

# Educator Resource

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## *Place of Provenance: Regional Styles in Tibetan Painting*

October 12, 2012-March 25, 2013



RUBIN  
MUSEUM  
OF ART

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## How to Use This Educator Resource

*The Place of Provenance: Regional Styles in Tibetan Painting* explores the four distinctive provincial artistic styles of Tibet as well as those of Bhutan, Mongolia, and Qing-dynasty China. Although provincial styles are crucial to identifying the origin of Tibetan paintings, the elements of each style are largely unknown to Western scholars. The exhibition compares certain key elements of landscape, such as skies, clouds, and snow mountains, as a means of exploring the unique artistic attributes of each region.

The contents of this Educator Resource are designed to be used by educators and students and can be adapted to suit the needs of a wide range of classrooms. **Included are three key images from the exhibition.** The guiding questions provided with each image are intended to draw attention to details in each painting and to the broad themes of the exhibition. It is always helpful to begin looking at each work of art with some basic, open-ended questions that will elicit observations and questions.

- What’s going on in this painting?
- What about this painting made you say that?
- Where else have you seen something like this?

We encourage you to use this guide in any way that works best for you:

- Learn about the exhibition as you prepare to bring your students to the Rubin Museum.
- Introduce art from the Himalayas and the main theme of the exhibition to your students.
- Use the guiding questions as a starting point for students to conduct independent research.
- Explore the additional resources to learn more about art from the Himalayas.

## Glossary

**Deity**- the state of being divine; god or goddess.

**Tibet**- an administrative division of China, North of the Himalayan Mountains: prior to 1950 Tibet was a theocracy under the rule of the Dalai Lama. The region is approximately 471,660 square miles. It also is home to the tallest mountains at an average elevation of approximately 16,000 feet.

**Tara**- a female deity and goddess for the benefit of all beings.

**Style**- a distinctive artistic manner which permits the grouping of works into related categories\*

**Thangka**- Tibetan scroll paintings on cloth that often represent Buddhist deities or mandalas and can be rolled up and easily transported.

**Provenance**- the place or source of origin.

**Province**- a country, territory, district or region.

**Buddha**- a title given to one who has attained spiritual awakening (enlightenment) in the Buddhist tradition. The term “the Buddha” often refers to Buddha Shakyamuni, Siddhartha Gautama, who lived from approximately 563-483 BCE.

**Buddhism**- a religion and a philosophy that is based on the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha. The Buddhist tradition focuses on the attainment of the enlightenment and nirvana and release from an endless cycle of death and rebirth.

**Lama**- a teacher or guru in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.





### White Tara

U Province; 19<sup>th</sup> Century  
Distemper on primed cotton  
C2008.34 (HAR 51)

This painting of White Tara lacks dating inscriptions or contemporary historical figures. Still it can be confidently identified as nineteenth-century Uri painting thanks to several key stylistic features. The painting's general symmetry, light tonalities, light-blue skies, and three-lobed cumulus clouds, each with a prominent dark "cloud eye" hole, are all typical of the Uri style. Another indicator is the even spacing of the jewels in the main figure's tiara.

### Guiding Questions

1. Look closely at the central figure. List *10 words* that help you describe her.



2. This **thangka** was created to transmit the teachings of one group of people to another. What do you think is the relationship of the large and the small figures?
3. This painting was the first Tibetan painting purchased by Donald and Shelley Rubin, the founders of the Rubin Museum of Art. They made a personal connection to the painting even though they did not know much about Himalayan Asia. What personal connections are you making and what would you like to learn more about?





### Arhat Rahula

China; 18th century  
Distemper on primed cotton  
Rubin Museum of Art  
C2004.9.1 (HAR 65363)

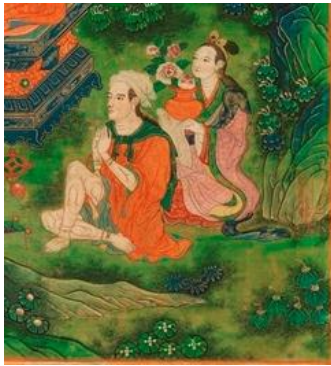
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This painting portrays the Arhat Rahula, one of the Sixteen Arhats, seated in a landscape of fruit trees and rocky blue and green crags attended by a standing monk. The faces have an unusual amount of shading. An array of puffy clouds with three main lobes and horizontal tails float in a sky that begins as an intense blue and fades to a softer tone at the horizon. These stylized cumulus clouds imitate the Chinese auspicious symbol ruyi (如意), meaning “as you wish.”

This painting is not purely Chinese; it conforms to Tibetan conventions accepted and piously supported by China’s Qing court. So while the blue-green landscape is distinctively Chinese, the landscape forms have become stylized by Tibetan conventions and populated by buddhas and other sacred figures that are portrayed in a Tibetan manner.

### Guiding Questions

1. Look at the painting. If you could enter this painting where would you go?
2. Look at the two kneeling gurus(?) in the lower right corner. What do you think their role is in this thangka?



3. The landscape in this work of art incorporates elements of traditional Chinese and Tibetan painting styles. What can we learn about the relationship between these two cultures?





### **Buddha Shakyamuni**

China; 18th century

Distemper on primed cotton

Rubin Museum of Art

F1996.27.3 (HAR 499)

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This painting depicts a famous ancient Indian sandalwood statue of Buddha Shakyamuni. The original statue was believed to have been brought to China in the fourth century from India via Central Asia. Called “the Sandalwood Lord of China” by Tibetans, a similar early wooden copy of this standing Buddha image, traditionally said to have been commissioned by King Udayana in India, survives in the Seiryō-ji Temple of Kyoto, Japan.

The original wooden statue was worshipped by successive generations of Chinese Buddhists. During the Qing dynasty it was housed in Beijing in a temple named Zhantansi, or the “Sandalwood Temple.” In 1900, during the unrest of the Boxer Rebellion, that temple was destroyed by fire, and the venerable buddha image was smuggled by pious Buriat Mongols to their homeland. There it survived the destruction prevalent during the Soviet period and the Chinese Cultural Revolution, and it now stands in a new temple dedicated to it.

### **Guiding Questions**

1. Looking at the painting, take the pose of the central figure. This pose is meant to convey a message: what do you think this figure is trying to say?
2. This is a painting of a sculpture. Why do you think it would be important to reproduce the image of a sculpture in this format?
3. This image and depiction are both examples of **cultural diffusion**. Define this phrase and discuss why.



## Resources for Further Learning

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### *Web Resources*

[www.rmanyc.org/provenance](http://www.rmanyc.org/provenance)

**The Place of Provenance: Regional Styles in Tibetan Painting** // Explore exhibition resources and to learn further about the four distinctive provincial artistic styles of Tibet.

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[www.rmanyc.org/education](http://www.rmanyc.org/education)

**Rubin Museum of Art** // Explore multimedia resources and videos. Find out about current and upcoming exhibition and programs at the Rubin Museum of Art.

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[www.rmanyc.org/schoolprograms](http://www.rmanyc.org/schoolprograms)

**School Programs: Rubin Museum of Art** // Browse and learn about the different programs the museum has to offer for students K–12.

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[www.rmanyc.org/universities](http://www.rmanyc.org/universities)

**Universities: Rubin Museum of Art** // Learn how you can use the museum, our collections, and online resources as an extension of the classroom.

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[www.himalayanart.org](http://www.himalayanart.org)

**Himalayan Art Resources** // Search a virtual museum of documented Himalayan art that includes high-resolution images, essays, articles, thematic collections, bibliographies, and activities for children.

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[www.tibetanlineages.org](http://www.tibetanlineages.org)

**Treasury of Lives: Biographies of Himalayan Buddhist Masters** // Browse biographies and portraits of Tibetan Buddhist and Bon masters by religious tradition, geography, community, and historic period.

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<http://interactive.rma2.org/>

**Educational Interactive Library** // Journey behind works of Himalayan art on this interactive site, revealing the stories, ideas and beliefs that inspired them.

### *Readings*

Beers, Robert. *The Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2003

McArthur, Meher. *Reading Buddhist Art: an Illustrated Guide to Buddhist Signs and Symbols*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2002

Leidy, Denise Patry. *The Art of Buddhism: An Introduction to its History and Meaning*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 2008

Menzies, Jackie, ed. *Buddha: Radiant Awakening*. Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2001

Jackson, David, *The Place of Provenance: Regional Styles in Tibetan Painting*, 2012

\* Fernie, Eric. *Art History and its Methods: A critical anthology*. London: Phaidon, 1995, p. 361