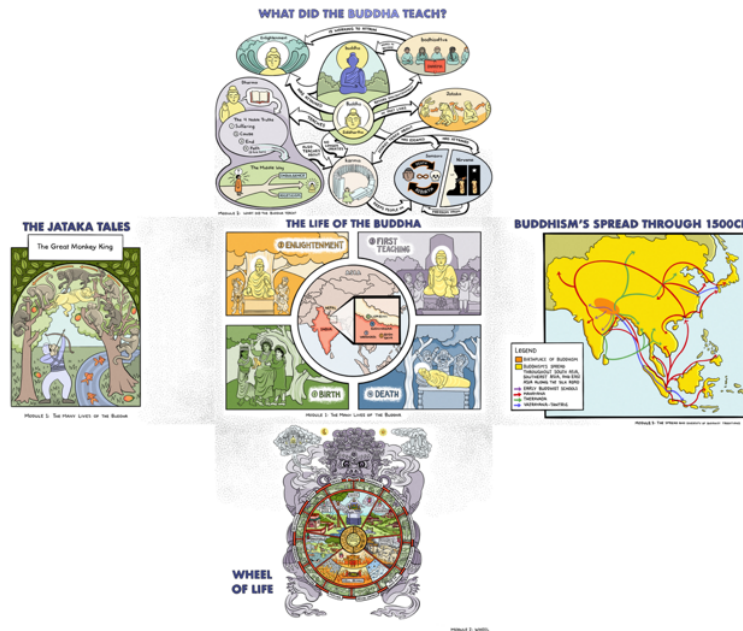
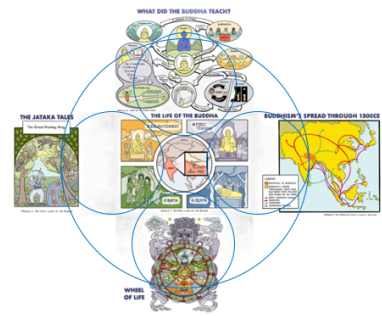
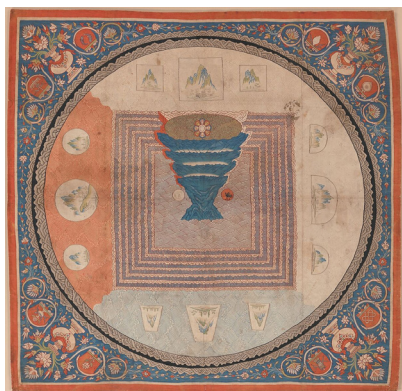


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The Illustrations



The five illustrations included in these materials are designed to reflect the concept of a mandala. Mandala means “circle” in Sanskrit, and in Buddhist contexts, is a circular diagram that takes many forms. Mandala are often two-dimensional representations of Buddhist cosmology—that is, Buddhist views of the universe—with Mount Meru at the center surrounded by continents in each of the four directions. Mandala are also architectural plans of an idealized palace surrounded by circular boundaries, with a particular Buddhist deity, buddha, or bodhisattva residing in the center. Teachers and students may be most familiar with Tibetan sand mandalas, brightly colored works meticulously created by Buddhist monks and then swept away upon completion. The illustrations are meant to evoke these many meanings. Each image functions independently in its corresponding Module. But as you work through these materials, we encourage teachers and students to consider connections across modules, and the ways that a mandala invites additional, non-linear pathways through the materials and modules.



Left: *Cosmological Mandala with Mount Meru*, China, 14th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1989.140.
Center: *Mandala of Jnanadakini*, Tibet, late 14th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987.16.

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Module 1: The Many Lives of the Buddha

The Life of the Buddha

How do we know who the Buddha was? The person we call “the Buddha” probably lived around the sixth or fifth century BCE and was active in what is now northern India. Short accounts of events in the Buddha’s life circulated soon after his lifetime, but they were primarily oral accounts and were not compiled as written narratives until centuries after his death. Some of these accounts are still beloved today. In addition to oral and written versions, the Buddha’s life was conveyed through works of art. These visual, oral, and written narratives were often paired with jataka tales recounting the Buddha’s prior rebirths, which we also cover in this module. Before he became the Buddha, he was reborn many times in different forms, often as a human or an animal. The jataka tales recount how, during each of these lives, he worked on developing certain skills or qualities necessary for becoming a buddha (such as generosity, wisdom, and patience). When a person becomes an enlightened buddha, they know the details of all their past lives. The life of the Buddha is, in a sense, the ending of a much longer story and the culmination of his many past lives. For that reason, Module 1 is called The Many Lives of the Buddha.

Accounts of the Buddha’s life vary in content, length, language, style, medium, and so on, but they generally present the same key events. The Buddha was born a prince named Siddhartha Gautama and lived a sheltered life of luxury in a palace, until he was startled by encountering sickness, old age, and death for the first time. He left his life in the palace to seek a way to overcome this suffering for himself and studied with important teachers of his time. He mastered their techniques but still found himself no closer to a solution to end his own suffering and death. He sat down under a tree and vowed not to move until he achieved that realization. He succeeded, becoming an enlightened buddha. He went on to teach others what he had realized, providing them with a roadmap to achieve their own realization or enlightenment. A community of students grew up around him. He also gained patrons—kings and regular people alike—who materially and financially supported this nascent Buddhist community. Eventually, the Buddha grew old and died, as is the plight of every sentient being. However, this time the Buddha was not reborn—he had achieved final nirvana, or liberation, from the endless cycle of death and rebirth called samsara.

Over time, a set of Eight Great Events in the Buddha’s life emerged, four of which became the most important. These are the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, first teaching, and death. These four events are deeply connected with the four places in northern India and Nepal where they are thought to have occurred. (See the map in the center of The Life of the Buddha illustration.) Over time, they have been important places for pilgrimage and practice, the sites of temples, monasteries, and shrines, and subjects depicted in Buddhist art. Visual narratives of the Buddha’s life often depict the Great Events through specific motifs that identify each scene. This core iconography (or way of visually identifying an image) was widely translated across media and

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form—stone, wood, clay, paint, architecture, manuscripts, sculpture—and across the Buddhist world—from India in the south to Siberia in the north, from Afghanistan in the west to Japan in the east, and farther still. This lesson includes an adapted retelling of the major events in the life of the Buddha in four sections: The Buddha’s Birth and Youth; The Buddha’s Enlightenment; The Buddha’s First Teaching; The Buddha’s Final Death. Each section is accompanied by an image depicting those events that reflects some of the core iconography associated with each scene. These four illustrations should aid students in identifying the events depicted in other scenes from the life of the Buddha that they will encounter in other modules.

Many different names are used to refer to the Buddha, most frequently Siddhartha, Gautama, and Shakyamuni. In this resource, we use “Siddhartha” to refer to his time as a prince and ascetic, and “Buddha” to refer to him after his enlightenment. Siddhartha (or Siddhārtha) means “he who achieves his goal.” In some versions of the life of the Buddha, Siddhartha is the name the Buddha is given as a prince. The clan the Buddha was born into is called both Shakya and Gautama (or Gotama), hence the name Siddhartha Gautama. The name Shakyamuni (or Śākyamuni) means “sage of the Shakya clan.” You may encounter the epithets Bhagavan, Bhagavat, or Tathagata, which all occur in Buddhist textual sources.

Module 1: The Many Lives of the Buddha

The Jataka Tales

Jataka tales are stories about the past lives of the Buddha. Before he became the Buddha, he was reborn many, many times in different forms, often as a human or an animal. The jataka tales recount how, during each of these lives, he worked on developing certain skills or qualities necessary for becoming a buddha (like generosity, wisdom, and patience). The word bodhisattva is used to describe someone who is working toward becoming a buddha, so the jataka tales are about events when the Buddha was still a bodhisattva. Jataka tales are incredibly popular and widespread. In fact, there are hundreds of stories about the Buddha before he was the Buddha! These stories don’t just appeal to Buddhists. They’re popular works of literature and art that also incorporate elements from other traditions and are popular outside of just the Buddhist tradition.

The story of the Great Monkey King, or Mahakapi Jataka, is one of the most popular jataka tales. It is frequently depicted in art, often with the narrative conveyed through a single scene, like the illustration included in the lesson. As students read and discuss the jataka, ask them to think about how the image and story relate to each other, and which parts of the story each format emphasizes.

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Module 2: What did the Buddha Teach? Key Concepts

These concepts can be difficult to explain in a short paragraph, so students may need additional explanation and guidance. You can let the students know that you will go over each concept again with the slide deck. The two sections of this lesson—**The Wheel of Life** and **What did the Buddha teach? infographic**—cover the same eight concepts. Repeating the same material in several different formats will help familiarize and reinforce their meaning. Additional explanation for some of the key concepts is included here and below in the Teacher Notes for **The Wheel of Life**. You may wish to review it before the lesson.

Karma is often misunderstood as an immediate cause and effect, but in Buddhist contexts, it plays out over the course of lifetimes. It may be effective to give students examples of familiar and immediate cause and effect—for example, if I kick a wall, I hurt my toe; if I return a lost wallet, I might receive a reward. A Buddhist doctrinal explanation of those events would potentially attribute them to karmic actions from prior rebirths. While the ultimate goal for most Buddhists is enlightenment and nirvana, most practitioners view that as a very long-term goal. Daily practice is often oriented toward more immediate goals, like maintaining health and prosperity, or obtaining a good rebirth in the next life. One example of a common form of daily practice that generates good karma is the Buddhist Prayer Wheel included in Module 3.

As a moral system, karma accounts for apparent inequalities in the world, for why some people are wealthy, sound in mind and body, or obtain high positions in the world, while others may be poor, suffer, or hold less favorable positions. A karmic lens explains things that may seem unfair, like wealth and poverty, as the result of one's karma, of actions in this life or prior rebirths. However, karma is not fatalistic in the sense of voiding free will, removing choice, or locking a person into a certain course of action. Karma enables choice. People are always responsible for their own actions, as well as their reactions to events around them. A person's intentions also shape the karmic outcome of their actions. The karmic result of an accidental injury to another person differs from that of an intentional injury. Karma as a moral system of cause and effect provides a counterargument to other ethical extremes the Buddha cautioned against, like determinism (the idea that our actions are controlled, governed, or predetermined by some external authority or force), nihilism (the idea that our actions have no moral consequence), and eternalism (the idea that there is a permanent, unchanging entity, god, absolute, or soul that is not impacted by our actions).

The **four noble truths** are what the Buddha figured out when he sat under the tree and gained enlightenment. They are also the first things he taught to others after he achieved enlightenment. He realized that the general condition of existing in the world is suffering. (Remember that he left the palace to seek an end to the suffering of old age, sickness, and death.) He wanted to find a way to end suffering. One way to stop something is to figure out how it started in the first

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place, to discover its cause. The Buddha realized that what causes all our suffering is karma, or action, and negative qualities like ignorance, hatred, and greed. The Buddha discovered a plan or a path to follow that can bring an end to karma and negative qualities. That path has eight parts and is called the eightfold path. This path prescribes ethical behavior, training or practices, and wisdom or insights one needs to develop to achieve enlightenment. You need not cover this with the students but can include it if time and interest allow. The components of the eightfold path are often explained in terms of the three trainings: wisdom, morality, and effort.

wisdom	right view	correctly or accurately understanding the nature of things
	right intention	avoiding negative harmful motivations, like hatred and desire, and cultivating beneficial one, like nonviolence
morality	right speech	avoiding negative speech like lying, gossiping, etc.
	right conduct	avoiding harmful actions, like killing and stealing, and cultivating beneficial actions.
	right livelihood	avoiding harmful occupations, like those that harm people or animals
effort or practice	right effort	giving up harmful or unwholesome habits, and preventing new ones from developing
	right mindfulness	maintaining awareness of one’s body, sensations, mental state, and “factors” or aggregates (the basic building blocks of the physical world in Buddhist teachings) *note, this is not “mindfulness” in the sense commonly used today to refer to some forms of meditation
	right concentration	this is a quality or strength of mind called one-pointed concentration

The **Middle Way** describes the Buddha’s rejection of both extreme indulgence and extreme renunciation. But it can refer to other Buddhist teachings and concepts. One common explanation is that the Buddha taught the middle way between the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism (in other words, the idea that nothing exists or that everything exists permanently). At the time of the Buddha, philosophical and religious traditions actively debated both ideas. Rival philosophical systems charged Buddhism with being nihilistic because it taught interdependence and no-self. Another way of understanding the middle way is refuting both the idea of fate (we have no control over our actions) and the idea that everything is chance (there is no reason or result of our actions).

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Module 2: What did the Buddha teach? The Wheel of Life

Overview: The Wheel of Life (also called the Wheel of Existence or Bhavachakra) is a visual depiction of many core Buddhist concepts and Buddhist cosmology (the structure of the world). It is particularly popular in Tibetan Buddhism, but it is not specific to that tradition. The earliest known artistic example of the Wheel of Life is from a place in India called Ajanta. Ajanta is a complex of Buddhist caves carved from the living rock. The caves contain sculptures and paintings and likely once served as temples and monastic residences. The painting of the Wheel of Life in Ajanta's Cave 17 dates to the fifth century C.E.

Who holds the wheel?: Although Mara is a deity who oversees samsara, he is more of an administrator than a god who rules over the world or dictates fate. Beings are reborn according to their own actions or karma and are responsible for their own fate. Mara is also part of samsara, and subject to the same cycle of death and rebirth. In this sense, "Mara" is like a title or placeholder. The being who is currently Mara will eventually be reborn elsewhere, while another being takes his place governing samsara.

Six Realms of Rebirth:

Hungry ghosts figure prominently in Buddhist culture and rituals in history and today. Hungry ghosts are tormented by hunger and thirst. They have huge stomachs and tiny throats, showing that they are starving but not able to sate their hunger. When they try to eat and drink, the food turns to fire and ash in their mouths. During the Hungry Ghost Festival, Buddhists make offerings of food, incense, and other items to alleviate the suffering of hungry ghosts. In the DIA's Chinese Art Gallery, you can find examples of joss paper, which are sheets of paper burned as offerings to one's deceased ancestors. Joss paper has objects such as money drawn on it and burning that paper transfers ownership of it to the deceased. The Hungry Ghost Festival is one of the primary occasions for burning joss paper.

There are many **hell realms** in Buddhism, typically eight cold hells and eight hot hells, each with its own form of torment. Beings are reborn in hell to suffer the negative consequences of their own actions. Hell is not a permanent place, and everyone sent there will eventually be reborn elsewhere. In that sense, it is similar to the concept of purgatory.

The Human Realm: Buddhism teaches that the best rebirth is as a human. Humans experience suffering, but they are not overwhelmed by it the way beings in hell and hungry ghosts are. Humans experience more suffering than gods or demi-gods, which motivates them to escape samsara and practice Buddhism. Humans are also intelligent enough to study the dharma and achieve enlightenment.

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The gods and demi-gods are various titan-like deities who enjoy a comfortable existence in heaven realms. However, this bliss is temporary, and those reborn in heaven will eventually exhaust their good karma and fall into a lower rebirth. For this reason, Buddhism does not characterize rebirth in these heavens as the goal.

What keeps beings trapped in samsara? The three animals at the center of the wheel represent three basic harmful conditions or emotions called the three poisons because they “poison” the mind and negatively influence actions. The bird (often a rooster) represents greed. The pig represents ignorance. The snake represents hatred. The circle that is immediately outside the animals at the center shows beings who are rising and falling in a cycle. The beings on the left in the clouds are rising to good rebirths as humans or deities, and the beings on the right are being dragged down to hell.

The Twelve Links of Interdependence: The outer circle is the Buddhist teaching of interdependence. Interdependent here is the opposite of independent. Something independent can exist on its own without relying on anything else, but interdependence means everything relies on something else. Since everything is connected, nothing relies on only itself. This concept of interdependence is central to the Buddhist teaching of no-self, which we do not address in these materials. However, you could certainly include it in your lesson. Essentially, no-self or emptiness is the idea that human beings do not have a permanent, enduring self (like a soul) because they are made up of many interdependent parts that together form what we mistakenly think of as a permanent self.

Students may struggle with this complex concept, and metaphor is often helpful. You could explain that a chair with only one leg would fall over. The chair relies on all its legs to stand. If you take away the back of the chair, it becomes a stool. The “idea” of a chair is dependent upon specific parts that differentiate it from other objects. If you have a piece of wood that has not been shaped into a chair, then it’s not a chair. But if you make a chair out of it, then the chair is dependent upon the wood. Is a stump that someone sits on a chair or not? Language (“name and form”) also plays a role. We understand what a chair is because someone (repeatedly) used the word “chair” to describe specific objects in the world, and if someone says, “picture a chair,” we can generate an image in our minds based on that word. The image of a chair in our minds depends on the word chair and on the many various chairs we have seen in life.

Each of the twelve links on the outside of the wheel relates to the terms on either side of them, to the left and right, and all the links connect to each other. It is possible to explain the twelve links in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction, beginning with any one of the twelve terms. Buddhism refers to breaking the cycle of interdependence or breaking the cycle of samsara. This means obtaining enlightenment or nirvana and becoming free from rebirth, free from suffering, and free from samsara. Most of the twelve terms are self-explanatory, like birth and death.

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Others are less so. For example, the Six Sense Doors are the six organs of the senses. Our eyes are the sense door/organ that sees. Our ears are the sense door/organ that hear. The Sense Contact is the actual seeing, hearing, smelling. Our reaction to that sensory stimulation is Feeling.

For those interested in a more detailed explanation and breakdown of each section, I recommend Eric Huntington's interactive Wheel of Existence, which as of Spring 2024, was available at https://erichuntington.org/?da_image=wheel-of-existence-bhavacakra-zurmang-shedrup; the Rubin Museum's Visual Explanation of Buddhist Cosmology, available at <https://projecthimalayanart.rubinmuseum.org/essays/wheel-of-existence/>; Francesca Fremantle's What Turns the Wheel of Life from Lion's Roar at <https://www.lionsroar.com/what-turns-the-wheel-of-life/>. Google Arts & Culture has a visually engaging exploration of the Wheel of Life, but provides limited explanation <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/zoom-in-to-the-wheel-of-life/tAWxiq4aJtXv5w?hl=en>.

Module 3: The Spread and Diversity of Buddhist Traditions

The two activities in Module 3, the Map and the Object Analysis, explore the ways material objects enabled the spread of the Buddhist traditions throughout Asia. What does it mean to refer to the spread of a religious tradition in general and of the Buddhist traditions specifically? Buddhism spread through material transfers, that is, through the movement of people and objects throughout Asia. Some Buddhist objects are stationary, like large stupas or temples, and others are mobile, like texts and small statues. Stationary objects can cause people to move around them, while mobile objects can be moved around. For example, pilgrims traveled long distances to and from famous stupas, monasteries, and other sacred sites, and perhaps acquired objects that they carried home with them. Their movements and interactions with Buddhist objects spread Buddhism. Merchants traveled long distances carrying texts, sculpture, ritual objects, clothing, and other items that enabled the circulation of the Buddhist tradition. Emperors, kings, and other leaders invited Buddhist teachers to their court and supported large-scale projects like translating the entire Buddhist canon or founding new monasteries and temples. All these projects enabled the spread of the Buddhist tradition through materials and objects like those the students will explore in this module. It is impossible to understand the history, development, and spread of Buddhism without considering Buddhist art.

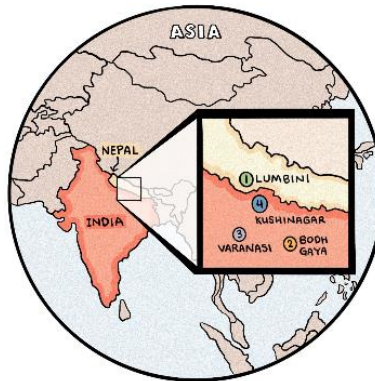
Activity: Mapping Buddhism's Spread Through 1500 CE


This map shows a broad classification of the various Buddhist traditions into the early Buddhist schools, Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana-Tantric. The **orange oval** in the center of the map depicts the  **birthplace of Buddhism**, the part of northern India where the Buddha spent his


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life. **Slide 5: The Life of the Buddha** shows the map of the four great places associated with the life of the Buddha. Students should be familiar with these locations and what happened at each from the **Life of the Buddha** readings.

- Lumbini (in present-day Nepal) is where the Buddha was born.
- Bodh Gaya (in present-day India) is where the Buddha achieved enlightenment.
- Varanasi (in present-day India) is where the Buddha gave the first teaching.
- Kushinagar (in present-day India) is where the Buddha died.




In the centuries after the Buddha's death, several different Buddhist traditions developed in northern India. Scholars refer to these as the **early Buddhist schools**, early Indian Buddhism, and mainstream Buddhism. The names and number of these early Buddhist schools are not certain. The various early Buddhist schools spread throughout the Indian subcontinent and eventually to other parts of Asia. The  **purple arrows** on the map show their spread. These schools gradually changed and died out over time.

One Buddhist tradition that exists today in much of Southeast Asia is called **Theravada**. It is indicated by the  **green arrows** on the map. The word "Theravada" means "School of the Elders." It is used today to describe the dominant Buddhist tradition in much of Southeast Asia, in places like Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and Laos. The name has a rather confusing history and usage. It appears in early Buddhist sources, but it is not used to refer to a distinct "school" or branch of Buddhism. It began to be used by scholars and Buddhists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to describe Buddhism in Southeast Asia at that time. They also anachronistically applied the name Theravada to much earlier forms of Buddhism in those same regions. However, this latter usage is not supported by historical sources. Regardless, Theravada is the term used to describe Buddhism in Southeast Asia today.

Note that sometimes the early Buddhist schools and the Theravada tradition are called **Hinayana**. Hinayana is a pejorative name coined by the **Mahayana** tradition in order to differentiate themselves from their opponents. Hinayana means "little" or "lesser vehicle." Conversely, Mahayana means "great vehicle." No one refers to themselves as Hinayana.

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Also note that while much of Southeast Asia is currently predominantly Theravada, historically, Mahayana and Vajrayana were also present. This is why some parts of India and Southeast Asia show red, blue, and green arrows in the same places.

The **Mahayana** tradition is depicted with  red arrows. It is the predominant form of Buddhism in East Asia today, as well as in parts of Central Asia (Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, and Japan). Prior to 1500 CE, Mahayana was more widespread than it is today and was also found throughout parts of South and Central Asia (India, Pakistan, Afghanistan) and Southeast Asia (Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.).

Mahayana means “great vehicle” and is a term the tradition uses to describe itself. It began to be used in reference to Buddhist texts that emerged around the first century CE, some five hundred years after the Buddha lived, that refer to themselves as having been taught by the Buddha. Mahayana texts argued that their “Hinayana” opponents followed a lesser Buddhist path. Several important Mahayana texts are the foundation for distinct schools or approaches to Buddhism. The most well-known of these texts are the Avatamsaka Sutra, Diamond Sutra, Heart Sutra, Lotus Sutra, Vimalakirti Sutra, and the Pure Land Sutras.

There are many similarities and differences between the early Buddhist schools, the contemporary Theravada tradition, and the historical and contemporary Mahayana traditions. Some key differences are:

- Theravada uses a Pali-language textual canon, whereas Mahayana uses a Sanskrit-language canon. Most Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist texts were translated from Sanskrit. Early Buddhist schools used several different languages and relied on oral transmission.
- In the Theravada tradition, there can be only one buddha present in the world at a time, and they arise sequentially. Shakyamuni is the buddha of the present period. Maitreya is the next or future buddha.
- In the Mahayana tradition, there can be more than one buddha present in the world at the same time. There are also many more buddhas listed in Mahayana texts than in Theravada texts.
- The bodhisattva plays a comparatively minor role in Theravada but is central to the Mahayana.
- In the Mahayana tradition, bodhisattvas are considered great beings who make a vow to defer their own buddhahood and nirvana in order to stay in the world and help other beings. They are motivated by their great compassion for the suffering of others.
- The Mahayana tradition elevates the status of lay (non-monastic) practitioners.

The last major tradition is called **Vajrayana** and is designated with a blue arrow  on the map. Vajrayana means the “adamant,” “diamond,” or indestructible vehicle. It is also called Tantrayana or the “Tantric vehicle.” Both Vajrayana and Tantric are listed in the map key. The Vajrayana is not a separate tradition from the Mahayana but is generally co-present with it.

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Vajrayana is characterized by a set of tantric techniques and teachings that provide an expedited path to enlightenment. For example, the Mahayana tradition elevates the bodhisattva, who spends countless lifetimes working to save others before becoming a buddha. The tantric traditions assert that it is possible to achieve buddhahood in a single lifetime. Other important features of Vajrayana and tantric practice are the use of mandalas, mantras, visualization techniques, and yogic techniques (bodily postures and practices). Vajrayana and Mahayana are generally coextensive throughout East Asia today.

Module 3: The Spread and Diversity of Buddhist Traditions

Activity: Object Analysis

This activity contains four sets of works that students will compare and contrast based on their Object Analysis handout.

- Objects 1 and 2 compare and contrast two Buddhist texts.
- Objects 3 and 4 compare and contrast depictions of the Life of the Buddha in different media.
- Objects 5 and 6 compare and contrast two hand-held, portable objects.
- Objects 7 and 8 compare and contrast two depictions of the Buddha Shakyamuni at the moment of enlightenment.

As you discuss these works as a class, keep in mind the **Essential Question** of the **Buddhist Traditions Educator Resource**: How have objects played an essential role in the development and spread of Buddhism?