

Schools of Tibetan Buddhism

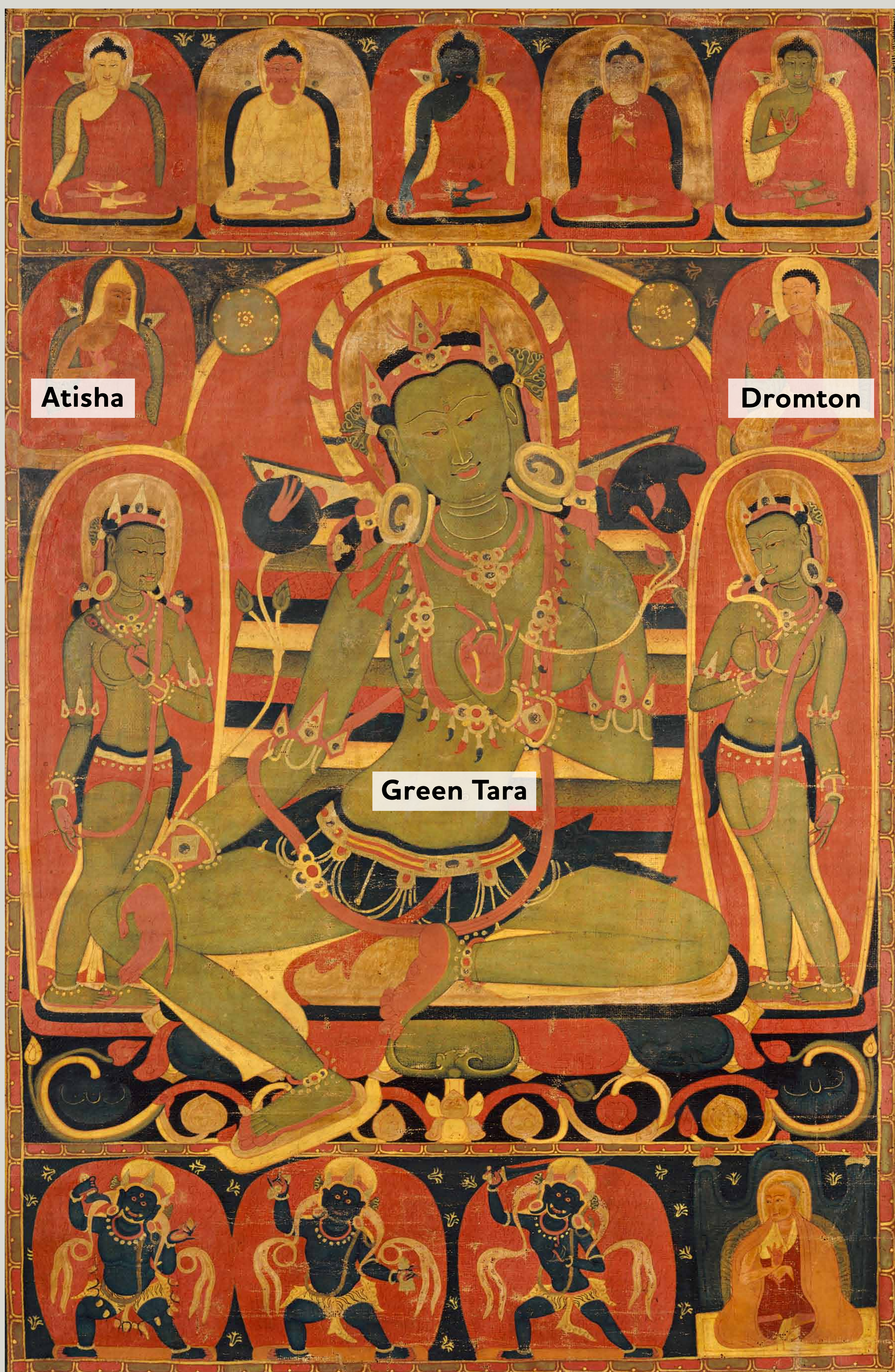
Buddhism first came to Tibet in the seventh century, the start of what would later be called the “Early Spread of the Dharma.” Distinctively Tibetan forms of the religion began to develop in the late tenth century, now known as the “Later Spread.” From this a number of sects, or schools, came into being, each flourishing at different times and in different regions. These traditions’ founders and teachings as well as the deities they emphasize are distinct, and thus the school in which a work of art was created can be determined using these elements as clues. The panels at right examine the characteristics of the schools explored in the exhibition and reveal the details that help identify to which tradition a painting belongs.



This map identifies the principle monasteries of the schools explored in the exhibition. As their geographic relationship suggests, Tibetan Buddhist schools to some extent borrowed and expanded upon the practices of their neighbors. For example, worship of the Nyingma School founding guru Padmasambhava was taken up by most other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Teachings and traditions of the Kadam School were incorporated by the Gelug, Kagyu, and Sakya schools. Further, the scholastic traditions of certain monasteries spanned beyond school boundaries.

Kadam School

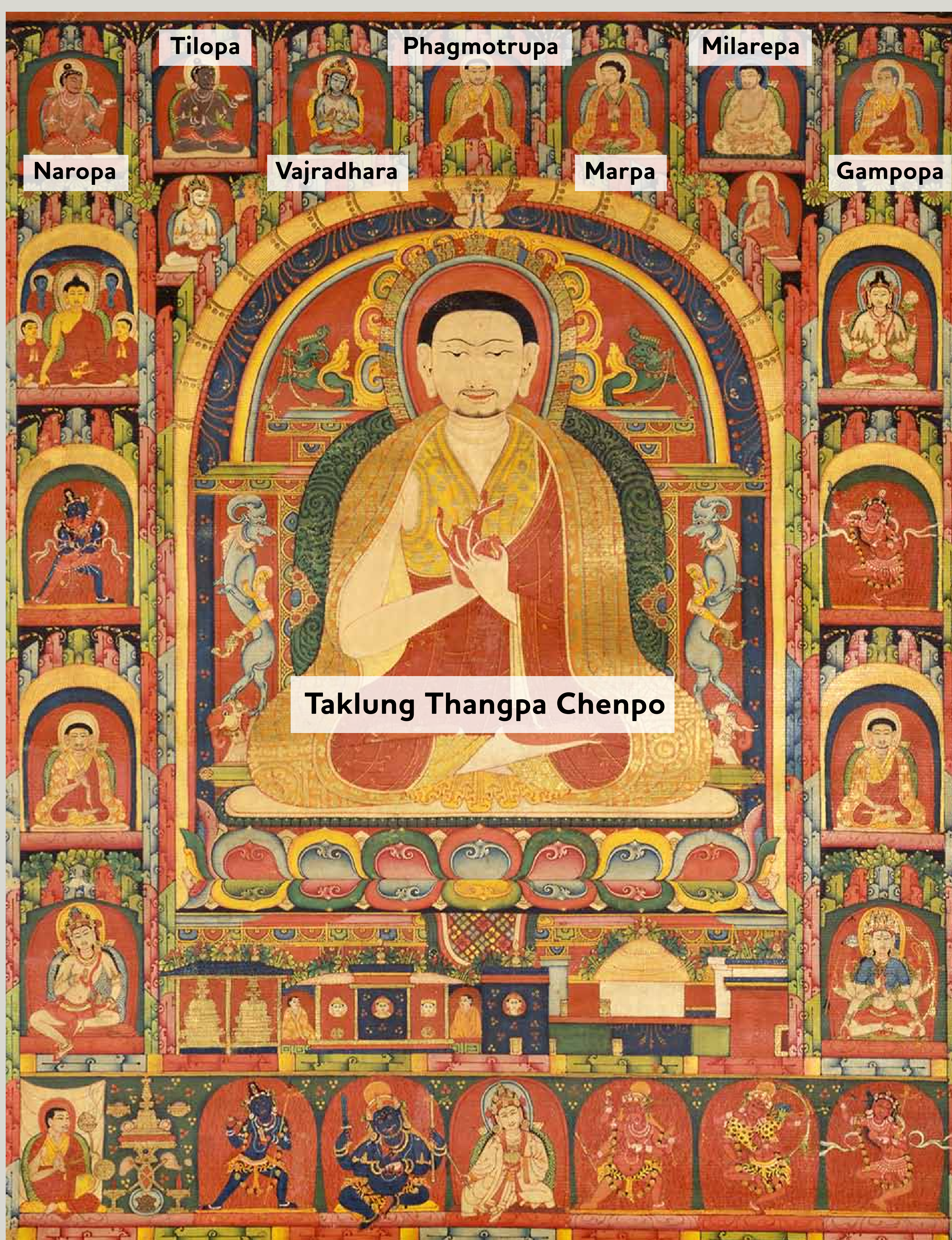
Followers of the Kadam School, or Kadampa, are the lineage holders of the oral teachings of the Indian master Atisha, who visited Tibet in the mid-eleventh century, mainly as transmitted by his principal disciple Dromton. The school emphasized monasticism, scholarship, and the restriction of esoteric instruction and paid particular attention to the popular deities Buddha Shakyamuni, Avalokiteshvara, and Tara. Important early monasteries included Reting (founded 1057) and Sangpu Neudok (founded 1072) in central Tibet. This school was later partly incorporated into the Gelug School, which considered itself the New Kadam order.



The Indian teacher **Atisha** and his primary Tibetan disciple **Dromton**, a lay follower, can be recognized by their dress. Atisha wears a pointed scholar's hat and monastic robes and Dromton is dressed in Tibetan secular robes. Atisha introduced certain evocations of **Green Tara** into Buddhist teachings and thus Green Tara was a popular subject of Kadam art.

Kagyü School

Followers of the Kagyü School, or Kagyüpa, stress the oral teachings of Marpa Chokyi Lodro (1010–1097) via his famous disciple Milarepa. The school later split into many sub-schools, four of which were founded by students of the master Gampopa (1079–1173) and another eight by disciples of Gampopa's pupil Phagmotrupa (1110–1170). Some of these sub-schools became major powers, three of which are explored further in the panel at right. Among many other esoteric deities, their practices all emphasize Vajravarahi and Chakrasamvara prominently. Important early monasteries of this school include Dakla Gampo and Densathil in central Tibet.



All of the Kagyü sub-schools share the same lineage up to **Gampopa**. This line of teachers begins with the blue buddha **Vajradhara** and the two siddhas **Tilopa** and **Naropa**. It then continues with the layman **Marpa** and the yogin **Milarepa**, clad in a white robe. This group is completed by **Gampopa**, who is often represented with gray hair.

The inclusion of **Phagmotrupa** (top center) and **Taklung Thangpa Chenpo** (1142–1210), indicate that this painting is from the Taklung sub-school. Taklung Thangpa is often represented in a frontal pose with a slight beard.

Karma, Drigung, and Taklung Kagyu Schools

The Karma Kagyu School goes back to Dusum Kyenpa (1110–1193), a pupil of Gampopa, who founded Karma Monastery in eastern Tibet in 1185 and Tsurpu Monastery northwest of Lhasa in 1189. The head of this school, the Karmapa, wears a black hat and represents the earliest reincarnation lineage in Tibetan Buddhism.

The Drigung Kagyu School was founded by Jigten Sumgon (1143–1217), a pupil of Phagmotrupa. Drigung Monastery, northeast of Lhasa, was very powerful in the thirteenth century. Allying itself with Mongolian tribes, it was at one point destroyed by forces of the Chinese Yuan and Tibetan Sakya governments.

The Taklung Kagyu School was founded by Thangpa Chenpo (1142–1210), a pupil of Phagmotrupa. With the monasteries of Taklung and Riwoche, they had important seats in both central and eastern Tibet. Today this school is best known for the beautiful art they commissioned in their first two centuries of establishment.



This painting features the common Kagyu lineage explored further in the panel at left, and includes **Phagmotrupa** and terminates with Jigten Sumgon, the founder of the Drigung School, thus we know that it is a creation of that tradition. All of the Kagyu sub-schools share an emphasis on the deity **Chakrasamvara**, and he appears prominently in their art.

Early Drigung paintings often feature distinctive sets of mahasiddhas, or great tantric adepts, and protectors. These can be seen at the sides and bottom of this painting, respectively.

Sakya School

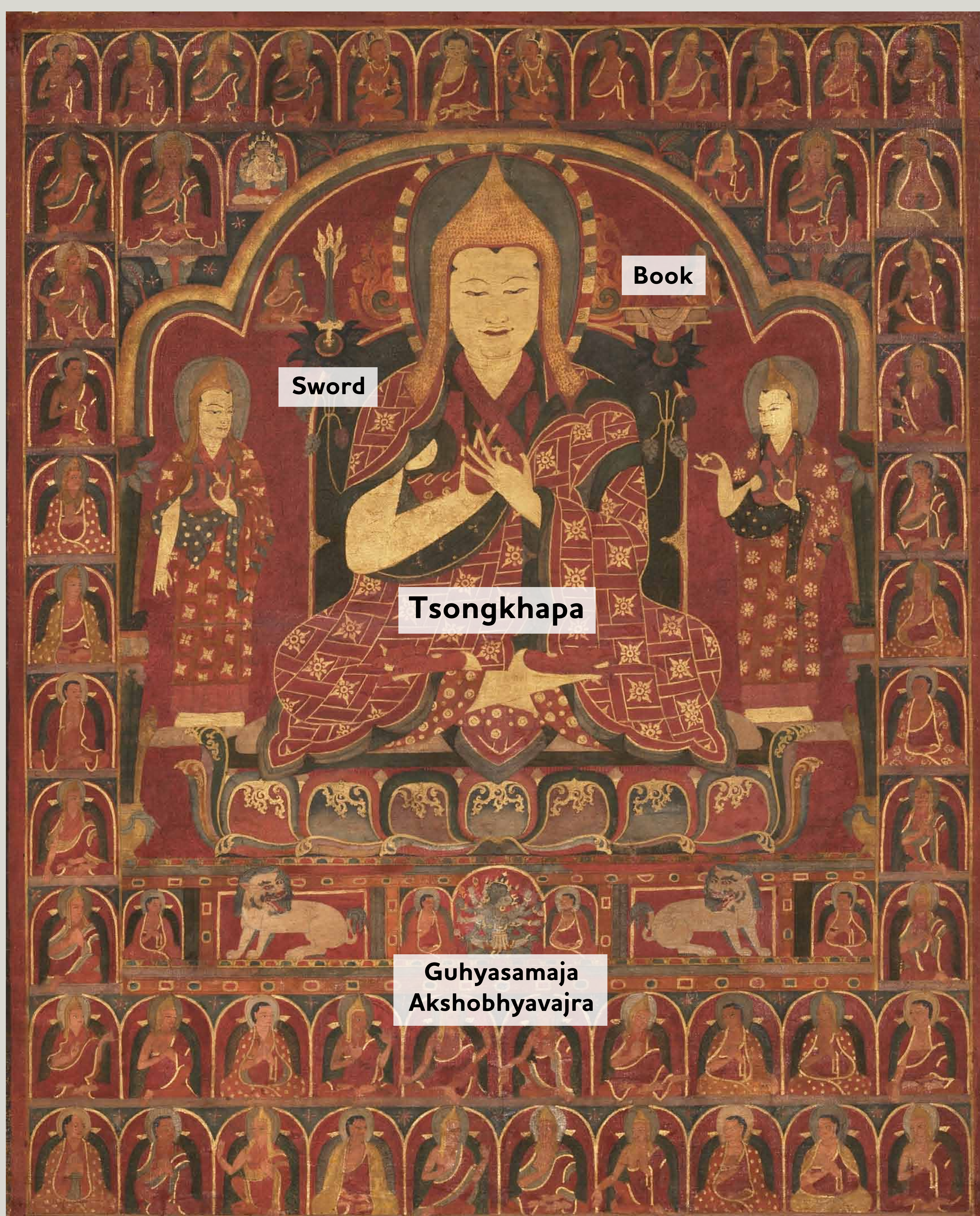
The Sakya School is named after its main monastery, Sakya, in Tsang Province, southern-central Tibet. Founded in 1073 by a member of the Khon family, the school's leadership has been determined by heredity down to the present Throne Holder. They are best known for their "Path with the Fruit" teachings, which descended from the great Indian adept Virupa, and rituals related to the tantric deity Hevajra. Appointed by the Chinese Yuan ruler Khubilai Khan, the Sakya School's head lamas ruled Tibet from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fourteenth century. Ngor, Gongkar, and Nalendra are important branches of the school that were established in the fifteenth century.



The most important Sakya teachings go back to the great tantric adept **Virupa** and have authoritatively been commented on by **Sachen Kunga Nyingpo** (1092–1158), the first of a distinct group of five early Sakya patriarchs. Kunga Nyingpo can often be easily recognized by his dress—that of a Tibetan layman—and his white hair. This painting represents him among his teachers, among them the bodhisattva **Manjushri**, a teacher in vision only.

Gelug School

The Gelug School can be traced back to the great teacher Tsongkhapa (1357–1419), who studied in many monasteries but mainly under the outstanding Sakya School master Rendawa. He founded Ganden Monastery, which became one of the “Three Great Seats” of the Gelug School, the other two being Sera and Drepung. Gelug teachers are largely distinguished by their yellow pointed hats. They propitiated wisdom deities such as the bodhisattva Manjushri, Yama Dharmaraja, and Vajrabhairava. The Dalai Lamas, who became political heads of Tibet in the mid-seventeenth century, and the Panchen Lamas, based at Tashilhunpo Monastery in Shigatse, are the most prominent incarnation lineages of the school.



Gelug School paintings are easy to identify if the school’s founder, **Tsongkhapa** (1357–1419), is represented. He wears a yellow pointed hat and monastic robes and is surrounded by a **sword** and **book**, identifying him as an emanation of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, Manjushri.

One of the main deities of worship within the Gelug School, **Guhyasamaja Akshobhavajra**, is represented in the center of Tsongkhapa’s throne.