

# **ICONOGRAPHY OF MAHĀKĀLA**

**A Thesis**

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**By**

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the iconographies and functions of Mahākāla, a Buddhist deity featured in paintings, sculptures and other types of images throughout Asia. Artifacts representing the deity and his offerings are collected from China, Japan, India, Nepal and the Tibetan cultural sphere, both in published books and in slides from the Huntington archive at The Ohio State University. Firstly, this study categorizes Mahākāla images according to physical differences and textual descriptions. It also reexamines existing identifications of the Tibetan figures, since previously published catalogues often contain generic or misidentified descriptions.

Secondly, the study locates the textual descriptions on which the iconography is based. These texts include the Buddhist canon as well as iconographic compendia. Finally, it analyzes the functions and practices of worship associated with Mahākāla.

The diversity of Mahākāla's iconographies and functions can be understood through two broad themes: (1) localization and continuity, and (2) the multiple levels of worship from lay devotion to yogic practitioners.

In addition, the study analyzes how the deity has been localized in different cultural settings, rendering the images unique to particular regions. It shows that worshippers have categorized the deity in relation to their expectations, and frequently combined the images with their local beliefs. On the other hand, certain iconographic elements have remained consistent, epitomizing a persistent cultural continuity throughout Asia. Mahākāla's diverse functions may be similarly understood by worshippers across time and regions.

While Mahākāla figures as a *dharmapāla* and benefactor in many contexts, interpretations of his function are closely related to the level of worshippers. While he serves as a benefactor to lay devotees, in another level, he has more esoteric functions for initiated practitioners.

**Dedicated to my parents**



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### OVERVIEW

Mahākāla is a very popular Buddhist deity found throughout Asia where Buddhism was practiced. It is possibly one of the oldest deities that was present before other Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna deities appeared. Evidence for this belief is that the name, “Great Black One”, was already stated in the Pāli canon.<sup>1</sup> Even today, Mahākāla continues to be popular in Tibet, Mongolia, Nepal, and Japan, although his iconography and the ways in which he is worshipped are varied.

The name “Mahākāla” is a Sanskrit compound. The word *Mahā* means Great, while *kāla* is black but also means time. The word Mahākāla is usually translated as “Great Black One” in English, but may also suggest “Great Time”, due to the double meaning of *kāla*. In Chinese, he is



Magejialuo, which is a transliteration of the Sanskrit name Mahākāla. He is also called Daheitien, which means Great Black god in Chinese. The Chinese version of Mahākāla does not specify time. The same Chinese characters are employed in the Japanese version of Daheitian, but pronounced as Daikokuten in Japanese. In Tibet, Mahākāla is generally called mGon po, “Protector”.

Almost all Buddhist deities belong to a particular *kula*, or family. For instance, Avalokiteśvara is associated with the Amitābha family. Buddhist deities often reflect the original form. We see this in manifestation of particular deities; for example, Vajrabhairava is a wrathful manifestation of Mañjuśrī. Although some construe Mahākāla as a wrathful form of Avalokiteśvara, neither his origin, nor his *kula* are known. He is a mysterious figure in the Buddhist pantheon.

In contrast to other deities that are iconographically stable through the ages and in different regions, Mahākāla is very diverse in forms. There are a great number of Mahākāla figures in Tibet alone. Not only the images, but also the functions of Mahākāla are extremely diverse with the Buddhist worlds. For example, Mahākāla is generally perceived as a *dharmapāla* or protector of Buddhist treasure in Tibet, a War God in China and a benefactor deity in Japan.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Huntington and John C. Huntington, *Leaves from Bodhi Tree* (Dayton: The Dayton Art Institute, 1990), 377. See also T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *Buddhist Birth Stories or Jataka tales* (London: Trubner

Such diversity in the function of Mahākāla may be ascribed to the nature of Mahākāla himself. This deity exemplifies the diversity that can accommodate different cultural expectations in different regions. He also inspired the innovative figure envisioned by high-ranked monks. After such envisioning, different types of Mahākāla entered the Buddhist pantheon. These types of Mahākāla were created in Tibet and Japan.

The difference in functions and images of Mahākāla suggests the broader situation where Buddhism was transmitted. On the other hand, his varied iconographies and functions reveal the some features shared among those from different regions. This indicates cultural continuity in the different social settings where Buddhism was received. The levels of worship are also crucial for the development of the images and functions of this deity. After all, the iconography of Mahākāla shows how he is understood by people at different levels.

## **FOCUS OF STUDY**

This study catalogues the iconography of Mahākāla images from India, Nepal, China and Japan, while paying special attention to the Tibetan images of Mahākāla. Tibetan Mahākālas are reexamined because the figures were often misidentified, or simply given the generic name of Mahākāla, or a wrathful deity. The iconography will be identified with textual references.

The purpose is to explore the iconography and functions of Mahākāla. As an iconographic study, this paper will provide an overview of Mahākāla images and their buddhological functions.

Previous scholarship has generally focused on local representation of Mahākāla, and has overlooked the larger significance of the deity, specifically his esoteric context. In this study, two themes will be emphasized in establishing various functions of Mahākāla: first, the issue of localization and constancy of the figure in different cultures, and second, the multiple interpretations of Mahākāla from lay devotion to esoteric worship. The diversity in the deity's forms and functions can be understood through these two central issues.

First, this study will reveal that Mahākāla's functions were modified locally; this change in function is closely related to the transformation of iconography. Specific features of alterations often reflect the historical background and cultural context in which Mahākāla was received. Mahākāla is consequently locally interpreted in various ways, while he persistently retains certain elements across Asia. This study will emphasize both aspects of Mahākāla as a localized deity, as well as the ubiquitous wrathful benefactor god throughout Asia

Further, this study shows that the figure has been understood differently by various levels of worshippers. The different phases of Buddhist development and worship are represented in this varying appreciation of the

deity. These understandings of the deity are reflected in the iconography in obvious ways. For example, in certain aspect of iconography, Mahākāla is represented as a benefactor and protector of the lay devotees. In other contexts, his esoteric nature is revealed to initiated practitioners.

Mahākāla remained popular because his functions and images have adapted to diverse cultural settings. This is distinctive to the deity. Other Buddhist deities have been somewhat stable in iconography and function through Buddhist cultures. I have selected Mahākāla for this cross-cultural study because this diversity indicates some codes of general development of Buddhist iconography and worship. Moreover, this study generates a historical model of transmission for concepts, texts, and images across Asia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Buddhist iconography is one of the primary studies of both Asian art history and Buddhist studies. The pantheon often perplexes scholars in these fields, as it consists of many deities with divergent names, forms and functions determined by area and time. Nonetheless, through interdisciplinary efforts with philology, anthropology and other studies, new findings of texts and artifacts provide a clearer idea of Buddhist iconography. Previous studies have focused on particulars, either on a specific deity, or on areas, showing that there are various ways of researching Buddhist iconography.

### Iconographic study focusing on a particular deity

One approach to studying Buddhist iconography is to select a deity and locate the text in which the image or religious function of that deity is based. Various types of texts in different languages and derivations may be compared; images from different areas, times or styles may also be collected and compared. By this process, the development of iconography and the special aspects of the deity emerge. Such differences in function or forms frequently indicate variations of historical background, philosophy and cultural milieu.

Numerous attempts have been made by scholars to investigate a particular Buddhist deity. The problem is that the texts or images have been scattered throughout Asia, and the Buddhist homeland of India, does not necessarily provide the oldest archaeological evidence. For example, we sometimes find the oldest dated image of certain deities in China or Japan. In many cases, the study of a deity is limited to regions of close physical proximity, such as China and Japan, or India, Nepal, and Tibet.

Another way to explore Buddhist iconography is to focus on a group of deities that share the same functions or a fixed set of representations. The Buddhist Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna pantheon is systematically organized in an iconographical compendium whose contents are typically classified into sections containing the same types

of deities, such as Tathāgata, Bodhisattva, teachers, and so forth. The study of a set of deities is fruitful because there are definite relationships between deities in the same categories. Further, the representation of deities as a set represents an integrated idea of that set of deities.<sup>2</sup> Although it is limited to the Tibetan deities, in *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, Nebesky collected and translated the *sādhana*s of each angry deity in the first part, and explained the cult of protective deities in the second part.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Ladrang Kalsang published a study of the guardian deities of Tibet, based on the translation of different texts.<sup>4</sup> Studies that limited to a particular deity and its manifestation across cultures help elucidate its origin, iconography and functions. However, such studies sometimes overlook the overall dynamism of Buddhist development and the relationship between deities.

#### Iconographic study focusing on a area

The other way is to conduct research on the development of several Buddhist deities belonging to particular areas and times. Rob Linroth, in *Ruthless Compassion*, focused on wrathful deities from Eastern India, tracing their iconographic development until these

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<sup>2</sup> For example, five Jina Buddha shows the whole idea of Buddhism as a set.

<sup>3</sup> René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and Demons of Tibet* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Ladrang Kalsang, *The Guardian Deities of Tibet* (Dharamsala: Little Lhasa Publications, 1996).

deities reached the highest status equal to the Buddha.<sup>5</sup> He attempts to set a model of the development of wrathful deities based on the specific time frame. John and Susan Huntington contributed an iconographic and art historical study concerning the art of the Pāla and Sena dynasties under Eastern Indian influences. Their exhibition catalogue, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*,<sup>6</sup> is a collection of objects influenced by East Indian art, including works from India, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. In an encyclopedic study of the iconography of Chinese Buddhism, Matsumoto Eiichi meticulously researched the paintings from Dunhuang.<sup>7</sup> By contrasting these paintings to Central Asian artifacts, Matsumoto provided some interesting views on the paintings of Dunhuang. Similarly, Tibetan paintings are carefully studied by Tucci in his *Tibetan Painted Scrolls*.<sup>8</sup> These studies, focusing on a particular area, clarify the specific features in the area at a particular time. However, the characteristic of each deity is not thoroughly investigated.

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<sup>5</sup> Rob Linrothe, *Ruthless Compassion: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Susan Huntington and John Huntington, *Leaves from Bodhi Tree* (Dayton: The Dayton Art Institute, 1990).

## Methodological Approach

Based on above methodologies, this study selected one deity, Mahākāla, from all Buddhist imagery. By doing this, it will clarify the characteristics of Mahākāla's iconography and functions. Further, it enables scholars to analyze the specificity of the area where Mahākāla is worshipped. The main discussions include the iconography, practice and functions of Mahākāla. Issues of regional artistic styles are however, not within the scope of this study.

In my research, 394 of Mahākāla images were collected from previously published books and slides from the Huntington Archive at the Ohio State University.<sup>9</sup> These images are from India, Nepal, Tibetan cultural sphere including Bhutan and Mongolia, China and Japan. Some other areas were clearly influenced by Indian Buddhism. However, this study does not include images from Southeast Asian countries. The images are catalogued and categorized according to the regions in which they were produced. They are further subcategorized by physical differences. For my discussion, I choose images distinctive to particular regions or a type of particular form. The selected images in my discussion generally represent other examples of the types.

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<sup>7</sup> Eiichi Matsumoto, *Tonkoga no Kenkyu* (Tokyo: Toho Bunkagakuin Tokyo Kenkujo, 1915).

<sup>8</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1949).

<sup>9</sup> The numbers of Tibetan Mahākāla exceeds that of other regions, as 320 are Tibetan figures. Other figures are, 38 from EastAsian, 6 from India, 30 from Nepal. There are numerous



This study also locates the textual sources of visual examples. These texts describe not only the appearance of Mahākāla, but also the way of worship and function of the deity. Thus, texts' transmission, translation, and annotation are crucial to Mahākāla's iconography. All the Chinese texts and Japanese inscriptions discussed in this study are translated by the author because there are no English translations. These include Tibetan inscriptions in paintings which show the deities' names, and some inscriptions written in amulets. While, these are excellent sources of deity identification, but in many cases, they are difficult to decipher, as the paintings are often ragged and appear reduced in size in books.

This paper also discusses the sources or models for creating images. These are the iconographic illustrations in woodblock print such as *Narthang Five Hundred Deities* from Tibet, and the copied version of the all deities appearing *maṇḍalas* such as *Taizokai genzu maṇḍala* from Japan.

As Tibetan offerings to Mahākāla feature a distinctive way of worship and function, these are included in my discussion. The offerings are also frequently represented in the paintings of the deity.

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examples of Mahākāla from Japan, known as Daikokuten. But, the availability of the Japanese book was limited, and the most of the images have not published in books.

## STATUS OF SCHOLARSHIP

This study is generated from two types of sources: primary and secondary. The primary sources are iconographic compendia, texts in Buddhist compendia, and canonical texts related to Mahākāla. The secondary sources include published research conducted by modern scholars.

### Primary sources: Compendia of Iconography

Buddhist iconography is important not only in terms of the creation of deities' images, but also as visualization exercise for practitioners. Artists have understood the significance of the correct iconography to represent deities. On the other hand in the Tantric context, practitioners train themselves in visualizing and realizing the deities they choose, and they simultaneously identify themselves as the deity. To achieve the goal of the practice, they need the exact form of the deity to be represented in the mental image. Hence, the iconographic text as well as illustrations of deities has been fundamental to practitioners and artists alike. Such phenomena are also crucial in considering both the identification and development of iconography for modern scholars of Buddhism and art history.

The description and illustration of deities are found in Buddhist canonical texts, or the iconographic collections of the deities. In the case of Mahākāla, his *sādhana*, literally, visualizations, is found in

most iconography books and Buddhist compendia. Covering Mahākāla from India to Japan, the texts mentioned below are sources with which to identify the iconography of Mahākāla from different areas and in different languages.

There are Sanskrit compendia of iconography describing the form of deities, one of which is known as *Sādhnamālā*. It is dated circa. eleventh century, when the Indian Buddhist pantheon reached the highest point of its development. *Sādhnamālā* is well known after Benoytosh Bhattacharyya edited and translated the Sanskrit texts in English.<sup>10</sup>

The other Sanskrit iconographic compendium is the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, a description of *maṇḍalas* written by Abhayākāragupta in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. This thesis mostly relies on the iconographical study based on *Niṣpannayogāvalī* published by Mallmann, entitled *Introduction à l'Iconographie du Tantrisme Bouddhique*,<sup>11</sup> and Bhattacharyya's *Indian Buddhist Iconography*.

For Chinese texts, this paper partly owes the description of Mahākāla to the *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*. Mahākāla is described in

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<sup>10</sup> Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography; Mainly Based on The Sādhnamālā and Cognate Tāntric Texts of Rituals* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1987).

<sup>11</sup> Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, *Introduction à l'Iconographie du Tantrisme Bouddhique* (Paris: Librairie Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1975).

*Daikokutenjinho* that cites several other Chinese texts in Taisho.

However, some texts should be treated carefully, because their attributions are not always reliable. For example, one of the texts that explains the two-armed Mahākāla attributed to the Tang dynasty monk, Jinkai, was considered to be written in Japan.<sup>12</sup>

The Tibetan Buddhist pantheon is so vast that the images and texts of Mahākāla in Tibet are more numerous than in any other Buddhist cultural sphere. To organize and explicate the extensive pantheon, compendia of Buddhist deities have been compiled. Both in painting and text, they help the practitioner in their meditation as well as artists who require textual reference.

The compendia from the Tibetan cultural sphere have been published both in the original and in translation by several modern scholars. The earliest contribution of Tibetan Buddhist iconography was made by the Russian scholar, Oldenburg. He published *Three Hundred Deities of Tibetan Buddhism* in 1903, which contains the illustration of the deities with its *dhāraṇī* in Tibetan.<sup>13</sup> It is dated at the time of the emperor Qian long (1735-96) compiled by the Lcan-skya Hutuktu Lalitavajra.

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<sup>12</sup> Cigaku Azuma, "Daikokutenjinzo no yurai," *Nihon Bukkyo Gakkai Nenpo* 45 (1980), 338.

<sup>13</sup> S.F. Oldenburg, Reprint. *Sbornik izobrazhei 300 burkhano : Po albomu aziatskago muzeia s primiechania izdal* (Tokyo: Meicho-Fukyu-Kai, 1977).

Later, in 1937, American scholar, Walter Eugene Clark, studied and published the collection of Tibetan bronze sculptures stored in the Bao xiang Lou, a temple in Beijing, as well as the iconography manuscript, both collected by Stael Holstein in 1926.<sup>14</sup> The iconography manuscript is attributed to Lcan-skya Hutuktu, with the title, *Zhu fo pusa sengxiang zan*. The illustrations of deities are accompanied by names in Chinese at the top, Tibetan at the bottom, with Mongolian and Manchu at the sides. All deities are depicted in the center on pedestals with pointed aureoles, just like the paintings sketched from the bronzes.

The distinguished Tibetan scholar monk, Tāranātha, compiled the *sādhana*s *Yi dam rgya mtsho 'i sgrub thabs rin chen 'byung gnas* in 483 folios in the sixteenth century. This is the basis for the 4<sup>th</sup> Pan chen bla ma (1781-1854)'s *Yi dam rgya mtsho 'i sgrub thabs rin chen 'byung gnas kyi lhan thabs rin 'byung don gsal* that contains two volumes of 23 sections with 519 and 470 folios, called *Rin lhan* in short. In addition to the *Rin lhan*, an appendix of *Rin lhan*, i.e., *rNar thang*, and *rDor 'phereng* based on Abhayākāragupta's *Vajrāvalī*, was compiled. It is concluded with a collection of drawings of deities and the accompanying *mantra*, as *Rin 'byung rnar thang brgya rtsa rdor*

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<sup>14</sup> Walter Eugene Clark, *Two Lamaistic Pantheons* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University Press, 1937).

*'phreng bcas nas gsungs pa'i bris sku mthong ba don ldan*, known as *Five Hundred Gods of Narthang* for short.

According to Lokesh Chandra, his father, Raghu Vira, obtained The Narthang xylographic edition of five hundred gods from a *lama* in Ulanbator.<sup>15</sup> The former continued his father's work to complete the pantheon, and published it as *A New Tibeto-Mongol Pantheon* in 1964. However, it is obvious that this collection is not from the xylographic copy, but a drawing that Lokesh Chandra possibly had an artist trace from the xylograph. Braun and Willson pointed out that the Lokesh Chandra's Narthang version has some discrepancies and errors.<sup>16</sup>

Another version of *Narthang Five Fundred Gods* was published by three scholars, Tachikawa, Mori and Yamaguchi in 1995.<sup>17</sup> According to the preface written by Tachikawa, he found the wooden prints of line drawings at the Indian Institute of the University of Hamburg. Having made a xylographic copy of the set, he also completed the missing part in cooperation with the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala. This volume, containing double enlarged 503 woodblock prints with the mantra originally printed at

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<sup>15</sup> Lokesh Chandra, *Buddhist Iconography*, (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1987), 40-41.

<sup>16</sup> See Martin Willson and Martin Brauen, *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism: The Zurich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 8-9. In the section, Martin compared the several illustrations of Lokesh Chandra's and Tachikawa's xylographs mentioned later. As Tachikawa's is considered to be the original, some discrepancy between Chandra's and Tachikawa's illustration is a result of Chandra's artists' mistake or free inspiration.

the reverse side of each deity, is far more credible than Lokesh Chandra's reproduction of *Five Hundred Gods of Narthang*.

In 2000, Martin Brauen and Martin Willson published the Tibetan Buddhist iconography encyclopedia entitled *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism: The Zurich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See*.<sup>18</sup> This is the same *Narthang Five hundred Gods* published by Tachikawa et al.. The Zurich Narthang Gods includes the illustration of deities in color and with text translation.

In terms of textual descriptions of Mahākāla, Brauen and Willson and Nebesky are similar. Nebesky's translation is from *yidam rgya mtso'i sgrub thas rin chen 'byang gnas kyi lhan thabs rin 'byun don gsal bzhugs so*, also known as *Rin lhan*.<sup>19</sup> Brauen and Willson's translation of the text is identified by the authors as *Rin lhan*.<sup>20</sup> Any references to *Rin lhan* in this paper imply both translations. Nebesky, however, added some translations other than *Rin lhan*, so a greater number of items is included than in Brauen and Willson.

According to the authors' introduction, the illustrations in Brauen and Willson's Zurich manuscript were obtained by the curator

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<sup>17</sup> Musashi Tachikawa, Masahide Mori, and Shinobu Yamaguchi, *Five Hundred Buddhist Deities* (Osaka: National Museum of Ethnology, 1995).

<sup>18</sup> Martin Willson and Martin Brauen, *Deities of Tibetan Buddhism: The Zurich Paintings of the Icons Worthwhile to See* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Oracles and demons of Tibet* (Delhi: Book Faith India, 1993): 598.

<sup>20</sup> Brauen and Willson, 231-233.

at the Zurich museum from a vendor. The vendor reportedly suggested that the illustrations were purchased in Kathmandu in 1972. The book covers are assigned to the Qing dynasty, and the color of pigments indicates that the date of manufacturing was probably around 1850.<sup>21</sup>

Nepal is a culturally fertile area of Buddhist heritage, especially rich in the tradition of preserving of Sanskrit texts. There are two Mahākāla texts available in English. One is *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal* translated by Todd T. Lewis, which is a collection of “working texts” in Nepal assembled during the author’s fieldwork.<sup>22</sup> The other is a Sanskrit text on Mahākāla, *Mahākālatantra*, found by William Stablein in Nepal. According to Stablein, there were originally fifty chapters in *Mahākālatantra*,<sup>23</sup> but he found only twenty-nine because the Nepalese *vajrācāryas* he met knew only parts of the texts. The twenty-one chapters missing from the Nepali manuscript is found in Tibet, but Tibetan manuscripts are also incomplete. Stablein also published a book about Mahākāla containing his personal views and experiences in India and Nepal. In his writings, he sees Mahākāla as a

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<sup>21</sup> Brauen and Willson, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Todd T. Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism* (New York, State University of New York Press, 2000).

<sup>23</sup> Willam George Stablein, *The Mahākālatantra: A Theory of Ritual Blessing and Tantric Medicine* (Ph.D.diss., Columbia University, 1976).



healing figure, an idea was established from his personal experience in South Asia and the translation of *Mahākālatantra*.<sup>24</sup>

### **Secondary sources: Studies on Mahākāla**

Varied visual figures and texts of Mahākāla are found in many areas where Buddhism prevails. Although the form and religious functions are different, the cult of Mahākāla is active in Nepal, Tibet and Japan to the present day. There have been different studies of specific forms of Mahākāla, but these are widely dispersed in books, articles or museum exhibition catalogue entries.

Indian Mahākālas are researched and published primarily in exhibition catalogues. Because there are extant Mahākālas found in eastern India, these figures and their explanations are included in *Leaves from Bodhi Tree*, and in excavation reports such as *Ratnagiri* and *Contribution a l'Etude du Stūpa Bouddhique Indien*.<sup>25</sup>

In the case of Indian Mahākāla, Buddhist and Hindu origins are sometimes difficult to discern. The Hindu god Śiva often takes the form of Bhairava and is called Mahākāla. Both the Hindu Śiva Bhairava and the Buddhist Mahākāla are depicted with the same attributes. Thus, minor difference such as the representation of attending

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<sup>24</sup> Willam George Stablein, *Healing Image The Great Black One* (Berkeley: SLG Books, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Mireille Benisti, *Contribution à l'Etude du Stūpa Bouddhique Indien: Les Stūpa Mineurs de Bodh-gayā et de Ratnagiri* (Paris: Ecole Française d'Extrême-orient, 1981).

Buddhist deities is the only means to identify the images.<sup>26</sup> Because of the similarities, it is assumed that the origin of Mahākāla is the Hindu god Śiva. Yet, this is difficult to prove because it has not been ascertained which deity came first. In any case, the episode of Hindu Śiva Bhairava has nothing to do with that of Buddhist Mahākāla; Śiva Mahākāla is a representation of Śiva who wanders around till he reaches Vārānaśi after he decapitates the god Brahmā<sup>27</sup>.

In Nepal, Mahākāla is popular and worshipped by people in the present day. He is seen particularly at the gate of Buddhist monuments paired with Gaṇeśa. Because of continuing worship, Mahākāla in Nepal is adorned with powders and food. Although no studies have focused on Nepalese Mahākāla, the images do appear in several catalogues of Nepalese art.

With the exception of the Dunhuang and Yunnan long scroll and stone relief, Chinese Mahākālas have not been identified. Some Mahākāla stone relief sculptures and figures in long scrolls are found in Yunnan, indicating the existence of a specific Mahākāla cult during the Dali dynasty. The Yunnan long scroll has been carefully studied by Soper<sup>28</sup> and Matsumoto<sup>29</sup>. Additionally, there is a copy of the scroll

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<sup>26</sup> Huntington and Huntington, 154.

<sup>27</sup> Stella Kramrisch, *The Presence of Śiva* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 250-300.

<sup>28</sup> Helen B. Chapin, Alexander C. Soper, revised, *a long Roll of Buddhist Images* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae Publishers, 1972).

produced during Qing period. The Qing version of the long scroll was rearranged with some additions but was mostly copied from the original.<sup>30</sup>

Japanese Mahākāla is a complex deity who combines traditions from Buddhist and local folklore. For example, the god 'Daikoku', one of the Seven gods of Good Luck, was misunderstood as the Shinto deity 'Okuni no nushi no mikoto' owing to the usage of coeval Chinese characters. Previous research demonstrated that the Japanese Mahākāla originates from Chinese textual descriptions. In *Northern Buddhist iconography*, Alice Getty claims that Mahākāla originated from the Greek God Poseidon, from which Mahākāla and Kubera became separate deities.<sup>31</sup> Azuma Chigaku further developed this idea, arguing that Yijing took Jambhala as Mahākāla.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, both scholars argued that the divergent form of Japanese Mahākāla is a result of Yijing's misunderstanding of the deity. As Yijing's travel account was cited and canonized, the two-armed Mahākāla took root among the Japanese. *Daikoku shinko*, an anthology of essays about Mahākāla, includes studies of Mahākāla from buddhological, art

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<sup>29</sup> Moritaka Matsumoto, *Chang Sheng-wen's Long Roll of Buddhist Images: a Reconstruction and Iconology* (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1976).

<sup>30</sup> Ding Guanpeng, *Fajie Yuan liu Tu Jie shao yu xinshang* (Hong Kong: Shangwu Chubanshe, 1992).

<sup>31</sup> Alice Getty, *The Gods of Northern Buddhism: Their History and Iconography* (New York: Dover Publication, 1988), 160-161

<sup>32</sup> Cigaku Azuma, "Daikokutenjinzo no yurai," *Nihon Bukkyo Gakkai Nenpo* 45 (1980), 337-350.

historical, and anthropological point of views.<sup>33</sup> Though Japanese Mahākāla figures have been thoroughly studied, the connections between Japanese, Indian, Chinese and Tibetan Mahākālas have been overlooked so far.

The study of Tibetan art rapidly developed after the People's Republic of China annexed Tibet in 1950.<sup>34</sup> Since this period, Tibetan cultural legacies and monks have traveled outside of Tibet. Many exhibitions introduced artifacts that are now housed by museums. In recent major exhibitions, Marylin Rhie and Robert Thurman published catalogues titled *Wisdom and Compassion*<sup>35</sup> and *World of Transformation*.<sup>36</sup> *Wisdom and Compassion* arranges paintings and sculptures according to each Tibetan sect, while *World of Transformation* covers a wider range of previously unpublished paintings from the Rubin collections. Rhie and Thurman's remarkable contribution of their exhibition and catalogues of Tibetan art drew the attention not only of scholars, but also of those people who has been indifferent to Tibetan culture. Another noteworthy exhibition, *Sacred*

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<sup>33</sup> Tatehiko Oshima, ed., *Daikoku shinko* (Tokyo: Yuzankaku shuppan, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> The date is not clear. Chinese celebrated the fifty's anniversary in 2001, suggesting the date of annex is officially in 1951.

<sup>35</sup> Marylin M. Rhie and Robert A.F. Thurman, *Wisdom and Compassion: the Sacred Art of Tibet* (New York: Abrams, 1991).

<sup>36</sup> Marylin M. Rhie and Robert A.F. Thurman, *Worlds of Transformation: Tibetan art of Wisdom and Compassion* (New York: Tibet House New York in association with the Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation, 1999).

*Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet*,<sup>37</sup> directed by Jane Casey Singer and Stephen Kossak focused mainly on the stylistic analysis of early paintings in central Tibetan art.

The catalogues mentioned above contain Mahākāla entries, but these are not identified as a particular Mahākāla. Instead, they are catalogued according to the number of arms, such as the six-armed Mahākāla. Exceptions include the Mahākāla as Lord of the Tent (Gur gyi ngon po), as well as the Brāhman form of Mahākāla (Brāhmanrūpa). These exceptions were probably made because these Mahākālas are easily identifiable and vast in number.

Individual Mahākāla figures also receive attention from scholars. The Mahākāla from Kashmir, a peculiar stone sculpture with two figures back to back, has been reported and studied by Phillis Granoff.<sup>38</sup> Citing Chinese sources, she argues that the statue is a combination of Mahākāla and Maheśvara, a pairing also found in the paintings from Dunhuang and Chinese texts.

The study of Gur gyi ngon po has received much attention from scholars. This is likely attributable to the fact that Gur gyi ngon po is easy to recognize, and there are many images of him. In his study of

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<sup>37</sup> Steven M. Kossak, Jane Casey Singer, *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998).

<sup>38</sup> Phillis Granoff. "Mahesvara/ Mahākāla: a Unique Buddhist Image from Kashmir," *Artibus Asiae* 41 (1979), 64-82.

the Tibetan Gur gyi mgon po, Pratapaditya Pal concludes that it is of Tibetan origin, and that the oldest Gur gyi mgon po image dates back to the fifteenth century.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, Heather Stoddard dated a well-known Gur gyi mgon po image, according to the inscription on its base, to 1292, a time when 'phags pa and Anige were still alive.<sup>40</sup> Because of this evidence, but if this is the case, Tibetan art scholars should reconsider the dating of some Mahākāla figures.

Lastly, the research on Mahākāla covering regions from India to Japan was reported by Yumin Lee at the conference in Kobe, Japan.<sup>41</sup> She notes that the Yunnan Mahākāla was always represented with Vaiśravaṇa, something that is not seen in Tibet. Although Yunnan imported Buddhism from different sources, Lee claimed that this feature is a local convention and was not influenced by Tibetan Mahākālas. However, this paper will show the Mahākāla and Vaiśravaṇa pair is sometimes represented in both Tibetan paintings and Dunhuang paintings. Thus, the coupling is not a local convention. Lee covered Mahākālas from a wide area in Asia, but she overlooked the diversity of Tibetan Mahākālas as the purpose of her paper was to investigate the Yunnan Mahākāla. My thesis will show there are many

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<sup>39</sup> Pratapaditya Pal. "The Lord of the Tent in Tibetan Paintings," *Pantheon* 35 (1977), 92-102

<sup>40</sup> Heather Stoddard. "A Stone Sculpture of mGur mgon-po, Mahākāla of the Tent, dated 1292," *Oriental Art* 31 (1985), 278-282.

iconographic elements and functions that are shared by Tibetan and Yunnan Mahākāla.

To sum up, previous studies on Mahākāla emphasized local representations. They overlook the continuity of his iconography and buddhological functions. In addition, they do not provide on the perspective on the level of the worshippers. However, worshippers are a significant factor in understanding both iconography and function as closely to relate each other.

## CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH

Except Yumin Lee's paper, little attention has been given to the development of Mahākāla iconography and the diversity of his functions. There is absolutely no thorough iconographic research. As mentioned, the Tibetan art catalogues, published thus far, show many Mahākālas; however, they do not refer to specific forms, identifying as a wrathful deity, or the general Mahākāla, instead. However, Tibetan and Sanskrit iconographic texts and illustrations are more available than before, so Mahākāla can be identified based on the texts. While the East Asian Mahākāla has been examined by several scholars, the studies are scattered and primarily based

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<sup>41</sup> Yu-min Lee, "An Iconographic Study of Mahākāla Imagery in Yunnan: from the Ninth to Thirteenth centuries," *Iconography and Style on Buddhist Art Historical Studies* (Kobe: Kokusai koryu bijutsushi kenkyukai, 1996), 99-117.

on Chinese texts. Studies have not provided an overview of Mahākāla's iconographical development.

As this study will explore Mahākāla's iconography and functions from a wide range of Buddhist cultures, it will provide an exemplified model of the transmission of images and texts. The manner of spreading out the Buddhist texts and images itself shows dynamism of Buddhist religion that prevails throughout Asia. It further embodies the people who worshipped and maintain the religion and tradition. It shows how the people in historical or cultural diverse settings communicated with the deity in interpreting the texts and producing imagery. For this reason, this research can be used for future studies of other deities, as well as Buddhist and socio-cultural studies of Asia.

## ISSUES OF CHRONOLOGY

In this thesis, I will begin with images of China and Japan because there are more extant early examples than in other cultures. This fact raises the issue of the chronology. Mahākāla originated in India, as the name is mentioned in several texts such as the Pāli canon. Another mention of the figure is in the travel account of Yijing (635-713).<sup>42</sup> He reported that the deity called Mahākāla was worshipped in India. These texts reveal Mahākāla

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<sup>42</sup> Taisho, 54: 209b. This part of the text is translated in later discussion.



existed in India, in the seventh century at the latest when Yijing visited there. However, there are no extant examples of images found thus far from that time in India. The earliest images that have found in India include stone sculpture dated around the ninth century or slightly later.

The Chinese inherited Mahākāla imagery from India through the contingent areas. The earliest image of Mahākāla is found from Dunhuang, dated in the first half of ninth century. Japanese *Taizokai maṇḍala* contains the image of Mahākāla that Kukai brought it from China also dated in the beginning of the ninth century . Thus, the earliest extant images are found in East Asia, although Mahākāla originated in India.

## CHAPTER 2

### MAHĀKĀLA IN EAST ASIA: ICONOGRAPHY AND TEXTUAL REFERENCES

#### 2.1 Iconography of Chinese and Japanese Mahākālas

##### Mahākāla in China

Generally, the early Chinese Mahākālas are found in paintings from Dunhuang, the Yunnan stone relief and *Long scroll of Buddhist images*. The ancient images found so far date to the ninth century from Dunhuang and the Yunnan stone relief, but the cult of Mahākāla had already spread in the late ninth century to Yunnan.<sup>43</sup> Later in the Ming and Qing dynasties, the emperors patronized Tibetan Buddhism and commissioned the production of Buddhist art. As the art objects of the periods are primarily based on Tibetan Buddhist art and philosophy, this paper treats them in the Tibetan art section.

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<sup>43</sup> Lee, 99.

### **Mahākāla in China: Wrathful, one or three-faced and six-armed Mahākāla**

In Dunhuang, Mahākāla figures are found in the *maṇḍala*, thousand-handed Avalokiteśvara painting, as well as an illustration of deities. Figure 1 shows the *maṇḍala* with deities and symbols. Most of the deities in this *maṇḍala* are represented as a symbol, but some are in anthropomorphic form, and the symbols are accompanied by inscriptions as means of identification. Three-faced Mahākāla is seated at the northeast corner of the first frame around the circle in the center (see Figure.2 for detail). He is six-armed, with both primary hands holding a club horizontally, and both third hands clutch the elephant skin over his back. The most outer corner of the same direction is Vaiśravaṇa, the four guardian kings at the north.

A similar form of Mahākāla is found in the painting of thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara. Figure 3 shows three-faced Mahākāla as represented to the right of Avalokiteśvara. He is standing on a snake and skullcups. He has a spear in both primary hands placed horizontally, and the second arms are stretched outside, the left hand holding a *triśūla* with a handcuffed man attached and the right hand holding the spear like figure, which shows a handcuffed woman attached. The uppermost hands clutch an elephant skin at his back. In this painting, the placement of Mahākāla is paired with Maheśvara appearing at the left side of Avalokiteśvara.

Another illustration of Dunhuang Mahākāla now in a private collection (Fig.4) shows him with one face and six arms, standing on a snake. His

primary hands grab a spear horizontally, the second pair holds spears with impaled emaciated male corpses and the third pair holds a skin, most likely that of an elephant without depiction of its head. Except for the number of faces, this illustration is almost the same as the Mahākāla in the thousand-handed Avalokiteśvara *maṇḍala*.

There are some variations in the attributes and pose of Mahākāla. Images seen so far are somewhat similar to the description of the text, *Daikokutenjinho* by Jinkai describing the image of Mahākāla, as seen in the part,

Mahākāla is blue and has three faces and six arms. The first both hands take a sword horizontally, and second left hand grabs the topknot of a human, while right second hand clutches female sheep and the third have an elephant skin at his back. His garland is made of skullcups.<sup>44</sup>

This image was inherited in Japan seen in the figure in *Taizokai maṇḍala*, which is discussed in Japanese section.

### **Mahākāla in China: Yunnan Mahākālas**

In contrast to them, Mahākāla figures from Yunnan show a small difference in iconography. It is the first Mahākāla holding the later typical attributes, the skullcup. Figure 5 shows the Mahākāla from Yunnan province. One-faced standing Mahākāla has six arms, with the first right hand holds a sword vertically, while the other right hands grasp a trident and a noose. His left hands hold a drum and a skullcup. Figure 6 also

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<sup>44</sup> Taisho, 21: 355c.

represents a standing six-armed Mahākāla with the attributes; trident, sword, rosary, drum and skullcup. According to Yumin Lee, figure 6 is dated to the ninth century, that is, contemporary to the Dunhuang Mahākāla,<sup>45</sup> but the attributes are different.

Later in Yunnan, the iconography of Mahākāla retains a skullcup as an attribute but expands the types of iconography. There are four types of Mahākāla in the *Long Scrolls of Buddhist Images*. The Mahākāla in frame 124 (Fig. 7), shows a standing white Mahākāla in water along with a label of the name. Adorned with a necklace of human heads and garland of skullcups, he is four-armed, the first right hand holding a trident with human heads and snakes attached, while second right hand has a skullcup with eyeholes and the teeth. The first left hand grasps a *damaru* and the second has a noose. The inscription clearly states this figure is the Great Holy Mahākāla, 'Dasheng Daheitian shen', which the direct translation of Mahākāla from Sanskrit.

The second Mahākāla in Yunnan scroll is found in frame 122 (Fig. 8). Blue Mahākāla with six arms stands on the pedestal with seven stars. Similar to the first Mahākāla in Fig.7, he is attended by *yakṣa* figures and ladies. He clutches a trident in his first right hand, a staff in the second and a club in his third right hand. His left hands hold a skullcup, an axe and a noose. The label on his right indicates he is a Daan Yaocha shen, the Great

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<sup>45</sup> Lee, 100-101.

Peace Yakṣa god suggesting his derivation as a god of Yakṣas. Yumin Lee suggests that this particular Mahākāla on pedestal with the seven stars is the God of the Longevity and that the Mahākāla as the Longevity God is exclusive to Yunnan.<sup>46</sup>

The third figure of Mahākāla is problematic. The frame 119 (Fig.9) shows a four-armed deity standing on the cloud, attended by ladies at both sides and lacking any label. He is human skin colored with a trident and a noose in his right hands, and a *damaru* standing upright on his left-hand palm. The problem is the identification of the attribute in his primary left hand. The distorted gray figure in the center looks like either a mouse or skullcup. Soper identified this image as Virūdhaka,<sup>47</sup> while Matsumoto describes it as compound of Vaiśravaṇa yakṣiṇī and Gandharva.<sup>48</sup> It is also identified as Mahākāla by Yumin Lee as she claims the attribute is clearly a skullcup.<sup>49</sup>

From the present condition of the painting, it is difficult to identify the key attribute. Nonetheless, the painting copied in the Qing dynasty from the *Dali long scroll Buddhist images* provides a clue to identify the deity. The Qing dynasty long scroll was commissioned by Emperor Qianlong (1735-1795 A.D.) in the late eighteenth century. The new version exhibits rearrangement

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<sup>46</sup> Lee, 102-103.

<sup>47</sup> Soper, 183-184.

<sup>48</sup> Matsumoto, 332.

<sup>49</sup> Lee, 102.

and corrections based on the Tibetan Buddhist system. Figure 10 is a copied Qianlong Mahākāla with a nameplate at the right top. The figures are exactly copied from the original Dali scroll, but the attribute in his left first hand is clearly reproduced as a white skullcup. In addition, the nameplate states he is four-armed Mahākāla, which is added and appears only in the Qing dynasty scroll. Therefore, at least in Qing dynasty, he was understood to be Mahākāla. In addition to the later Qing interpretation of the deity, other attributes of the figure are typical attributes of Mahākāla (compare with Figure 7), and the hollow in the gray object in Figure 9 probably are the joint part of skullcup and teeth, as seen in other skullcup representation in the Yunnan long scroll (see the skullcup in Figure 7), it is represented by semicircular skullcup with teeth. Consequently, this figure also represents a type of Mahākālas.

The last image is a variant form of Mahākāla. In frame 121 (Fig.11), the six-armed and three-faced fierce deity stands on the *nāgas* amidst flames with attending figures of ladies and animal-faced demons. The plate indicates he is '*jinbojialuo shen*', the Golden Alms Bowl God. Some aspects of this figure are the same as the East Asian figures already seen, but the attributes are quite different. His right hands hold the *vajra* and a quiver with arrows. His left hands clench a bell and an arrow. The principal hands hold a conch bowl. Although the animal headed figures are very typical attendants of Tibetan Mahākālas, the attributes are peculiar to Mahākāla, as they are not

seen in other types of Mahākāla. This is the fourth variant of Mahākāla, the new convention which Soper suggests that “the god embodies the dynasty’s control over its western lake”.<sup>50</sup>

Iconographically, Yunnan Mahākāla shows different features from the contemporary Dunhuang Mahākāla. Mahākāla’s iconography in Yunnan probably expanded to cater to local belief and legends. On the other hand, Yunnan Mahākāla retain the elements that the Tibetan Mahākālas have. This is not present in East Asian Mahākālas, but his attendants and the God of Longevity is also seen in Tibet. They originated probably in India or contingent areas, or in Tibetan cultural areas. Furthermore, Yunnan Mahākāla is the earliest unambiguous example with the typical Indian and Tibetan attributes, the skullcup. However, the chopper is not yet seen in Yunnan.

### **Mahākāla in Japan**

Mahākāla is still popularly worshipped by lay devotees in Japan. He is a benefactor *Shinto* deity rather than Buddhist wrathful deity. Nonetheless, the figures appear in the *Taizokai maṇḍala* retain the angry aspect of the deity.

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<sup>50</sup> Soper, 129.



## Mahākāla in Japan: Wrathful two-armed Mahākāla

The Japanese *Taizokai maṇḍala* has several versions, and the other version except *Genzu maṇḍala*, shows the different Mahākāla. According to Ishida, the two versions, *Taizo zuzo* and *Taizo kyuzuyo* were received in Japan later than *Genzu*, but the origins are older than *Genzu*.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the *Taizo zuzo* contains a colophon which states Śubhakarasiṃha wrote and translated it during his stay in China.<sup>52</sup> These two versions of the *Taizokai maṇḍala* contain figures of Mahākāla that are different from the *Genzu maṇḍala*. Figure 12 is Mahākāla from *Taizo zuzo* where he is placed at the south gate. He is one-faced and two-armed, holding a cup in his left hand and a sword in his right hand. The figure from the *Taizo kyuzuyo* also shows the same iconography, but in this *maṇḍala* Mahākāla appears twice in the second and the fourth circles (Fig. 13). Both are in the south. The Mahākāla placed in the outermost register is also at the south gate. Nonetheless, the description of this two-armed Mahākāla cannot be found in Chinese texts. This lack of textual description dissuades us from identifying for certain attribute in his left hand. Based on later Indian and Tibetan examples, it will be the skullcup, but it is not yet specified. The sword held in his right hand also relates to a chopper held by Indian and Tibetan Mahākālas. Both are

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<sup>51</sup> Hisatoyo Ishida, *Mandara no kenkyu* (Tokyo: Tokyo bijutsu, 1975), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Hisatoyo Ishida, 4.

employed as tools to cut something, specifically ignorance in the Buddhist context.

### **Mahākāla in Japan: Wrathful six-armed Mahākāla**

A similar iconography of Chinese six-armed Mahākāla is found in *Taizokai genzu maṇḍala* in the north of outermost square (Fig.14). Here, the three-faced Mahākāla is seated with legs crossed. He rests a sword on his lap, held in his primary hands, and the second right hand holds the topknot of a human, the left grasps the ear of a female sheep, and the uppermost hands hold up the elephant skin. His attributes match exactly the description of the *Daikokutenjin* cited in Chinese section, except that the attributes in his right and left are opposite.

The six-armed Mahākāla from Dunhuang and Japan seen thus far share the same characteristics in that they have a spear or a sword horizontally in his primary hands, while the secondary hands are raised and holding an elephant skin at the back. These features are peculiar to the Dunhuang and Japanese *Taizokai* Mahākāla that follow the description of *Daikokutenjin*. The second hands are either grabbing a human or an animal, or a spear with a human body attached. They are devoid of Mahākāla's attributes later seen in India and Tibet, namely the skullcup and chopper. In addition, while the body type of Mahākālas are well built, they are not plump, or potbellied. Lastly, it should be noted that the standing Mahākāla is usually stepping on snakes.

### Mahākāla in Japan: Benevolent two-armed Mahākāla, (Japanese Daikokuten)

The Mahākāla seen so far has some minor difference in attributes and the number of arms. However, they are consistent in the wrathful forms. The form of Mahākāla from Japan shows many different features never seen in other places. As already stated, the Mahākāla in *Taizokai maṇḍala* shares many characteristics with the Dunhuang Mahākāla, but the other type, the most prevalent and popular Mahākāla is the two-armed benevolent Mahākāla. This Mahākāla is basically based on the *Daikokutenjinho*, which refers to the Yijing's account. In the first part of *Daikokutenjinho* states:

“The body of Mahākāla is 5 shaku (feet) or 3 shaku (feet), 2 and half shaku (feet) is also acceptable. The color of the body is entirely black. Mahākāla wears *eboshi* cap. Everything is black. Mahākāla wears pants tacked up and not pending. The edge of clothes is short and the sleeves are narrow. The right hand is clenched and put on the waist. The left hand has large sack at the back thrown from the shoulder. The sack is gray and reaches at the buttocks.”<sup>53</sup>

The Mahākāla before the Kamakura period (Fig.15) shows the same iconography as the *Daikokutenjinho* describes. He is two armed, and holds a sack by the left hand, with his right hand put on his waist. Clad in a long upper garment and short pants with boots, he also wears an *eboshi* cap, making his attire consistent with the male aristocratic outfit in *Heian* Japan. As it is seen, the example of Mahākāla before the Kamakura period is

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<sup>53</sup> Taisho, 21: 355b.

frowning and looks stern, elements that later Mahākāla lacks. Such features still stick to the wrathful original nature of Mahākāla.

Japanese Mahākāla has more development until he reaches the present iconography. The previous study has already shown that the iconography of joyful Mahākāla is fixed around Kamakura period, when the name of the Daikoku (Mahākāla) and *Okuni no nushi no mikoto* in Shinto deity were mixed up due to *Honchisuijaku* theory. As a result, in the seven lucky gods, Daikoku is understood as a native Japanese god.

Figure 16 is one of the many examples of typical modern Daikokuten in Japan. He is plump and smiling, holding a sack on his back and secures its edge by his left hand and carries a small mallet that is believed to issue money in his right hand. Under his feet are straw bags of rice that illustrate his nature as a benefactor. In comparison with the earlier Daikoku (Fig. 15), the modern Daikoku adds a small mallet and straw bags of rice,<sup>54</sup> which is the result of a jumble of iconography with Shinto. The difference in clothes also suggests a transformation in function. The old type Japanese Mahākāla (Fig.15) wears *kariginu* and *eboshi*, the attire mostly for Heian aristocrats, while the modern Mahākāla wears something like *Hitatare* and *zokin*, clothes for the commoner. The modern Mahākāla in commoner clothes would be more appealing to the people at the time.

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<sup>54</sup> Addition of rice also suggests a pun of the word, *koku*; which has a double meaning of either “black” and/or “grain”.

### Mahākāla in Japan: Variant form of Daikokuten, three-faced and six armed Daikokuten

Other than Taizokai *maṇḍala* Mahākāla, there is also a Mahākāla that has three faces and six arms. Figure 17 shows the Mahākāla from the book, *Butsuzozui* compiled by Ki Hidenobu. The Mahākāla holds staffs, a small mallet and a large sack is seated on the straw bags of rice. At the top register it is stated as three-faced Mahākāla with the Sanskrit letter *Ma*. The inscription above Mahākāla states: “when the bukkyo daishi (Saicho) established his institute at Mount Hiei, (Mahākāla) appeared in the manifestation with three faces to protect three thousand people.” The Mahākāla is a mixture of the iconographic elements of two types of Mahākāla, two-armed and six-armed *Taizokai* Mahākāla. The apparent difference between the *Taizokai* Mahākāla and the *Butsuzozui* Mahākāla is the appearance of three faces. The three faces of *Butsuzozui* Mahākāla consist of Mahākāla in the center, and Bishamon (Vaiśravaṇa) to the right and Benzaiten (Sarasvatī) to the left. Those three gods are popular benefactor gods worshipped throughout the time in Japan, so the Yoshida claimed the three-faced Eizan Mahākāla is an amalgam of the three gods from *Kurama Bishamon* and *Chikubu Benzaiten*,<sup>55</sup> but the reason for that choice of two gods is not clear. All three gods are popular benefactor gods, so the god of

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<sup>55</sup> Sadakichi Yoshida, “Daikokushinzo no henshen,” in *Daikoku shinko*, ed. Tatehiko Oshima (Tokyo: Yuzankaku, 1990), 34.

these three faces are probably considered as being empowered and more auspicious.

## 2.2 Practice and Functions of East Asian Mahākāla

As seen so far in images of the East Asian figures of Mahākāla, the difference in iconography in each Mahākāla shows the difference in function. His varied attributes are the result of different embodiments of Mahākāla. This is proved by the texts that illustrate the iconography and functions of the deity.

Two-armed Mahākāla and the three-faced Eizan Daikoku were especially believed to be a god who supplies food. In Yijing's account, he states:

In every large temple in west, (Mahākāla is) in the pillar of kitchen, or a gate of large storehouse. It is carved wood, or in a form of god king 2 or 3 shaku (feet). He is seated and holds a golden sack with a leg pendant.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, Yijing supplemented the episode of the deity. In short, in India, there was a temple that normally supported one hundred monks. One day, the temple had to feed a total of five hundred monks as guests. By praying to the god, food for one hundred monks became enough for even five hundred. This is because the temple worshipped Mahākāla.<sup>57</sup>

Also seen in *Daikokutenjinho*,

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<sup>56</sup> Taisho, 54: 209b.

<sup>57</sup> Taisho, 54: 209b-c.

If Mahākāla is placed in temple and worshipped reverentially on a daily basis, the temple will have many monks and a thousand monks will be supported. Also, it is the case to a (lay) residence. If a worshipper prays to him for three years, he will gain wealth and promotion or position.<sup>58</sup>

Mahākāla is a god of food and wealth. In addition, later Daikoku's straw bag of rice also reminds us of him as the god of money, because rice is staple food, and it functioned as currency.

Three-faced Butsuzozui Mahākāla (Fig.17) was also understood as a god of food. As stated, his attributes, rice straw bags and a small mallet suggest his function as the god of wealth. Yoshida presented the *Sogishokoku monogatari* as referring to the three-faced Mahākāla. According to his report, long time ago when the Denkyo taishi (Saicho) established his institute on mountain, he vowed to have three thousand monks. When he appealed the supply for the food and clothes for the monks, the three-faced god appeared. The god's face was Mahākāla, Bishamon and Benzaiten. Saicho was pleased and carved the image for a reminder.<sup>59</sup> This episode exactly corresponds to the inscription on the figure.

As seen in the texts, Mahākāla is a food god and especially functions in monastic life to support many monks. It is stated in *Daikokutenjinho* that the layperson will also gain a merit from him by worshipping. Thus, in the context of two-armed Mahākāla and Eizan Mahākāla, his function is benefactor as a food god, worshipped by monks and laity alike.

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<sup>58</sup> Taisho, 21: 355b.

The wrathful Mahākāla of China and Japan is different in function from the benefactor Mahākāla, as seen clearly from the differences in appearance. *Daikokutenjinho* cited *Ninnokyoso*, *Kujakuokyo* and *Dainichikyoso* and explains the role of Mahākāla. In *Ninnokyoso*, it is clearly stated as a war god. If worshippers pray to Mahākāla, the worshippers will gain the power and win.<sup>60</sup>

These texts explain Mahākāla as a form of Maheśvara, Vairocana or Prthvī. The first part of *Daikokutenjinho* states that Mahākāla is a transformation of Maheśvara and that he is said to be manifestation of Prthvī.<sup>61</sup>

*Dikokutenjinho* citing *Kujakuokyo* states:

There is a forest to the east of Uḍḍayana called Shamashana. It is a forest of dead body. The size of forest is 1 yojana square. Mahākāla is a variant form of Maheśvara. With every demon god and his retinues, Mahākāla wanders in the forest at night. He has a splendid power, and exceptional treasures including secret and long-term medicine. Mahākāla wanders and fly in the sky. He trades the human flesh for the medicine.<sup>62</sup>

In this passage, Mahākāla is understood as a transformation of Maheśvara dwelling in the graveyard. Also, it should be noted that he is related to the medicine, which may share the same characteristics with Tibetan Mahākāla.

On the other hand, *Daikokutenjinho* also cited *Dainichikyoso* and states that Vairocana hopes to subdue a *ḍākinī* because the *ḍākinī* was fond

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<sup>59</sup> Yoshida, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Taisho, 33: 490a.

<sup>61</sup> Taisho, 21: 355b.



of devouring human flesh. Vairocana then becomes Mahākāla smeared with ashes.<sup>62</sup> In *Dainichikyoso*, Mahākāla is a transformation of Vairocana, and the subduer of dākinī. This may refer to Mahākāla's esoteric nature.

After all, *Daikokutenjinho* explains Mahākāla as a variant of Maheśvara, Vairocana and Pṛthvī by citing other texts describing Mahākāla. It is obviously confused in the origin of Mahākāla. Nonetheless, the common feature between the texts is that he is a war god living in the graveyard. He has a special power somehow related to human flesh.

Based on the textual description, his function is summed up in two characteristics: one as a benefactor food god, and the other as a War God or subduing figure. The material remains also reveal two types of Mahākāla: a benefactor god and a wrathful god. The benefactor god, however, is only found in Japan. Mahākāla as a wrathful war god can be seen from Dunhuang and the Japanese *Taizokai maṇḍala*. Iconographic features of two types of Mahākāla follow the functions traditionally understood by people once.

### 2.3 Concluding remarks

East Asian Mahākālas show both localized and constant features of the deity. In the benefactor aspect of Mahākāla, Japanese Daikokuten has been seen as a localized version. Indeed, his appearance is obviously based on Japanese convention. Although his background starts from the Yijing's

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<sup>62</sup> Taisho, 21: 356b.

<sup>63</sup> Taisho, 21: 356b.

account, his form was transformed to meet local expectations. He added some elements to his iconography, finally enabling Mahākāla to become a friendly and popular deity. His garments were also adjusted to appeal to lay people rather than monks. However, monks worshipped him too, as a food or protective god who ensures a prosperous monastic life for monks.

Nonetheless, he has never been understood as an esoteric form except description of *Daikokutenjin* identifying the deity as a variant form of the other deity. The reason that Mahākāla survived throughout history may be due to the fact that he gained a new function as a benefactor god and newfound popularity among lay people. The transformation of a deity can be caused by misunderstandings, but furthermore, it came up to the expectation in the society where a deity was transmitted.

Lastly, Yunnan Mahākāla also went through the same transformation and became a localized god. Soper suggests that Mahākāla emerging from the water is related to a local lake, furthermore, the lake deity is reference to a god that existed before the introduction of Buddhism.<sup>64</sup> Yumin Lee proposes that the Mahākāla on the star-strewn pedestal is a God of Longevity.<sup>65</sup> Based on the studies, Lee suggests the four types of Mahākāla appearing in the Dali scroll have unique functions only seen in Yunnan, and concludes that the

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<sup>64</sup> Soper, 186-189.

<sup>65</sup> Lee, 103.

Mahākāla iconography is also peculiar to Yunnan.<sup>66</sup> It is true that popular Mahākālas in Yunnan were localized in response to the needs of Yunnanese people, which is how the transformation and mixture with local deities occurred. However, there are many similarities between Yunnan and Tibetan Mahākālas. The Yunnan Mahākāla's function as the King of Yakṣas, and the God of Longevity are also seen in Tibetan Mahākālas. These functions may have roots in India, or other places. The localization of Yunnan Mahākālas is not a peculiar example because, like other Mahākālas, in different regions, the former had minor changes to the iconography and functions, while they retained the archetypal image for the most part.

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<sup>66</sup> Lee, 110.

## CHAPTER 3

### MAHĀKĀLA IN INDIA: ICONOGRAPHY AND TEXTUAL REFERENCES

#### 3.1 Iconography of Indian Mahākāla

Indian Mahākāla figures were discovered in Eastern India dating to the hegemony of the Pāla and Sena dynasties(9-12<sup>th</sup> century). These figures are made of black stone that survive for a long time. Only a few figures of Mahākāla have so far discovered in India, but the other figures ephemeral made perhaps did not survive up to the present day. There should have been more figures, as Yijing stated that what is called Mahākāla is generally wooden carvings.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, these wooden sculptures are more subject to decay and loss. Even though Mahākāla was popular and many figures were created, they did not often last long.

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<sup>67</sup> Taisho, 54:209b.

In the texts, the name of “Great Black” already appeared and he is understood as a king of Nāgas.<sup>68</sup> The relation between Mahākāla and the snake is seen in the typical wrathful deities’ accessory such as a garland and armbands with intertwining snakes. Also, East Asian figures appear to retain this relationship, as the Dunhuang Mahākāla is represented stepping on snakes, suggesting the snake as a *vāhana* of Mahākāla rather than being subdued by Mahākāla. In Yunnan, Mahākālas are also represented as a set with *Nāginī* at Mahākāla’s left. That may also suggest a close association between Mahākāla and Nāga or Nāginī cult.

#### **Four-armed Mahākāla (Caturbhuja)**

Several four-armed figures found in India stress the features of Mahākāla as a Nāga king. Figure 18 shows a ninth century four-armed and one-faced Mahākāla standing on the pedestal with flames surrounding the back. He is chubby with a distinct potbelly and is frightening with his flaming hair and the three bulging eyes. He has a sword and probably a *kartirī* in his right hands, and a *triśūla* in his left hand. The first left hand may hold a skullcup, as evidenced by the remaining shape of the hand. The crowns he wears consist of the beads and flower with triangles, and the top of the crown in the center is the snake in profile. The crown is a key to identify deities, because they reveal their origins and is considered an indication of

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<sup>68</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids, trans., *Buddhist Birth Stories of Jataka Tales* (New York: Arno Press, 1997), 97.

the *kula*, the snake figure in the center of crown probably shows the Mahākāla's origin as a Nāga king.

Another ninth century figure of Mahākāla also has the same crown. Figure 19 represents one-faced and four-armed Mahākāla seated on a pedestal, with the left leg pendant, and adorned with all sorts of snake ornamentation. He has sword in his right hand, and *triśūla* in his left. The first right hand is damaged, and the first left hand possibly holds a skullcup because the spherical part remains. The crown in this Mahākāla is made of five upturned skullcups tied together, and a cobra emerges from the central skullcup. This also may reflect Mahākāla's possible origin as a Nāga king.

The third figure of a tenth century four-armed Mahākāla also shows the same crown. As seen in Figure 20, Mahākāla with one face and four arms stands on a pedestal. He has a sword and a skullcup in his right hand, and *triśūla* and a shield in his left. He is adorned with snake ornaments: a sacred thread of snake and snake ornaments emerge from above the ears. The center of the crown is a snake coiled and in profile.

As seen so far, all three of four-armed Mahākāla always have snake headgear and it may suggest the Mahākāla Nāgarāja. In *Sādhnamālā*, the four-armed Mahākāla is described as the blue figure carrying the *kartrī* and the *kapāla* in the first or the principal pair of hands, and the sword and the

*khaṭvāṅga* in the second pair.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, these Mahākālas almost follow the depiction in the *Sādhanaṁālā*.

### **Three-faced and Six-armed Mahākāla**

Tenth century three-faced and six-armed Mahākāla was also found in India. Figure 21 shows standing Mahākāla possibly on a corpse and straddling a bump with left leg bent and right leg stretched. He has sword and beads in his right hands, but the attribute of his principal hand is not identified due to damage. The left principal hand holds a skullcup while the two others is unidentifiable. He wears a crown with a central figure, but it is broken, so unfortunately, it is impossible to judge whether it is a snake-crown or not. Based on the number of arms and faces, three-faced and six-armed Mahākāla is similar to the East Asian Mahākāla discussed already, but the East Asian standard features of an elephant skin and horizontally placed staff are lacking.<sup>70</sup>

In the *Sādhanaṁālā*, Mahākāla is described as having four representations: one face with two arms, one face with four arms, one face with six arms, and eight faces with sixteen arms and embracing his consort. The three-faced and six-armed Mahākāla is not described in the *Sādhanaṁālā*. However, in *Vajraḥṁkāramaṇḍala* in the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, Mahākāla is black and three-faced, holding a trident. Also in the *Dharmadhātuvāgīśvaraṁḍala*, he is described as the black figure, holding

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<sup>69</sup> Bhattacharyya, 346.

a trident and a skullcup.<sup>71</sup> Therefore Mahākāla's number of faces and arms are varied in India, but Mahākāla always holds the key attribute of the skullcup in all forms.

The body type of Indian Mahākāla is chubby with a potbelly and short legs. This body type is not seen in East Asian Mahākāla, either. However, such a body type is inherited and retained in Tibet. The prevalent of pair attributes, a skullcup and chopper, also emerged in India for the first time and were preserved in the Tibetan representation of Mahākāla.

### 3.2 Practice and Function of Indian Mahākāla

As stated, Mahākāla may have been understood as Nāgarāja Mahākāla in India, although no texts except in the Pāli canon give Mahākāla a snake connection. Instead, in *Sāadhanamālā* Mahākāla is understood as a warning figure for those opposed to the Buddhist *Dharma*. As stated in *Sāadhanamālā*:

“He who hates his preceptor, is adversely disposed to the Three Jewels, and destroys many animals is eaten up raw by Mahākāla. He (Mahākāla) cuts his flesh to pieces, drinks his blood, and (after) entering into his head breaks it into small bits”<sup>72</sup>.

He was thought to chop up the adversaries of Buddhism, probably with the chopper in his hand. The attributes obviously display Mahākāla's function

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<sup>70</sup> The sixteen-armed yub-yum Mahākāla in *Sadhanamala* has an elephant hide.

<sup>71</sup> Benoytosh Bhattacharyya, *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, ed., (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1949), 24 and 62. as cited by Phyllis Granoff, 80.

<sup>72</sup> Bhattacharyya, 348.



and perform as a reminder of the vow to revere the Buddhist Dharma. His function is also understood as a protector of Buddhism, a *dharmapāla*, and this connection is passed along to Tibetan Mahākāla imagery. Similarly to some East Asian Mahākālas, he is a blood-related figure. Associated with a dead body or human flesh, he was perceived as a demonic figure.

### **3.3 Concluding remarks**

There are no two-armed Mahākālas that show a connection with the East Asian Mahākāla. However, the three-faced and six-armed Mahākāla is somewhat similar to the six-armed and three-faced figure in China and Japan. As Mahākāla originated in India, the figure probably served as an archetype of the developing image in different cultures. Thus, the specific image found in other areas, than India suggest that the Indian origin does not survive to the present day, but existed sometime in the past.

As stated, Indian texts reveal Mahākāla's function as *dharmapāla* and worshipped by monks. In addition, Yijing's account, as cited in the Chinese section, showed he was also worshipped by lay devotees. The lay worship form of Mahākāla is described as a benefactor deity.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAHĀKĀLA IN NEPAL: ICONOGRAPHY AND TEXTUAL REFERENCE

#### 4.1 Iconography of Nepalese Mahākāla

Mahākāla is very popular in Nepal and found typically at entrances to Buddhist monasteries, paired with Gaṇeśa. Figures of Mahākāla are objects of lay devotion, thus the Mahākāla is often smeared by devotees with food and powder. The iconography of Mahākāla here is analyzed by the number of the arms.

##### Two-armed Mahākāla

The most common Mahākāla in Nepal is the two-armed Mahākāla standing erect. Figure 22 is one of many examples of two-armed Mahākāla. One-faced and two-armed Mahākāla stands on a corpse, with his right hand holding a chopper and a skullcup in his left hand. Specific to Nepalese images, the figure holds a *khaṭvāṅga* on his left side. His ornament, a snake

sacred thread and anklet, garland made of skullcups, earrings, necklaces and bracelets are the same as the Indian Mahākāla. The dwarfish figure with bulging eyes and flaming hair also follow the Indian versions. The new features which appear in Nepalese depiction of Mahākāla are standing upright on a corpse under foot and the set of attributes; a chopper, skullcup and *khaṭvāṅga* as a reference to this Tantric nature. The standing posture is contrasted with the Tibetan Mahākāla, which is shown squatting or with one leg bent.

Some Nepalese figures show a new convention on the crown. Figure 23 exhibits similar iconography of Mahākāla as just explained, but he has a Buddha figure at the center of the crown. It is Akṣobhya, as in the invocation of Mahākāla Vratākathā, Mahākāla is understood as the figure with the stamp of Akṣobhya Buddha on your crown and clothed in tiger skin.<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, some Nepalese Mahākālas have Akṣobhya on his crown instead of the snake seen in India. This suggests his lineage with Akṣobhya and also associated with Cakrasaṃvara.<sup>74</sup>

#### **Four-armed Mahākāla**

Four-armed Mahākāla is also found in Nepal. Figure 24 shows ca. 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century one-faced four-armed Mahākāla with a sword and a chopper in his right hands and a skullcup and *khaṭvāṅga* in his right hand. The

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<sup>73</sup> Lewis, 112.

ornamentation and the other features are the same as the two-armed Mahākāla, but here he is seated on a pedestal. This four-armed Mahākāla may be traced back to the Indian Mahākāla because the attributes are almost the same except that the Nepalese Mahākāla is seated with legs crossed, while Indian Mahākāla is seated with left leg pendant (See Figure 19). Furthermore, the Nepalese Mahākāla follows exactly the description of four-armed Mahākāla in *Sādhnamālā*, because in the text, a blue four-armed Mahākāla is specified as carrying a chopper and a skullcup in his principle hands, and a sword and *khaṭvāṅga* in his second pair of hands. The similarity between figures from India and Nepal suggests the close relationship between the two, and Nepalese presumably imported the figure directly from India.

### **Six-armed Mahākāla**

Nepalese Mahākāla preserved well the Indian Mahākāla iconography, as proven by four-armed Mahākāla. Besides, six-armed Mahākāla also exhibits faithfulness to the Indian model. Figure 25 is one-faced and six-armed Mahākāla standing on a female figure in the ornamented shrine. The six attributes of Mahākāla are: *damaru*, rosary, and chopper in his right hands, while his left hand holds a skullcup with the two other attributes damaged and unreadable. Adorned with typical Mahākāla ornaments, he

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<sup>74</sup> For more discussion on the connection between Cakrasaṃvara and Akṣobhya, see Dina Bangdel, *Manifesting the Mandala: a Study of the Core Iconographic Program of Newar Buddhist Monasteries in Nepal*, (Ph. D. diss., The Ohio State University, 1999).

shows his right leg bent and left leg stretched. Although Indian six-armed and three-faced Mahākāla (Fig. 21) can be comparable, exactly the same iconography of Mahākāla was not found in Indian figures. However, in the *Sādhnamālā*, the six-armed Mahākāla is stated as having a blue body with *kartrī*, rosary, and *damaru* in his right hand, and *kapāla*, *śūla* and *vajrapāśa* in his left hand.<sup>75</sup> The description almost corresponds with the six-armed Nepalese Mahākāla.

Another six-armed Mahākāla demonstrates apparent Nepalese conventions. Figure 26 shows 17<sup>th</sup> century six-armed Mahākāla standing on a corpse with flame at the back. Mahākāla has the sword and chopper in his right hands and a *khaṭvāṅga* and skullcup in his left hands. The rear hands also hold an elephant skin hide behind him. The Nepalese element is the attending Gaṇeśa at his right. The elephant hide held by Mahākāla ---- implying overcoming ignorance----- contradicts having Gaṇeśa as an attendant. On the other hand, in Tibet, Gaṇeśa is typically stamped over and subdued by Mahākāla.

The *Mahākālatantra* describes several Mahākāla forms with various numbers of hands. In Chapter Two and Three of *Mahākālatantra*, the Buddha answered the questions of a goddess and instructed several mantras according to the number of Mahākāla's arm. According to the chapters, the numbers of Mahākāla's arms are, two, four, six, eight, ten, twelve, fourteen

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<sup>75</sup> Bhattacharyya, 346.

and sixteen.<sup>76</sup> The sculptures and paintings of Mahākāla found so far are mostly two-armed and some four and six-armed Mahākālas.

### **Multiple-armed Mahākāla**

The only example of multiple armed Mahākāla is Figure 27, which has eight or ten arms. Due to the poor quality of the photograph, it is difficult to determine the number of the faces. However, the figure clearly shows a Buddha-like small face at the top and another face to his right.

## **4.2 Practice and Function of Nepalese Mahākāla**

Mahākāla is understood as having various roles in Nepal, namely, he is a king of Yakṣas, and subduer of obstacles, thus, a protector of *dharma*. The *Caturdashivratā*, a text from Nepal, describes the ritual functions of Mahākāla. The text explains the way of *pūjā* to Mahākāla and states, if the eight precepts are observed, ‘the devotees will have full control over his enemies and can ascend to the status of head of state.’<sup>77</sup> Having stated this, the text adds the episode of the king who revered Mahākāla and gained merit from Mahākāla. Shortly, a story was narrated of the king who lived in Vārānasī and worshipped Śiva and Mahākāla. As he observed the eight precepts, his kingdom was blessed and secure. One day the foreign king brought his army and attacked the kingdom. During the emergency, the king

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<sup>76</sup> Stablein, 186-204.

<sup>77</sup> Lewis, 111.

went to Śiva's temple and also worshipped and meditated on Mahākāla. The hymns chanted by the king are:

Hail to you Mahākāla, destroyer of evildoers and bestower of boons!  
Hail to you of the round red eyes, bright like a flaming light!  
Hail to you with curly brown hair and rough skin!  
Hail to you with a big and terrifying dark body that is surrounded by a halo!  
Hail to you with sharply body and shapely limbs!  
Hail to you with a fierce-fanged face that loves flesh and blood!  
Hail to you with the stamp of Akṣobhya Buddha on your crown and clothed in tiger skin!  
Hail to you, the world in miniature, you with the thousand arms! <sup>78</sup>

Then, Mahākāla emerged in front of the king and bestowed eight powers to defeat the enemy. Empowered by Mahākāla, the king vanquished the enemies.<sup>79</sup> Thus Mahākāla is understood as a protector of the Dharma and all worshippers who revere the Buddhist *dharma*.

Based on the text, Mahākāla is understood first as a benefactor since he raises the status of worshippers. Second, Mahākāla is as a war god as the king gained the merit from Mahākāla and won the war. Third, he is a protector of Dharma as the whole story shows. Nonetheless, the Dharma protector aspect is stressed as a main function of Mahākāla, reinforced by his protection of the dharma, and support for the king, who was a good Buddhist practitioner and adherent to Mahākāla.

Mahākāla worship continues to the present day in Nepal. A popular temple in Kathmandu enshrines Mahākāla as a main deity (Fig.28). Worship of the main image is based on the following story. One day, a well-known

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<sup>78</sup> Lewis, 110-113.

Vajrācārya priest saw Mahākāla flying in the sky. He then hit on the idea of producing a huge sized Mahākāla, the same as his vision, to protect the city. When the Vajrācārya forced the deity to come down to the image, Mahākāla rejected, because his job was to circulate the earth. The Vajrācārya conceded the deity this point, and requested that the deity come down every Saturday to answer prayers.<sup>80</sup> Thus, worshippers' visit to the temple falls on Saturdays. The main image smeared with oil shows he is still worshipped (Fig.29). His ornamentation such as crown, necklaces, and scarves are later additions. Devotees push sweets and rice into his mouth as offerings. As the anecdote reveals this Mahākāla is benefactor as well as a protector of the city.

In the *Mahākālatantra*, Mahākāla has all the *dharma*s, and is called also Vajrasattva.<sup>81</sup> Mahākāla is repeatedly stated as a figure of pacifying enemies in the section of rising of the divinity in Chapter Seven.<sup>82</sup> Also, he is a king of Yakṣas.<sup>83</sup> Interestingly, he is understood as a benefactor figure. The eighth chapter of *Mahākālatantra* is a 'discussion of (making) holes in the earth for beings to acquire wealth'.<sup>84</sup> Buddha answers the question of a goddess on how the poor can enjoy the abundance, and he explains the process of rituals of making holes and eating all sorts of meats, to get

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<sup>79</sup> Lewis, 110-113.

<sup>80</sup> Mary Shepherd Slusser, *Nepal Mandala: A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 292.

<sup>81</sup> Stablein, 196.

<sup>82</sup> Stablein, 215-242.

<sup>83</sup> Stablein, 186.

<sup>84</sup> Stablein, 259.



treasures for the sake of sentient beings. As seen in the text, he is a benefactor god, but in contrast to the East Asian Mahākāla, the practitioner of the Tantric ritual is performed by a yogin and the ultimate purpose of obtaining the treasure is for sentient beings. In consequence, based on *Mahākālatantra*, Mahākāla should have appealed to a yogic practitioners rather than lay folks. Meanwhile, as a benefactor, Mahākāla has been worshipped by lay people in a different level. Mahākāla, specifically because of his attributes, the skullcup and chopper, also shows as a highly esoteric deity. In this case, his manifestation may be identified with Cakrasaṃvara.

#### 4.3 Concluding remarks

Nepalese Mahākāla basically followed the Indian examples as four-armed Mahākāla shows, but the typical two-armed Nepalese Mahākāla, and the Gaṇeśa as an attendant have not been found in India or Tibet thus far, suggesting these features to be a Nepalese conventions. They imported the Indian Mahākāla and at the same time they added their tastes, and expanded his iconography. Later, Nepalese artists were active in the Tibetan cultural sphere, which is why the painting reflects a mixture of Tibetan and Nepalese iconography.

Above accounts suggest that, Mahākāla in Nepal is worshiped by various levels of devotees. He is still popular as a benefactor deity in Nepal, while he is understood as an esoteric deity by initiated practitioners.

## CHAPTER 5

### MAHĀKĀLA IN TIBET: ICONOGRAPHY AND TEXTUAL REFERENCE

#### 5.1 Iconography of Tibetan Mahākāla

There is a greater frequency of Mahākālas in Tibet. It is said that there are more than seventy figures of Mahākāla in existence.<sup>85</sup> Mahākāla is *Dharmapāla*, the protector of Buddhist *Dharma* in the Tibetan pantheon. Generally, figures belong to the dharmapāla class have a wrathful appearance. The variety of forms for Mahākāla suggests his popularity in Tibet. In a modern account, he is seen as not only a *dharmapāla*, but also a *yidam* and *sambhogakāya* manifestation of enlightened beings.<sup>86</sup> Although he has a compassionate nature, he is stronger than humans and manifests wrathful form in order to control negative energy.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Nebesky, 38.

<sup>86</sup> Chogyal Namkhai Norbu, *The Guardians of the Teaching* (Italy: Shang Shung Edizioni, 1994), 7.

<sup>87</sup> Norbu, 7.

The first iconographical compendium, noted earlier, was compiled after the sixteenth century. Until then, the iconography for almost all the Mahākāla figures were well established in the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon. It includes a Mahākāla envisioned by high-ranking monks, evidence that these Mahākālas are clearly a Tibetan convention. Also, the compendia state that certain Mahākālas are in the style of a renowned Indian monk, suggesting these Mahākālas are considered as Indian derivations. The descriptions include Mahākālas from both Indian and Tibetan traditions.

This paper catalogues all types of Mahākālas, matching visual materials relating to the textual descriptions. The paper also identifies four major categories of Mahākāla: 1) Yes shes mgon po; 2) Legs ldan; 3) Four-faced Mahākāla (dPal mgon zhal bzhi pa); and 4) miscellaneous figures. Further classified by subdivisions may be made according to specified criteria. The first categories are based on the iconography compendia published so far, primarily the *Narthatang five hundred deities*.<sup>88</sup> Although this iconographic compendium was created under the dGe lugs sect and reveals the biases of the compliers,<sup>89</sup> the other sects' versions have not been uncovered as yet. Consequently, this is the best-described iconographical material. In addition to the Mahākāla from the new Tibetan Buddhist sects,

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<sup>88</sup> This paper refers to Zurich manuscript, Tachikawa's xylographs and Lokesh Chandras drawings as *Narthatang five hundred deities*.

<sup>89</sup> For more detail discussion, see Peter F. A., "The 'Rin- hbyun': Introduction to an Unpublished Tibetan Iconographical Work," *Journal Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal. Letters*. 9 (1943), 1-27.

Mahākāla from the rNying ma sect will also be discussed. Their iconography is so unique that even the dGe lugs iconography cannot be a reference to the rNying ma Mahākāla.

According to the *Narthatang Five Hundred Deities*, the *sādhana*s of Mahākālas are roughly divided to the three types. The classification of Mahākāla is based on *Narthatang five hundred deities* and subdivisional categories classified by physical differences. One is Yes shes mgon po, Mahākāla as an emanation of Gnosis. The second is Legs ldan, the Excellent Mahākāla. And the third remaining *sādhana*, mostly consists of four-faced Mahākāla and one Jackal-faced Piśāca. The fourth category with the figure not appearing in *Rin lhan*, unidentified figures, and folkish figures. In addition to the Mahākālas that fit the above category, this paper also covers *Maṇḍala* and the offerings dedicated to Mahākāla. The subcategories are set according to physical differences in the figures. These subcategories show a wide variety in the representation of Mahākāla. The names of Mahākāla in parenthesis are names of Mahākāla appearing in iconography compendia.

#### **5.1.1 Yes shes mgon po**

This paper subdivides Yes shes mgon po into four types;

- 1) Four-armed Mahākāla
- 2) Six-armed Mahākāla (including Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla)

3) Gur gyi mgon po

4) Raven-faced Mahākāla

**1) Four-armed Yes shes mgon po (Yes shes mgon po phyag bzhi pa)**

Four-armed Yes shes mgon po is further subdivided into four subcategories on a basis of physical difference;

- a) Caturbhuja (Four-armed Mahākāla)
- b) The One who Has a Heart-like *be-ta* fruit
- c) Yub-yum Mahākāla
- d) Yub-yum Mahākāla holding a fruit-like object.

**a. Caturbhuja (Four-armed Mahākāla in tradition of Ga Lotsawa, Nāgārjuna and combining the two)**

. There are five *sādhana*s for the four-armed Mahākāla in *Rin lhan*.<sup>90</sup>

According to the description of texts, Caturbhuja has three traditions, i.e., the tradition of Ga Lotsawa, that of Nāgārjuna and the tradition of combining the two.<sup>91</sup> The differences between the traditions are subtle, making it difficult to identify them.

The Four-armed Mahākāla obviously originates from India, because the Tibetan four-armed figures are the same as the Indian four-armed Mahākāla and closely follow the description of *Sāadhanamālā*. For most part, the iconography of the four-armed Mahākāla is stable ----even though

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<sup>90</sup> Nebesky, 44-48. Brauen and Willson, 23. 340-344.

<sup>91</sup> Nebesky, 44-48. Brauen and Willson, 23. 340-344.

the figure traveled as far as China----, because it exists in Yunnan long scrolls (fig7 and 9) and also in Nepal (Fig.24). Furthermore, in the drawings of *Zhu fo pusa sengxiang zan*,<sup>92</sup> he is shown as a seated figure bearing Tibetan inscriptions, *mgon po phyag bzhi pa*, meaning four-armed Mahākāla. Inscribed in Chinese at the top is ‘four-armed *dharmapāla*’ (Fig.30).

In Brauen and Willson, Mahākāla’s hand attributes are a knife and a sword in his right hands and a trident and blood-filled skullcup in his left hands. These attributes match the Indian prototype and the Figure 30.

Some Mahākālas in this category exist in the earliest artistic styles. Figure 31 is taken from the wall painting from the 12<sup>th</sup> century Lha kang soma in Alchi. The Mahākāla has customary attributes, a blazing sword and chopper in his right hand, and a *khaṭvāṅga* and skullcup in his left. The surrounding figures are standard Tibetan convention, raven-faced Mahākāla, animal-faced *dākinīs* and Cakrasaṃvara at the top. Another four-armed Mahākāla *in situ*, Figure 32, also represents this type of Mahākāla. The inscription unambiguously indicates that he is Caturbhuja. The top ridge at the viewer’s right of the Mahākāla’s pedestal shows ‘yes shes gyi mgon po phyag bzhi pa’, in Tibetan, namely, four-armed yes shes mgon po. The reference of Mahākāla with Cakrasaṃvara also refers to his esoteric nature.

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<sup>92</sup> Clark, 2: 301.

Figure 33 is a good example of the transition of Indian Mahākāla to Tibetan Mahākāla. Stylistically and iconographically, this figure shares many features with Indian Mahākāla (see Fig.19). Here, Mahākāla is placed inside a pointed arched halo, seated with right leg pended and left leg bent. The attributes of sword and *khaṭvāṅga* in the rear hands, and a chopper and skullcup in the primary hands follow the Indian rules. The way of rendering the *khaṭvāṅga* with three skullcups and vajra on the top is exactly the same as Indian conventions. Moreover, as already proposed, this wooden figure also has a cobra like snake in his center of crown, suggesting the figure exactly follow Indian models and possibly recognized as a Nāga related figure. The lack of attendants—a typical convention of Tibetan Mahākāla— also suggests the figure is more closely related to Indian Mahākāla or, earlier examples.

Tibetan examples, in contrast to the Indian four-armed Mahākāla, are always represented with a set of attendants, Lhamo, and animal-faced Mahākālas. It is possible that Indian Mahākālas were represented with other attendant figures, though there is no evidence to prove this assumption. Lhamo, however, is probably a Tibetan convention. We can safely assume that the Mahākāla and Lhamo couple was created in Tibet.

#### **b. The One who Has a Fruit (Four-armed Mahākāla in the ‘Tshal tradition)**

According to texts, the specific feature of Mahākāla in the ‘Tshal

tradition is that the figure has a heart-like fruit in his right hand. He is surrounded by Rematī, Ekajaṭī and eight *dākinīs*. Also, during the process of the meditation, the three Karma Mahākālas become the three lion-faced Piśaca, and then become Caṇḍikās.<sup>93</sup>

While Nebesky interpreted the *be-ta* fruit as a coconut,<sup>94</sup> Brauen and Willson suggest it is a heart-shaped fruit containing seeds used for making rosaries.<sup>95</sup> Conventionally, the *be-ta* fruit is translated as coconut,<sup>96</sup> but obviously, the object Mahākāla holds is not coconut, but a round reddish or brownish fruit with stem.

Figure 34 shows a four-armed Mahākāla surrounded by attending figures. The figure is seated in a fire flame, and carries a blazing sword in his right rear hand, trident marked *khaṭvāṅga* in his rear left hand, and a skullcup filled with blood in his first left hand. The specific attribute of this type of Mahākāla is a fruit held in the right hand. In this case, the fruit is red and oval, and the middle part is marked with indentations and the tip is adorned with circular patterns. The inscription below the figure reads ‘*Shri mahaa kaa la la na mo*’, which is a generic dedication to Mahākāla. The figure is also surrounded by raven-faced Mahākāla, animal-faced Mahākāla, two-armed Lhamo, four-

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<sup>93</sup> Brauen and Willson, 343. Nebesky, 47.

<sup>94</sup> Nebesky, 47.

<sup>95</sup> Brauen and Willson, 343.

<sup>96</sup> See for example, *Chandra Das Tibetan English dictionary*, Ninth ed., s. v.: beta.



armed Lhamo with ritual dagger in her left hand, and the skeleton couple, Cittipatti. The top register consists of Cakrasaṃvara in the center flanked by Shangpa bka brgyud lamas, again referencing Mahākāla esoteric association.

Another four-armed Mahākāla shows close affinity to the rNying ma sect. In Figure 35, Mahākāla in the center also has a green-stemmed fruit, red and pointed at the end. The attendants surrounding Mahākāla, such as Rahula at the bottom, clearly shows its derivation from the rNying ma sect. From the examples of this type of Mahākāla, he is worshipped throughout the sects in Tibet. Figure 36 also shows four-armed Mahākāla holding a fruit-like object. The other features are the same in the figures discussed above. The object held by the figure here is red and spherical with brownish stem. It also resembles the Tibetan rendition of heart.

**c. Yub-yum (Four armed Mahākāla in the tradition of the Mahāsiddha Śāntigupta)**

There are some examples of four-armed Yes shes mgon po who embraces his consort. According to *Rin lhan*, the black Mahākāla embraces a black Mahākālī,<sup>97</sup> but the examples represent variety of the body color of Mahākāla and Mahākālī. The examples from Phiyang are rendered in five colors of Yub-yum Mahākāla that correspond with

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<sup>97</sup> Brauen and Willson, 340-341. Nebesky, 44-45.

the five-colored *maṇḍala* (the two available Mahākālas out of five are Figure 37 and 38). Each color of these Mahākālas corresponds with the color of the five Buddhas, visual statement of Mahākāla alternate identity as a fully enlightened Buddha.

Other paintings also confirm that there was probably a tradition of representing yub-yum Mahākāla in different colors. Figures 39 and 40 show Mahākāla embracing his consort. Both couples are in temples with human heads ornamenting borders. Based on the same depiction of a temple and its outer scenery, two paintings that belong to different collections indicate that they are part of a set. Mahākālī in Figure 39 is red in color, corresponding to the color of Amitābha. In the other painting (Fig.40), Mahākālī is white, relating to the color of Vairocana, displaying his association.

These two figures also indicate that they are Nag po chen po, the Great Mahākāla from the rNying ma pantheon,<sup>98</sup> because these two paintings show its specific iconography. The iconography of the rNying ma and yub yum four-armed Mahākāla is the same.

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<sup>98</sup> See the illustration in Khempo sangey Tenzin and Gomchen Oleshey, Dowman trans., *Deities and Divinities of Tibet: The Nyingma Icons, A Collection of Line Drawing of deities and divinities* (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1988), 85.

**d. Yub-yum Mahākāla with fruit / heart, combining of the two (no description in *Rin lhan*)**

Figure 40 also represents a distinctive tradition of a fruit-like object<sup>99</sup> relating to yub-yum four-armed Mahākāla. In this painting the object is repeated; specifically, Mahākāla has a red spherical object with a white stem in his right hand. The object appears both at the top of the Buddha's head in the top center, and in the skullcup at the bottom of the painting. The presence of rNying ma lama and attendant deities show the painting is from the rNying ma sect. Figure 41 also shows a seated Mahākāla embracing a blue Mahākālī, holding a fruit-shaped object with unspecified color, as it is delineated, in his right hand. It also repeats the same motif in the skullcup offering, consisting of a fruit or heart held in the palms emerging from the skullcup.<sup>100</sup> Based on the presence of rNying ma lama and some attendants from the rNying ma pantheon, this painting is identifiable as part of the rNying ma sect.

An example from the bKa' brgyud sect is Figure 42. This Mahākāla also embraces a blue goddess and holds a white fruit with green stem. He is flanked by raven-faced Mahākāla and four-armed

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<sup>99</sup> However, this representation looks like heart too.

<sup>100</sup> There are many examples representing a heart in the skullcup. So, this object can be a heart.

Lhamo in typical style, and Cakrasaṃvara, father and mother on top. The top register represents Drukpa bKa brgyud lama.

The last example is a wooden sculpture of Mahākāla embracing a goddess holding the same fruit in his hand. Figure 43 is from the collection of John Huntington, bought from an art dealer as a set of yub-yum Mahākāla with the attendant, raven-faced Mahākāla (Fig. 44). This Mahākāla also embraces his red-bodied consort, holding a fruit in his right hand.

From the examples seen so far, Mahākālīs are rendered in blue, white and red. Again, this type of Mahākāla is possibly a part of a Maṇḍala representation with yub-yum Mahākāla, as discussed above. In addition, Chapter 6 in this paper shows the meditation process visualizing five colored Mahākālas and his consort.

As seen from above examples, there are some variations in the representation of fruits held by the Four-armed Mahākāla in the 'Tshal tradition (listed b in this paper) and the Yub-yum four-armed Mahākāla. The fruit represented in Figure 36 is red, round and roughly palm-sized. Other representations are relatively small and pointed at the end, with indentations (see Figures 34, 35 and 41). Also, some resemble heart representations (see Figures 39 and 40) In appearance, these fruit do not resemble a coconut, though they are

described as such in some texts.<sup>101</sup> In addition, there is confusion between heart and fruit.

## **2) Six-armed Mahākāla (Yes shes kyi ngon po phyag drug pa)**

Like the four-armed Mahākāla, there are many examples of six-armed Mahākālas from Tibet. This paper has already discussed East Asian and Indian examples of the six-armed and three-faced Mahākāla. But the similar Mahākāla has not been found in Tibet. Only the six-armed and three-faced yub-yum Mahākāla appears in the iconography compendia,<sup>102</sup> but no examples have yet been found in paintings or sculptures yet. According to *Rin lhan*, the Six-armed Mahākālas appear in five different colors, corresponding to the five colors of the *kulas*.<sup>103</sup> However, the examples only show a black and white bodied Mahākāla. Tibetan six-armed Mahākālas are divided into two types, one; standard six-armed Mahākāla, and the other; Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla.

### **a. Black-bodied six-armed Mahākāla, (Myur mdzad yes shes kyi ngon po phyag drug pa nag po Bar chad kun sel)**

According to Tucci's description of the six-armed Mahākāla, this figure is one of the *yidam* and popular especially in Sa skya and dGe lugs pa pantheon.<sup>104</sup> Furthermore, many *sādhana*s on this deity attest to his origination in India. This information is derived from a vision by

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<sup>101</sup> The name of the fruit cannot be specified. But the fruit is probably a medicinal in function.

<sup>102</sup> Brauen and Willson, 338-339. Nebesky, 43.

<sup>103</sup> Brauen and Willson, 336. Nebesky, 38-44.

<sup>104</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (Roma, Libreria dello Stato, 1949), 584.

the Mahāsiddha Śavarī in the cemetery of bSil pai tshal in Southern India.<sup>105</sup> His appearance is black, one-faced and six-armed, standing on Gaṇeśa. Crowned with an Akṣobhya image, he is carrying a crooked knife, a crown of skullcups, a *damaru* in his right hand, and a skullcup filled with blood, a trident and a noose in his left. He is flanked by dPal ldan Lha mo on the left, Yakṣa Kṣetrapāla opposite, Jinamitra to the right, Ṭakkirāja behind and Trakṣad to the left. In addition the ten keepers of the ten regions surround the figure.<sup>106</sup> Specifically, this forms of Mahākāla refers to the Tantric tradition.

Similarly, in the *Rin lhan*, a six-armed Mahākāla stamps on Gaṇeśa, carrying a vajra knife and skullcup full of blood in his first pair of hands, a rosary of dry skullcups and *damaru* in the second pair of hands, and a trident and *vajra* noose in the rear hands. His crown bears an image of Akṣobhya. In all other ways his features correspond to other Mahākālas. His acolytes are, Śrīdevī to the left, Kṣetrapāla in front, Jinamitra to the right, Ṭakkirāja behind and Trakṣad to the left. He is further surrounded by ten directional guardians and protectors.<sup>107</sup> The only differences between the *Rin lhan* and the texts Tucci cites are the expressions; they are almost identical in other ways.

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<sup>105</sup> Tucci, 585.

<sup>106</sup> Tucci, 585. Tucci cites Taranatha's *dPal ye shes kyi mgon po phyag drug pa'i sgrub thabs gtor ma'i cho ga dan. bcas pa'i aphrin las gter mdsod*, and *Pan che lama Blo bzang. dPal ldan bstan pai n-ma's Myur mdsad ye shes kyi mgon po phyag drug pa la mchod bstod thugs dam bskan. pai rim pa.*

<sup>107</sup> Brauen and Willson, 336-337. Nebesky, 38-42.

There are many paintings and sculptures of six-armed Mahākāla. Among these figures, the iconography of Mahākāla and his attendants reveal almost no variation, but there are some subtle differences. Figure 45 is one of the six-armed Mahākāla paintings. Here, the Mahākāla stands with right leg bent and left leg stretched, trampling on Gaṇeśa who holds a skullcup and red radish. Although he lacks the Akṣobhya on his crown, his other hand attributes such as rosary, *damaru* and knife in his right hands, and trident, noose and skullcup in his left hand match textual description. In addition to these, he also carries an elephant skin hide in his rear hands. His attendants are, Lhamo on his lower left, Trakṣad on his upper left, Ṭakkirāja on his upper right and red-bodied Jinamitra on his lower right. In front of the Mahākāla is Kṣetrapāla riding on a bear. These figures also agree with their textual descriptions.

Another figure also shows the by and large unvarying iconography of the six-armed Mahākāla. Figure 46 represents the figure with his attendants. Although he is standing upright instead of bending his right leg, his other iconography matches the former paintings. Specifically, the choice of attendant figures in this painting follow exactly the textual depiction. In the first, to his left is four-armed Lhamo with her attendants (four-armed in textual description), and to the right is blue bodied Ṭakkirāja, (who appears in red and behind the

Mahākāla in texts) in dancing posture. Below Mahākāla, in the center of the painting, is Kṣetrapāla riding on a bear, and at the left corner of the painting is red-bodied Jinamitra. At the right corner is Trakṣad. Mahākāla is further surrounded by ten directional deities, in addition to the figures of Vaiśravaṇa and Gaṇeśa at the bottom.

There are also many examples of the sculptural six-armed Mahākāla. Figure 47 is a gilded and inlayed sculpture. Mahākāla is represented in the same way as in the painting. Gaṇeśa's representation is also the same. On the back of the sculpture (Fig. 48), the figure clearly carries an elephant skin hide by his rear two hands. And the face of an elephant is represented at the viewer's right side. There are no references to elephant skin in textual description of the six-armed Mahākāla, but it is an artistic convention to represent six-armed Mahākāla with this object. Out of 34 available figures of six-armed Mahākālas, only three Mahākālas do not represent an elephant skin, and three are ambiguous.

As stated, six-armed Mahākāla from Nepal (Fig.26) is similar to the Tibetan examples. Yet, Tibetan Mahākālas are always depicted with Gaṇeśa being trampled by Mahākāla, while Nepalese figures do not follow this convention. According to the textual tradition, the *sādhana*s of six-armed Mahākāla were succeeded from a Indian monk, so the tradition of depicting subdued Gaṇeśa may have transmitted to



Nepal. However, the great popularity of Gaṇeśa in Nepal possibly hampered representing him as a subdued figure. This is a one example of a selective rendition of elements in iconography.

As already stated, elephant hide is a typical attribute of the six-armed East Asian Mahākāla. An elephant skin is an ancient motif, often implying physical strength. The oldest example is a coin in which Demetiras I wears an elephant skin helmet, an attribute of a great warrior. The skin is also functioned as a protective coat, owing to its thickness and durability. In Tibet, however, the elephant skin conventionally signifies ignorance. Thus, a figure having an elephant hide represents the overcoming of ignorance, as well as great, warrior-type, and physical strength.

**b. Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla, (mGon bka' gnis pa / mGon dkar yid bzin nor bu)**

The second six-armed form is white, a rare color for Mahākāla. Known as Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla, this image was extremely popular in Mongolia, but believed to be transmitted from Śavari. The painting representing Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla is typically adorned with various gems, which is considered to be extremely auspicious.

According to the description of *Rin lhan*, the white-bodied Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla is standing on Gaṇeśa who holds a radish and a mongoose. He has six arms, a knife, gems and *damaru* in his right hand, and skullcup, trident and noose in his left hand. Clad in the tiger

skin loincloth, silk garment and elephant skin scarf, he is adorned with ornaments. His is described with a hesitant walking posture and residing on the lotus seat.<sup>108</sup> In some paintings and sculptures, he is standing upright, unlike other Mahākālas, who stands with right leg bent and left stretched.

Figure 49 is an example of Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla. Standing erect on two Gaṇeśas who each hold a mongoose and radish, this white-bodied Mahākāla is adorned with exquisite gems, tiger loincloth and silk lower garment and sashes. He carries a chopper, *ḍamaru* and flaming jewels in his right hands, and *khaṭvāṅga*, goad and vase in skullcup in his left, while the rear hands hold an elephant skin hide. Instead of Akṣobhya, he is seen with a crowning Vajrasattva. But the other figures are *ḍākiṇīs* following the textual description. The lower painting represents a charnel ground, a *stūpa* and birds and a tiger eating a dead body. This lower depiction also matches a text.

The function of Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla is clear from his name and hand attributes. In addition to the typical attributes of Mahākāla (mostly weapons), he also has a wish-granting gem. His praise goes: “Compassionate Lord of the Wish-fulfilling Gem, / White as a snowy mountain, giving out light, / Quelling all poverty of migrating beings, /

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<sup>108</sup> Brauen and Willson, 338. Nebesky, 43.

Granting all wished-for *siddhis*—homage and praise! //”<sup>109</sup> As seen, he subdues poverty; thus, he is more like a benefactor god rather than a *dharmapāla*. The gems, however, also indicate the treasures of Buddhism.

Depiction of Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla is unique found only Tibet and Mongolia. In addition to these two six-armed Mahākāla, illustrations of *Zhu fo pusa sengxiang zan* contains another type of the figure.<sup>110</sup> It is the Āyuspati Mahākāla, the God of Longevity. Similarly, in the Wangyal’s version, the Āyuspati Mahākāla appears in yub-yum form.<sup>111</sup> *Rin lhan* also describes the green-bodied six-armed Mahākāla as a master of life, but this image has not been found yet.<sup>112</sup> Although these appearances are different, they are seen as the god of Longevity as the name indicates. The function is also seen in Yunnan Mahākāla.

### 3) Gur gyi mgon po

Gur gyi mgon po is a popular deity, found throughout the Tibetan sects. The Sa skya sect specifically adored the deity and considered him as its special protector, so Gur gyi mgon po is often called Sa skya mgon po. The number of the examples surpasses other representations of Mahākāla, suggesting his extreme popularity. He is translated as a “Lord of the Tent”

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<sup>109</sup> Brauen and Willson, 338.

<sup>110</sup> Clark, 303. In this illustration, the figure’s appearance and hand attributes are the same as six-armed Mahākāla.

<sup>111</sup> Blanche Christine Olschak and Geshe Thupten Wangyal, *Mystic Art of Ancient Tibet* (New York, St. Louis and San Francisco: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1973), 168-169.

from *Gur* meaning “tent” and *mgon po*, translated as lord or protector. His ritual is explained in *Vajrapañjara*, the explanatory *tantra* of the Hevajra Tantra. There are examples of Gur gyi mgon po *maṇḍalas* that represent this figure at the center. However, the detailed discussion of this specific image will follow in the *maṇḍala* section.

Although the Gur gyi mgon po image is not prevalent in India, the figure originated in the vision of Indian monks. The Sa skya sect’s history of the *Gur gon* stated that the great translator monk, Rin chen bzang po, was ordered to bring a special guardian of the doctrine to Tibet. When he was in Bodhgaya, he followed his teacher Śraddhakaravarman’s command, and ‘he beheld the form of Mahākāla in the act of trampling upon a dwarf and holding a knife and a skullcup, one above the other, at the chest with *gaṇḍī* held centrally in his hands.’<sup>113</sup> Then Mahākāla said to the great translator, ‘Obtain the instructions (from your lama) and we shall go to Tibet together in order to protect the doctrine.’<sup>114</sup> From this account emerges the image of Mahākāla who has a *gaṇḍī* staff held in his hands horizontally. It is also evidence that the image originates from the vision of the great translator, Rin chen bzang po. Secondly, he was identified as a protector of the doctrine,

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<sup>112</sup> Brauen and Willson, 339-340. Nebesky, 44.

<sup>113</sup> David L. Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski, *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1977), II: 99.

<sup>114</sup> Snellgrove and Skorupski, II:99.

*dharmapāla*. However, there is nothing to suggest that the same image existed in India at the time the great translator visited.

Despite the fact that the Gur gyi mgon po image was brought by Rin chen bzang po, no Gur gyi mgon po image has been reported in the temple associated with the latter. The most magnificent, and possibly the oldest image of Gur gyi mgon po is a stone sculpture dated at 1292 from the inscription (Fig.50). This exquisite Mahākāla squatting on top of corpse has the typical attributes of Gur gyi mgon po, a *gaṇḍī*, skullcup and chopper. He is surrounded by four figures, Lhamo, Ekajatī, Bhūtaḍamāra and Legs ldan Nag po.

*Rin lhan* described several type of Gur gyi mgon po. Some have wings at the back, images embracing the consort, but these are not found in available examples. Still others are differentiated by their specific attendants. The most typical painting shows Gur gyi mgon po with six or more attendants (Gur mgon lha brgyad).

Figure 51 is a typical representation of Gur gyi mgon po of the Eight-deity Pañjara-Mahākāla *sādhana*, and this almost matching the textual description. In the center of the painting, a dark blue Mahākāla with one head and two arms stands on a corpse in squatting with a flame at his back. He has three eyes, yellow flaming hair, and a gaping open mouth that reveals his fangs. His crown is adorned with five skullcups, and a garland of human heads surrounds his neck. He wears a tiger skin loincloth, and a scarf with a

floral motif. He has the typical attributes of Mahākāla, a chopper and blood filled skullcup on his hands. He also has a *vajra* and holds a decorated *gaṇḍī* horizontally with both hands on his chest. This *gaṇḍī* shows his function as a protector of the monastic community and symbolizes his authority. This is because it is a tool used in a monastery, indicating a policing role. Around him are animals of which only the gold outline remains. These well-worn figures are possibly a bird, a dog and a wolf, serving as messengers of Mahākāla.

Above Mahākāla, and at the very top is the primordial Buddha Vajradhāra, flanked by Kun dga' snying po and Sa skya paṇḍita, two lamas from the Sa skya sect. These images suggest the painting was commissioned by Sa skya pa. In the middle, to Mahākāla's right, is another form of Mahākāla, called Brāhmanrūpa and to the Mahākāla's left is the fierce Lhamo, consort of Mahākāla. At the bottom are the five attendants matching the textual description.

Brauen and Willson describe the iconography as well as the visualization on the figures.<sup>115</sup>

'from Mahākāla's heart comes forward a YA and from Devī's a MAM. The YA becomes Black Yakṣa (Nag po gnod sbyin), his right hand brandishing a knife and his left with a sun shining from its open palm. He wears a flayed human skin and has golden earrings. On his left, the MAM becomes Black Yakṣī (Nag mo gnod sbyin), her right hand with a golden razor, her left with a moon shining from its open palm. She has black silk garments and a coral ornament on the end of her braid of hair.'

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<sup>115</sup> Brauen and Willson, 346.

In this painting, the Black Yakṣa is depicted below Brāhmanrūpa, identified by the human skin on his back. Black Yakṣī is at the opposite side of Black Yakṣa, below Lhamo. They become mother and father of the three figures at the bottom, during the meditation process. In turn, this process matches the procession of figures in the painting.

The visualization of Mahākāla continues:

From their hearts emanate, from the Father's two TRIS and from the Mother's one BHYAUH, which become Putra and his brother and sister (Putra min srin gsum) in front of them. From TRI, Black Putra (Putra nag-po) with one face and two arms, his right hand brandishing a long saber, his left holding a skullcup full of warm blood and brains and offering it to his mouth. He has a *mon-kris* sash (*ga-za*) and black silk garments. From TRI, Black Bhratr (Bha-tra nag-po), wearing a silk sash and a tiger-skin coat, holding in his right hand a *dam-sin* ('pledge-stick) and his left a human heart, which he is eating. From the BHYAUH, Ekajāṭa Rākṣasī (Srin mo ral gcic ma), her right hand holding a golden razor and her left entrails, with blood dripping from her eyes and fire blazing from mouth.<sup>116</sup>

In this painting, Black Putra is in the center below Gur gyi ngon po, identified by his long saber and skullcup. At the viewer's left corner of this painting is Black Bhratr. As stated above, he wears a tiger-skin loincloth and holds a human heart. At the viewer's right corner is Ekajāṭa Rākṣasi. She is identified by entrails held in her left hand.

The viewer is given to understand in this painting that from both Gur gyi ngon po in the center and Lhamo emanate Black Yakṣa and Yakṣī in the middle below Gur gyi ngon po. From them, two brothers and a sister emanate, and they are depicted at the bottom of the painting. There are

strong indications that this group of deities is placed according to the process of visualization.

Gur gyi mgon po imagery was transmitted as far as Dunhuang. The east wall of the gateway Cave no.465 represents four-armed Mahākāla on the left sidewall (Fig. 52) and Gur gyi mgon po and his attendants on the right wall (Fig. 53). This is dated around the thirteenth century, the same time of the visit of great monk Sa skya Paṇḍita to the Mongolian court after the cultural exchange of Tibet and Tangut.<sup>117</sup> The placement of Mahākāla also follows Tibetan and Nepalese convention. Mahākāla *in situ* is typically represented at temple entrances. However, there are no existing examples so far of a four-armed Mahākāla and Gur gyi mgon po shown as a set.

The left wall (Fig. 52) contains a depiction of a typical four-armed Mahākāla, with a sword and a chopper in his right hand and *triśūla* and skullcup in his left. He is surrounded by attendant figures, but some of them are unidentifiable. The figure on the right upper corner has a beak, which indicates it as the raven-faced Mahākāla. The figure on Mahākāla's left, and on the opposite side of the raven-faced Mahākāla is Gaṇeśa, as he has a long trunk. The upper register arranges the *yidam* class deities, and the register below the Mahākāla represents his attendants. The lowest register has a

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<sup>116</sup> Brauen and Willson, 346.

<sup>117</sup> Patricia Berger and Terese Tse Bartholomew, *Mongolia: the Legacy of Chinggis Khan* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 208.



meditating Buddha figure. Their relationship with Mahākāla may reveal his esoteric nature.

The right wall (Fig. 53) shows three figures. Ekajaṭi and four attendants at the top, Gur gyi mgon po at the lower left, and four armed Lhamo at the lower right. Gur gyi mgon po shows the usual iconography except the fact that he is not squatting; his left leg is stretched. All three figures are of the same size, not suggesting the major deities.

The Dunhuang right wall painting also follows the textual description cited earlier. The generators, father and mother, are Gur gyi mgon po and Lhamo at the bottom. Other five figures at top emanate from them.

As the episode of Rin chen bzang po reveals, the Gur gyi mgon po was understood as a dharmapāla figure. What is more, his attribute, the *beng*, may signify his special function. As stated earlier, the *beng* is either used as a time gong or police club. If interpreted as a time gong, this is a reminder that one interpretation of Mahākāla's name, "Great Time". If we see the *beng* as a police club, Mahākāla again becomes an authoritative figure, probably on the alert for the vow breaker among practitioners.

The same figure was transmitted to the Mongol court where Gur gyi mgon po received great popularity. In Mongolia, he was understood as a protector of the regime, and as the god of victory. According to *Yuanshi*,

Anige created an image of Mahākāla for defeat of the Southern Song. A statue of Mahākāla was placed facing towards the land of Song.<sup>118</sup> Although the type of Mahākāla was not specified in *Yuanshi*, the figure may have been Gur gyi ngon po, owing to his popularity and the greater number of paintings and sculptures found in Yuan court as well as in the Sa skya pantheon. The functions of the Mahākāla were different than in the Tibetan context. A protector of dharma was interpreted as a protector of regime. The worshippers here were basically not vow abiding Buddhist monks, but people at court who had a worldly fascination for the magic power of Tibetan Buddhism.

### **Bhadra nag po**

An attendant of Gur gyi ngon po is sometimes represented individually in the center of the painting. Representing an attendant alone is rare; there is probably a set of such paintings depicting the other attendants of the figures. Figure 54 shows Bhadra nag po, one of the attendants of Gur gyi ngon po. As the text describes, he wears a tiger skin coat, carrying a club and a human heart raised in front of the mouth. The other figures also confirm that the painting is from the Gur assembly. To his left is his sister, Ekajaṭa Rākṣasī, holding a razor in her right hand and eating entrails held in her left hand. To his right is one of the Gur's acolytes, Ekajaṭi, seated.

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<sup>118</sup> Anning Jing, "The Portraits of Khubilai Khan and Chabi by Anige (1245-1306), A Nepali Artist at the Yuan Court," *Artibus Asiae* 54 (1994), 47.

Around Bhadra nag po are the messengers of animals, dog and birds, also specified in the text.

#### **4) Raven-faced Mahākāla (Las mgon bya rog gdon can)**

The Raven-faced figure is an attendant in the examples shown (see Fig. 11 for Yunnan, 31, 34, 35, 36, 44 for Tibetan examples). However, there are some paintings that represent this type of Mahākāla in the center. As the name implies, his face has a beak, indicating he is a raven. Some raven Mahākālas also have wings. Figure 55 is an example of a raven-faced Mahākāla, attended by additional three raven-faced Mahākālas at the bottom register. The central figure has one face, two arms and a beaked face. The right hand holds a chopper and the left has a skullcup. He has a large beak and his hair stands on end. The top of the painting shows Cakrasaṃvara in the center flanked by two lamas, with two other lamas.

Other than the above figure (Figure. 55), the Raven-faced Mahākāla always appears with a four-armed Mahākāla as an attendant. The figure itself already existed in the third quarter of the eleventh century when the Lha kang soma was constructed, based on the fact that Figure 31 is depicted on the temple's wall. Nonetheless, the figure is shown as an attendant, making it doubtful whether he was seen as a type of Mahākāla. He probably started his career as an attendant of Mahākāla, and then became central deity Mahākāla in future depictions.

### **Summary of Yes shes mgon po**

Yes shes mgon po excels any other types of Mahākāla forms in number. Half of the collected Tibetan examples belong to this figure, suggesting his popularity. Six-armed and four-armed Yes shes mgon po clearly indicates Indian traditional roots. Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla, however, is local convention, based on the traditional Indian six-armed Mahākāla.

#### **5.1.2 Legs ldan**

Legs ldan is further subdivided to

- 1) Club Mahākāla,
- 2) Knife Mahākāla,
- 3) Lion-seated Mahākāla
- 4) Trakṣad Mahākāla.

Legs ldan means ‘the Excellent One’. Some of the figures in this category are characterized by Tibetan clothing, suggesting the Tibetan conventions of the deity.

##### **1) Club Mahākāla (mGon po beng)**

This Mahākāla is represented with a sandalwood club held in his right hand. This paper further divides the figure into four categories;

- a) Club Mahākāla carrying an iron bowl in his left hand,
- b) Club Mahākāla carrying a skullcup in his left hand,

- c) Club Mahākāla carrying a club by both hands,
- d) Club Mahākāla carrying a spear in his left hand
- e) Tiger-mounted Mahākāla.

*Rin lhan* describes the other two type of club Mahākāla distinguished by their left hand, the one who has a *rākṣasī*'s leg bones in the left hand. But this figures is not found in available examples.

Club Mahākāla appears in many subtle variations probably due to his depiction by various sects. This paper categorizes all the Mahākālas holding clubs regardless of the sects and identifies them according to *Rin lhan*.

However, the texts obviously do not cover the all the Club Mahākālas; the categorization of deities has variations in each sect. The identification and categorization of Leg ldan is more difficult than Yes shes mgon po, owing to the variation between the sects. The fact that the examples of paintings and sculptures are fewer than that of Yes shes mgon po is another hindrance to identification and categorization. One Mahākāla, Ma ning in the rNying ma pantheon, has a club at his waist, but the discussion of his iconography follows in the section of the miscellaneous Mahākālas.

**a. Club Mahākāla with a cloak carrying an iron bowl in his left hand (mgon po beng bka' ma)**

*Rin lhan* describes the Club Mahākāla as a one-faced, two-armed and blue-bodied deity who tramples enemies. He has a sandalwood club in his right hand, and an iron bowl filled with all

sorts of diseases in his left. He wears a cloak of silk, a golden belt and boots of shagreen. To his left is Śrīdevī Rematī, and he is further encircled by eight tribes of gods and spirits.<sup>119</sup>

Figure 56 is an example of the Club Mahākāla. The painting shows the Club Mahākāla in the center carrying a sandalwood club and an iron bowl surrounded by rNying ma featured figures. Wearing a black cloak with a gold flower motif, he carries two special attributes, a club and an iron bowl. His attendants include the other types of Mahākālas, Ma ning to his right, four-armed yub-yum Mahākāla in the left corner of the painting, and six-armed Mahākāla opposite. Further, Lhamo, Ekajaṭī, Rahula and Vaiśravaṇa surround the figure.

**b. Aṅghora [Aghora] Mahākāla with a cloak carrying a skullcup in his left (mgon po anghora)**

This figure's appearance in textual description is almost the same as the figure above except that he has a blood-filled skullcup in his left hand and his boots are made from copper. He is flanked by Lhamo, and surrounded by other lesser gods and spirits.<sup>120</sup>

One example of this Mahākāla is identified as Daṇḍa Mahākāla on a website<sup>121</sup>. However, this paper recognizes it as Aṅghora

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<sup>119</sup> Brauen and Willson, 350. Nebesky, 52.

<sup>120</sup> Brauen and Willson, 351. Nebesky, 53.

<sup>121</sup> Jeff Watt, 9-2000. "Thangka of Mahākāla (protector)- Danda (Stick)" Himalayanart, painting no.66 New York: Shelley and Donald Rubin Foundation. Available from World Wide Web: <<http://www.himalayanart.org>> (18 October 2001)

Mahākāla because the iconography follows the *sādhana* of *Rin lhan*.<sup>122</sup>

Figure 57 shows a one-faced and two-armed Mahākāla holding a club in his right hand and a skullcup in his left. He wears a black cloak and is adorned with typical ornaments. Since this figure is taken from the internet, the attendant's figure is difficult to identify from poor quality of the saved image. The entry states that the figure includes

Padmasambhava.<sup>123</sup>

**c. Legs ldan: One who has a club by both hands and wears a cloak (appear mGon po legs ldan mched gsum, Legs ldan appearing in three in *Rin lhan* and three hundred icons)**

This club Mahākāla always appears in a set of three figures in the iconographic compendia. The *Rin lhan* states the three dark blue Legs ldan have clubs of sandalwood. They wear black cloaks and high boots of shagreen. The attire is the same as the mGon-po beng bka' ma, i.e., the figure wears a cloak and high boots.<sup>124</sup>

As an attendant of four-armed Mahākāla, he appears in the Figures 36 and 58 to the Mahākāla's right. As described in texts, the figures hold a club with both his hands, wearing a cloak and boots of shagreen. The three Legs ldan is meant symbolize three figures ruling

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<sup>122</sup> This figure is from rNying ma sect, as it has the figure of the monk. Although the *Rin lhan* is based on dGe lugs pantheon, there are some overlaps between the two sects. The source of identification of this figure is not provided on the web. As the available rNying ma iconography is limited, the best identification can be Angola Mahākāla.

<sup>123</sup> Watt, <<http://www.himalayanart.org>> no.66.

over the three worlds and the demons of the three prides. This is demonstrated by his praise, “Ruling over the triple world, / to tame the gods and demons of / Three prides, to you Three Excellent / Mahākāla Brothers, homage! //”<sup>125</sup> Consequently, Legs ldan should be presented with the other two paintings.

**d. Club Mahākāla carrying a spear in his left and (mGon po lha chen dpal 'bar jo bo'i lugs)**

*Rin lhan* described the figure as a dark purple-bodied Mahākāla carrying a large club in his right hand and a spear or lance in his left. He wears a silk cloak, a gold belt and high boots of shagreen. He is surrounded by Rematī or a *dākinī*, and other *dākinīs*.<sup>126</sup> Figure 58 can be an example of this Mahākāla, although previously identified as a different image.<sup>127</sup> The black-bodied figure holds a club with dagger at the end—probably a variation of the typical club--- in his right hand, and a spear and skullcup in his left. He wears a long cloak with long sleeves. His attendants do not match the textual description; he is surrounded by male attendants such as Vaiśravaṇa and other types of Mahākālas. Nonetheless, the attributes of the figure matches the

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<sup>124</sup> Nebesky, 52. Brauen and Willson, 351. Three Wangyal's versions also represent this Mahākāla as a set of three figures. See Olschak and Wangyal, 175.

<sup>125</sup> Brauen and Willson, 351.

<sup>126</sup> Brauen and Willson, 351. Nebesky, 53.

<sup>127</sup> Gilles Béguin, *Art Esotérique de l' Himālaya: Catalogue de la Donation Lionel Fournier* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990), 133-134. The author refers to Nebesky's translation, and the figure is identified as mGon-po beng gter ma ( ?).



textual description, thus, we can safely conclude that this is a spear-carrying club Mahākāla with other attendants.

**e. Tiger-Mounted Mahākāla (mGon po stag gzhon ma)**

The appearance of the Tiger-mounted Mahākāla is the same as mGon-po beng bka' ma, except for the content of the iron bowl in his left hand. The Tiger-mounted Mahākāla has an iron bowl filled with human blood.<sup>128</sup> He is surrounded by Devi, Mon tribesmen and other *dākinīs* and *mātrikas*.<sup>129</sup>

Figure 59 shows Tiger-mounted Mahākāla in the center of the painting. He is one-faced and two-armed, wearing a cloak. He has a club with a dagger at the end in his right hand and an iron bowl in his left. The presence of the rNying ma deities attests to the fact that the painting is from the rNying ma sect, so it is possible that the club with a dagger is their variation of the sandalwood club.<sup>130</sup>

The other figure from Gyantse, *in situ*, also shows the variation of Tiger-mounted Mahākāla (Fig. 60). The Mahākāla stands on a tiger, clad in a cloak. He has two skullcups in both hands, placed in front of his chest. According to Ricca and Lo Bue, the chapel is devoted to Tiger-mounted Mahākāla attended by Six-armed Mahākāla on a tiger

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<sup>128</sup> In Wangyal's version, Taksad has a club in his right hand, and possibly a skullcup in his left. Olschak and Wangyal, 175.

<sup>129</sup> Brauen and Willson, 349. Nebesky, 53.

<sup>130</sup> In the rNying ma sect, the similar deity called rDorje Gro lod, also rides on a tiger and holds a vajra in his right hand and a phurba in his left.

and club Mahākāla with other attendants.<sup>131</sup> From their description, it is unknown that the other figures in Gyantse include the attendants described in *Rin lhan*. Other paintings show the figure as an attendant. Figure 40 shows Tiger-mounted Mahākāla as an attendant of four-armed yub-yum Mahākāla. The dark blue figure wearing a cloak is seated on a tiger, carrying a club in his right and a noose in his left hand.

The tiger-mounted Mahākāla is perceived as a great warrior figure. His praise goes, 'Hum! General of the eight tribes! Dread great hero! / Strong one with the nine dramatic sentiments! / Emanator, slayer of vicious foes, / Brother and sister and your attendants---praise! //'<sup>132</sup> His *vāhana*, the tiger, signifies his power to control the furious, undisciplined animal and further indicates his spiritual power to alleviate negative disruptive human energy.

### **Summary of Club Mahākāla**

As seen above, club Mahākālas' special features are their attire. The images always wear long cloaks with long sleeves. Elegant floral and roundel patterns are also depicted. The collars overlap in front of the chest, suggesting typical Tibetan clothing. The shoes are high boots either made of shagreen or copper. These traits suggest this figure is

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<sup>131</sup> Franco Ricca and Erberto F. Lo Bue, *The Great Stupa of Gyantse: A Complete Tibetan Pantheon of the Fifteenth Century* (London: Serindia, 1993), 239.

<sup>132</sup> Brauen and Willson, 350.

not of Indian origin, but possibly the Tibetan creation of the deity's image. His attendants also support this assumption. The textual descriptions of Club Mahākāla often refer to Mon tribes' men and eight tribes of gods. They are the native tribes of Tibet. It is probable that the archetype of Club Mahākāla is the Tibetan warrior, or native soldier type of god, who entered the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon manifesting as a Mahākāla.

Another special attribute of the figure is a club. The club is a hand-held weapon that probably signifies vengeance against the oath breaker as well as Buddhist enemies. Mahākāla's club is specified as a sandalwood club. Sandalwood was considered as sacred Indian tree, with fragrance. Therefore, the club held by Mahākāla implies his dharmapāla function.

## **2) Knife Mahākāla (mGon po gri gug)**

Knife Mahākāla is subdivided by two types;

- a) Knife Mahākāla
- b) Black cloaked Mahākāla with copper knife.

Their clothing differentiates these two. Knife Mahākāla wears only a tiger loincloth, naked in the upper body. The Black cloaked Mahākāla wears long cloak. Both have the same attributes, a chopper and a skullcup. Black cloaked Mahākāla in the rNying ma sect is different in

iconography from this Black cloaked Mahākāla. The rNying ma figures do not hold a knife, instead they have a banner. This iconography is discussed in the miscellaneous section.

**a. Knife Mahākāla (mGon po gri gug)**

*Rin lhan* describes seven different types of Knife Mahākāla, but some of his images are similar, and the differences are suggested by the specific traditions or by the variation of his attendants. It also includes the red-bodied Knife Mahākāla, but no examples have yet been found. To sum up the image of Knife Mahākāla in *Rin lhan*, he is black, the color of a cloud at the end of time, one-faced and two-armed, standing on human corpse with right leg bent. He carries a chopper in his right hand, and a blood filled skullcup in his left. He is naked except for a loincloth, the garland skullcup or various ornamentations of the typical Mahākālas'. His crown bears the image of Akṣobhya.<sup>133</sup>

Knife Mahākāla frequently appears on the wall paintings of temples in Ladakh. The most significant figure (Fig.61) is the one that is depicted on the wall of Sumtsek in Alchi. He is represented adjacent to the entrance of the temple on the second floor, which is a constant placement for Tibetan and Nepalese Mahākālas. He is standing with right leg bent on the pedestal on a triangular meteoric iron cage adorned with skullcups. His appearance follows the textual

description--he wears a tiger loincloth and ornamentation--except that an Akṣobhya image is not represented. Around his fire halo, cremation mound scenery is depicted. At the left corner of the painting is Lhamo riding on a horse. At the opposite corner is a blue-bodied woman on a horse. As the episode already stated earlier, the temple is associated with Rin chen gzam po. He bought the Gur gyi mgon po image, but the temples contain the image of Knife Mahākāla instead of Gur gyi mgon po.

The Knife Mahākāla also appears in the Dukhang over the doorway (Fig.62). The iconography and artistic style of the figure are exactly the same as the Sumtsek Mahākāla, except the placement of female figures; Lhamo is at the right corner, and a female figure is at the left corner.<sup>134</sup>

In the above examples, placement of Mahākāla in the temples suggests that he is a guardian figure. The triangular shape beneath both Mahākālas represents a jail made of meteoric iron in which the evildoer is restricted.<sup>135</sup> This image also indicates that the figure has a

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<sup>133</sup> Brauen and Willson, 352-356. Nebesky, 54-56.

<sup>134</sup> The same Mahākāla also appears in Lotsawa Lhakang. See Pal Pratapaditya, *A Buddhist Paradise: The Murals of Alchi, Western Himalayas* (Hongkong: Ravi Kumar for Visual Dharma Publications Ltd., 1982), LL. 6.

<sup>135</sup> John C. Huntington and Susan Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India* (New York: Weatherhill, 1985), 383. Also, John C. Huntington, *The Phur-pa: Tibetan Ritual Daggers* (Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1975), 5.

subdueing function against Buddhist enemies, protecting the *Dharma* as well as the temple that houses the figure.

The knife Mahākāla possibly originates in India, because his *sādhana*s reveal a lineage associated with Indian monks. However, two-armed Mahākāla has yet to be found in India. A similar image occurring earlier is the two-armed Mahākāla appearing in the *Taizo zuzo* and *Taizo kyuzuyo* (Fig. 12 and 13) from Japan. Although the Japanese figure is seated, and the attribute in the right hand is not a chopper, but a sword, the two-armed figures are comparable. This leads to the assumption that they have the same roots in India. Also, the two-armed figure somehow retained the old type found in Japan and Tibet, the now-dead Indian tradition and happened to survive in Tibet and Japan.

**b. Black cloaked Mahākāla with chopper, Ber nag zangs (mGon po ber nag zangs gri can)**

Black cloaked Mahākāla, often called Ber nag zangs, is a very important figure in the bKa' brgyud sect,<sup>136</sup> and is considered as its special protector. The attributes of the figure are the same as the knife Mahākāla, holding a chopper and a skullcup, but the figure wears a cloak. *Rin lhan* states that he is dark blue, having a knife in his right hand and skullcup full of hearts' blood in his left. He is corpulent,

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<sup>136</sup> Chogyal Namkai Norbu, 7.

dwarfish, wearing the white and green sleeveless vests, a nine-layered cloak of black silk and high boots of shagreen.<sup>137</sup> The attire is again something like Tibetan attire, the same as some figures in Club Mahākāla.

Figure 63 is an example of Black cloaked Mahākāla. The figure stands on a lotus pedestal, with his right leg bent and left leg stretched. He carries a chopper with a vajra handle in his right hand, and a skullcup in his left. He wears a long red garment with golden dragon patterns, green collars and cuffs, and a black, silky coat with a cloud motif. Except that he is barefoot, instead of wearing high boots, the figure matches the textual description.

### 3) Lion-seated Mahākāla

In Brauen and Willson's descriptions, the Mahākāla riding on a lion is listed in the Legs ldan. According to the authors, the figure is a purple, four-armed figure, carrying a sword and a trident in the right hand, and a bull banner and a noose in the left hand. He wears a scarf of fresh elephant hide and a tiger-skin loincloth while being seated on a lion.<sup>138</sup>

No artworks have yet been found to represent the Lion-seated Mahākāla as a principle figure. Some similar figures appear as an attendant of Mahākāla, as seen Figure 40 at the middle right. However they are two-armed, so they are probably different deities despite the lion seat.

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<sup>137</sup> Brauen and Willson, 356. Nebesky, 56.

#### 4) Trakṣad Mahākāla

Trakṣad is one of the principal attendants of the four-armed, six-armed, and club Mahākāla, but in *Rin lhan*, he himself is considered as a type of Mahākāla. Trakṣad includes the Ma ning, Yak-faced and Dog-faced Trakṣad Mahākālas.

##### a. Trakṣad Mahākāla

Trakṣad Mahākāla always wears a cloak, either riding a horse or on foot. The hand attributes vary according to the type of Trakṣad. One sādhana in *Rin lhan* describes a four-armed Trakṣad who has two faces, including a dog's face,<sup>139</sup> and the same figure is seen in the Beijing painting of the Tibetan pantheon (fig 64). However, this figure rarely appears in the paintings.

The Trakṣad appearing most frequently as Mahākāla's attendant is the two armed, one-faced Trakṣad, carrying a trident with a human head and a flag in his right hand, and heart, lungs and noose in his left hand. In the description of *Rin lhan*, this figure corresponds to the Dakpo tradition Trakṣad,<sup>140</sup> Ma ning,<sup>141</sup> and the Trakṣad attended by Knife Mahākāla.<sup>142</sup> While the Trakṣad images themselves are fairly similar, their differences are based on the attendants they have. Since the Trakṣad appears as an attendant figure in the

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<sup>138</sup> Brauen and Willson, 357. For similar iconography, see Clark, 299. Olschak and Wagyal, 175.

<sup>139</sup> Nebesky, 57. Brauen and Willson, 357-359 Lha chen mgon-po lcam-dral trakṣad gnos-lugs.

<sup>140</sup> Brauen and Willson, 359. Nebesky, 58.



paintings, and is not attended by other figures, this paper does not differentiate between the Trakṣads. It is to be noted that the Mahākāla of the same name, Ma ning, appears in the rNying ma sect. As the iconography is distinctive to the sect, this paper discusses it in the miscellaneous section.

In one example of Trakṣad, the figure is represented as an attendant of the six-armed Mahākāla in Figure 45 and Figure 46. In Figure 45, a handsome Trakṣad is depicted in the upper right corner of the painting. Riding on a blue horse, he carries a banner in his right hand, and a skullcup in his left. He wears a green patterned upper garment with a red cloak, long boots, and various accessories. In Figure 46 Trakṣad appears at the right bottom corner of the painting. As stated in the section on the Six-armed Mahākāla, he is supposed to be seen at the back of that figure, so the placement differs in the two dimensional painting. The figure is again riding a horse, carrying a banner in the right hand and what is probably a skullcup in the left hand.

*Rin lhan* stated that two-armed Trakṣads have a trident with a human head and flag in the right hand, and a heart, lung and noose in the left hand. On the other hand, Geshe Thupten Wangyal's

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<sup>141</sup> Brauen and Willson, 361. Nebesky, 59.

<sup>142</sup> Brauen and Willson, 360. Nebesky, 59.

illustration represents a figure carrying a banner and a skullcup.<sup>143</sup>

The examples shown earlier are similar to the Wangyal's iconography.

#### **b. Yak-faced Trakṣad Mahākāla and Dog-faced Trakṣad Mahākāla**

Yak-faced Trakṣad Mahākāla and Dog faced Trakṣad Mahākāla probably originate from the animal-faced *dākinīs*, as these figures appear with other Mahākālas as attendants. It is, however, difficult to specify the animal in the paintings. So the other attributes and attendants are the elements with which to identify these figures.

*Rin lhan* described Yak-faced Mahākāla as a black figure with a yak-face, holding a club in his right hand and knife in his left. He wears a cloak and high boots on his feet, while riding on a horse.<sup>144</sup> The Dog-faced Mahākāla is described as a dark red figure with a dogface. The figure has a trident *khaṭvāṅga* in his right hand and the lung and heart of the enemy in his left. He wears a tiger skin loincloth and a human skin scarf.<sup>145</sup> These animal-faced figures frequently appear as attendants of the four-armed Yes shes mgon po (see Figures 31, 34 and 35 for examples). The four-armed Mahākāla can be seen as the king of Yakṣas, as he is almost always flanked by these animal attendants representing the Yakṣa-like aspect.

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<sup>143</sup> Olschak and Wangyal, 169.

<sup>144</sup> Brauen and Willson, 361. Nebesky, 60. Nebesky states the figure mounts on black mule.

<sup>145</sup> Brauen and Willson, 361-362. Nebesky, 60.

### Summary of Legs ldan

The process of categorizing and describing all the Legs ldan figures made it clear that the Mahākālas in this category have more variety and subtle differences relating to the sects. One particular figure is evidence that the figures in Legs ldan are object of meditation, appearing in rituals. Figure 65 is one of the paintings from the series of Incarnation of Paṇ chen bla ma. It shows the face of a Mahākāla appearing probably during a ritual. The monk seated on a tiger skin in the middle of the painting holds a dagger in his right hand and a skullcup with hair and blood inside. He evokes Mahākāla, whose face appears in front of him. Below Mahākāla's face, a small knife Mahākāla Ber nag zangs emerges. To his left is a club Mahākāla carrying a club and an iron bowl. These are the figures appearing during the Mahākāla rituals.<sup>146</sup>

#### **5.1.3 Four-faced Mahākāla (dPal mgon zhal bzhi pa)**

The rest of *Rin lhan* describes four-faced Mahākālas and Piśāca. Four-faced Mahākālas are differentiated by their combination of face colors and hand attributes. There are several examples of the four-faced Mahākāla, but some of the figures are available only in black and white. The absence of face

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<sup>146</sup> According to Pal, the figure represents a great monk, Gyung-ston rdo-rje dpal. He was believed to have the power to control Legs ldan. Pratapaditya Pal, *Art of the Himalayas: Treasures from Nepal and Tibet* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1991), 174. For discussion on the series of Incarnation of Paṇ chen bla ma Lama, see Tucci, 429.

colors makes it difficult to identify the figures. The four-faced Mahākāla is represented either in the center or as an attendant figure in the painting.

Figure 66 shows the four-faced Mahākāla in the center, standing on a corpse. His face colors are as follows; blue in the center, white to the right, red to the left, and smoke color at the top. He carries a chopper and a skullcup in the first hands, a sword in the second right, and a trident in his second left, while he holds a flask and rosary under his left arm. This image matches the dPal mgon zal bzhi pa sgrub dus dung 'brel ba, four-faced Mahākāla connected with “the period of accomplishment”. According to Brauen and Willson, he appears in the second succession of visualization.<sup>147</sup> However, there are no available examples of the first and the third Mahākāla appearing in the visualization.

There are some paintings in which the above type of the Mahākāla appears. As a minor figure in a painting, he is represented in the life of Paṇ chen bla ma series (the painting shows Sa skya Paṇḍita as he was Paṇ chen bla ma's former life). In Figures 67 and 68, two types of Mahākālas are shown in the corner of the paintings. The Figure 67 from Newark Museum shows the four-faced Mahākāla with a blue central face, white to the right, red to the left and smoke-colored upper faces. The combination of the face colors as well as the hand attributes follows the four-armed Mahākāla discussed above. On the other hand, the Mahākāla in the painting from Los Angeles

(Figure 68) has the same combination as the Newark Mahākāla, except that the right face is yellow. These two paintings are probably based on wood blocks stored in Narthang or on similar examples stored elsewhere.<sup>148</sup> They reveal the same format and drawings, but some subtle differences in color and style.

### **Piśāca(Jackal-faced Mahākāla)**

As in the case of the Yak-faced and Dog-faced Mahākālas, it is hard to differentiate the face of the animals in the paintings. Piśāca is a dark red figure with a jackal face. His right hand holds a knife and his left carries a skullcup full of blood. He wears a tiger-skin loincloth and a sash of entrails.<sup>149</sup> One of the figures surrounding the four-armed Mahākāla is probably Piśāca, or archetype of Piśāca. (For example, see Figure 35<sup>150</sup>)

### **5.1.4 Miscellaneous**

#### **Ma ning nag po (rNing ma sect)**

Ma ning nag po, or Enunch in the rNying ma sect, is iconographically different from the Ma ning in the Club Mahākāla section stated earlier. An illustration of the rNying ma pantheon shows a Mahākāla standing on

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<sup>147</sup> Brauen and Willson, 363. Nebesky only described the appearance of the figure. Nebesky, 61.

<sup>148</sup> See for more detail discussion in David Jackson 234-246. Tucci, Tibetan Painted Scrolls, 431.

<sup>149</sup> Brauen and Willson, 365. Nebesky, 63.

<sup>150</sup> The painting contains inscriptions probably indicating each names of the deity. But the detailed figures were not available when this paper was written.

corpses with right leg bent.<sup>151</sup> He wears a cloak and shoes, resting a club on his waist. He carries a staff in his right hand and a human heart with a noose in his left hand.

There are also some paintings representing the same figure. Figure 69 is exactly the same figure as the rNying ma illustration. He is surrounded by typical rNying ma deities including Vaiśravaṇa, who is under him. This placement of Vaiśravaṇa is probably a typical convention of this deity, as other examples also shows the same arrangement. This figure is identified as a generic Mahākāla in an earlier publication.<sup>152</sup> However, the iconography and presence of the other figures obviously reveal the figure as rNying ma Ma ning.

Figure 70 was identified as black-robed Mahākāla in recent catalogue,<sup>153</sup> but this is also specified as rNying ma Ma ning. The figure in the center is short and chubby, wearing a gorgeous cloak. He carries a banner in his right hand, while he holds a heart and noose in his left hand. Below the figure is Vaiśravaṇa, the same arrangement as in Figure 69. This painting is also from the rNying ma sect, as it includes Pehar and Rahula. Therefore, it can be identified as rNying ma Ma ning. He also appears as an attendant (Fig. 56).

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<sup>151</sup> Khempo sangey Tenzin and Gomchen Oleshey, 86.

<sup>152</sup> Pratapaditya Pal, *Tibetan paintings: a study of Tibetan thankas: Eleventh to Nineteenth Centuries* (Basel: Basilius Presse, 1984), 160.

<sup>153</sup> Rhie and Thurman, *Worlds of Transformation: Tibetan art of Wisdom and Compassion*, 273-277.

### **Siṃhamukha Kṣetrapāla Mahākāla**

Lion-faced Mahākāla is described only in Nebesky's volume. According to the author, the figure is black, ferocious and lion-faced. He has a lance in his right hand and a skullcup with *gtorma* in his left. He wears a black silk cloak, while riding on a horse.<sup>154</sup> Figure 71 shows a Lion-faced Mahākāla attended by his consort to his left. His appearances match the description of the Lion-faced Mahākāla by Nebesky. In addition, the monkey-figures below are known as Dudtri and Putri, messenger and daughter of the Lion-faced Kṣetrapāla Mahākāla. They are holding a skullcup containing a *gtorma*<sup>155</sup> for Lion-faced Mahākāla. The figure also appears as an attendant of the four-armed Mahākāla. For example, Figures 34 and 35 contains the figure surrounding Mahākāla in the center. Some figures in the paintings are white-faced with manes.<sup>156</sup>

### **Brāhmanrūpa (not occur in Narthang, but in other iconographical compendia)**

Brāhmanrūpa literally means 'Brāhman form' in Sanskrit, he appears as a human figure, particularly, in the form of an Indian Brāhman viewed from a Tibetan perspective. In Tibetan, he is called Gon po dram ze or Bram

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<sup>154</sup> Nebesky, 65.

<sup>155</sup> Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs* (Boston: Shambhala, 1999), 267.

<sup>156</sup> Also, lion-faced Mahākāla appears in figure 31 at bottom left corner and fig. 36 below Mahākāla. The body of Siṃhamukha in Figure 36 is black.

ze gzugs nag po chen po; both names are translated as the Great black one in the form of a Brāhman. He often appears in the painting of Gur gyi mgon po as an attendant figure.<sup>157</sup>

Figure 72 is from the Los Angeles collection. The Brāhmanrūpa sits at ease with a chopper in his right hand and a skullcup in his left. He is fearful, with his eyes and mouth open, showing his fangs. Wearing a loincloth and a shawl on the shoulder, he is adorned with six bone ornaments, bracelets, armlets, anklets, belts and earrings inlaid with turquoise, as well as a garland of freshly severed human heads. His matted hair is tied in a topknot pinned with a thighbone and adorned with a skullcup crown. His moustache is long, reaching to his breast.

When he appears in *brāhman* form, there are variations in Mahākāla's attributes. Typically, he is depicted with a thighbone trumpet in his hand. When he does not hold the trumpet, he often uses it to secure his topknot. This trumpet is used for rituals in Tibet, and it is believed that the sound pleases the wrathful deities. Also it is a characteristic attribute of yogins and yoginis associated with the cremation ground. The thighbone in the hair of the Los Angeles Brāhmanrūpa indicates his identification as a *brāhman* ascetic.

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<sup>157</sup> Pal confused Brāhmanrūpa with Putra Nag-po, as one manifestation of Brāhmanrūpa with sword resembles Putra Nag-po, a Gur gyi mgon po's acolyte. However, they are different figures. See Pratapaditya Pal, Pratapaditya Pal, *Art of the Himalayas: Treasures from Nepal and Tibet* (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1991), 160.



Although this Brāhmanrūpa was identified as Gur kyang rNgog lugs in previous publications,<sup>158</sup> this reflects a misunderstanding of his iconography. According to an iconographic description provided by Nebesky, the Mahākāla named Gur kyang rNgog is represented as having a human body of dark-blue color.<sup>159</sup> The description, having a human body, was possibly the source of identification, but there is no mention of a Brāhman form. In addition, illustrations of Buddhist deities do not represent Gur kyang rNgog having a Brāhman body.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, the Los Angeles Brāhmanrūpa is distinct from Gur kyang rNgog lugs.

Brāhmanrūpa does not appear in the Five hundred deities of Narthang or Rin 'lhan,<sup>161</sup> but he is represented in Wangyal's version and *Mongolian Pantheon* by Lokesh Chandra, named as mGon po bram ze'i gzugs can, translated as Mahākāla in the form of Brāhman.<sup>162</sup> In the Wangyal's version, he is seated on a corpse, holding a banner in his left hand and a *triśūla* in his right. His appearance and body type are different from other Mahākāla figures, as he takes the form of an Indian Brāhman. In *Zhu fo pusa sengxiang zan*, he is also named Brāhmanrūpa and has a special attribute, the

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<sup>158</sup> See in Pratapaditya Pal. *Art of Tibet*, (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1983), 213. Also, in *Dieux et démons de l'Himālaya: Art du Bouddhisme lamaïque*, (Paris: Editions des musées nationaux, 1977), 183.

<sup>159</sup> Nebesky, 52.

<sup>160</sup> See illustrations in Brauen and Willson, 150. Tachikawa, 404.

<sup>161</sup> Brauen and Willson. and Nebesky.

<sup>162</sup> See Olschak and Wangyal, 171. Lokesh Chandra. *Buddhist Iconography: newly revised and enlarged ed.* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1987), 2:765.

thighbone trumpet in his right hand.<sup>163</sup> Although the attributes of Brāhmanrūpa in the iconography compendia and the Los Angeles figure are different, the Los Angeles figure can still be identified as Brāhmanrūpa, based on the appearance in Brāhman form.

There are several episodes regarding the origin of Brāhmanrūpa. In one account, the origin of Brāhmanrūpa is associated with the great lama 'Phags pa (1235-1280). It is said that when 'Phags pa went to the Mongol court to see Kubilai Khan, Mahākāla in the form of a Brāhman appeared in front of him and helped to convert the emperor by answering questions on the Hevajra tantra.<sup>164</sup> Some *thangkas* representing Brāhmanrūpa also show the lamas of the Sa skya sect, attesting to Brāhmanrūpa's popularity with the Sa skya pa.

It was common for a deity to enter the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon with the vision of a high-ranking monk. Brāhmanrūpa originated in such a vision and is thus a product of the Tibetan religious sphere. As he became popular in Tibet, the iconography of Mahākāla expanded.

As the episode of 'Phags pa indicates, this form of Mahākāla is popular in the Sa skya sect. Tsarpa, a branch of Sa skya pa, venerated this deity as a protector, along with Lhamo and Begtse.<sup>165</sup> Associated with the teacher of the

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<sup>163</sup> Clark, 2:301.

<sup>164</sup> Getty, 161.

<sup>165</sup> Amy Heller, *Tibetan art* (Millan: Jaca book, 1999), 197.

third Dalai Lama from Tsharpa, Brāhmanrūpa also became popular with the dGe lugs pa sect.<sup>166</sup>

#### 5.1.5 Unique visual forms, not part of textual tradition

One Mahākāla shows an iconographical blend between Tibetan and Nepalese Mahākāla. Figure 73 is a Newar painting of Mahākāla in the center attended by Ekajaṭī and Lhamo at his left. The presence of Lhamo and Ekajaṭī is very important here, because they are very common attendants in Tibetan Mahākāla paintings, and this assemblage is not found among Indian figures.<sup>167</sup> In this case, however, the central Mahākāla is more like the Nepalese two-armed, erect Mahākāla than the Tibetan squatting Mahākāla, so we conclude the painting shows the combined iconography of the Nepalese Mahākāla with general Mahākāla retinues common in Tibetan paintings. This painting is dated 1543, produced after Nepalese artists played an important role in Tibetan art production. Accordingly, the styles as well as the iconography of two traditions are merged. The painting reveals an example of this mixture in the iconography of Mahākāla.

Next, the mixture of Gur gyi mgon po and black-cloaked Mahākāla is seen in the center of Figure 74. The Mahākāla in the center is surrounded by

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<sup>166</sup> Heller, 197.

<sup>167</sup> Pal identified the figure as Nepalese Mahākāla. However, it is not purely Nepalese because this painting contains Tibetan elements too. See Pratpaditya Pal, *The Arts of Nepal II paintings* (Leiden/Koln: E. J. Brill, 1978), 84.

Lhamo below, Jambala above, and human figures mounted on horses. The female figure at the bottom left corner has some affinity to the female figure seen in Sumtsek and Du khang (Figure 61 and 62). The Mahākāla's attributes, a skullcup, chopper, and a club held horizontally represent the same features as Gur gyi ngon po, while his attire, long cloak with sleeves, resembles the costume worn by some Legs ldan Mahākālas. The peculiar iconography as well as the artistic style suggests that the figure was derived much earlier than others and from a remote area.<sup>168</sup>

#### 5.1.6 Maṇḍala of Mahākāla

Mahākāla is also represented in the center of a Maṇḍala. The Maṇḍalas of Ngor monastery shows several *maṇḍalas* containing the figure in the center. The Mahākāla *maṇḍalas* illustrate the weapon symbolism relating to his function as a dharmapāla and a subduer. The first *maṇḍala* (Figure 75) shows a knife Mahākāla with a spear surrounded by a white Kayamahākāla, yellow Guṇamahākāla, Yellow Vagmahākāla, and green Karmamahākāla.<sup>169</sup> Mahākāla is in the center of a triangular formation

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<sup>168</sup> There are two rNying ma figures that this paper does not identify as Mahākāla, as the text describing the figures are not found. One is yub-yum winged Mahākāla, and the other is winged four-faced Mahākāla. See yub yum Mahakla in Rhie and Thurman, *Worlds of transformation: Tibetan Art of Wisdom and Compassion*, 269-273. Gerd-Wolfgang Essen and Tsering Tashi Thingo, *Die Götter des Himalaya: Buddhistische Kunst des Tibets* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1989), 2: 179-180. In these catalogues, both are identified as Mahākāla.

<sup>169</sup> According to the author, they symbolize the wisdom of five Buddhas. Bsod-nams-rgya-mtsho, et al., *Tibetan mandalas: the Ngor Collection* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), 1: 270.

signifying a jail in which an evildoer is restricted.<sup>170</sup> So, the figure is placed to constrain or seal the enemies of Buddhism. The four attendants are each at the four points of a cakra or a throwing star. The cakra is an ancient motif representing a physically powerful weapon. The throwing star is also a well-known weapon used in Chinese Kung-fu. The *maṇḍala* is full of threatening motifs, such as a jail, cakra, chopper and skullcup, suggesting Mahākāla's menacing aspect. The structure is enclosed by a circle made of skullcups, which is placed in the larger triangular form. This, in turn, is placed in a wall with four gates, further encircled by two bands.

Figure 76 shows the Gur gyi mgon po in the center surrounded by six attendants including Ekajaṭā, Ekajaṭārākṣasī, Putra and Bhadra at the points of the throwing star. They are a group of the figures emerging as acolytes of the Eight-deity Pañjara Mahākāla stated earlier. The overall format is the same as Figure 75. The only difference is the number of points for the throwing star. Figure 77 also represents the Gur gyi mgon po in the center of six-pointed throwing star. The difference lies in the presence of the animal-faced *ḍākinī* guardian figures at the four gates.

Figure 78 shows the Knife Mahākāla at the center of the doubled triangle forms. These triangles are three-dimensional cages which are stacked, suggesting a double jail. Double triangles also imply the affinity to a

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<sup>170</sup> The author proposed that this triangular formation is a dharmakara placed on a center of a four-bladed cakra, symbolizing natural-state wisdom. Ibid.

*yantra*. Like other *maṇḍalas*, the attendant figures are at the eight points of the throwing star.

There are other *maṇḍalas* containing the four-armed Yes shes mgon po. The Mahākāla in the center is surrounded by other Mahākālas and animal-faced figures.<sup>171</sup> The combination of the four-armed Yes shes mgon po and the animal-faced attendants is also exemplified in the paintings stated earlier. The arrangement suggests he is a king of Yakṣa or Yakṣī figures. Thus, the figures appearing in these *maṇḍalas* are almost the same as the painting discussed above. As the process of visualization is represented in the painting of Gur mgon lha brgyad, the *maṇḍalas* are the different format, but based on the same process.

The motifs show that Mahākālas in *maṇḍalas* have the function of overcoming enemies and hindrances to enlightenment of Buddhists. He has a subduing function, i.e., holding the negative spirits in jail. The symbolism of weapons also shows his ferocious nature when confronted with evils.

## **5.2 Concluding remarks**

Although previous studies on Mahākāla tend to focus on features specific to the Tibetan area, his iconography and functions are wide-ranging, including traditional figures that originated in India.

As stated earlier, there are many variations in the representation and iconography of Tibetan Mahākālas. One of the Tibetan examples, such as

four-armed Yes shes mgon po has its roots in India, suggesting fidelity to the Indian tradition. However, there are some local variations based on iconography. The black cloak and high boots worn by some Mahākālas are obviously a Tibetan convention. The yak, an animal found only in Tibet, appears in the previously discussed image, Yak-faced Mahākāla. Similarly, the Mon tribes who are inhabitants of the region appear as some Tibetan Mahākāla paintings as attendants. This suggests that both are local conventions added in Tibet. The wide variation seen among the Tibetan Mahākālas is by far the most in any region.

The variety of Mahākāla representations is a reflection of his many functions. Basically, he is understood as a *dharmapāla* regardless of the sects or date. His wrathful forms are understood as anger towards the enemy of Buddhism both outside of the Tibetan Buddhist circle as well as inside: Buddhist monks' own spiritual demons.

First, as the episode of Rin chen bzang po indicates, Mahākāla was originally brought from India as a special guardian of Tibetan Buddhism, probably to protect from the outer force. His attributes which are weapons--- the chopper and the knife--- evidence his wrathful nature. With these, he can “chop up” the enemies of Buddhism. These elements above all indicate that Mahākāla is a guardian of Buddhism who would attack any assailant of the religion.

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<sup>171</sup> See examples in Bsod-nams-rgya-mtsho, et al., I:302-305.

Second, the triangular jail, represented in the knife Mahākāla and Mahākāla *maṇḍalas*, suggest a jail to restrict the evildoer. The club of the Gur gyi ngon po also reveals a police-like function, to watch and to alarm the oath breaking practitioners. These functions are threatening to the monks who violate their oath. Mahākāla's surveillance function is also suggested by Gur in the name of the Gur gyi ngon po. Gur indicates the cage, symbolically, a physical human body. Tucci's nuanced interpretation of Gur gyi ngon po's function as "the God who helps in destroying the *corporal cage* in which ignorance keeps us prisoners"<sup>172</sup> indicates that Mahākāla may be esoterically understood as a figure for supporting the path towards enlightenment. This function is also indicated by his attributes, as the Buddhist enemies are "chopped up" by his chopper and skullcup. Buddhist enemy also signifies negative hindrances that the practitioner must conquer. These are meditational processes, suggesting Mahākāla is a catalyst for practitioners to overcome obstacles to enlightenment. This function is implicit in the visual representation of Mahākāla.

Mahākāla is also seen as a benefactor. The most explicit example is Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla, a wish-granting deity. The wish-fulfilling gems he holds also symbolize the treasures of Buddhism. He is understood as such by monks who hope for revelation to the all-sentient beings. Nonetheless, his

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<sup>172</sup> Giuseppe Tucci, *Gyantse and its Monasteries: English version of Indo-Tibetica* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan: 1989), 125.



popularity in Mongolia probably owes to his function as a benefactor deity. The episodes of Mongolia Mahākāla statues also suggest that he is the deity who meets the people's worldly needs. For this reason, he was popular owing to his magical aspect. Understandings of his roles as benefactor and protector vary according to the level of the worshippers. The figure, therefore, can be understood in many ways.

Many Tibetan paintings described earlier feature the maṇḍalic arrangement of the deities. For example, as stated that section, a Gur gyi mgon po painting shows the process of the deities' visualization (see example Figure 51). His attendants emanate from the Mahākāla in the center. A painting of the six-armed Mahākāla also shows the integrated display of deities (see example Figure 46). The six-armed Mahākāla is conceived in the center, surrounded three dimensionally by his acolytes. The attendants include the *dikpālas* who frequently appear outermost in a *maṇḍala* as guardians. Some of the attendants are animal-faced, assuming similar weaponry attributes of the Mahākāla. Also, animals are dispatched from the figure as messengers, suggesting they serve Mahākāla. This layout indicates that the Mahākāla is a king of Yakṣas. Finally, he is almost always depicted with the cremation mound, where Mahākāla is believed to dwell.<sup>173</sup> This is already described in the Chinese text, *Daikoku tenjinho*.

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<sup>173</sup> He also has some relation to the medicine, as one of his attributes, a fruit indicates. As stated, Chinese text described that he has an elixir to cure diseases. But it is not proved in this paper.

## CHAPTER 6

### VISUALIZATION AND PRACTICE OF MAHĀKĀLA



#### 6.1 Visualization and Practice of Mahākāla

Although Mahākāla served primarily as a protector or benefactor for lay devotees, he embodies an esoteric nature that is visualized and meditated upon by initiated Tantric practitioners. This little-known aspect of Mahākāla, found in Tibetan manuscripts and *Mahākālatantra*, is practiced even today in Nepal and Tibet.

Fundamental to the Tantric practice is the generation of a deity and transmutation of the practitioners with the deity during the visualizing meditation. The texts on Mahākāla belong to the highest yoga, or Anuttarayoga class tantras. They explain two stages of visualization in the ritual process. The first stage, understood as the generation stage, stresses

the male principle or *upāya*. The second stage, the completion stage, stresses the female aspect, *prajñā*. The core symbolism of the two ritual processes indicates male and female unification, leading to the state of complete enlightenment, culminates in yogic meditation.

The generation stage of Mahākāla ritual always begins with cultivating Vajravārāhi.<sup>174</sup> A practitioner first unites with the goddess “to be generated as the self”.<sup>175</sup> This identity transfer suggests two aspects of Mahakala. First, as Vajravārāhi is Cakrasaṃvara’s consort, the Mahākāla is metaphorically equated with Cakrasaṃvara. People who know the symbolism of esoteric deities alone have this awareness, because it is something even the texts do not describe. Second, he is understood as the *yidam* class deity. As Vajravārāhi is *yidam* of both a practitioner and Mahākāla, once the transsignification of the deities through the practitioner’s body is complete, Mahākāla is the same as *yidam* Cakrasaṃvara. Thus, in this process, Mahākāla can be *yidam*, symbolizing transsignification between the Vajravārāhi and himself.<sup>176</sup>

The practice of completion stage is achieved through yogic meditation in which the practitioner controls his/her own breath and energy or wind, and experience the wind going up and down through cakras along major three

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<sup>174</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 229.

<sup>175</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 229.

<sup>176</sup> Ritual or meditation process beginning with Vajravārāhi suggest the Mahākāla can be identical to Cakrasaṃvara. See Dina Bangdel, *Manifesting the Mandala: a Study of the Core*

nadis. When the cakras are awakened and the practitioner experiences the highest state of bliss, identity transfer is complete.

This highly esoteric practice relating to Mahākāla is explained in Tibetan texts, *sgrub chen karma paksha'i man ngag yi ge med pa'i snyan brgyud ma gnon zhal sbyor sgrub pa'i man ngag zin bris ngag khrid yod 'di la bskyed* in detail. In the process, a practitioner begins by inhaling the wind (Rlung) as OM, retaining it as AH, and exhaling as HUM. S/he, then blows the stomach empty, indicating the stage of purifications. S/he then realizes the mother goddess merging into a blue bamboo arrow in sexual union, as is standard in the Anuttarayoga tantra. The blue body color here is significant because it also suggests the color of Cakrasaṃvara, and thereby the secret identity transfer of Mahākāla. The process is described as:

“the merging with the self to the size of a blue bamboo arrow as the central inner channel in the middle of one's own body reaches the top of the cranium which has the sign of the universal vajra and downward to the root of the genitalia. Yet, one should cultivate: there is small space between the Goddess and the genitalia; and this is the essence of maintaining the vow.”<sup>177</sup>

There are three nadis in the body of practitioner. Through two of the three, the right red *nadi* and the left white *nadi*, the semen and blood go up and down until they are unified in the middle *nadi*. The text describes five cakra, containing the five negative elements, corresponding to particular colors and mantra syllables. They are: confusion at head cakra (OM), lust at

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*Iconographic Program of Newar Buddhist Monasteries in Nepal*. (Ph.D. diss., the Ohio State University, 1999).

<sup>177</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 33.

neck cakra (HRIH), hatred at heart cakra(HUM), pride at navel cakra (TRAM) and envy at genitalia(HAM). These five poisons are then unified with the five knowledges through the sacred knowledge rays. In the visualization, syllables then melt. When the practitioner inhales again, the new breath melts into the five syllables. He then holds the breath to burn down seed syllables equated to the five defilements. These five poisons are related to Mahākāla's specific form.

- 1 Head Cakra: white Mahākāla with his consort symbolizing the body  
and white dakinis,
- 2 Neck Cakra: red Mahākāla and consort symbolizing speech and red  
dakinis,
- 3 Heart Cakra: dark blue Mahākāla with his consort symbolizing  
mind and the dark blue goddess
- 4 Navel Cakra: yellow Mahākāla with his consort symbolizing quality  
and yellow dakinis
- 5 Genitalia Cakra: green Mahākāla with his consort symbolizing  
miraculous deeds and dakinis.<sup>178</sup>

In the completion stage, this process purifies the body by annihilating the negative elements in the practice. Mahākāla with his consort are placed in each cakra, assuming the same color of the cakra. Here he is figure relating to purification and subjugation of hindrances to the Buddhist path.

This suggests that the five Mahākālas are prajñā as well as the five negative elements purified in the process. The context in which Mahākāla appears is absolutely esoteric known only to the esoteric practitioners.

*Mahākālatantra* alludes to a similar process of using the practitioner's body in the dialogue between Bhagavan and a goddess. The practice requiring generation and completion stages are implied in Bhagavan's speech, "Creation is maintained relative to dissolution. Such a path, i.e., the yoga of creation and completion, has the potential to be harmoniously performed which provides its fruits like those of females".<sup>179</sup>

Further, *Mahākālatantra* implies the completion stage, the process of the unification of semen and blood in the nadi. Bhagavan states, "The body is said to be the *vajra*. It is said to be the confluence of paths which is from uniting with man; it is within the nature of *māyā* being and discriminately sports with the left, right, and central channels path (emerges) as a Vajra that is purified by mantra".<sup>180</sup> The *vajra* body is acquired by practice using nadi and *cakra* in the *yogin's* body, the same exact process as in the completion stage as cited earlier.

In *Mahākālatantra*, Mahākāla is defined as "he whose body possesses great time is known as Mahākāla."<sup>181</sup> Thus, Bhagavan himself said, "I am

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<sup>178</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 33-34.

<sup>179</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 179.

<sup>180</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 181.

<sup>181</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 177.

Mahākāla.”<sup>182</sup> In addition, Mahākāla is described as a being in whom “Method and insight are said to be bound together (with time) in great compassion.”<sup>183</sup> These explanations are based on the syllables of Mahākāla: MA for compassion, HA for incorporating insight, and *Kāla* meaning time.

Other Tibetan manuscripts also reveal that Mahākāla is not only the protector, but also identified with other *Yidam* class deities.<sup>184</sup> According to the text, “when desiring separately the hierophant, tutelary deity and dharma protector they are realized separately. Yet, their separate realization from such an appearance does not exist. The hierophant is the tutelary divinity and the dharma protector; tutelary divinity is the hierophant and the dharmaprotector; the dharma protector is the hierophant and the tutelary divinity.”<sup>185</sup> Thus, *yidam* and Mahākāla as dharmapāla are identical.

This identification with other deities is probably clear in modern rituals. Stablein states that his informant, a *Vajrācārya* said that there is no difference between Vajramahākāla and Cakrasaṃvara.<sup>186</sup> This association is already suggested in Mahākāla’s crown, Akṣobhya in some Mahākāla figures from Nepal and Tibet(already shown). As Cakrasaṃvara is a manifestation of Akṣobhya, Akṣobhya’s crown on Mahākāla’s head indicates his *kula* and the

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<sup>182</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 177.

<sup>183</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 184.

<sup>184</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 216. The text is entitled, *rje btsun dpal ldan nag po chen po i mngon rtogs don kun sgrun byed log ‘dren tshar gcod sdang ba rnam bsreg gi phrin las gsal bar byas pa mi nub bstan pa’ i rgyal mtshan zhes bya ba bzhugs so*

<sup>185</sup> Stablein, *Mahākālatantra*, 216.

<sup>186</sup> Stablein, *Healing Image: Great Black One*, 103.

relation to Cakrasaṃvara. Thus, Mahākāla can be a manifestation of Aksobhya, and further, Cakrasaṃvara.

Lastly, oral teaching also states that Mahākāla is a *saṃbhogakāya* manifestation.<sup>187</sup> Although he is understood as a *dharmapāla*, Mahākāla is not just a guardian, but a “beyond worldly guardian”.<sup>188</sup> The deity’s technical and esoteric aspects are covertly expressed, and thus, only understood by the practitioners.

In summary, Mahākāla’s rituals, and the texts discussed here, reveal that Mahākāla is a fully esoteric figure. Specifically, he is secretly identified as Cakrasaṃvara by implication. Further, he is also identified as a *yidam* class deity only for the esoteric practitioners.

## 6.2 Offerings to Mahākāla (Tibet and Nepal)

### 1) *rgyan tshogs*

The wall painting on the temple dedicated to dharmapāla, gonkhang, often shows wrathful deities with animals and the various severed parts of a human body. Another painting, similar to the wall painting, is offered to Mahākāla for special ceremonies, known as *rgyan tshogs*. The painting does not typically show Mahākāla himself, but attributes symbolize the figure’s presence. The attributes generally represent six-armed Mahākāla, (some are

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<sup>187</sup> Chogal, 7.

<sup>188</sup> Chogal, 7.



Brāhmanrūpas with thighbone trumpet and sword<sup>189</sup> indicated by a chopper, skullcup, sword, *khaṭvāṅga*, rosary and other types of typical Mahākāla attributes.

Figure 79 shows an example of the painting. Mahākāla is again symbolized by his attributes, sword, banner, chopper and skullcup, as well as his garment and accessories such as an elephant skin, human-head garland and skullcup crown. To his left is what is probably Brāhmanrūpa, signified by a thighbone trumpet and sword. Below, *gtorma* is offered to Mahākāla. Around the figure are auspicious symbols including jewels, the seven treasures of the monarch and eight other auspicious symbols. The bottom register shows animals and Mount Sumeru in the center. The upper register consists of ornamentation of a flayed human skin, eyes and hearts. These are the conventional representations in offering paintings. Although I have not found a text describing the process, the empty robes strongly suggest the transformation of the practitioner into Mahākāla. Only further research will solve this dilemma.

## 2) Food offerings (*gTor ma*)

In the Mahākāla rituals, the food sculpture called *gtor ma* is offered. It is made of dough, forming a pile of flesh and blood represented by five colors.

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<sup>189</sup> This paper does not take an example of Brāhmanrūpa with sword, but some of the figures hold a sword. See Pal, *Art of Himalaya*, 92. Essen and Thingö, II: 182.

This is an offering to represent five poisons; “jealousy for bile, desire for blood, pride for brain, marrow and hatred for bone”.<sup>190</sup> These are hindrances to enlightenment that are substantiated as offerings to Mahākāla. Finally, the offering is eaten by the deity in rituals. The process obviously indicates the all-negative concepts overcome by the deity. Thus, Mahākāla functions here as the destroyer of obstacles for enlightenment and as a protector of *Dharma*.

### 3) Thread cross (*mdos*)

Other objects offered to Mahākāla in the special rites are thread offerings (*mdos*). These are made from various colored threads bound and crossed to form web-like objects, or even large geometrical structures. They are used for trapping and hooking evils, as an abode for the deity, and even as a heaven for god.<sup>191</sup> The larger web structure hung over the figure or *maṇḍala* is supposedly considered as an abode of a deity. For example, according to Nebesky, in a black ritual, practitioners offer Mahākāla a thread-cross placed on top of the *maṇḍala* that represents World Mountain, where he lives.<sup>192</sup> In addition, Stablein introduced the thread cross as Mahākāla’s mansion made for a special Mahākāla ritual (see an example, Figure 80).

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<sup>190</sup> Stablein, 51.

<sup>191</sup> Nebesky, 370.

<sup>192</sup> René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Tibetan Religious Dances: Tibetan Text and Annotated Translation of the `chams yig* (The Hague: Mouton, 1976), 4.

#### 4) Masks

In various sects, Mahākāla frequently appears in a ritual dance.<sup>193</sup> According to Nebesky, the most frequent figures in rituals are; six-armed, four-armed, Brāhmanrūpa and Gur gyi ngon po. As in many other paintings, he appears with attendants such as Lhamo, Trakṣad, Jinamitra, and other typical acolytes.<sup>194</sup> Figure 81 shows a mask of Mahākāla. The black, fierce-looking mask with a crown of skullcups represents the typical Mahākāla features. The number of arms and attributes are added to the performer when he dances. As already cited, there is a ritual featuring Mahākāla that is performed to kill the enemy.<sup>195</sup> This suggests his subduing and fearful black magic-nature.

#### 6.3 Charm

Charms found in Tibet are pieces of paper or cloth on which mantras, deities, diagrams and invocations are depicted. They are carried either to protect against evils or to do harm to others. Many charms woodblock print, while some are drawn with a brush or dip pen. There are also charms representing Gur gyi ngon po that are part of this study.

Figure 82 shows a charm of Gur gyi ngon po *maṇḍala*. It consists of

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<sup>193</sup> Nebesky explained the religious dance according to sects. See Réne de Nebesky-Wojkowitz, *Tibetan Religious Dances: Tibetan Text and Annotated Translation of the 'chams yig*.

<sup>194</sup> Nebesky, *Tibetan religious dances*.

<sup>195</sup> Nebesky, *Tibetan religious dances*, 4.

concentric circles with a six-bladed cakra and fire outer band. In the center is Gur gyi mgon po, holding a club, chopper and skullcup and stepping on a corpse. His wrathful appearance, squatting position and accompanying messengers; birds, dog, and male figure, are the same as other paintings of the figure (see the Gur gyi mgon po section).

The first circle encircling the figure contains the invocation of Gur gyi mgon po. The second circle is divided into eight parts, but represents the same objects, --choppers and skullcups, -- which are Mahākāla's attributes. These are set in the center of six-bladed cakra. Each of the six blades includes a figure that corresponds to the invocation and mantras in the outer circle of the cakra (the third circle). Every invocation summons the deities, --Ekajaṭi, Indra, Karmadevi, Bhadra Yakṣa, Black Yakṣa, Mahākālī, Putra (nag po), Bhadra (nag po) -- and contains a request for their protection. Excepting Indra, all deities mentioned here appear as Gur gyi mgon po's acolytes in the paintings. The next outer circle is divided into six by the attributes of the deities depicted in the blades (the fourth circle). The inscription is a request to the deities for protection. The next outer circle contains the invocations. Further, the next circle contains mantras and invocations. The last circle in the section contains inscriptions that correspond to the figures of the wide band that comes immediately after.

The wide band has eight sections in which ten figures are depicted. The bottom (east) and the top (west) contain the two figures. They are

*dikpālas*, guardians relating to direction. *Dikpālas* are ten deities seen as both protectors and benefactors. They appeared in Six-armed Mahākāla paintings as stated earlier, and in outer circle in other *maṇḍalas*.

The arrangement of the *dikpālas* follows the typical convention of representing the figures. The bottom and the top contain two figures representing a three-dimensional layout in a two-dimensional painting (see Figure 83). The zenith (appearing at the bottom in this painting, under Gur gyi mgon po's foot) is Brahmā with multiple faces riding on a bird. The inscription flanking the figure in Tibetan is an invocation to Brahmā, requesting for his protection. The figure flanking Brahmā in the same section is Indra, with an elephant as his *vāhana*. His placement is correct, as he is one of the *dikpālas* in the east. The invocations of other figures are all the same except the names of the deity. The figure to the Indra's right, southeast in this diagram, is Agni. Next to Agni, in the south is Yama mounted on a bull. The figure in the southwest of this diagram is Nirṛti holding a chopper and skullcup, mounted on human. The section at the top contains Varuṇa and Pṛthvī, suggesting both west, and nadir. Pṛthvī is considered to dwell in the nadir, while Varuṇa is in the west. The figure in the northwest is Vāyu, and in the north is Kubera. Finally, the figure in the northeast is Īśāna.

The band inside the *dikpālas* contains the invocations and what are probably the mantras corresponding to each *dikpāla*. The inscriptions are upside down when viewers see the *dikpāla* from the center. They are requests

for the protection of the ten deities, followed by the mantra, and the typical endings of *hūm phat*.

After the *dikpālas* is a band representing human skullcups. It is further surrounded by a circle decorated with vajras. The outermost circle depicts blazing fire. These are typical *maṇḍala* formations. The invocations on this amulet are classified into three groups. One is to Mahākāla, the figure placed in the center. The second is to the Mahākāla's retinues, represented in the six blades of cakra. The third is to *dikpālas* shown in the outer circle. All the invocations are inscribed adjacent to the figures.

The material and form, cloth and drawing by dip pen, and the remnants of creases on the object suggest that it was folded to carry in an amulet. As stated, all of the inscriptions request the deities' protection from harm. The harm implied is probably to the ego or hindrances to enlightenment for practitioners, as well as the physical daily perils for all. The amulet is understood as a tool to communicate with deities represented. Worshippers may thus appeal to the deities' for a protection by carrying the amulet. Thus, Gur gyi ngon po represented on the amulet reveals his function as a protective figure.

#### **6.4 Concluding remarks**

The texts and the practice shows, Mahākāla can be interpreted as a highly esoteric deity. In this level, he is not only a protecting figure, but also

a yidam class deity for the yigic practitioners. This feature is not open to the public, but his rituals obviously imply that he is identified as Cakrasaṃvara.

In his practice and the example of offering, Mahākāla is understood both as catalyst figure who purify the all defilements, and as a *dharmapāla* who defeats the Buddhist enemy inside practitioners. This function is indicated by the offerings, since Mahākāla is the figure who eats up negative elements or enlightenment hindrances of the practitioners.

*Mahākālatantra* includes the higher esoteric descriptions. The practice described in the text suggests the text is understood as esoteric class. In addition, the other Tibetan texts explain the deity employed in a meditational process to purify the all defilement merge into the five knowledges. Mahākāla is, thus, pertained to the fully esoteric nature for the technical practitioners.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

I have reexamined the various identifications of the figure of Mahākāla and given a detailed analysis of his iconography and iconology. I have also provided an overview of the representation and the function of the deity throughout Asia. As seen, the ancient deity of Mahākāla originated in India, and then traveled as far as Japan. In the course of travel, his functions and appearances were received and transformed in the places where Mahākāla was worshipped. Local alterations were made to meet indigenous expectations both worldly and spiritual. On the other hand, some iconographical and functional elements remained stable features that the figure shares in every Buddhist cultural sphere.

Despite the differences between the Mahākālas, all types of Mahākālas share at least one element characterized by Mahākāla's attributes. This



sharing occurs because Mahākāla's appearance and iconography has been expanded from the archetypes. The differences are also related to the figure's level of development. Probably, the East Asian Mahākālas were inherited from an early forms of Mahākāla from his homeland in South Asia at least to a certain extent. There are many similarities between the Japanese wrathful Mahākāla and the Tibetan and Nepalese Mahākāla, in spite of the remoteness of the figures from each other in date and geography. These examples show that certain elements of Mahākāla have remained but are still subject to local alterations. As the specific appearance of Mahākālas in each cultural sphere shows, he is localized to fit the cultural and social context.

Nonetheless, these specific, localized Mahākālas are not differentiated from the other Mahākālas, because they are somehow linked to other Mahākālas in different regions. For example, the theory that the Japanese benevolent Mahākāla is Yijing's misinterpretation is plausible, yet Mahākāla's function as a benefactor deity is seen from other regions. The aspect of food-god is seen not only in the Japanese Mahākāla, but also in the modern Nepalese Mahākāla.<sup>196</sup> This connection suggests Mahākāla acted once as a food god in South Asia, and the function was inherited by the Japanese despite the different appearance of this Mahākāla. Thus, somehow,

the functions and iconography of Mahākāla show cultural continuity throughout Asia.

Yumin Lee concludes that Yunnan Mahākāla and Tibetan Mahākāla have hardly any relationship. One of the reasons for this assumption is Yunnan Mahākālas bear no resemblance to the Gur gyi ngon po figure that prevailed in Tibet. However, there are significant connections between Tibetan and Yunnan Mahākālas. As stated in their function, the typical representations of Mahākāla with animal-headed attendants are seen in both regions. This assemblage suggests one of the functions of Mahākāla as a king of Yakṣas. In a Yunnan painting, Mahākāla is specified as a king of Yakṣas in the inscription beside the figure. This function of a Yakṣa king is also seen in Tibetan Yes shes ngon po and the description of *Mahākālatantra* worshipped in Nepal and Tibet. In addition, the convention of representing Vaiśravaṇa is not only seen in the Yunnan Mahākāla, but also in some Mahākālas of the Tibetan rNying ma sect. The god of Longevity appears not only in Yunnan, but also in Tibet and Mongolia. Thus, the Yunnan Mahākālas are very distinctive in appearance, but they are not excluded from the other Mahākāla imageries.

These differences and similarities result from the balance between local transformations and a degree of preservation of the archetypal

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<sup>196</sup> One of the functions of Mahākāla is stated as “he can provide sufficient foods to the needy” in Min Bahadur Shakya, *The Iconography of Nepalese Buddhism* (Kathmandu: Handicraft

Mahākāla. The iconography and functions were subject to change once they were received in different cultural settings. The original functions were misunderstood or interpreted in a different way, as shown in the examples of different functions understood by Tibetan monks and Mongolian rulers. Sometimes the imagery was mistakenly transmitted, as Yijing's example shows. A benefactor god can be interpreted in many ways; understanding of the deity depends on the nature of worshippers. As seen in the example, "treasure" can be interpreted as "Buddhist treasure" for monks, as well as "material treasure" for lay people. What happened was that people incorporated the Mahākāla figure into indigenous legend, or categorized this figure with other local deities to understand this new Buddhist figure and concept. This resulted in the establishment of unique forms of Mahākāla. During these processes of transformation, specific modifications due to indigenous and imported deities were made. For example, the Nepalese Mahākāla has the Gaṇeśa as an attendant figure, not a subdued character as the Gaṇeśa figure with the Tibetan Mahākāla. This is an example of selective iconographic development of people, when the iconography transmits in specific ways between the different cultures. This paper showed these selective phenomena by elucidating the different imageries and the functions of Mahākāla.

Mahākāla has a pan-Asian popularity. This fame continues in several places in Asia. The popular rituals practiced in present Nepal and Tibet offer prospects for future studies on this figure. This paper examined his varied iconographies and functions of the figure. They reveal cultural continuity across Asia as well as his aspect as a localized deity. The variety of his function, I believe, is a result of the figure's adaptability into many different contexts, for both esoteric practices and lay devotion.

## **APPENDIX A**

### **FIGURES**

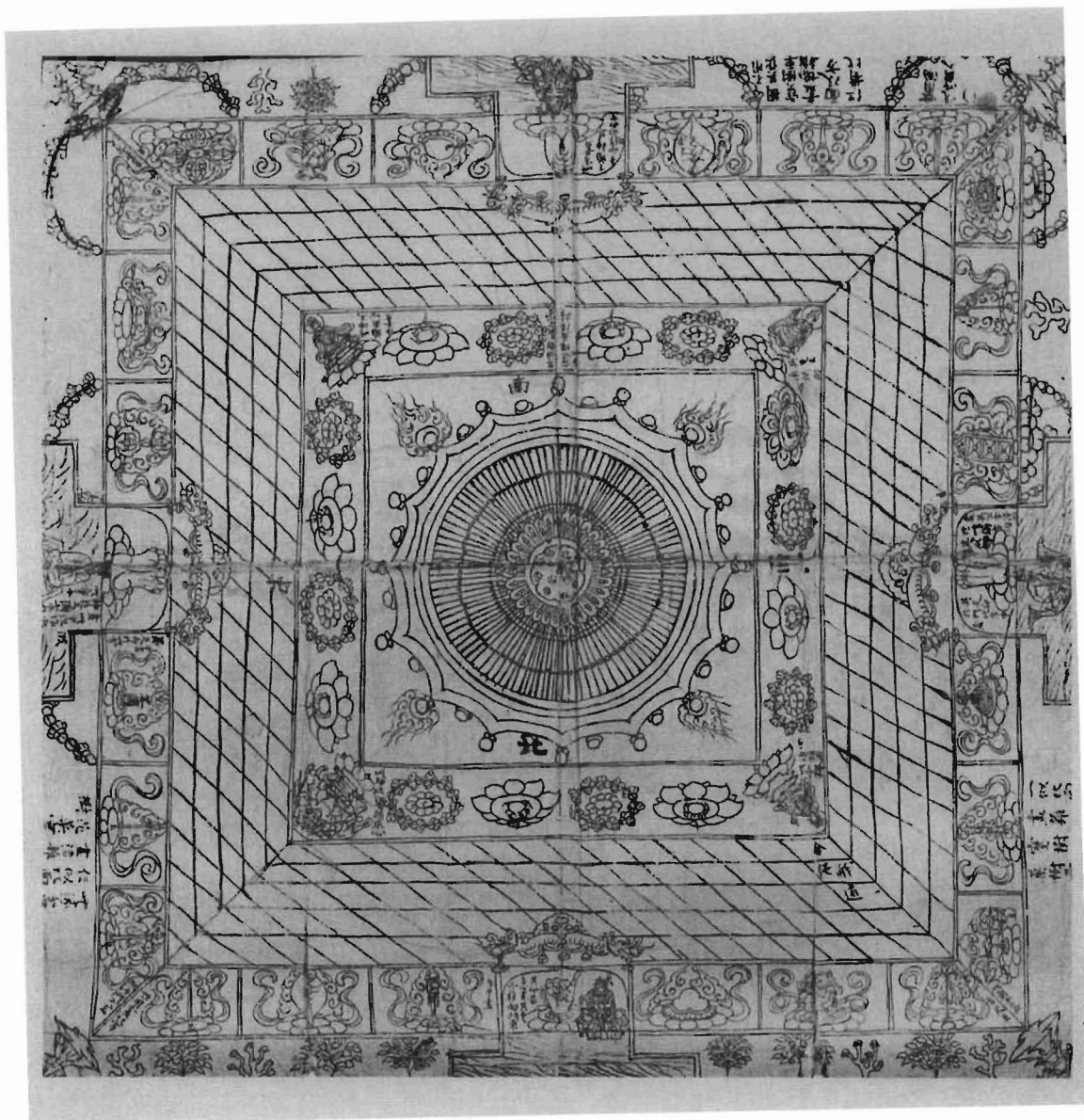


Figure 1. Mandala, Dunhuang.

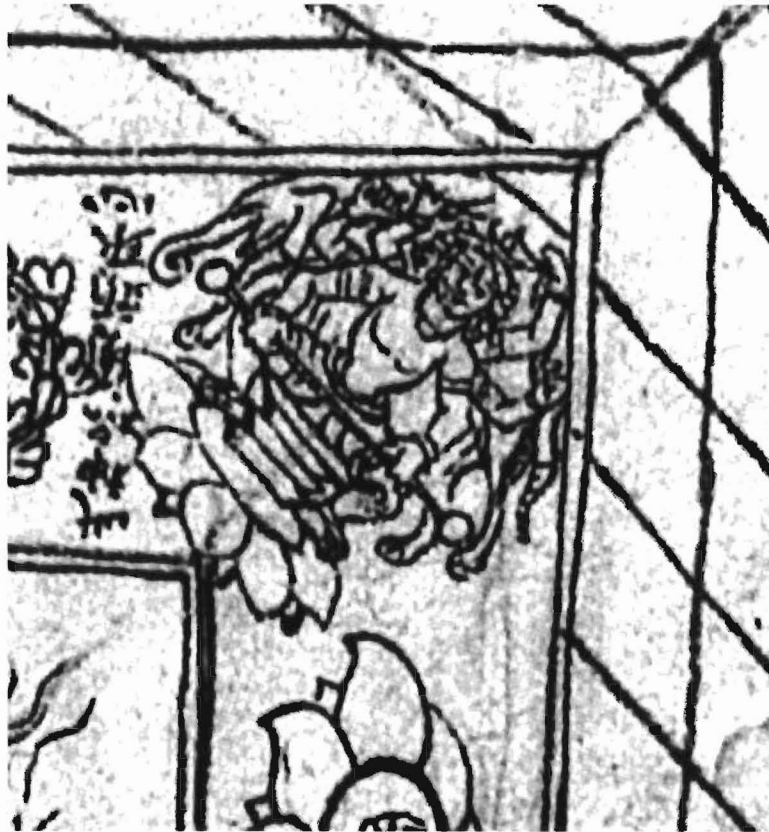


Figure 2. Detail from figure 1.



Figure 3. Detail: Mahākāla from Thousand-armed Avalokiteśvara painting.





Figure 4. Illustration of Mahākālā.

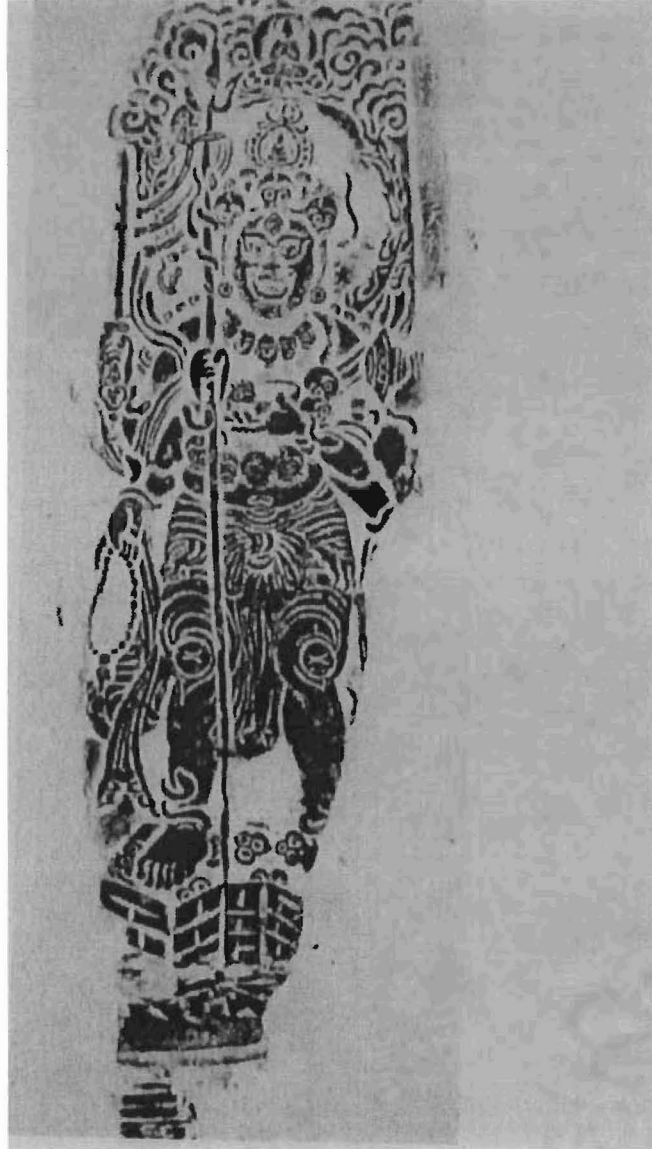


Figure 5. Mahākālā.



Figure 6. Mahākāla.



Figure 7. Mahākālā.

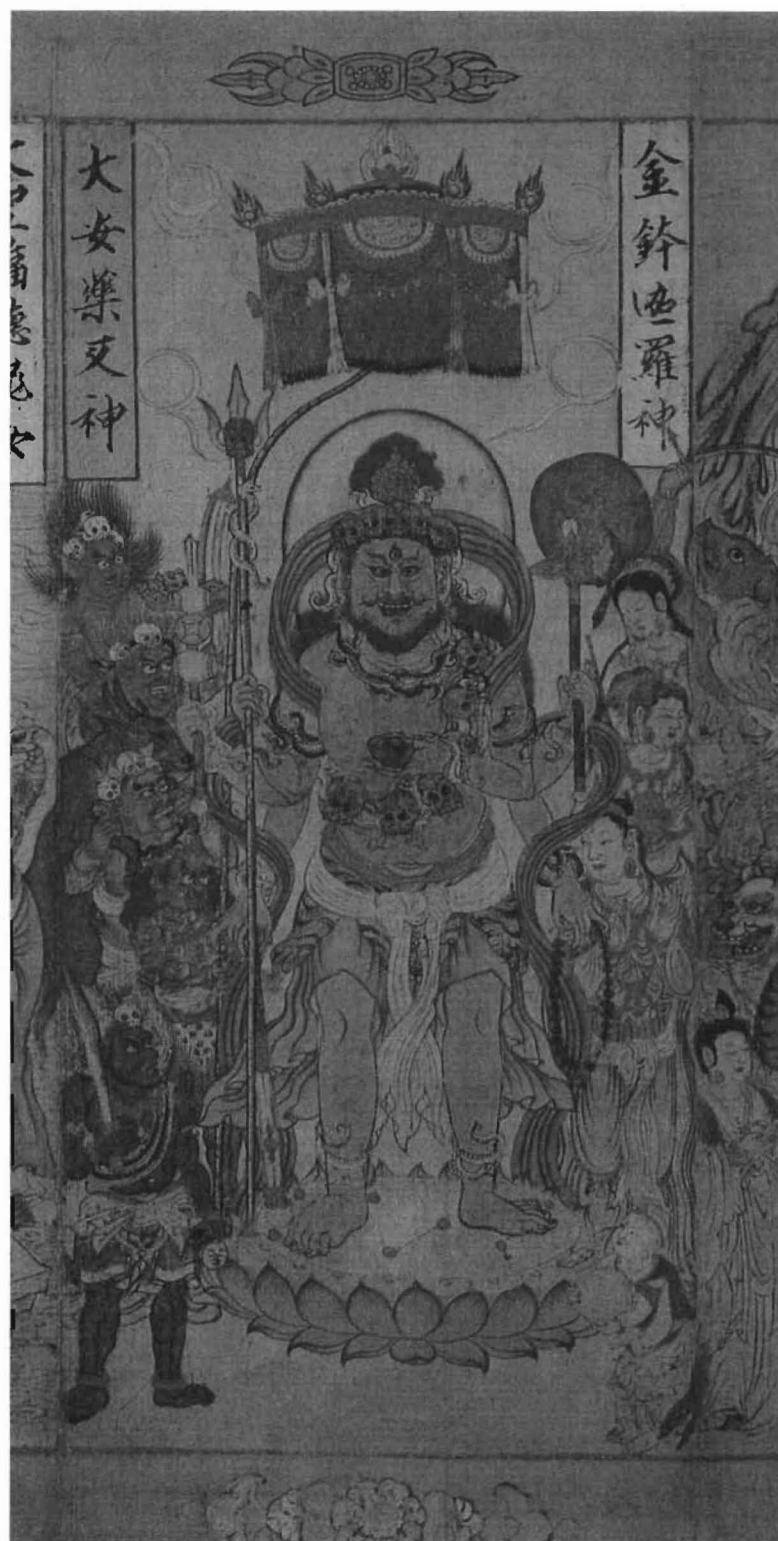


Figure 8. Mahākāla.



Figure 9. Mahākāla.



Figure 10. Mahākāla.



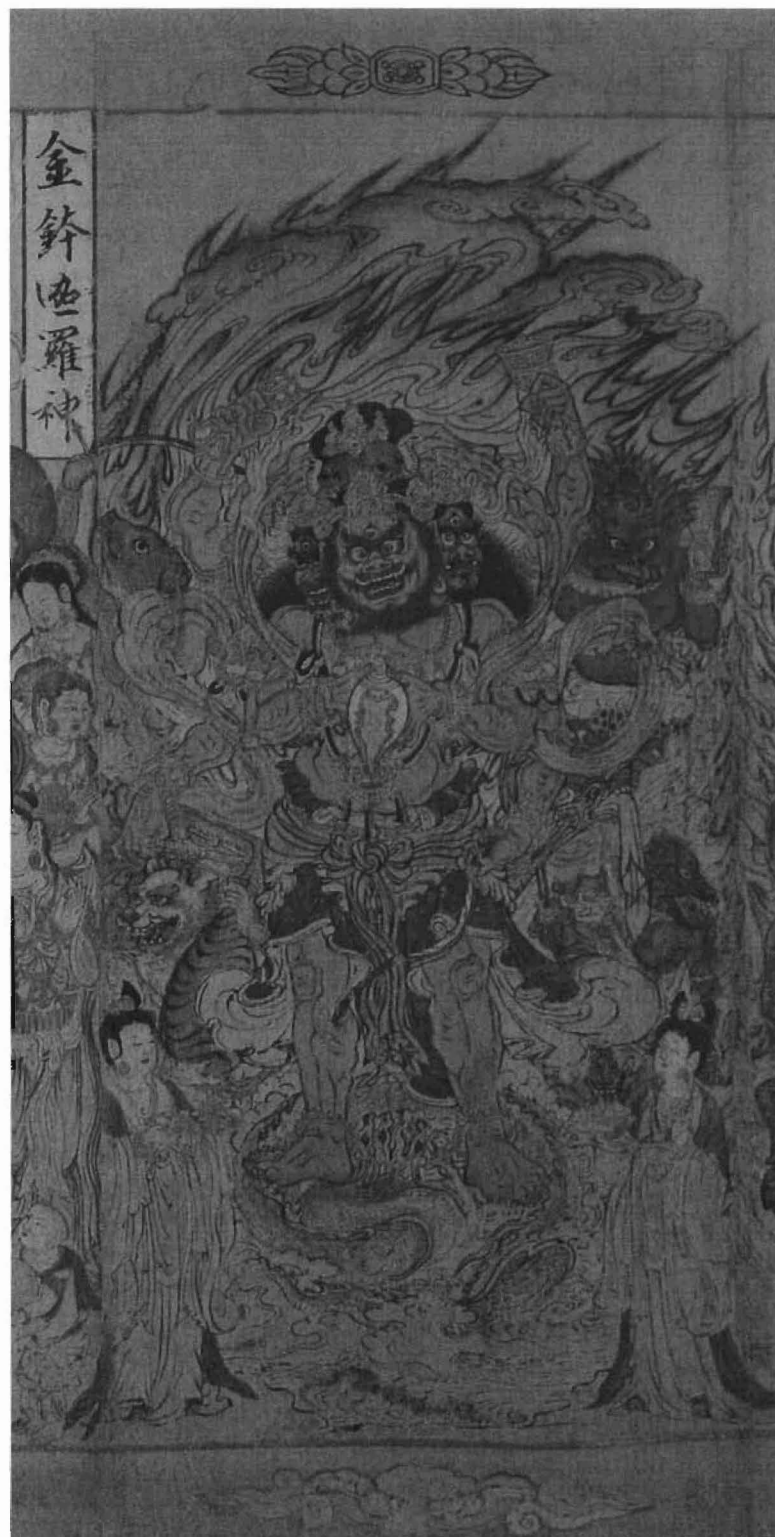


Figure 11. Mahākāla.





Figure 12. Drawing of Mahākāla from Taizozuzo.



Figure 13. Drawing of Mahākāla from Taizokyuzuyo.



Figure 14. Mahākāla from Taizokai genzu maṇḍala.



Figure 15. Daikokuten.



Figure 16. Daikokuten.



Figure 17. Sanmen Daikokuten.



Figure 18. Mahākālā.



Figure 19. Mahākāla.





Figure 20. Mahākālā.



Figure 21. Mahākāla.



Figure 22. Two-armed Mahākāla.



Figure 23. Two-armed Mahākāla.



Figure 24. Four-armed Mahākāla (Caturbhuja).



Figure 25. Six-armed Mahākāla.

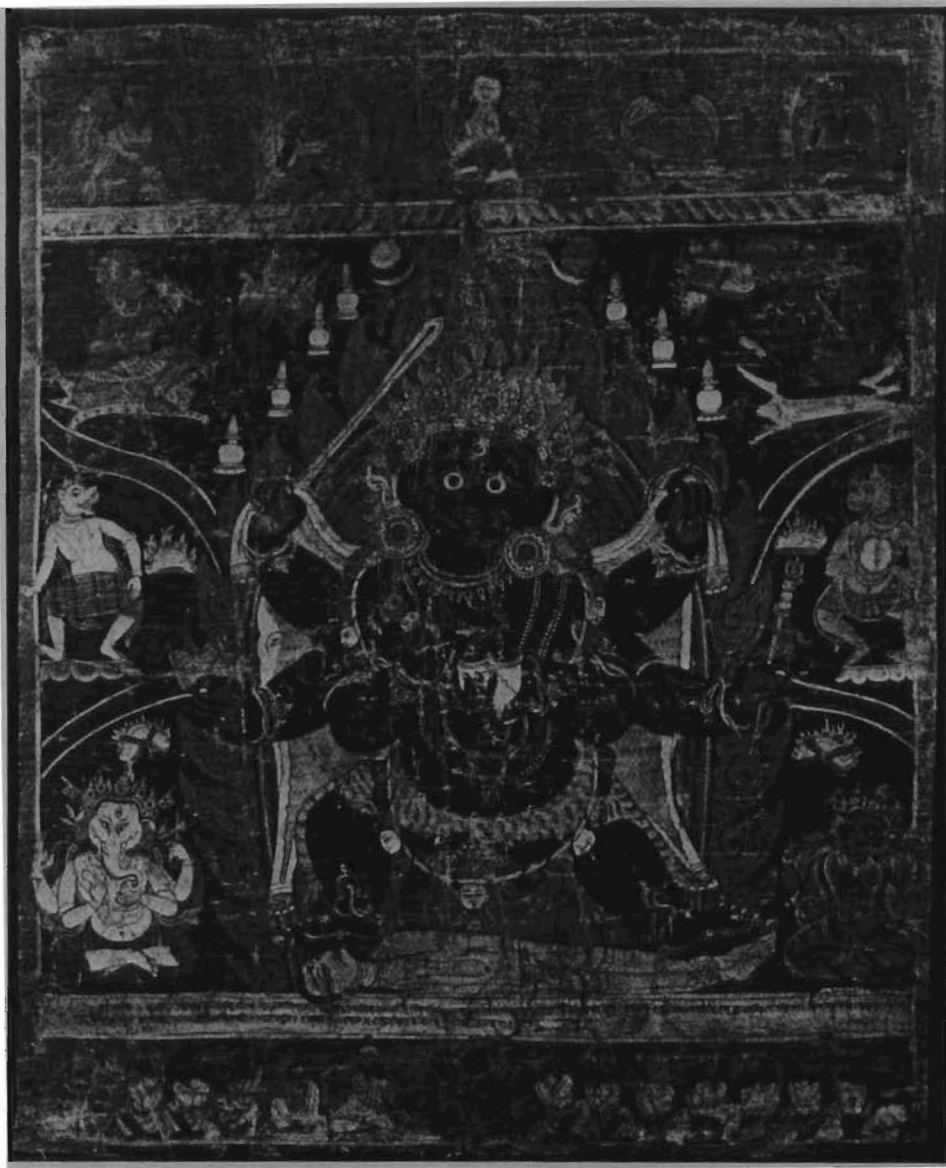


Figure 26. Six-armed Mahākāla.

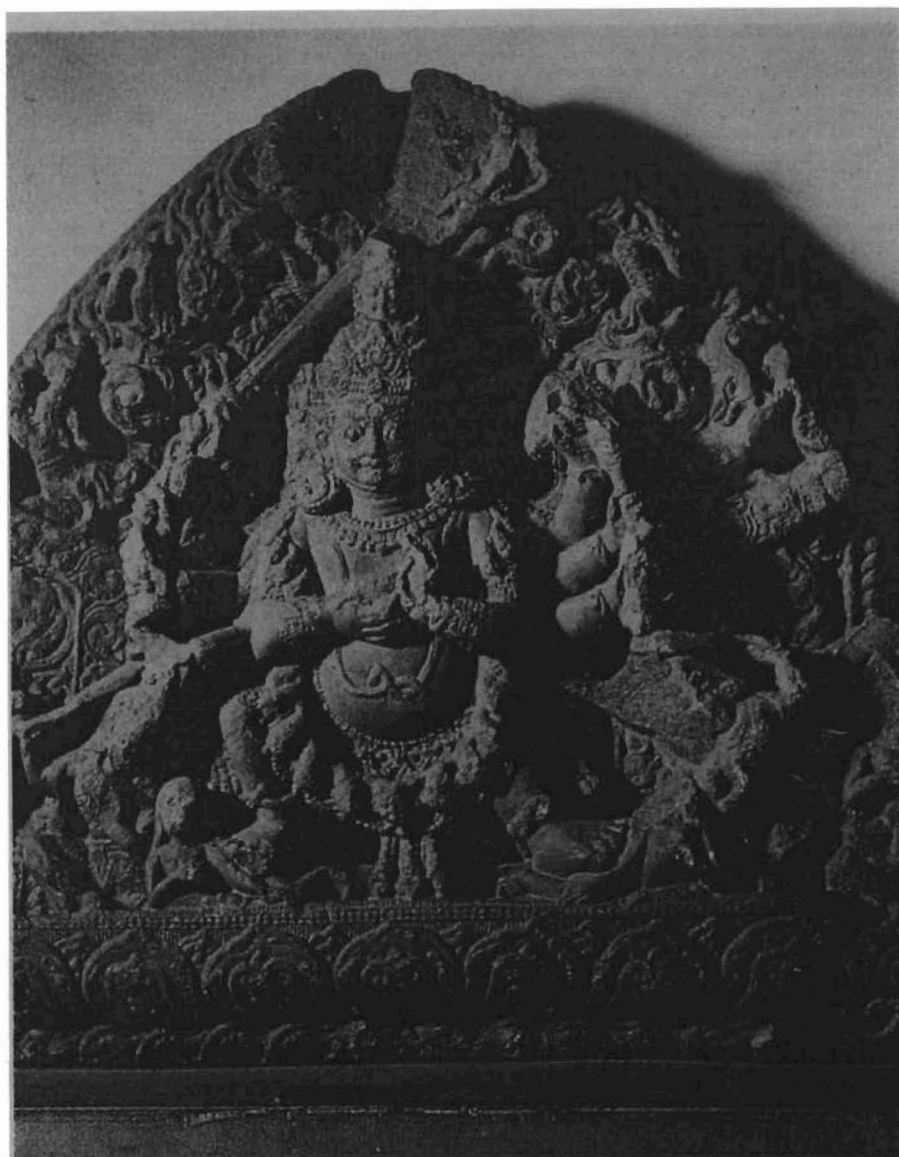


Figure 27. Multi-armed Mahākāla.





Figure 28. Mahākāla temple, overview.



Figure 29. Mahākāla in Mahākāla temple.



Figure 30. Four-armed Mahākāla (Caturbhuja).

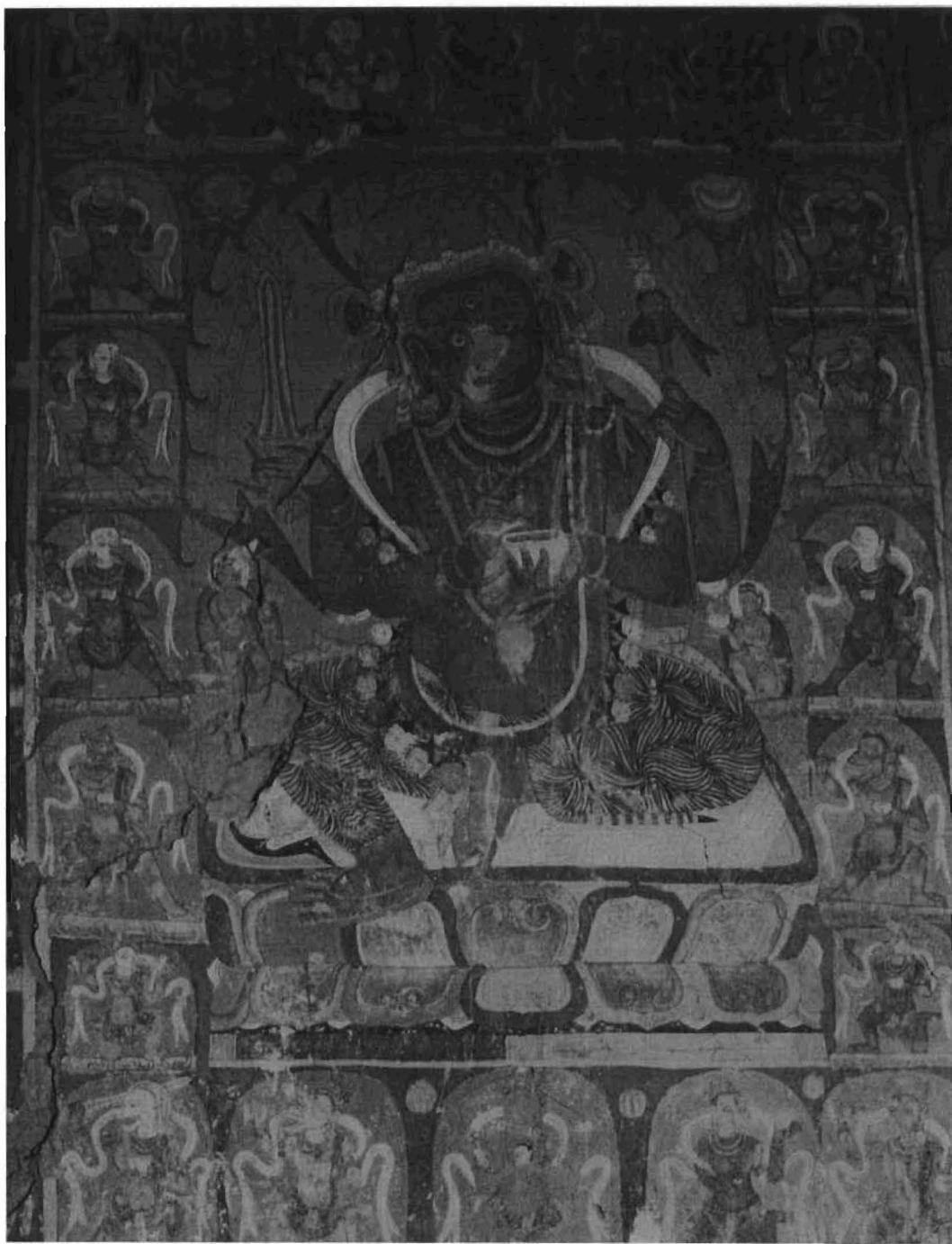


Figure 31. Four-armed Mahākāla (Caturbhuja).

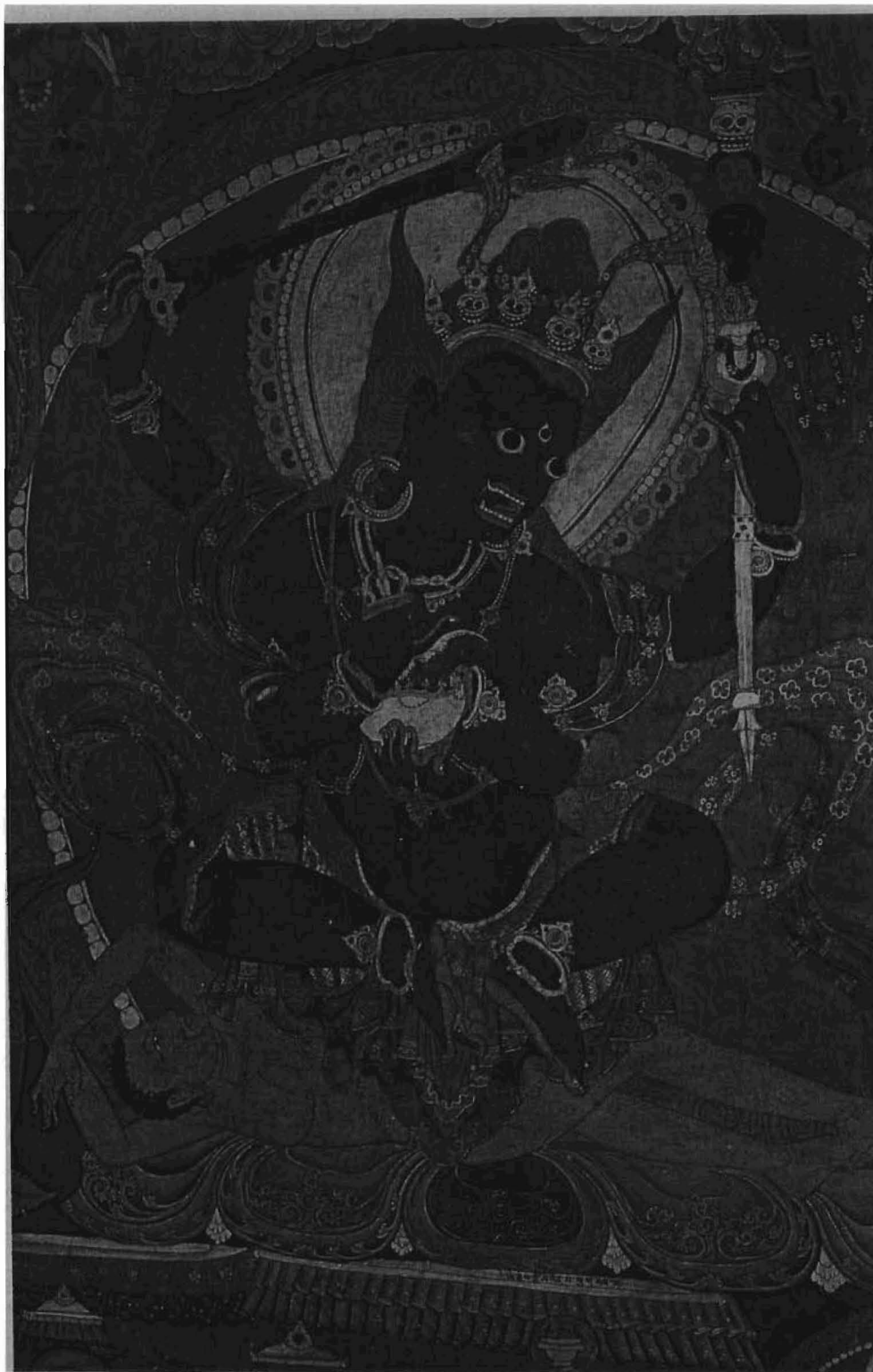


Figure 32. Four-armed Mahākāla (Caturbhuja).



Figure 33. Four-armed Mahākāla (Caturbhuja).

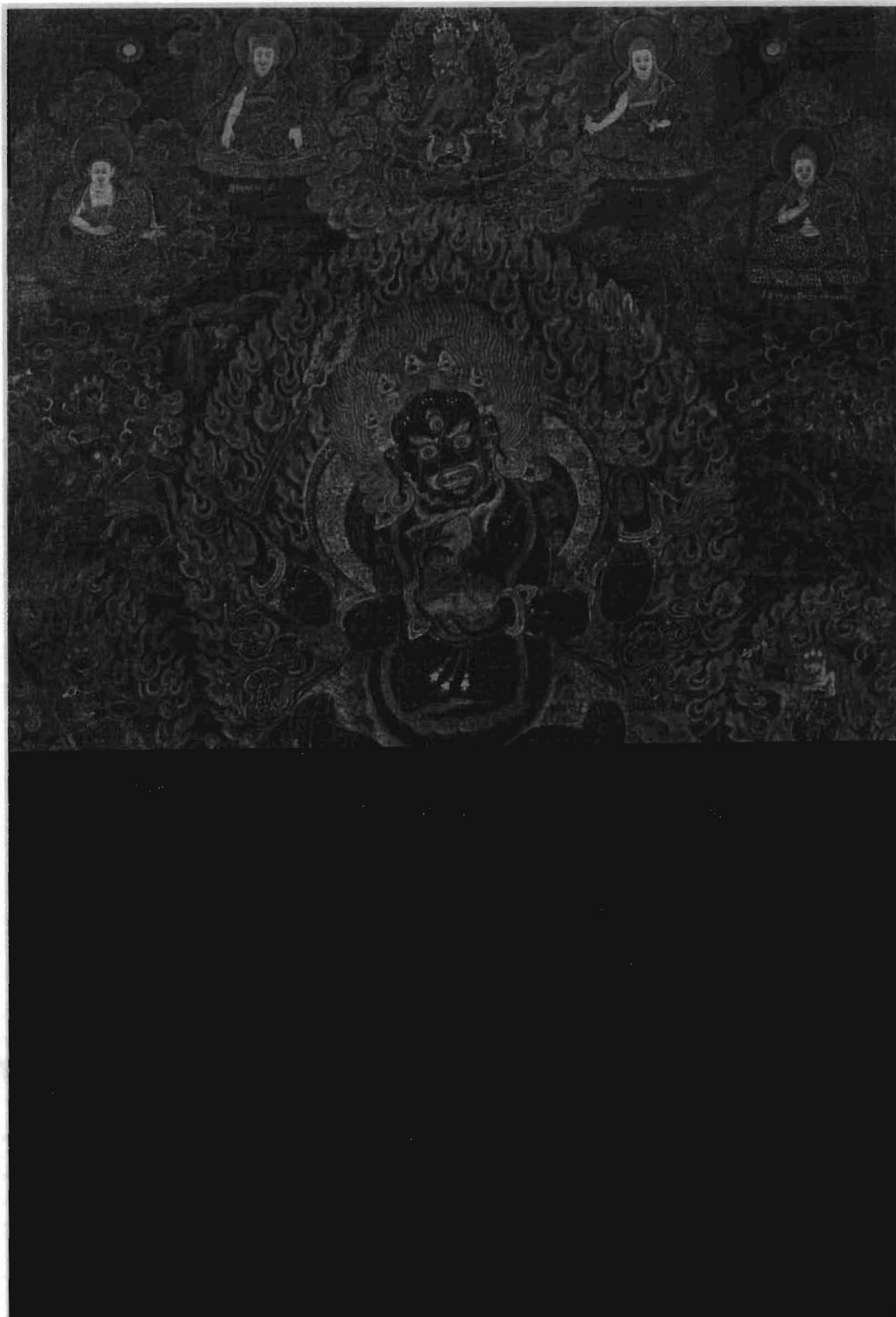


Figure 34. Yes shes mgon po (in the 'Tshal tradition).



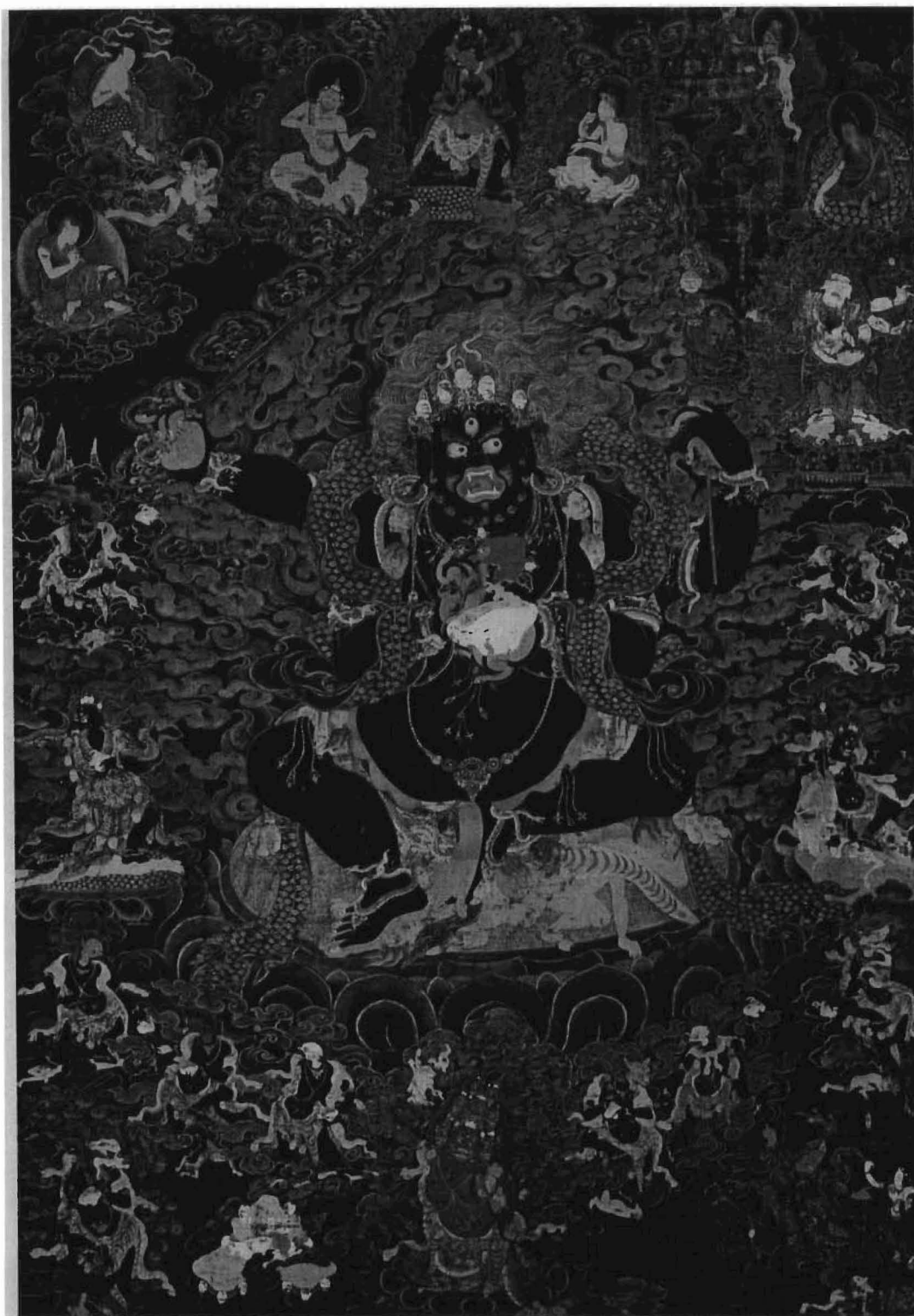


Figure 35. Yes shes mgon po (in the 'Tshal tradition).



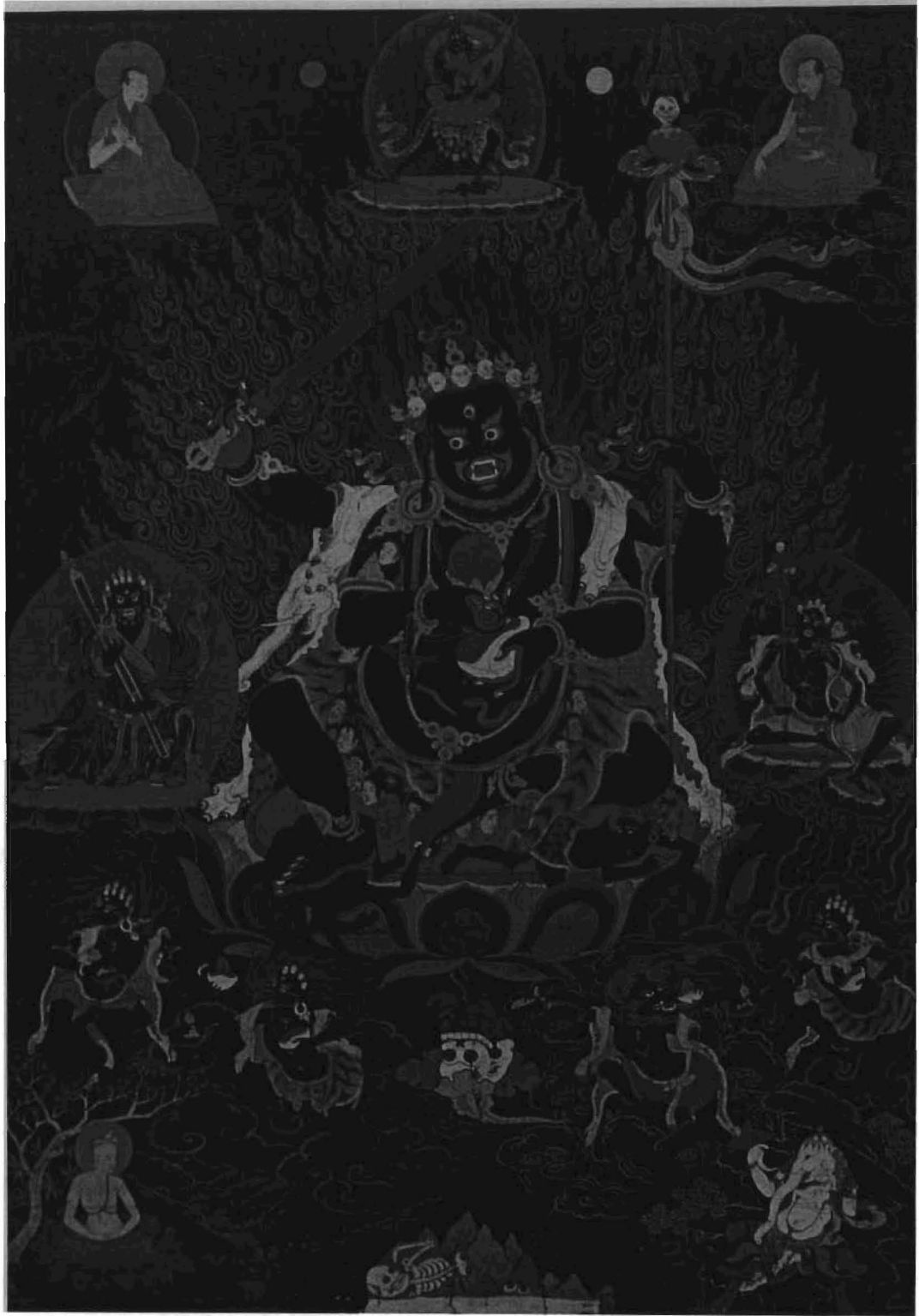


Figure 36. Yes shes mgon po (in the Tshal tradition).



Figure 37. Yes shes mgon po (in the tradition of Mahāśiddha Śāntigupta).



Figure 38. Yes shes mgon po (in the tradition of Mahāsiddha Śāntigupta).

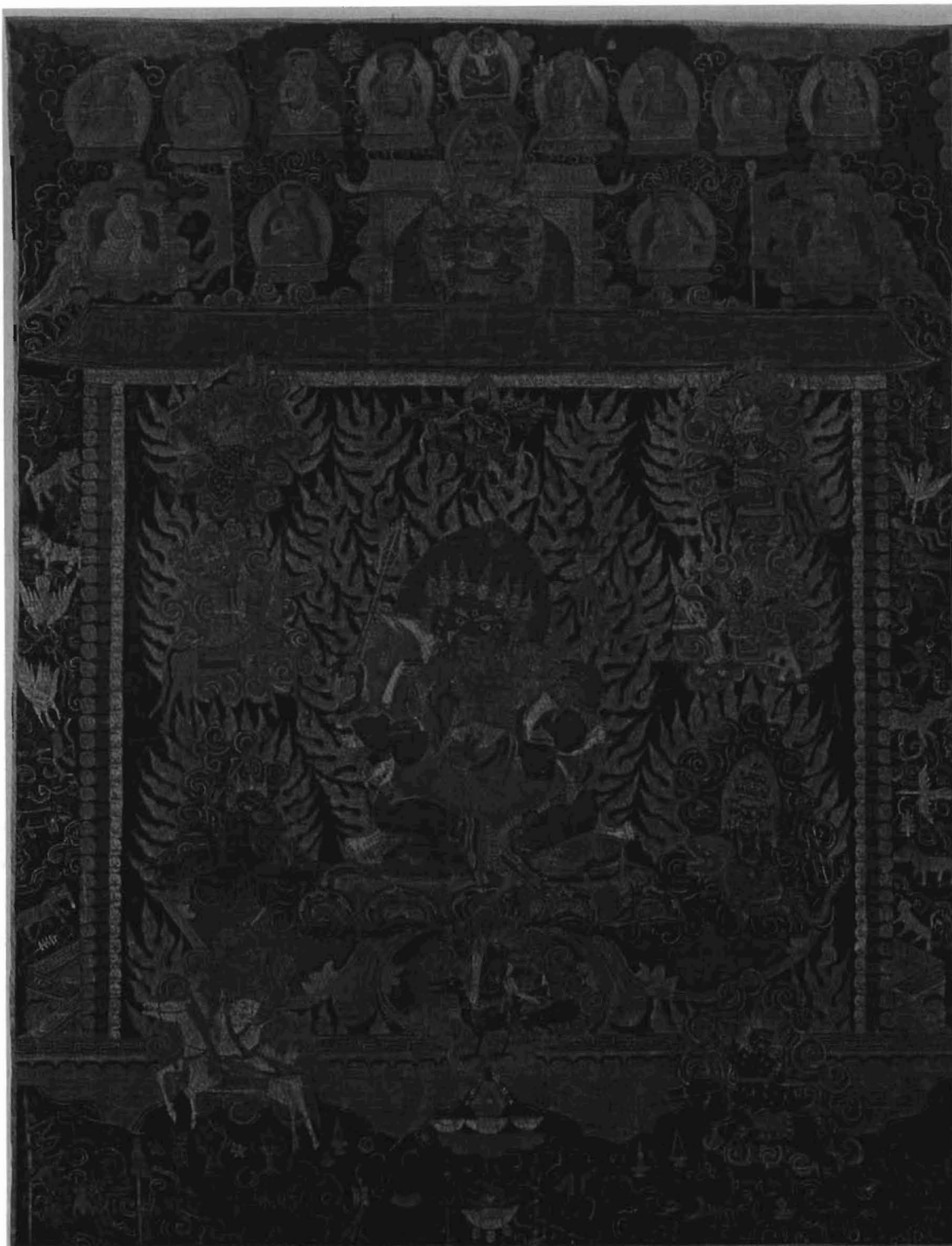


Figure 39. Yes shes mgon po (in the tradition of Mahāsiddha Śāntigupta).

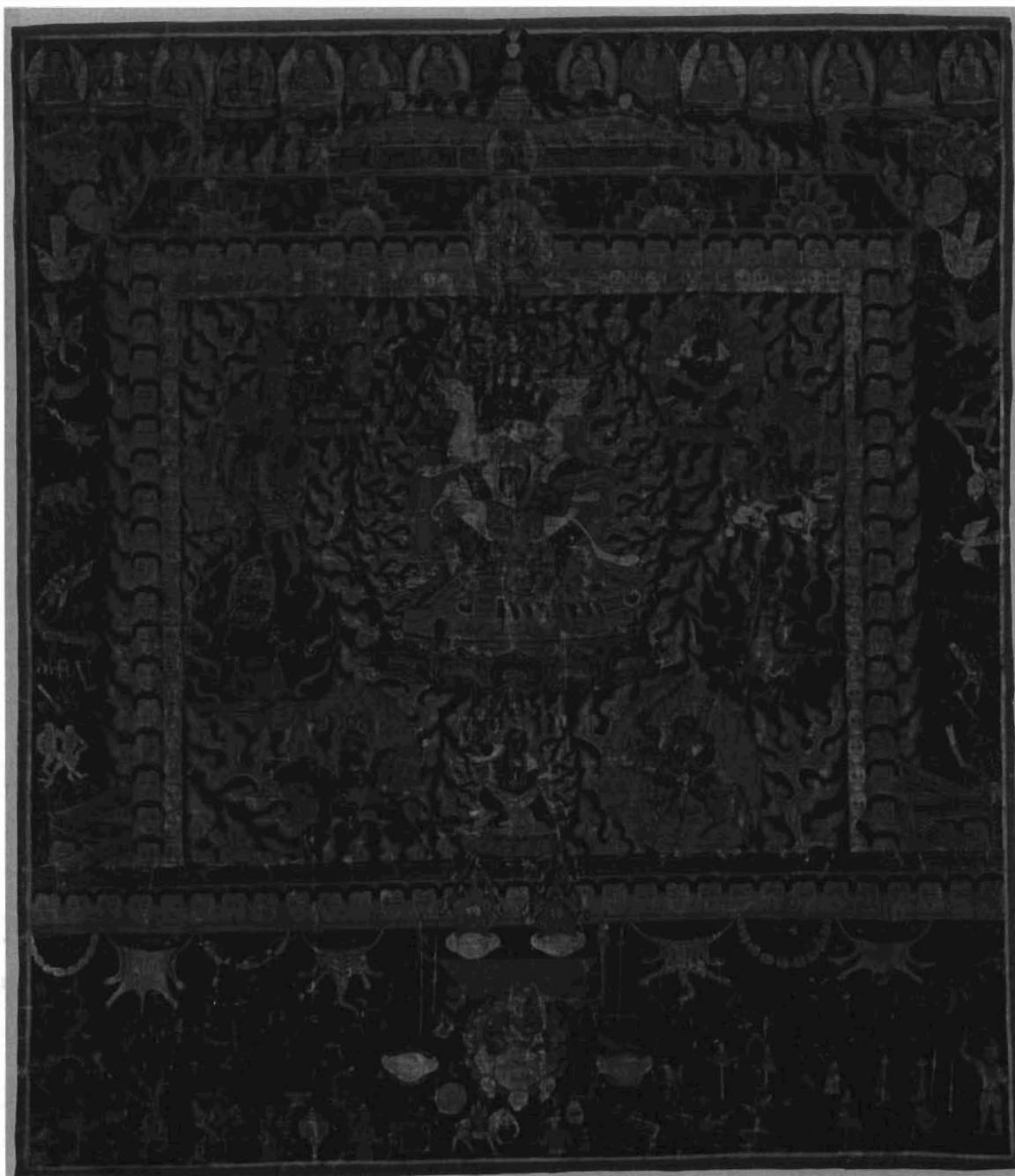


Figure 40. Yes shes mgon po (Yub-yum form carrying a fruit/heart).

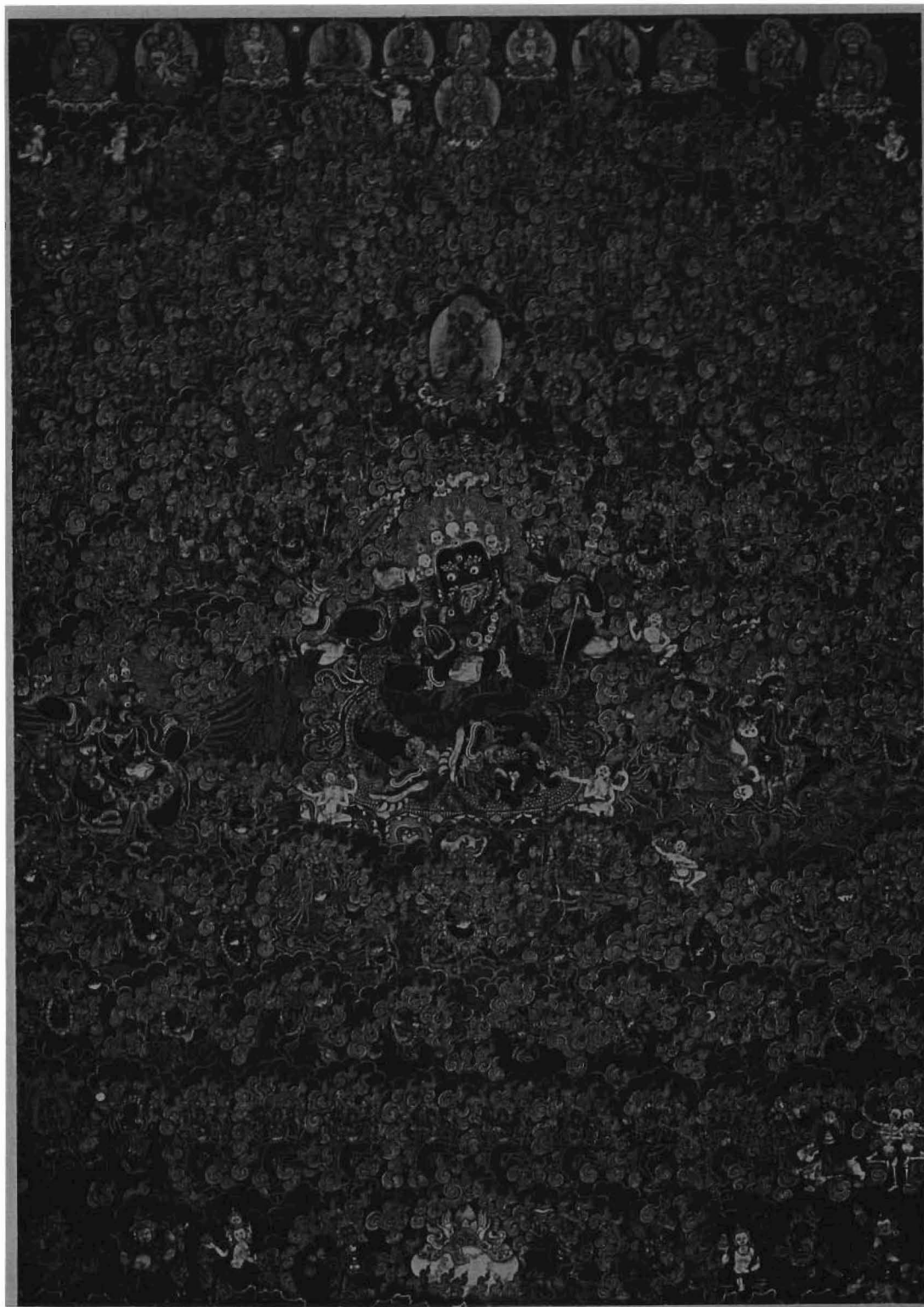


Figure 41. Yes shes mgon po (Yub-yum form carrying a fruit/heart).



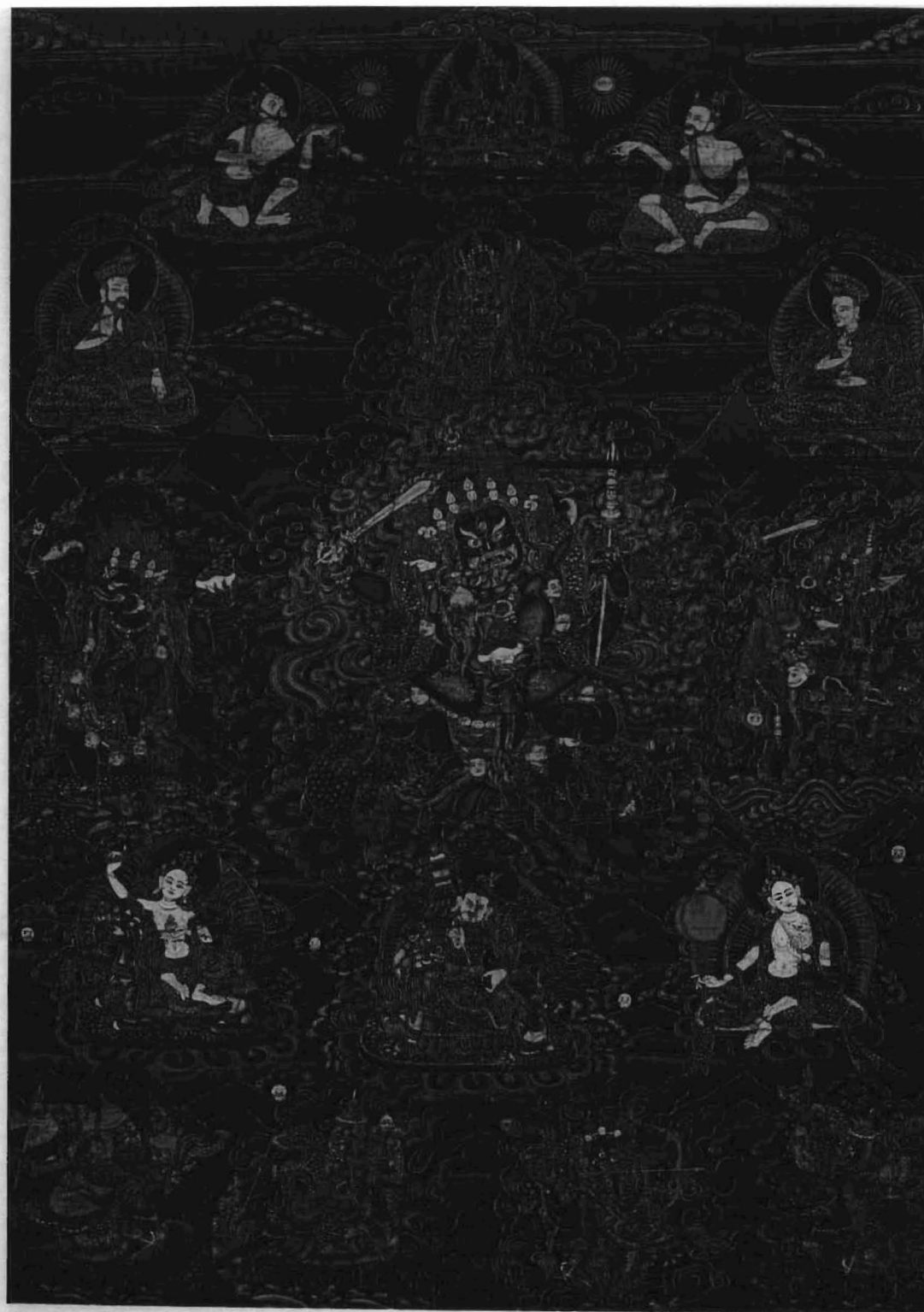


Figure 42. Yes shes mgon po (Yub-yum form carrying a fruit/heart).



Figure 43. Yes shes mgon po (Yub-yum form carrying a fruit/heart).





Figure 44. Raven-faced attendant.

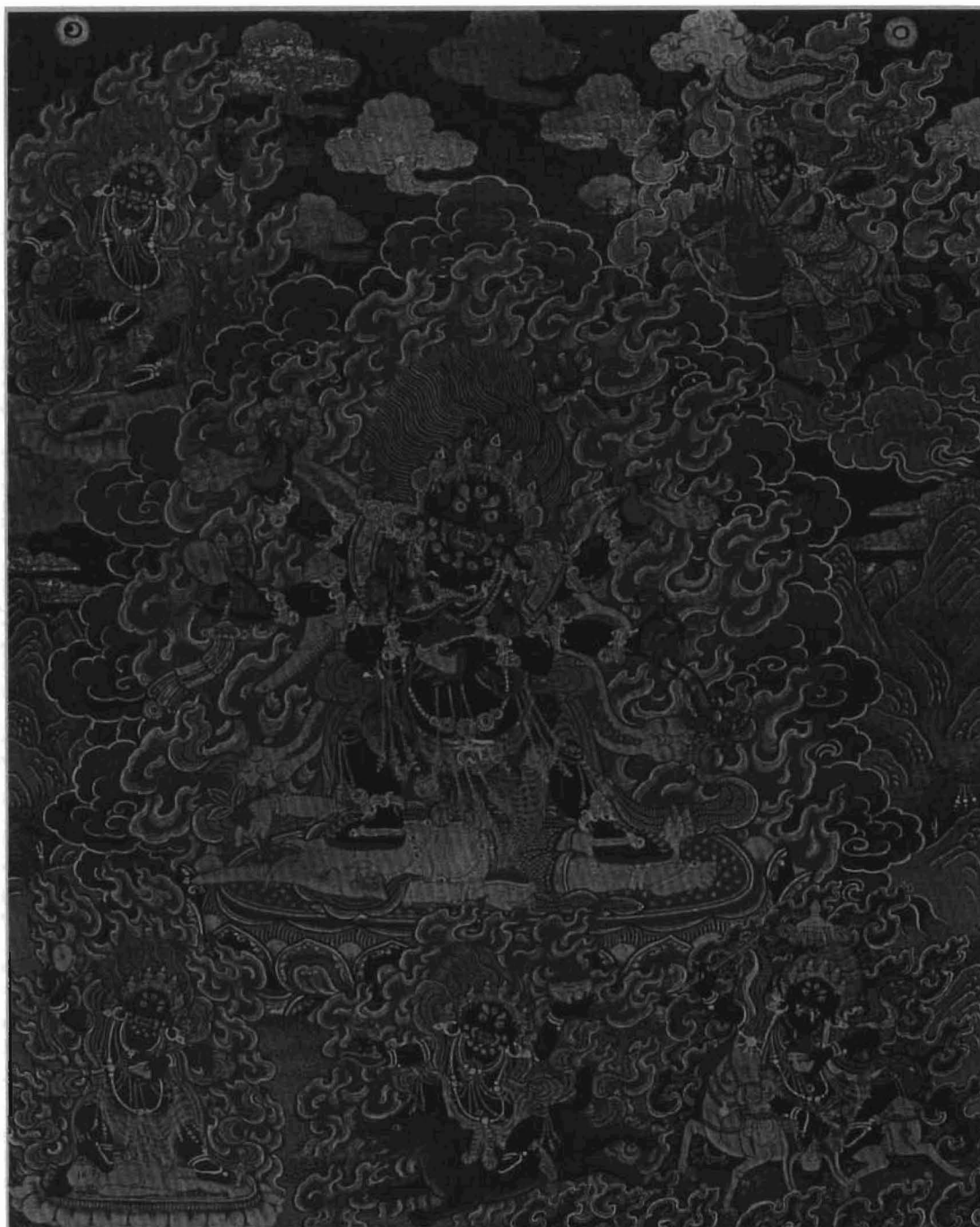


Figure 45. Black-bodied and Six-armed Yes shes mgon po.

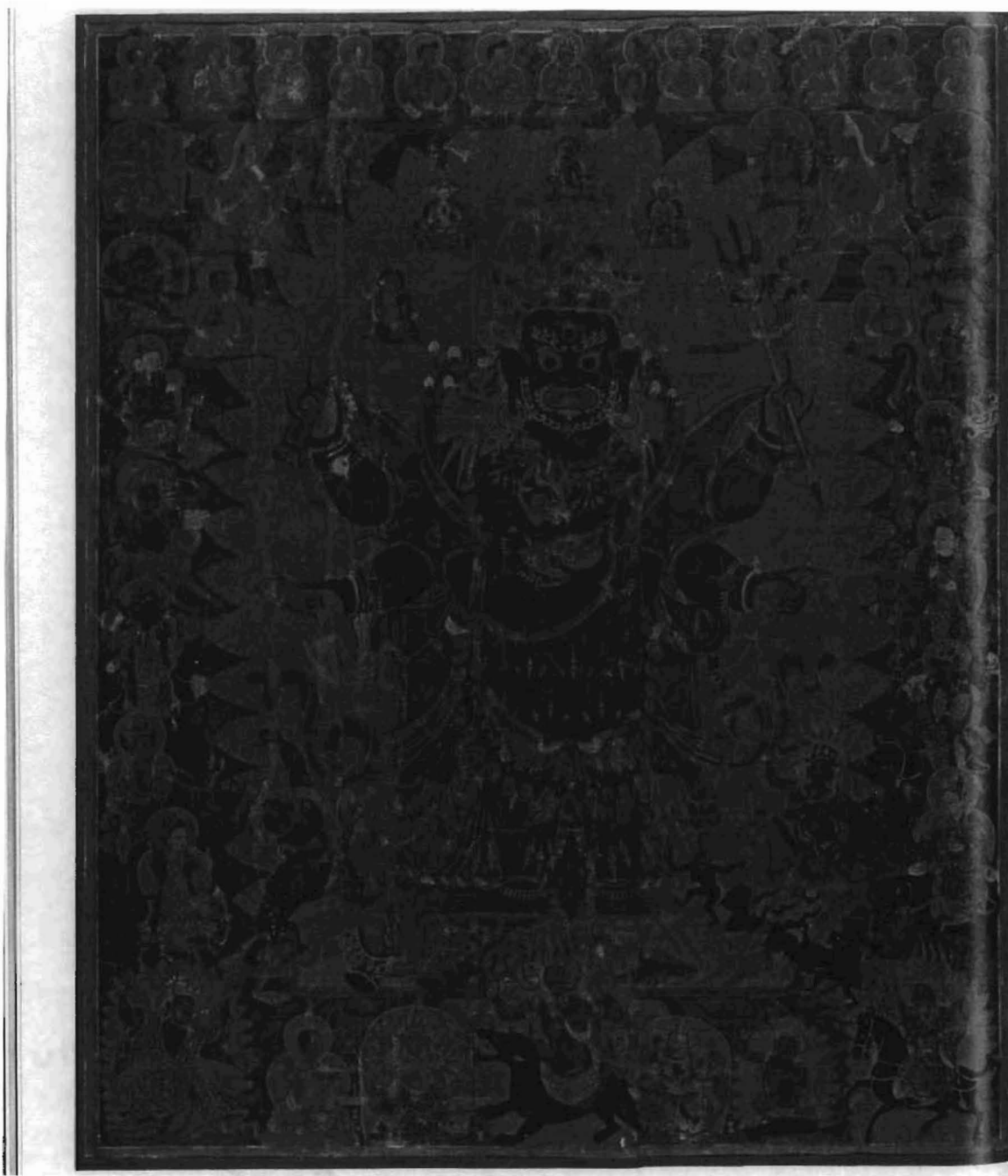


Figure 46. Black-bodied and Six-armed Yes shes mgon po.



Figure 47. Six-armed Yes shes mgon po, front.



Figure 48. Six-armed Yes shes mgon po, back.

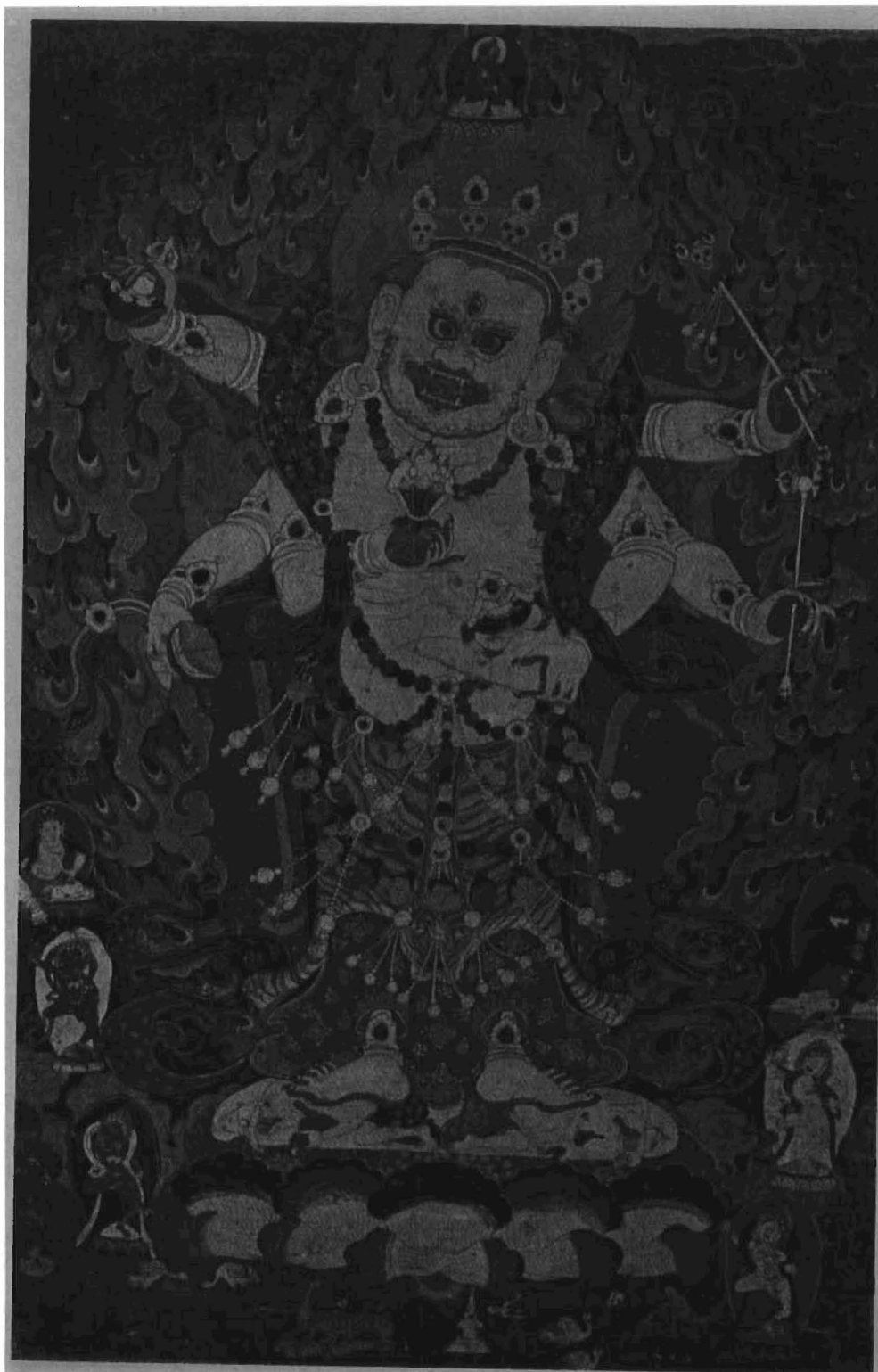


Figure 49. Cintāmaṇi Mahākāla.



Figure 50. Gur gyi mgon po.



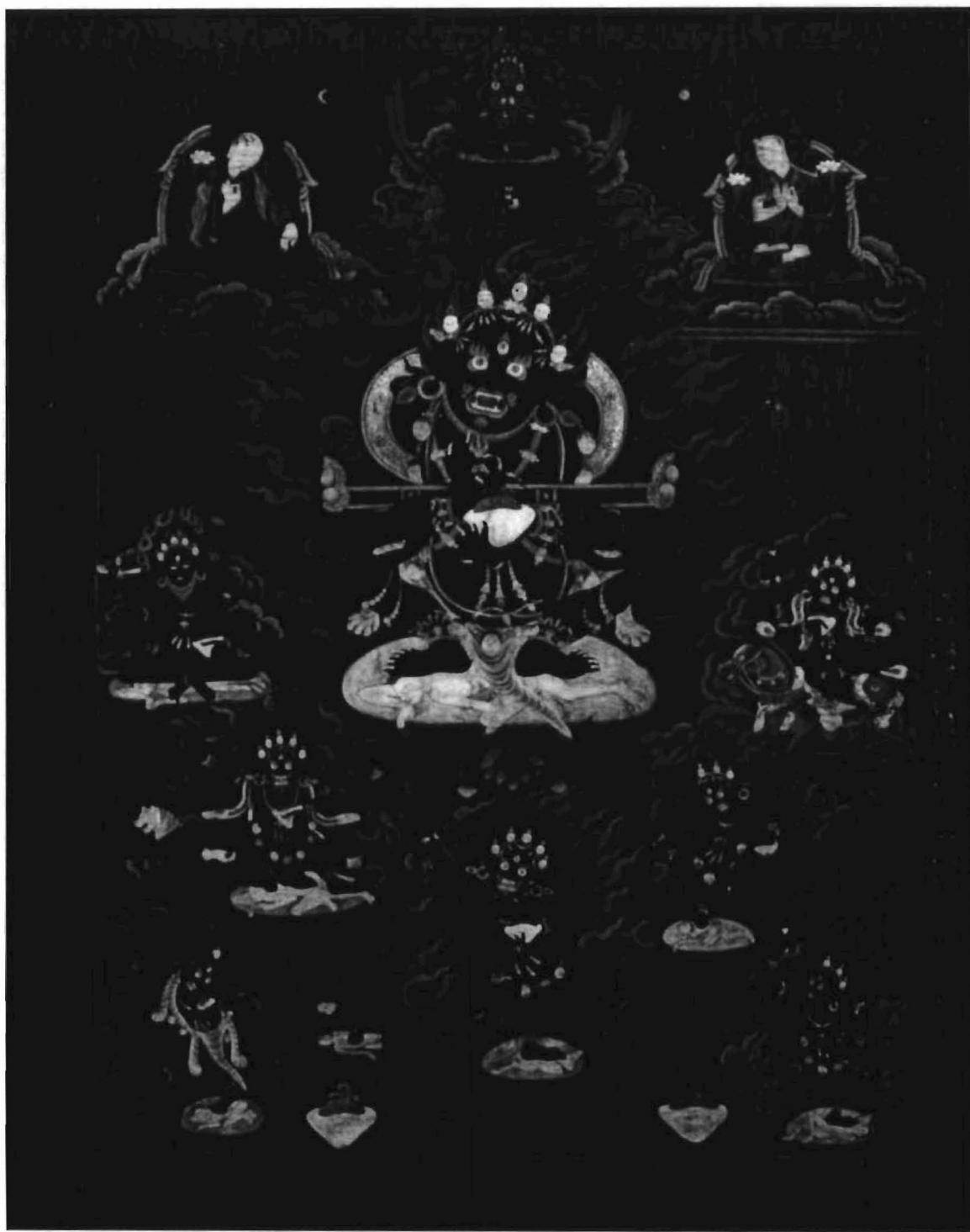


Figure 51. Gur gyi ngon po (Gur ngon lha brgyad).



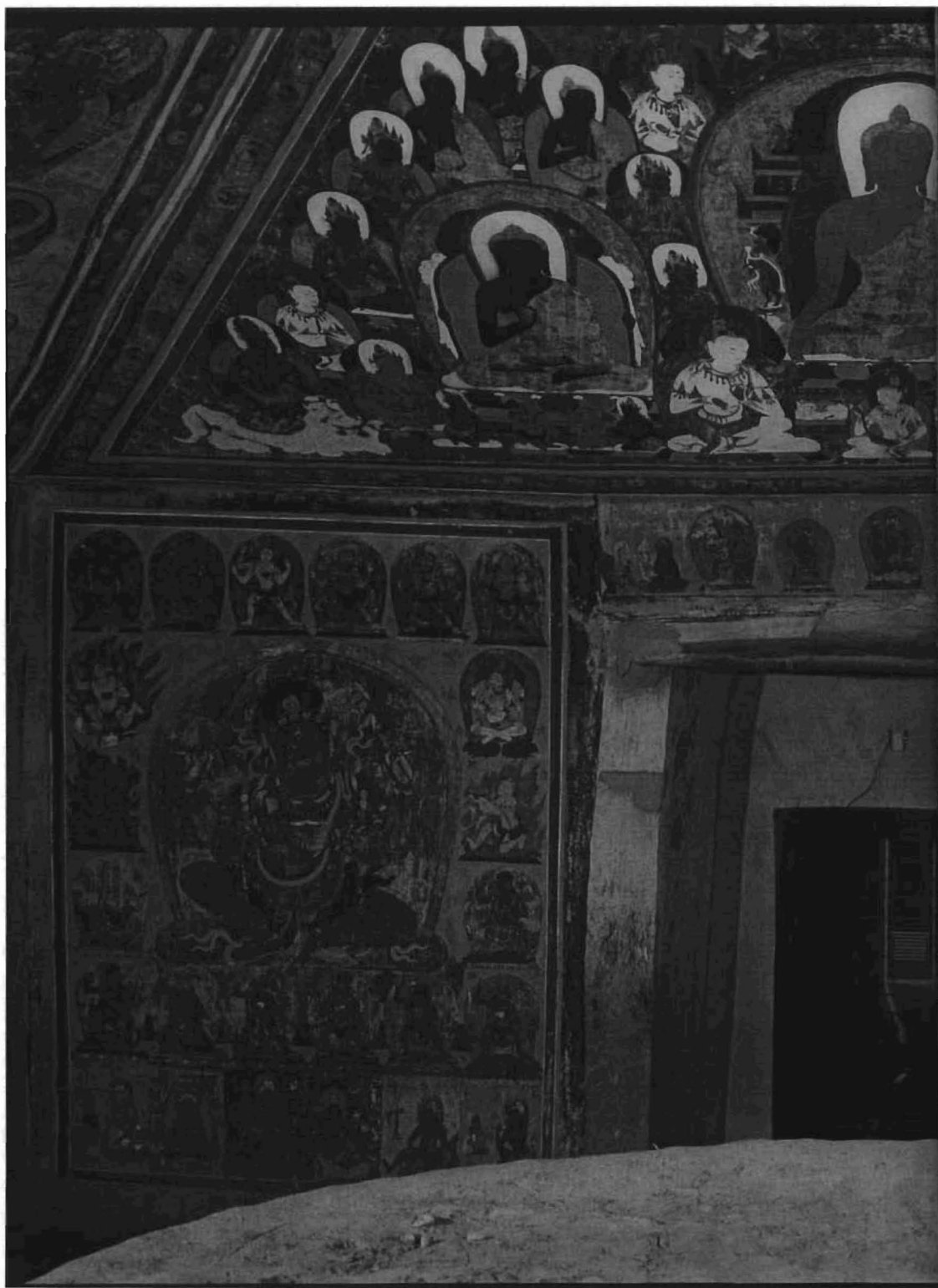


Figure 52. Four-armed Mahākāla and attendants.



Figure 53. Gur gyi mgon po and attendants.



Figure 54. Bhadra Nag po.



Figure 55. Raven-faced Mahākāla.

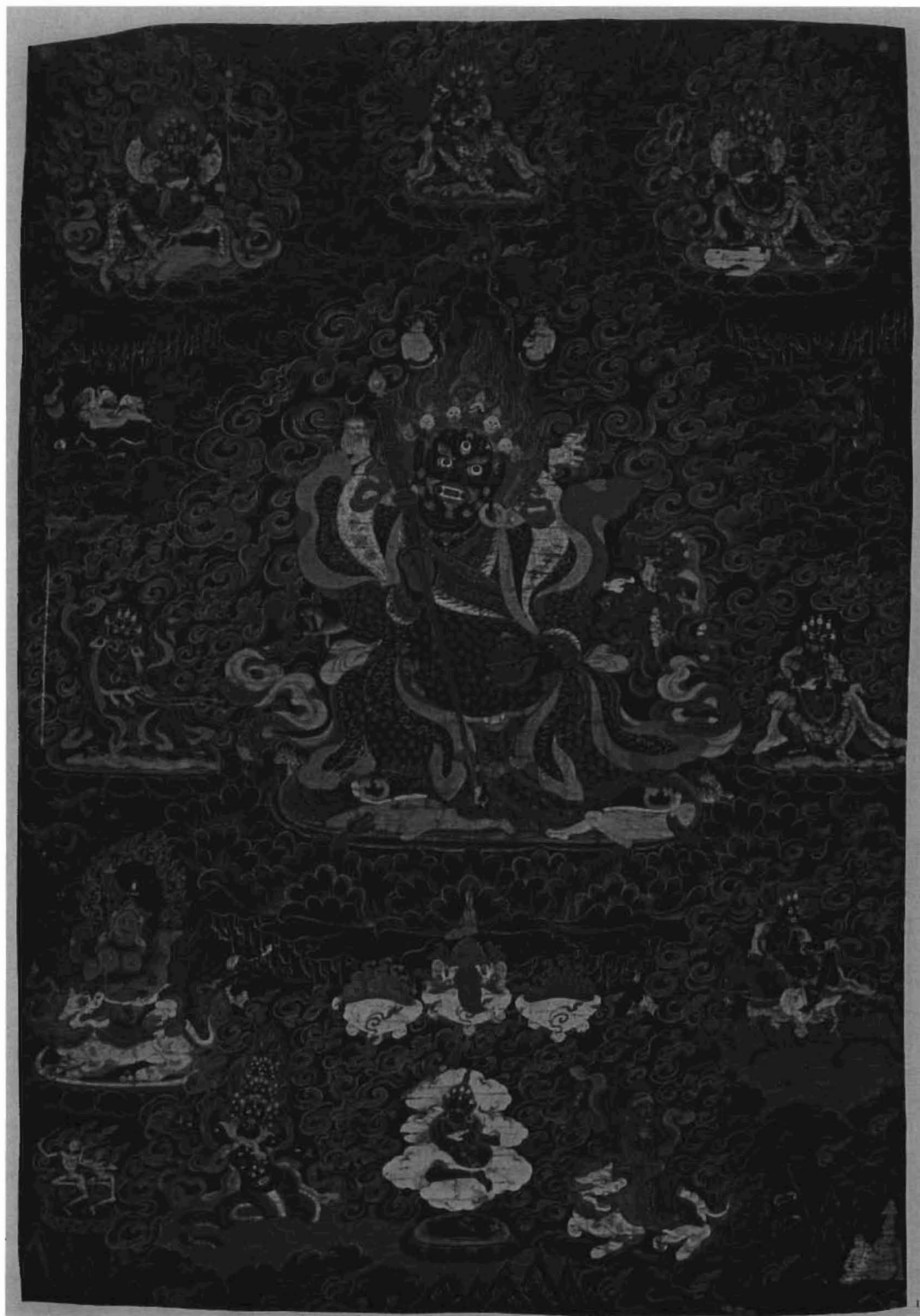


Figure 56. mGon po beng bka' ma.



Figure 57. mGon po anghora.





Figure 58. mGon po lha chen dpal 'barjo bo'i lugs.

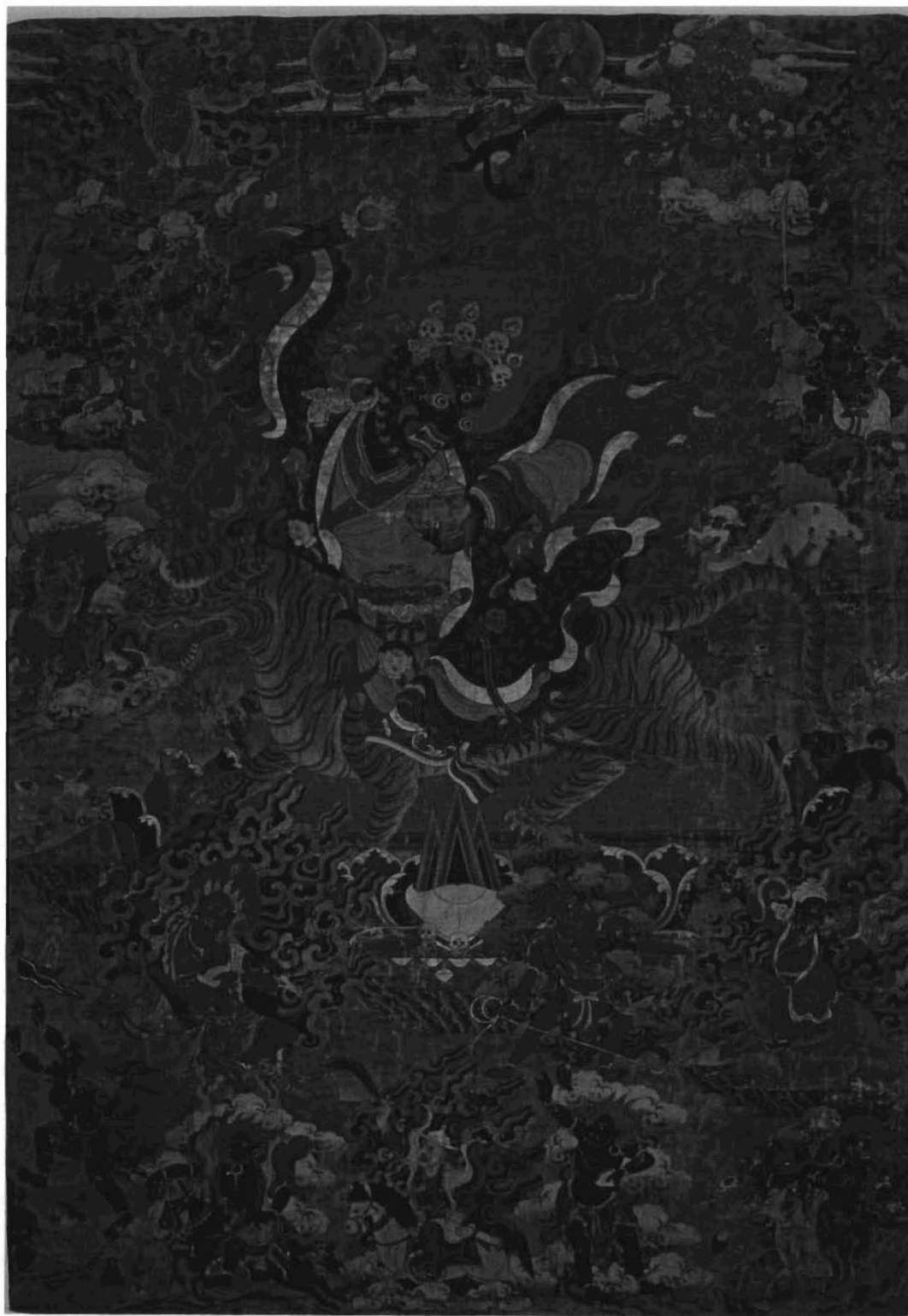


Figure 59. mGon po stag zhon ma.





Figure 60. mGon po stag zhon ma.



Figure 61. mGon po gri gug.



Figure 62. mGon po gri gug.



Figure 63. mGon po ber nag zangs gri can.



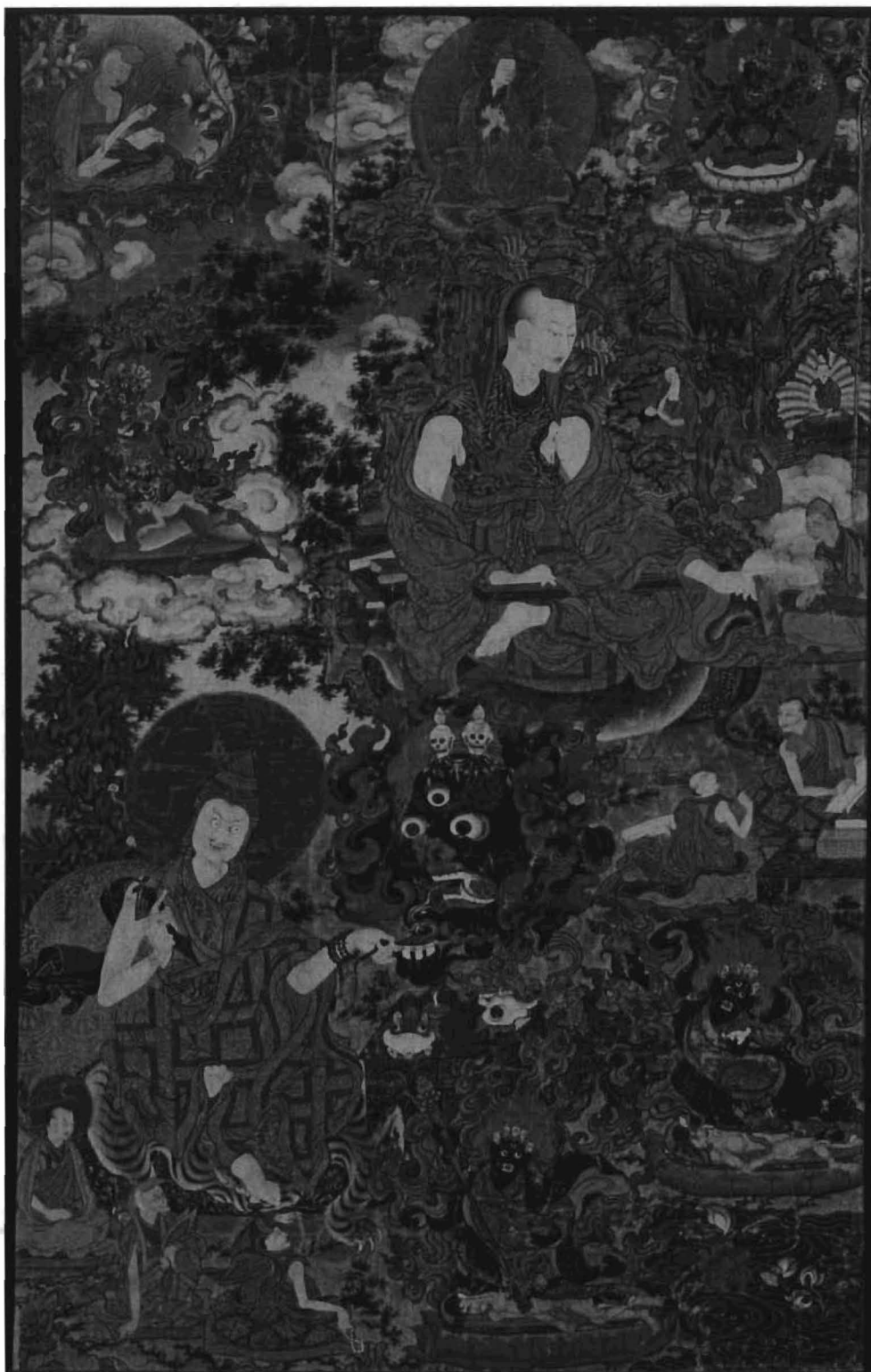


Figure 65. Incarnation of Pan chen bla ma.

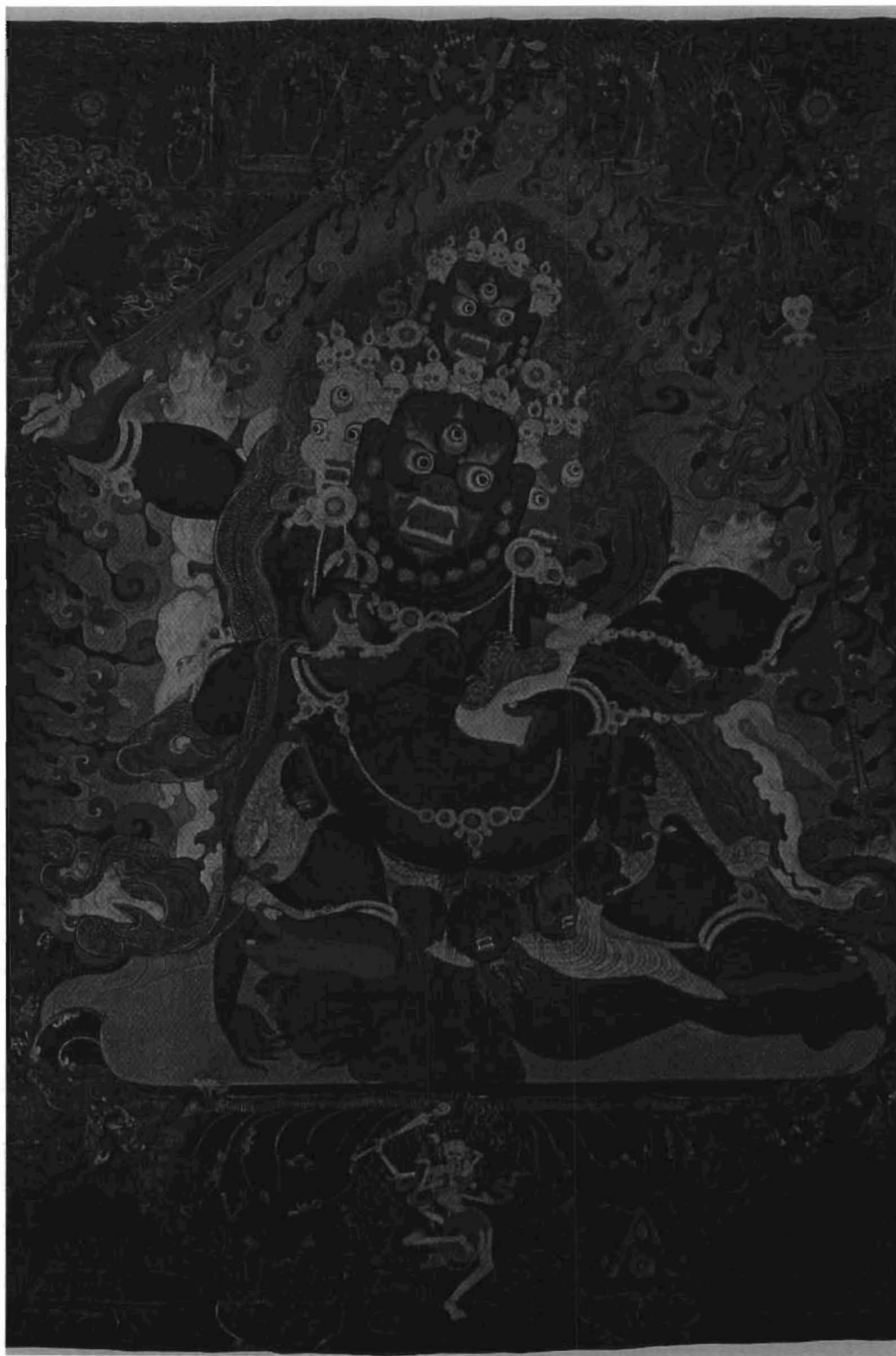


Figure 66. dPal mgon zhal bzhi pa.





Figure 67. Paṇ chen bla ma's former life as Sa skya Paṇḍita.





Figure 68. Paṇ chen bla ma's former life as Sa skya Paṇḍita.



Figure 69. Ma ning nag po (rNying ma)

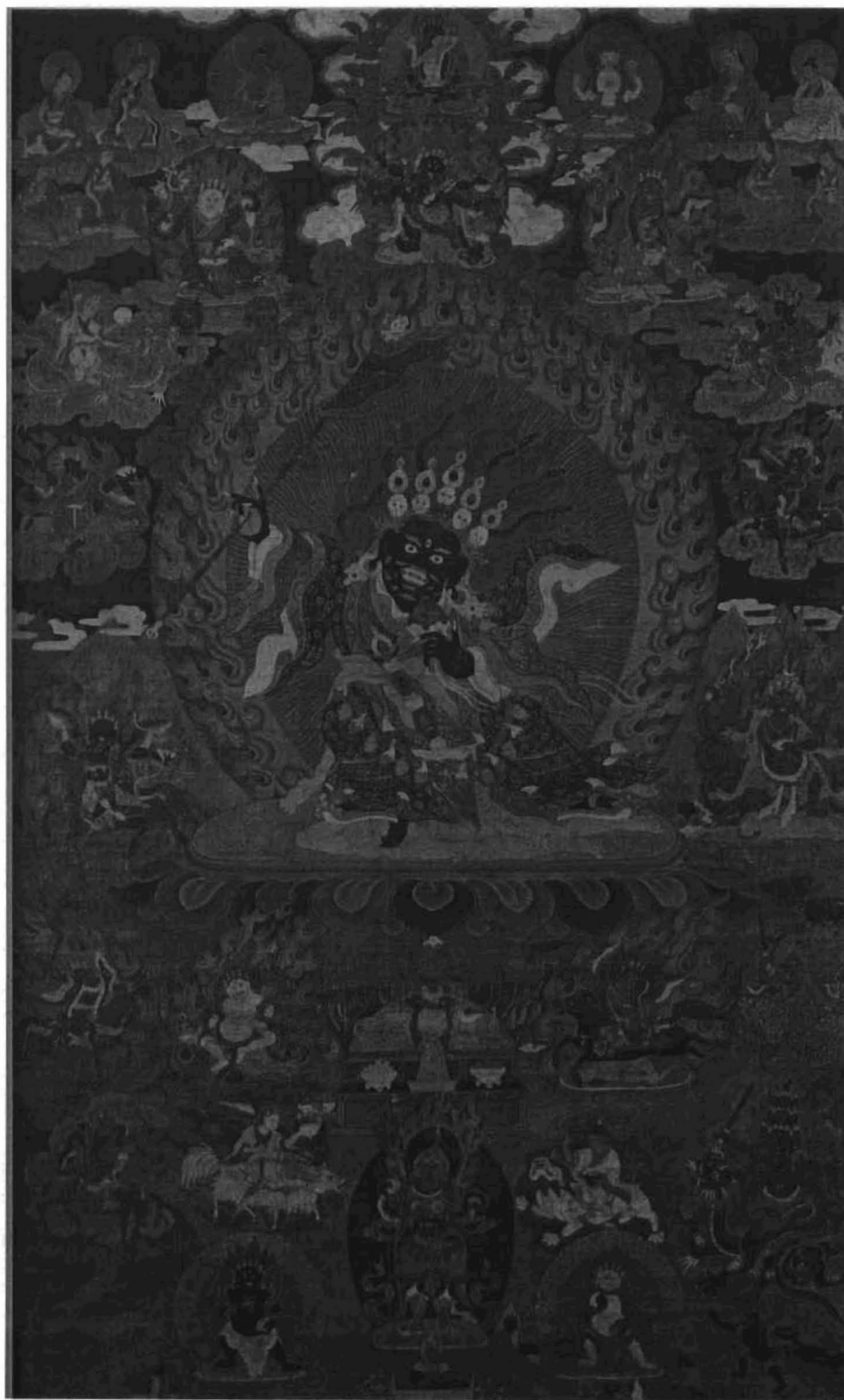


Figure 70. Ma ning nag po (rNying ma).

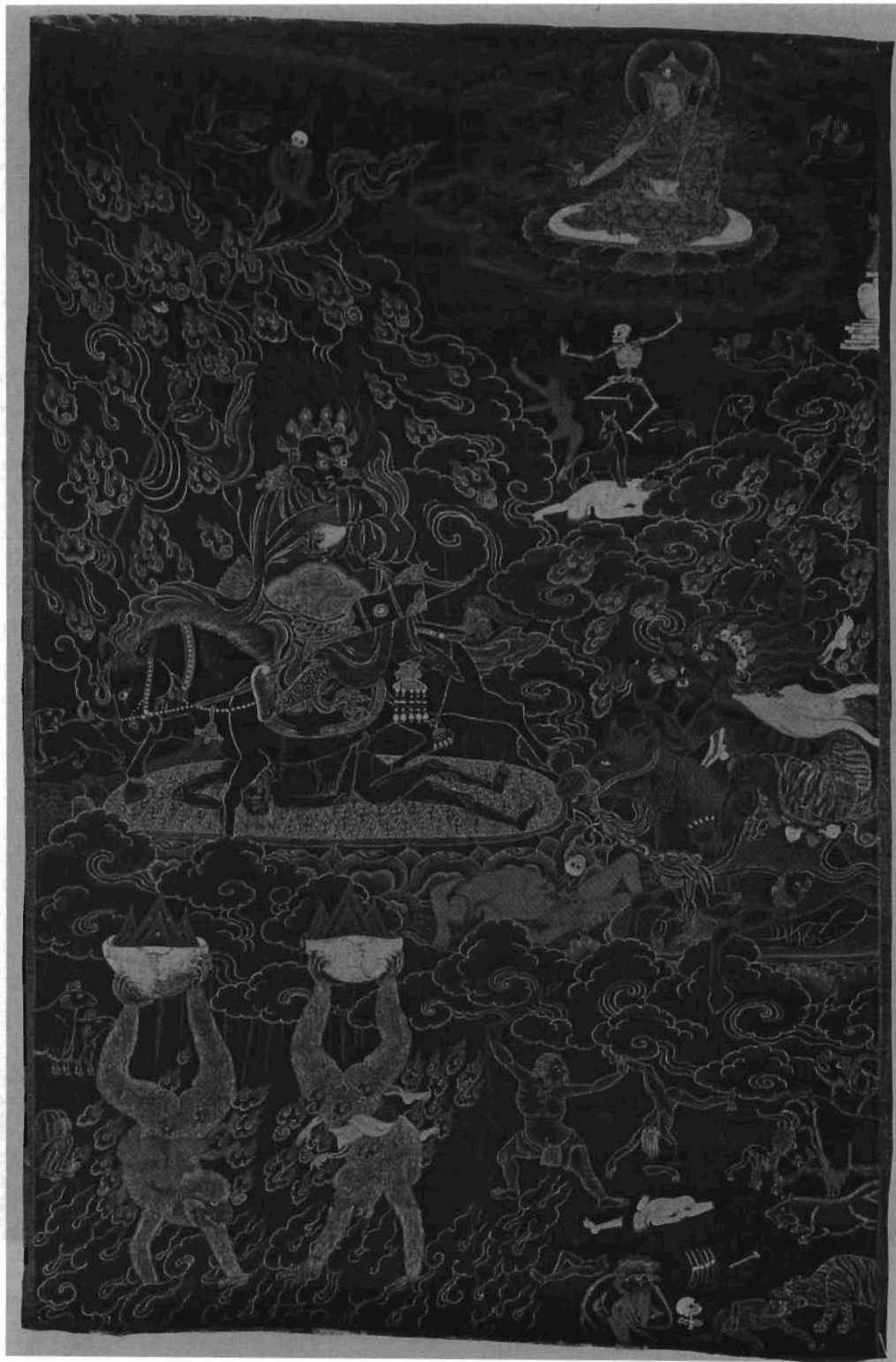


Figure 71. Simhamukha Mahākāla.



Figure 72. Brāhmanrūpa.





Figure 73. Two-armed Mahākāla with attendants.



Figure 74. Mahākāla (maṇḍala?).

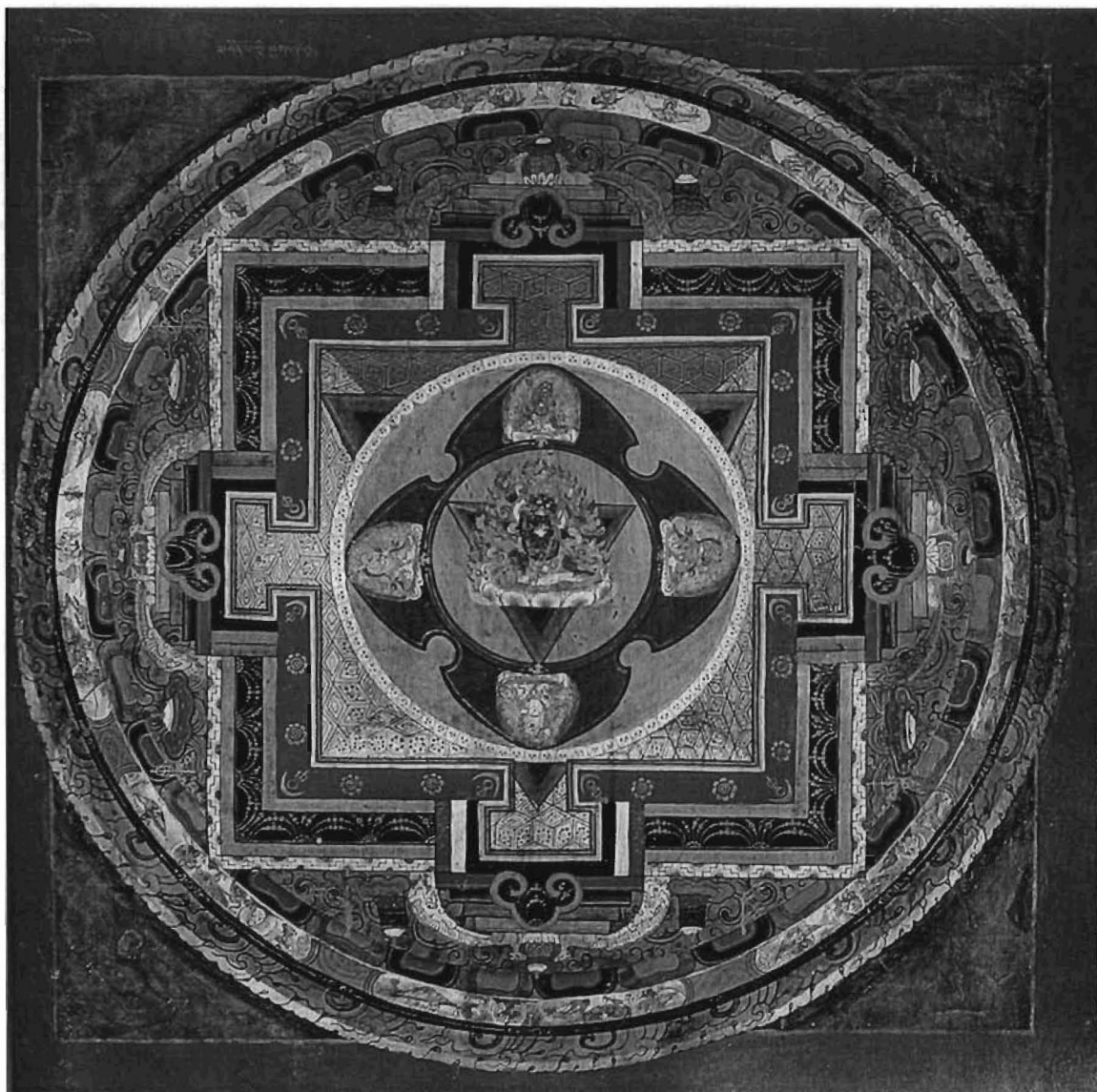


Figure 75. rdo rje nag po chen po gri gug lha lnga'i dkyil 'khor.





Figure 76. rdo rje nag po chen po lha brgyad kyi dkyil 'khor.

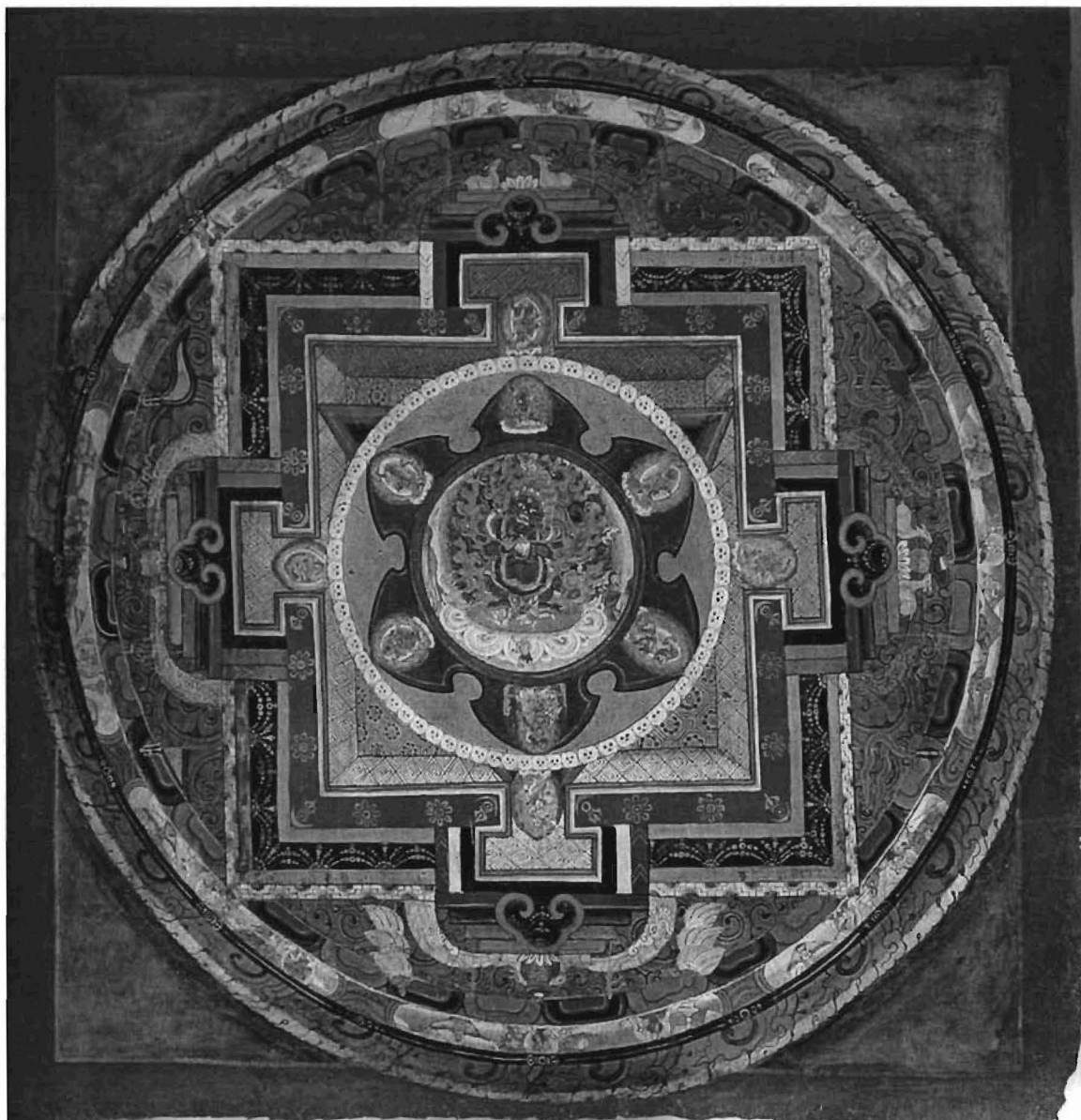


Figure 77. rdo rje nag po chen po lha bcu gyis kyi dkyil 'khor.

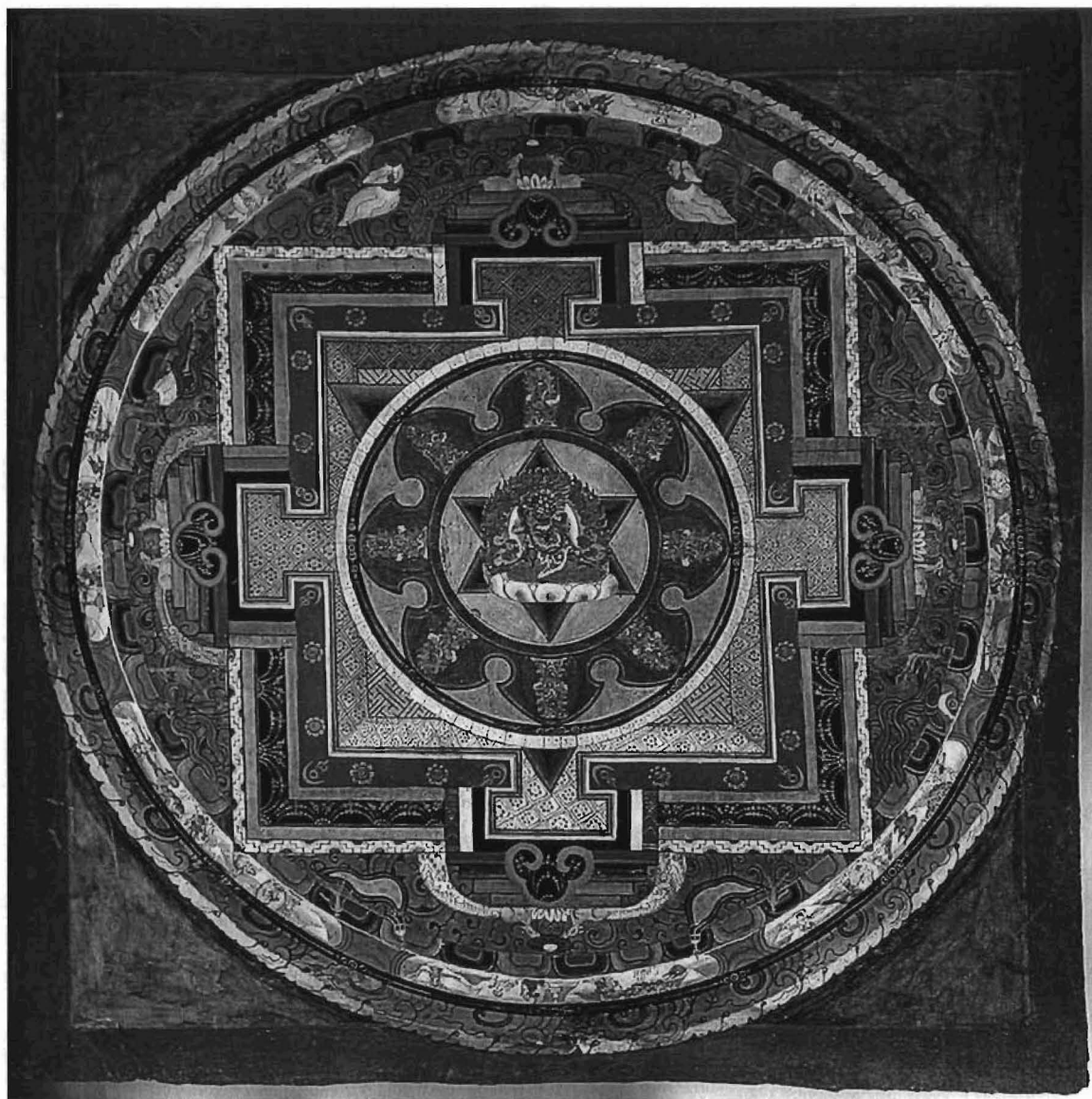


Figure 78. rdo rje nag po chen po lha bcu bdun gyi dkyil 'khor.

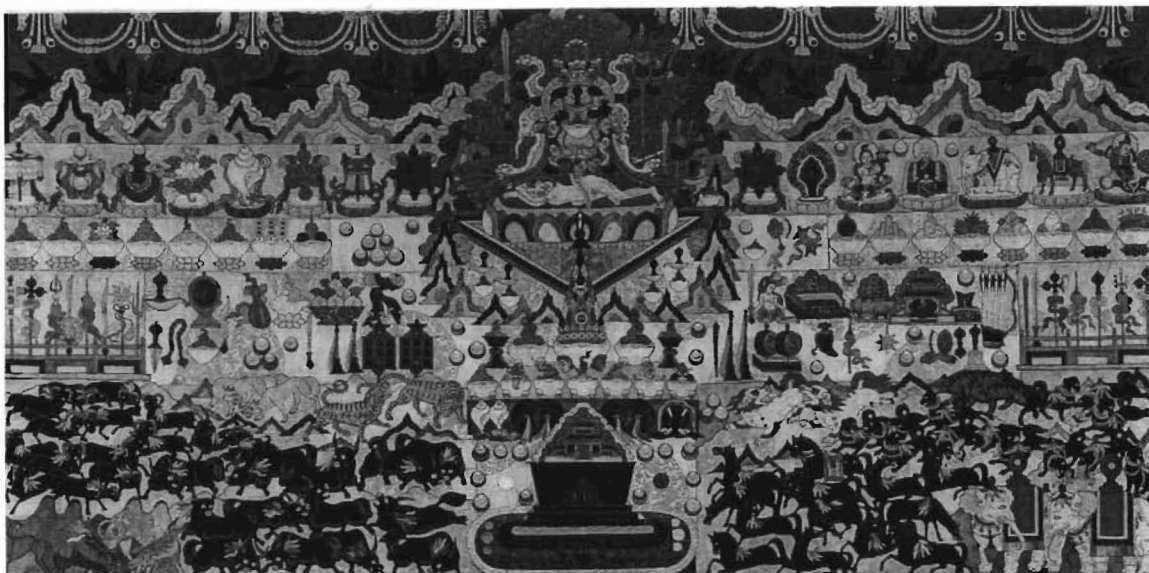


Figure 79. rgyan tshogs.



Figure 80. mdos (thread cross).

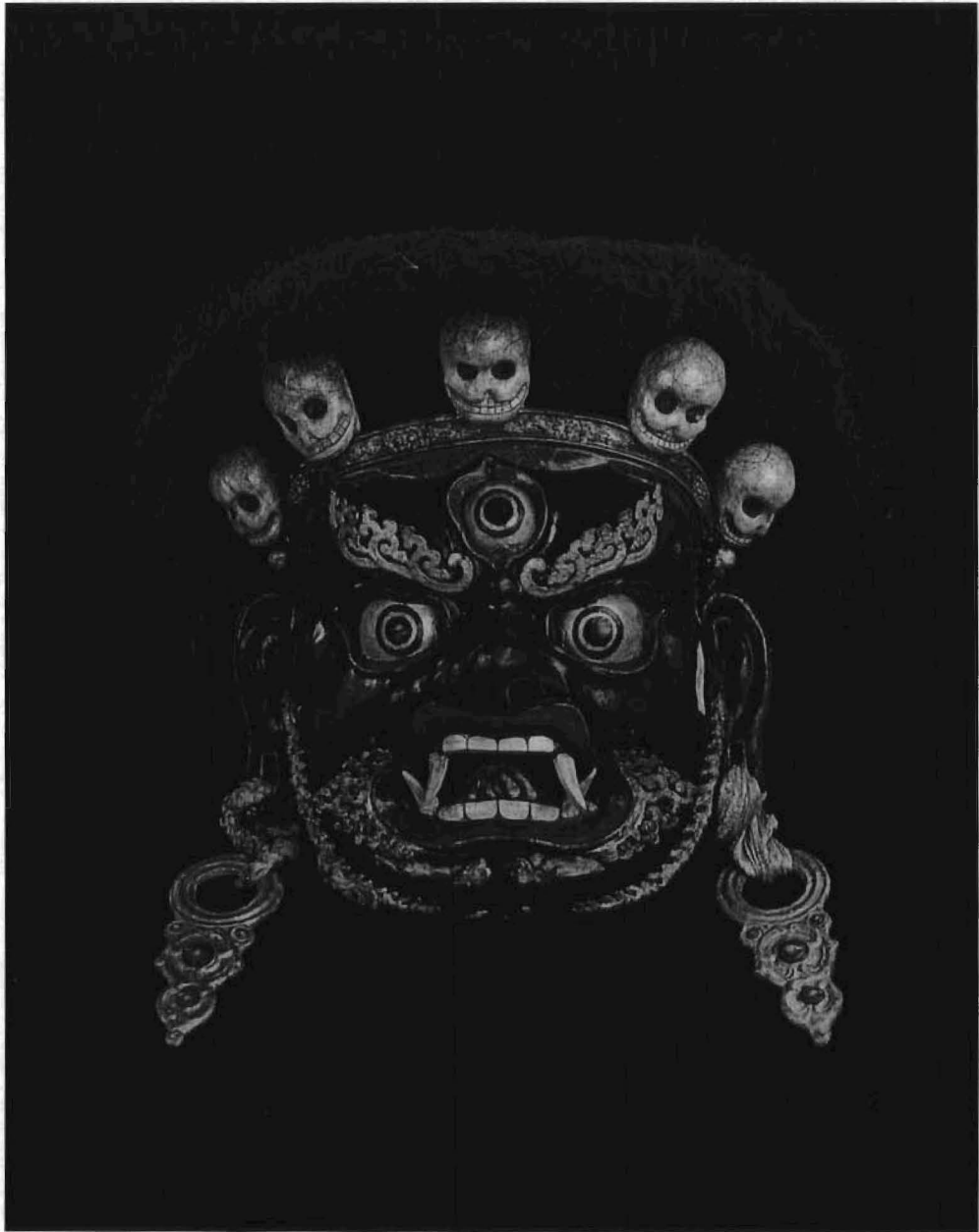


Figure 81. Mask of Mahākāla.

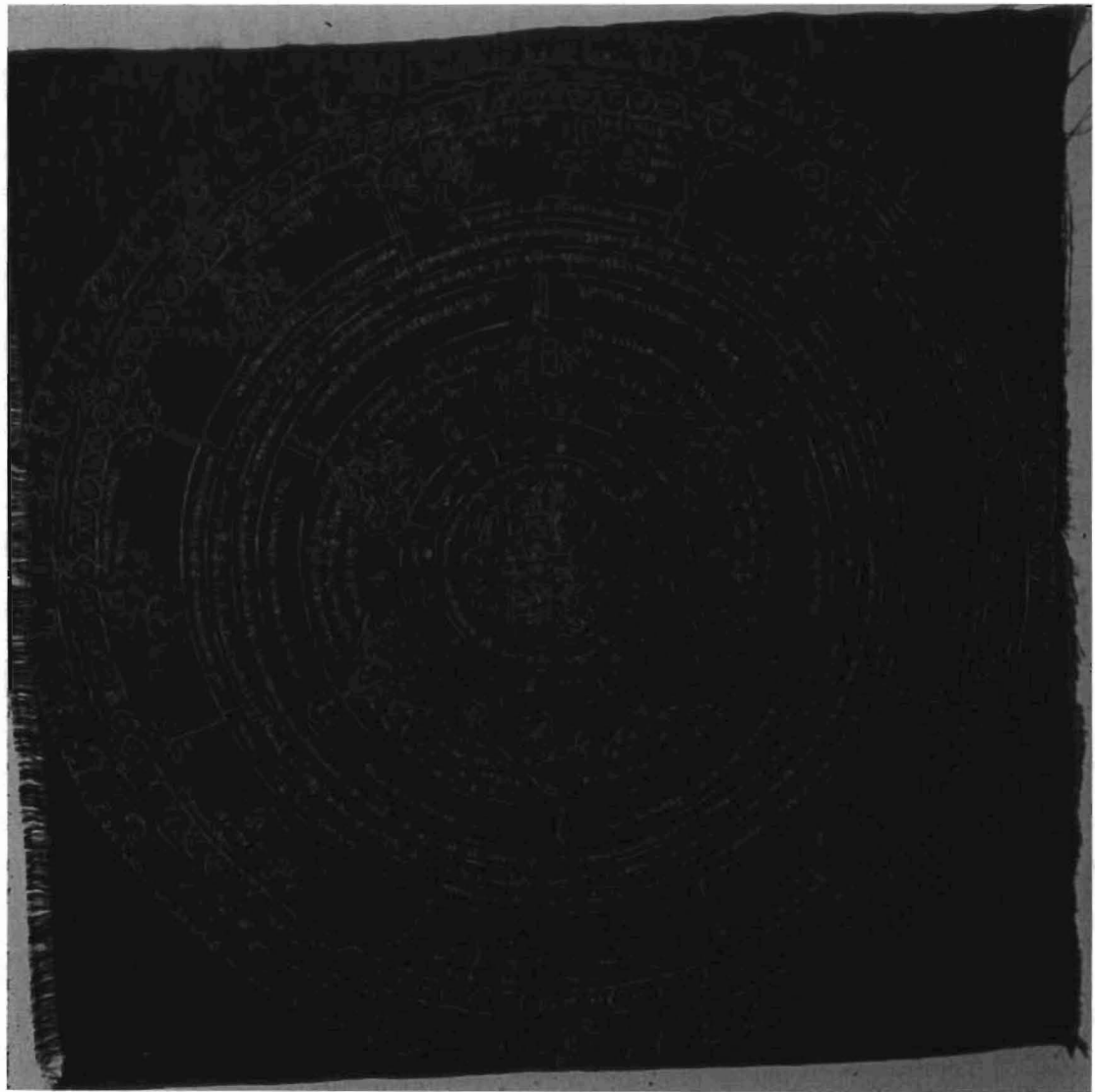


Figure 82. Mahākāla maṇḍala as a charm.

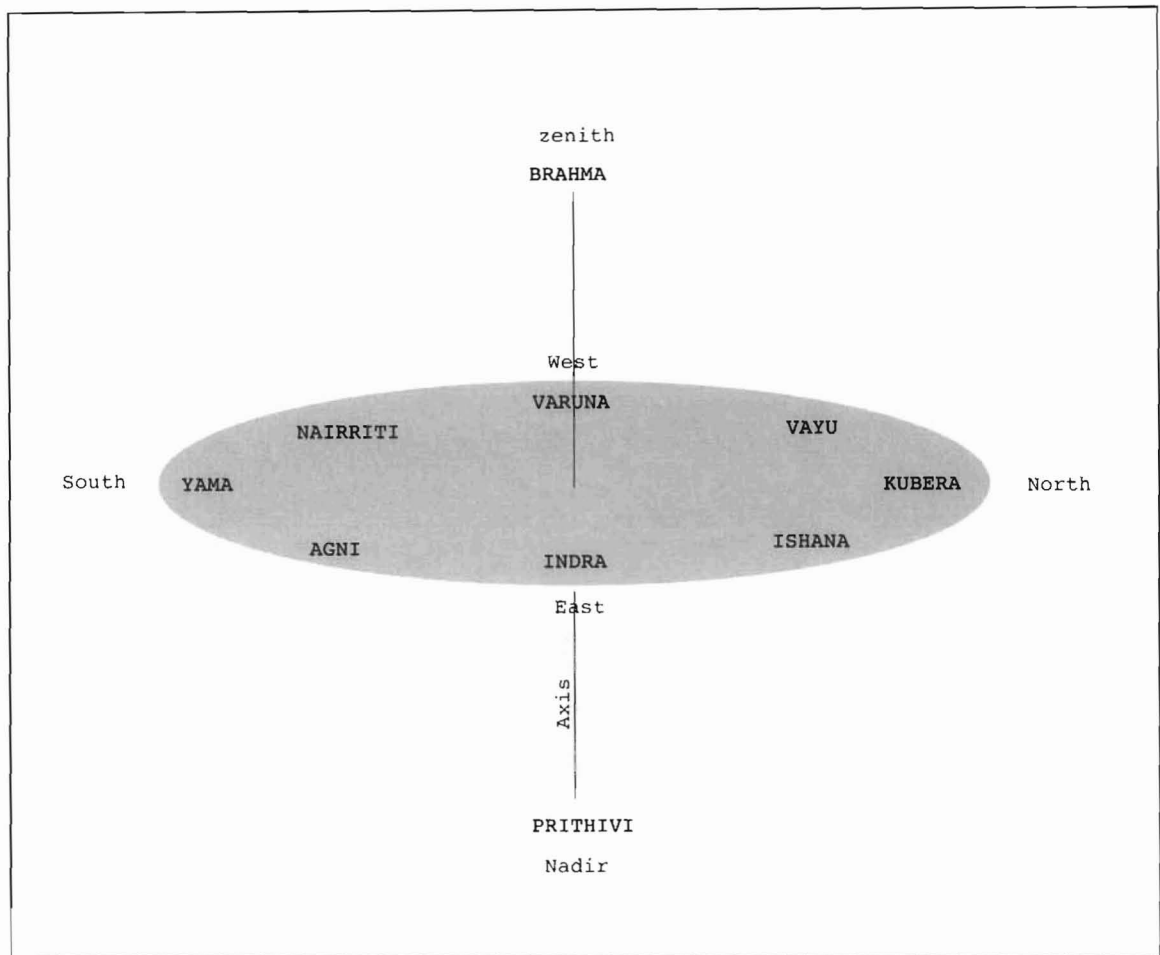


Figure 83. Diagram of Dikpāla.



## GLOSSARY

Bao Xiang Lou	賽相樓
Benzaiten	弁財天
Bishamon	毘沙門
Butsuzozui	仏像図彙
Daan Yaocha shen	大安藥叉神
Daiheitian(Chinese)	大黒天
Daikokuten(Japanese)	大黒天
Daikokutenjinho	大黒天神法
Dainichikyoso	大日經疏
Dali	大理
Dali guo fanxian tu	大理国梵像図
Dashen daiheitian shen	大聖大黒天神
Dunhuang	敦煌
Eboshi	烏帽子
Fajie yuan liu tu	法界源流図
Hitatare	直垂
Jianbojialuo	金鉢迦羅神
Jinkai	神愷
Kariginu	狩衣
Ki Hidenobu	紀秀信
Kujakuokyo	孔雀王經
Mogejialuo	摩訶迦羅
Ninnokyoso	仁王經疏
Okuni no nushi no mikoto	大国主命
QianLong	乾隆
Shaku	尺

Sogishokoku monogatari	宗祇諸国物語
Taizokai genzu	胎藏界原図
Taizokyuzuyo	胎藏旧図様
Taizozuzo	胎藏図像
Yijing	義浄
Yunnan	雲南
Zhang Shengwen	張勝温
Zhu fo pusa senxiang zan	諸佛菩薩聖像贊
Zukin	頭巾

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