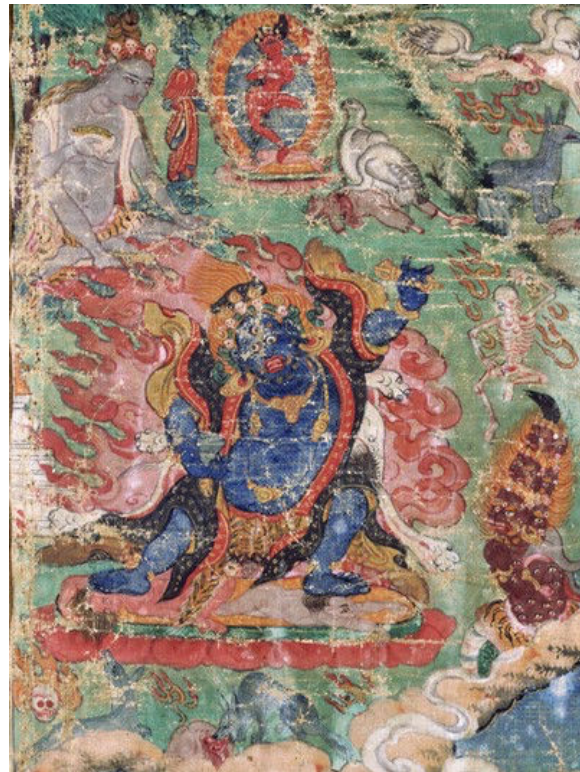
[2] Childhood At the side of the lake the miraculous birth is discovered by a Minister who then tells of the event to the childless King of Orgyan, Indrabhuti. Padmasambhava, known as Padmakara at this time, is escorted to the palace and enthroned as the crown prince of the Kingdom; visually portrayed in the top right corner.





[3] **Cool Grove Charnal Ground.** Below the birth and palace scenes and slightly to the left, after leaving the palace, Padmasambhava is portrayed as an orange coloured mahasiddha like figure seated in the charnal ground of Cool Grove (Sitavani) with his back to a stupa. During this time he recieved teachings from two Dakinis named Tamer of Mara and Sustainer of Bliss. In this form and at this time he is known as Shantarakshita. This form of Padmasambhava is almost identical to the form known as [Nyima Ozer](#) as he represented in the principal [Eight Forms](#).

[4] To the right, Padmasambhava appears as Dorje Dragpo Tsal, wrathful, blue in colour, holding a vajra and bell, dwelling in the Rugged Forest, subduing nagas and planetary spirits. The daemon Rahu (eclipse) is portrayed at the side with nine heads, and maroon in colour. The nine heads represent the eclipsing and controlling of the nine planets.





[5] **Zahor Kingdom & ordination as Shakyasengge.** Below that, Padmasambhava travels to the land of Zahor and takes ordination as a monk from the teacher Prabhahasti and receives the name [Shakyasengge](#). In this form he appears as a Buddha, wearing monk's robes, and holding a black begging bowl.

[6] **Loden Chogse.** Directly below, he is known as [Loden Chogse](#), richly attired with a turban crown, he holds a damaru drum in the upraised right hand and bowl in the left. This form depicts Padmasambhava as having received all of the Vajrayana Tantric teachings after studying with many famous teachers such as Buddhaguhya and Shri Simha.





[7] **Maratika Cave.** Again at the lower left Padmasambhava is depicted in the Maratika Cave in the land of Zahor. Seated in the meditation posture and with the hands placed in the lap, he meditates on the visualizations of [Amitayus](#) pictured in the space above, in a circle of light. At this time he is known as Chime Pema Tsal, or Guru Pema Tsal.

[8] **City of Zahor.** Leaving the cave of Maratika, Padmasambhava travels to the capital of Zahor to teach and beg for alms. At the right side of the composition Padmasambhava is depicted in the garb of a monk and holds a skullcup in the upraised right hand. The king of Zahor, depicted in front, is displeased and arrests Padmasambhava and sets about burning him alive. Padmasambhava transforms the fire into a cool lake seen here with the fire pushed out to the edge. He then manifests himself seated on a lotus in the middle of the lake.





[9] Orgyan Kingdom. After that, Padmasambhava returned to the land of Orgyan and again displeased those rulers and was burned in a pyre of sandalwood. Once again Padmasambhava changed the fire into a cool lake with a lotus seat in the middle. He and the consort Mandarawa appeared together in the middle wearing a garland of human heads. At this time he was known as Padma Totreng Tsal. (This narrative is not represented in the painting). Inspiring faith in

the inhabitants of Orgyan he remained and taught for thirteen years as [Padma Raja](#). At the bottom right corner, he is dressed as a king and holds aloft in the right hand a damaru drum and in the left hand a mirror reflecting all things as they are. In a bowed posture the king listens intently at the side.

In some biographies of Padmasambhava the form known as [Nyima Ozer](#) with his stories and adventures is placed between the Orgyan Kingdom Story and the Bodhgaya Story.

[10] Bodhgaya. Moving to the left, a single episode in Padmasambhava's life is represented with two images. First he is depicted in his usual form in debate with four non-Buddhist teachers. When some of these teachers resort to magic spells after being defeated, Padmasambhava manifests in the wrathful blue form of [Sengge Dradog](#), surrounded by orange flames, and utterly destroys the four teachers. The deity [Simhamukha](#), a teaching received from the Dakini Tamer of Mara in the Sitavani charnal ground, is pictured directly above Padmasambhava.





[11] Nepal, Yanglesho Cave. Again to the left, Padmasambhava is seated next to an elaborate mandala lying flat on a shrine with ritual objects arranged on all four sides. In his extended right hand is a kila (purba) peg and in the left a skullcup. Three daemon spirits lie on their backs having been defeated by the power of the [Vajrakila](#) practice special for removing obstacles on the spiritual path.

[12] At the lower left is [Orgyan Dorje Chang](#), blue in colour, embracing the Indian consort Mandarawa. In this form Padmasambhava is said to have taught the celestial beings in the heavens. This form along with accompanying stories is not found in a consistent chronological order between the various life-story texts of Padmasambhava.





[13] **Tibet, Samye Monastery.** At the bottom left corner Padmasambhava, in his form as [Pema Jungne](#), having been invited to Tibet by King [Trisong Detsen](#), is depicted with the King and two accompanying figures. Below the King are four figures representing four indigenous types of Tibetan mountain and nature spirits. It was these spirits that were creating obstacles to the completion of the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet, Samye Chokor Ling. To the right side is the monastery with a black stupa visible in front and a red stupa behind. A large Tibetan stone edict stands at the entrance.

Twenty-five Disciples. Directly above, Padmasambhava holds a damaru drum and a vajra bell. He bestows upon the King and his retinue, including Yeshe Tsogyal, initiation into the [Eight Pronouncement Heruka](#).

[14] **Tiger's Den.** For the purpose of subduing the daemons and spirits of Tibet and surrounding

Himalayan regions, Padmasambhava appeared as the wrathful [Dorje Drolu](#) at the thirteen mountain retreats each known as the Tiger's Den, or lair. The most famous of these is Paro Taktsang in Bhutan.





[15] Remaining Years in Tibet. At the middle left side of the painting are many images of Padmasambhava in rocky caves and snowy mountains. As examples, four handprints and four sets of footprints mark sacred places where he spent time in meditation retreat. All of this represents the years spent in Tibet visiting and blessing the twenty snow mountains of Ngari, the twenty-one sacred places of U-tsang, the twenty-five sacred places of Dokham, and the three hidden valleys (beyul).

[16] The Empty Cave. Padmasambhava has left Tibet.





[17] Copper-coloured Mountain. At the top center, Padmasambhava is depicted leaving Tibet from the Gungtang Pass, mounted on a white horse framed by cushions of white cloud.

[18] After having arrived at the [Copper-coloured Mountain](#) on the Chamara continent of daemon spririts far to the west, he liberated the daemon king called Raksha Totreng and then manifested the palace of Lotus Light where Buddhist teachings are continually taught.



"Miraculous buddha arising from a lotus, unborn, undying, possessing a vajra body, performing the activity of all buddhas of the three times; homage to Padmasambhava." (Nyingma liturgical verse).

Considered principal among the many teachers to bring Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century, Padmasambhava has numerous forms representing [outer, inner and secret aspects](#).¹ Within the Oral (Kama) Tradition of the Nyingma School, Padmasambhava was born in Northern India as the son of a king, or minister. In the Treasure (Terma) Tradition he was born on a lotus in Dhanakosha lake in the kingdom of Orgyan (Uddiyana, Urgyan) as an emanation of [Amitabha Buddha](#). This painting follows the Treasure Tradition of the Nyingma.

Jeff Watt 9-2006

Front of Painting

English Translation of Inscription: [Extensive inscriptions beneath each narrative vignette]

Reverse of Painting

English Translation of Inscription: [It is not currently known if there are inscriptions on the back]

¹ Outer, Inner & Secret Forms of Padmasambhava.

- Outer Padmasambhava
- Inner Guru Dragpo
- Secret Simhamukha.

Outer, Inner & Secret Forms of Padmasambhava

A. Outer Padmasambhava

B. Inner Guru Dragpo

C. Secret Simhamukha.

A. Outer Padmasambhava - (Main Form)

<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/188>

Tibetan: པད་མ་འབྱུང་གནས། Chinese: 莲花生大士

(item no. 188)



Origin Location Tibet

Date Range 1800 - 1899

Lineages Nyingma

Size 69.85x48.56cm (27.50x19.12in)

Material Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton

Collection Rubin Museum of Art

Catalogue # acc.# F1997.12.1

Notes about the Central Figure

Classification: Deity

Appearance: King

Gender: Male

TBRC: [bdr:P4956](#)

Interpretation / Description

Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava (Tibetan: pe ma jung ne, English: Lotus Born): the main founder of Buddhism in Tibet. (See Padmasambhava [Life-story Painting](#)).



[Pemasambhava](#)



[Pema Jungne](#)



[Biographical Details](#)

Videos: - [How To Read A Painting](#) - [How To Read A Painting \(Part 2\)](#)



- With a steady composure gazing on all beings, white in colour with a reddish hue,
- one face adorned with a moustache and goatee,
- the right hand holds to the heart an upright gold vajra.
- The left hand placed in the lap holds a white skullcup filled with nectar, jewels and a long-life vase.
- The ornate katvanga staff of a Vajrayana mendicant decorated with white streamers rests against the left shoulder.
- Adorned with gold earrings and a necklace, the head is covered with a lotus hat, a gift of the King of Zahor, of silk brocade topped with a half-vajra and a single vulture feather.
- Attired in various robes of different colours reflecting the disciplines of the Vinaya, Bodhisattva and Mantra Vehicles, he sits atop a sun and moon disc above a multi-coloured lotus blossom rising from the blue waters of Dhanakosha lake; encircled by a rainbow sphere.

- Seated to the viewer's left is the consort Mandarava holding the long-life symbols of an arrow with a mirror and streamers in the right hand and a vase in the left.
- At the viewer's right is the consort Yeshe Tsogyal holding up a skull offering bowl with the left hand.
- At the top center is the primordial buddha Samantabhadra, black in colour, naked, with the two hands placed in the lap and seated in vajra posture.
- To the left is Buddha [Amitabha](#), red, holding a begging bowl in the lap with both hands; attended by two bodhisattvas, orange Manjushri on the proper right and blue Vajrapani on the left.
- To the right is Padmapani (Lotus Holder) Avalokiteshvara, white with one face and two hands. The right hand performs the mudra of generosity while the left hand pressed against the seat holds the stem of a lotus blossom; attended by two bodhisattvas.
- At the bottom left is the Great Abbot Shantirakshita, wearing the robes of a monk and a red pandita hat performing the mudra of explication. Seated with the legs pendant in a western style he is attended by two monks presenting offerings.
- The monk holding the golden flask is Namkha'i Nyingpo and the other holding the begging bowl is Dorje Dudjom. They are two of the famous Twenty-five disciples of Padmasambhava. (Both names are inscribed with fine gold lettering).
- To the right is King Trisong Detsen performing the Dharma Teaching mudra while holding the stems of two lotus blossoms supporting a wisdom sword and book.
- The prince Mutri Tsanpo sits to the lower right while in front is the minister Lhazang Lhupal and Bami Trizheng presenting offerings.

In between, the ground is strewn with heaps of multi-colored wishing jewels, elephant tusk, precious objects and a gold Dharma Wheel.

"Miraculous buddha arising from a lotus, unborn, undying, possessing a vajra body, performing the activity of all buddhas of the three times; homage to Padmasambhava." (Nyingma liturgical verse).

Principal among the many teachers to bring Buddhism to Tibet in the 8th century, Guru Rinpoche has numerous forms representing outer, inner and secret aspects. Within the Kama (Oral) Tradition of the Nyingmapa School, Padmasambhava was born in Northern India as the son of a king or minister. In the Terma (Treasure) Tradition he was born on a lotus in Dhanakosha lake as an emanation of the Buddha Amitabha.

The four small attendant figures at the bottom of the painting have name inscriptions written in fine gold lettering (illegible).

Jeff Watt 10-1998

Front of Painting

Wylie Transliteration of Inscription: rdo rje bdud "jom pa.

B. Simhamukha (Buddhist Deity) - (5 deity)

<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/419>

Tibetan: རེང་གཞིང་མ། རྩང་མྱ། Chinese: 狮面空行佛母 (佛教本尊)
(item no. 419)



Origin Location Mongolia

Date Range 1800 - 1899

Lineages Buddhist

Size 46.99x31.75cm (18.50x12.50in)

Material Ground Mineral Pigment, Fine Gold Line on Cotton

Collection Rubin Museum of Art

Catalogue # acc.# F1996.6.1

Notes about the Central Figure

Classification: Deity

Appearance: Animal-Feature

Gender: Female

Interpretation / Description

Simhamukha, Dakini (Tibetan: seng ge dong chen kha dro ma, English: Lion Faced Dakini) and a retinue of four deities.

- With a body black in colour,
 - the face is that of a white lion, with three round yellow eyes, blazing fiercely with a gaping mouth, a yellow beard, eyebrows and hair flowing upward.
 - The right hand holds upraised a curved knife to the sky,
 - left a skullcup of blood to the heart,
 - carrying a khatvanga staff tipped with a trident in the bend of the elbow supported against the shoulder.
 - Adorned with a tiara of five skulls, red scarf, elephant skin, bone ornaments, a long snake and fifty freshly severed heads as a necklace, she wears a tiger skin skirt.
 - Standing on the left leg with the right drawn up, trampling on a double triangle symbol, corpse, sun and multi-coloured lotus seat,
 - Simhamukha in a mood of great fierceness dwells in the middle of a blazing fire of pristine awareness.
-
- At the top center is Guru Rinpoche [Padmasambhava](#), white, with the right hand holding a vajra and the left supporting a skullcup and vase in the lap. A khatvanga staff leans against the left shoulder. Wearing a lotus hat he sits in a relaxed posture with the right leg extended.
 - At the top right is green Karma Simhamukha.
 - At the left is red Padma Simhamukha. At the bottom left is yellow Ratna Simhamukha.
 - At the right is white Buddha Simhamukha.
 - Above the yellow dakini are three skullcups filled with nectar, blood and the offering of the five senses.

- A solitary offering skullcup is placed on the right side.
- At the bottom center is the wrathful worldly protector Tshangpa Karpo, white, with one face and two hands. In the right hand he holds aloft a spear with a red banner and in the left, held to the heart, a flat bowl of jewels. Adorned with a bow and quiver of arrows in a leopard skin pouch, wearing lavish garments and a round white hat, he rides atop a white horse surrounded by flames. He was subjugated and bound as a protector by Guru Padmasambhava.

"Arising from the state of the dharmadhatu, Mother of all conquerors, Queen of all the countless dakinis; With magic powers smashing to dust hindrances and enemies. Homage to Simhamukha." (Nyingma liturgical verse).

Within the Nyingma School, of the two divisions of Kama (Oral Teachings) and Terma (Revealed Treasures), Simhamukha belongs to the Terma. From the three general divisions of Terma: Root, Branch and Essence, Simhamukha belongs to the Dakini Cycle within the Root Terma class. Generally she is regarded as the secret form of Guru Rinpoche Padmasambhava. In the Sarma Tradition the deity [Simhamukha](#) is found in the Chakrasamvara Cycle of Tantras and although similar in name and appearance is unrelated.

The bright combinations of colour and the unusual swirl design of the clouds betray a Nepali or Western Tibetan painting influence. The stylized faces of the lions are of Chinese origin.

Jeff Watt 6-98

C. Padmasambhava - Guru Drago (meditational form)

<https://www.himalayanart.org/items/447>

Tibetan: པད་མ་འབྱུང་གནས། Chinese: 莲花生大士
(item no. 447)



Origin Location Tibet

Date Range 1600 - 1699

Lineages Nyingma

Size 68.58x50.80cm (27x20in)

Material Ground Mineral Pigment on Cotton

Collection Rubin Museum of Art

Catalogue # acc.# F1996.1.11

Notes about the Central Figure

Classification: Deity

Appearance: Wrathful

Gender: Male

Interpretation / Description

Guru Dragpo, (English: Wrathful Teacher) fierce Padmasambhava, from the Terma (Revealed Treasure) Lineage of Nyang Ral Nyima Ozer (1124-1192).

- Very fierce, red in colour, with one face and three eyes, he has a gaping mouth and yellow hair flowing upward.
- The right hand holds upraised a black vajra sceptre, the left a nine-headed black scorpion.
- Adorned with a crown, earrings, bracelets and necklaces of gold and numerous writhing snakes, he wears a garland of heads and an elephant skin draped across the shoulders.
- A tiger skin covers the lower body.
- With the right leg bent and left extended atop a seat of two prone figures, a sun disc, multi-coloured lotus blossom and dharmakara, he stands surrounded by the orange flames of pristine awareness.

A [Garuda](#) bird soars at the apex of the flames.

"From the wrathful mandala of natural great bliss, Padma Krodha, with a red-black blazing body, one face, two hands, two legs outstretched; homage to the form of the terrifying Fierce One." (Nyingma Liturgical Verse).

- At the top center is [Amitabha](#), the buddha of boundless light, red in colour, with the hands in the mudra (gesture) of meditation.
- At the left is Sadaksari [Avalokiteshvara](#), white with one face and four hands.
- At the right is Guru Rinpoche [Padmasambhava](#), holding a vajra to the heart, a skullcup in the lap and a katvanga staff against the shoulder; attired in variously coloured robes and a lotus hat. At each corner a lay figure is attired in multi-coloured garments and seated on mats of cloth.

Above Guru Dragpo is a row of wrathful figures.

- From the left is blue Vajrapani, yellow Yamari, a maroon figure holding a trident, red Hayagriva and maroon Jvalaketu. Each has one face and two hands, adorned with wrathful vestments and surrounded by flames of wisdom.
- At the left is a blue wrathful figure holding a vajra and bell, attired in long flowing garments.
- At the left and right of the central figure are five goddesses, red, green, white, blue and yellow. Each has one face and two hands, peaceful in appearance, holding a curved knife and skullcup. In a dancing posture they each stand upon a corpse seat, sun disc and pink lotus blossom.

Seated at the bottom center is a monk wearing orange robes and a red cap.

- Directly in front is a white skullcup containing an offering of the five senses; held with a severed hand. A golden bowl of wishing jewels and precious objects stands below.
- At the left of the monk is a table displaying a row of red cone shaped tormas offerings (stylized food).
- At the left corner, a seated lay figure is shaded by a parasol held by an attendant as a gold teapot is offered in front.
- At the bottom right are three protector figures.
- On the left is a Tsen daemon, red, wrathful, holding aloft with the right hand a spear with a red banner; riding a red horse.
- Above is a red bird and below a red dog. In the middle is a wrathful Dre Du daemon, black, holding a spear banner in the right hand and a hook in the left; riding a black horse.
- Above is a black bird and below a black dog.
- At the right is a blue Naga, holding aloft a spear banner in the right hand and a bag of disease in the left; riding a green horse.
- Above is a blue bird and below a blue snake.
- All three are well attired in the dress of warriors with helmets and protective armour.

Jeff Watt 3-99