

I Prostrate to the Goddess Foe Destroyer – Tibetan Buddhism and the (mis)Naming of Venusian Features

By Kristine Larsen¹

*OM I prostrate to the goddess foe destroyer, liberating lady Tara,
Homage to TARE, saviouress, heroine,
With TUTTARE dispelling all fears,
Granting all benefits with TURE,
To her with sound SVAHA, I bow*

-- Praises to the Twenty-one Taras (abbreviated version)

Introduction

In 1781, amateur astronomer William Herschel stumbled across a new planet, the first discovery of its kind. A native German and musician, he had immigrated to England and was able to follow his passion for astronomy through the generous support of his patron, King George III. To the distress of astronomers outside of England, Herschel proposed the name *Georgium Sidus* as the name for his new discovery. Others suggested naming the planet after its discoverer, another break with the long-standing tradition of planetary names in Western culture. After much discussion, the mythological name Uranus (father of Saturn) was finally settled upon. Similar international disagreement and confusion occurred throughout the nineteenth century concerning the naming of features on Mars and the moon. In response, at its 1907 general assembly in Vienna, the Council of the International Association of Academies created a committee to regularize the nomenclature of bodies in the solar system. This committee formally organized in 1919 in Brussels as the International Astronomical Union (IAU). Since that time, the IAU has been the sole arbiter of all nomenclature for astronomical bodies (U.S. Geological Survey, 2004b).

The IAU has established various working groups and divisions to tackle specific problems in nomenclature and classification. In 1973 the Working Group for Planetary System Nomenclature (WGPSN) was formed, with Canadian Peter Millman as its president. Individual subgroups were created for each of the four inner planets, and a group for the outer solar system. The thirteen current members of the WGPSN hail from the U.S., U.K., Russia, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, and the Vatican, while its Task Group for Venus Nomenclature consists of three members, two from Russia and one from the U.S. (USGS, 2004c). Their task was originally to suggest naming themes for each planet, and then to propose and screen names for all individual features discovered by the increasing number of space probes and large telescopes (USGS, 2004b). For example, it was established that all features on the planet Venus were to be

¹Professor of Physics and Astronomy, and Director of the Honors Program, at Central Connecticut State University. Her publications include articles on the history of women in astronomy, astronomy pedagogy, astronomical allusions in the work of J.R.R. Tolkien, and a book-length biography of physicist Stephen Hawking. She is a student of Tibetan Buddhism through the Venerable Geshe Khensur Wangdak, former abbot of Namgyal Monastery.

named for women. Specifically, “craters and volcanic calderas (paterae) are named for women of history; craters less than 20 km in diameter are given female first names from various world cultures. Other types of features are named for mythological women” with rules created for each subclass of features (USGS, 2003).

Names are suggested to the IAU from various sources, and are scrutinized for adherence to their published criteria before being officially accepted. Among the rules are the following:

1. Nomenclature is a tool and the first consideration should be to make it simple, clear, and unambiguous....
7. Solar system nomenclature should be international in its choice of names.... The WGPSN strongly supports equitable selection of names from ethnic groups/countries on each map; however, a higher percentage of names from the country planning a landing is allowed on landing site maps.
8. No names having political, military or religious significance may be used, except for names of political figures prior to the 19th century. (USGS, 2005a)

Despite the multicultural intent of the IAU’s charge, the serious lack of Eastern representation in the membership of this supposedly international organization has serious repercussions for the naming of Venusian surface features. As this paper will demonstrate, the criteria used in naming eight Venusian features after “Tibetan Buddhist goddesses” is inconsistent and ambiguous at best, and clearly erroneous at worst. The attempt to pigeonhole Tibetan Buddhist iconographic representations of the feminine principle into a Western model fails because of what is posited to be a serious lack of understanding by the WGPSN of Tibetan Buddhist culture and beliefs. It will therefore be argued that the IAU must reconsider the membership of its Nomenclature groups and include representatives from Eastern traditions in order to prevent such problems in the future.

Brief Overview of Venusian Geology

The surface of Venus has been largely shaped by various types of volcanic activity, some having direct counterparts on Earth, others seemingly unique to our neighboring world. In addition, tectonic deformation (compression and extension of the surface) has occurred, but there is no evidence for widespread plate tectonics as found on Earth (Basilevsky and Head, 2003). The surface is generally divided into several major types of features, with the most dominant being volcanic plains (*planitia*) which cover approximately 80% of the surface. A number of upland plateaus or *highlands* (“continents”) are composed of severely deformed terrain called *tesserae*. Finally, there are volcanic rises associated with unusual volcanic features dubbed *coronae* (Hansen, Willis, and Banerdt, 1997). In general, the geological record of the Venusian surface seems to span several hundred million years, with the following reconstructed ordering of events: formation of *tesserae*; emplacement of lowland plains; volcanic features such as *coronae* and tectonic features such as ridge and fracture belts; wind flow features (Tanaka et al., 1997). The individual types of Venusian features of interest to this paper are

tesserae (Lhamo Tessera), *coronae* (Vasudhara Corona and Rabzhima Corona), *mons* (Toma Mons and Kurukulla Mons), *tholi* (Drölma Tholus), *dorsae* (Odzerchen Dorsa), and *fossae* (Namjyalma Fossae).

Tesserae (Latin for mosaic tile) were originally called parquet terrain, and are a unique form of Venusian tectonic terrain (Cattermole, 1994). Mainly found in the highland regions, this terrain, also called complex ridged terrain (CRT), is made of intersecting ridges and troughs spaced about 10-20 km apart (Consolmagno and Schaefer, 1994). Additional sections of tesserae are found as “islands” in the volcanic plains and associated with volcanic features. In accordance with IAU conventions, Venusian tesserae are named after goddesses of fate or fortune (Tanaka et al., 1997).

Another type of geologic terrain seemingly unique to Venus is the coronae (Latin for crown). Over 500 of these circular or nearly circular volcanic features have been located. They range in size from 60 to over 2500 km, and are found “at volcanic rises (rise coronae); along chasmata (chasmata coronae); and as relatively isolated features in the plains (isolated coronae)” (Stofan et al., 1997, p. 942). Although some questions remain concerning their formation and evolution, they are generally considered to be the result of rising plumes of magma (diapirs) which reach the surface, push the crust upward, and then collapse (like a badly cooked soufflé) after the diapir cools (Basilevsky and Head, 2003). Venusian coronae are named after fertility and earth goddesses (Tanaka et al., 1997).

Volcanoes of various sizes dot the Venusian landscape. The largest (over 100 km across) are generally dubbed mons (Latin for mountain). Venusian mons are named after miscellaneous goddesses. Intermediate sized volcanoes (20-100 km) display a variety of morphologies. A domical volcano is termed a tholus, while a pancake-like structure is called a farrum. Tholus is the Latin term for a round building with a conical roof. Venusian tholi are named after miscellaneous goddesses. Other features of interest for this paper are ridges known as dorsae (named after sky goddesses) and fossae, which are grabens (long, narrow depressions). Dorsum is Latin for back, while fossa is Latin for trench. Venusian fossae are given the names of goddesses of war (Tanaka et al., 1997).

Introduction to the Role of the Feminine in Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism is largely misunderstood by those in the Western world. Also called Tantrayana or Vajrayana, it falls within the Mahayana vehicle of Buddhism. In addition to taking the vow of refuge (reliance on the “three jewels” of the Buddha, the teachings or dharma, and religious community or sangha), Tibetan Buddhists also take the bodhisattva vow, where the individual affirms that they desire to seek enlightenment for the sake of aiding all sentient beings. A bodhisattva is an enlightened being who has generated the loving compassion for all sentient beings (called bodhicitta) and seeks to free all such beings from samsara - the cycle of continual rebirth (or reincarnation) (Paul, 1985; Powers, 1995). A buddha has achieved bodhicitta as well, but has also achieved omniscience and “has actualized the three bodies: complete enjoyment body, truth body, and emanation bodies” (Powers, 1995, p. 450).

Tantra, the cornerstone of Tibetan Buddhism, is shrouded in mystery and hyperbole. In Western popular culture those people who have even heard of it usually connect it with unusual sexual practices touted by the rock star Sting and others (Potter, 1998). In actuality, tantra refers to the meditative practice of deity yoga, where the

practitioner visualizes oneself as a special being of certain characteristics (*self-generation*). Rather than feed the ego, the goal is to realize that all things are empty of inherent existence, including oneself and all deities and buddhas, and in such a way transform one's mind and reach enlightenment (Novick, 1999; Powers, 1995). It should be noted that the concept of "emptiness" in Buddhism does not mean nihilism, but rather that although all things and persons have conventional existence, they do not exist as absolutes – they arise only in dependence on their causes and conditions (so-called *dependent origination*). For example, a chair does not exist without the wood, the carpenter, the nails, and even the sunshine and water which nourished the tree from which the wood came. It cannot exist without its legs, back, and seat, but it is not a leg, a back, or a seat.

A meditational deity visualized by a practitioner is referred to as a *yidam*. The practitioner may select the deity based on the various characteristics it embodies (such as Manjushri, the bodhisattva of wisdom, or the Medicine Buddha) or a dharma teacher (lama) may choose the appropriate deity for their student based on their personality or psychological needs (Novick, 1999; Powers, 1995). It should be noted that the terms "deity" and "goddess" in Tibetan Buddhism are quite different from their colloquial usage. They are not worshipped in the usual sense, but are aids which enable the practitioner to transform their mind through meditative practices. Besides buddhas and bodhisattvas, there are historical figures who were great teachers and founders of philosophical schools and lineages, such as Padmasambhava, and curious wrathful deities, whose function is the use of normally negative emotions, such as anger, to remove psychological obstacles from the path of the practitioner.

Feminine deities are found among all the preceding categories, but in addition there are *dakinis*, wisdom beings who transmit secret knowledge "through dreams and visions, and as sexual partners..." (Young, 2004, p. 224). In Tibetan Buddhism, the feminine aspect symbolizes wisdom, while the masculine aspect symbolizes method. Enlightenment can only be achieved through the union of wisdom with method (the realization of emptiness and the achievement of bodhicitta). This is widely symbolized in the artistic representation of the *yab-yum* – a heterosexual pair of deities coupled in sexual union. Given the complexity of the concept of the "goddess" in Tibetan Buddhism, and the lack of Eastern representation in the IAU's Venus nomenclature group, it is not surprising that the attempt of the IAU to pigeonhole this culture's concept of the divine feminine principle into a Western model fails, leading to the exact opposite of their goal – a "simple, clear, and unambiguous" (and non-political) nomenclature. In the succeeding sections of this paper, eight Venusian features named after Tibetan "goddesses" will be discussed.

Venus and Tara—An Embarrassment of Riches

On the edge of Bereghinya Planitia lies a 40 km wide volcano named Drölma Tholus. According to the IAU gazetteer for Venus, the feature is named after the "Tibetan goddess of compassion" (USGS, 2004d) and the name was taken from Ann and Imel's *Goddesses in World Mythology* (1993, p. 228). That work refers to her as Dolma, and surprisingly list her main attributes as "Love and sexuality; Goodness". Drölma, more commonly called by her Sanskrit name Tara, is one of favorite buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism. She is said to have been born from the tears of Chenrezig, the bodhisattva of

compassion. According to folklore, the Tibetan people are the descendents of a monkey and the abominable snow lady, the former an emanation of Chenrezig and the latter an emanation of Tara (Mullin, 2001). Tara is seen as the embodiment of the compassion and wisdom of all the Buddhas, and is often called the “mother of the Buddhas” (Novick, 1999, p. 20).

The main form of Tara is called Green Tara. She is depicted as a green-skinned sixteen-year-old girl with one face and two arms. Her right leg is tucked in, as if sitting in the lotus position, with the right foot extended as if ready to spring into action (to help sentient beings). There is also White Tara, who is considered one of the long-life deities (associated with the Buddha Amitayus). She is depicted as a more voluptuous woman with seven eyes (two normal eyes plus one each on her forehead, hands, and feet) and sits in the usual lotus position. The main text for a Tara-based practice is the “Praises to the Twenty-One Taras” (Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, nd.), which includes stanzas of praise for twenty-one different manifestations of Green Tara. Each emanation varies in characteristics such as color, hand gestures (mudras), and attributes of action (how they may benefit sentient beings) (Knapp, 1998). The names of the Taras vary slightly from tradition to tradition (among different lineages or schools). Ironically, five of the seven remaining Tibetan “goddesses” after whom Venusian features are named appear on the list of the twenty-one Taras. Therefore, six of the eight features are actually named after the same goddess, certainly violating the IAU mandate that nomenclature be “unambiguous.” As Geshe Khensur Wangdak, the former abbot of the Dalai Lama’s monastery, succinctly explains, “All Taras are Drölma” (Wangdak, 2005).

One of these features is Namgyalma fossae, a 560 km-long graben on the edge of Tinatin Planitia. By convention, fossae are named for goddesses of war. The feature is named after the “Tibetan victorious mother.” The name was suggested by a private letter from Lisa Leghorn of the Rigdzin Ling Buddhist Center in Junction City, California (USGS, 2004d). The preferred spelling of the name in the literature appears to be Namgyalma, although transliteration from Tibetan to English has been a perennial problem. She, like White Tara, is a long-life deity associated with Amitayus, and has a white body, three faces (red, yellow, and blue) and eight arms. Her mantra is called “The Mother of the Supreme Crown Pinnacle, Victorious in all Aspects, Completely Purifying all the Bad Migrators,” and her practice is said to remove obscurations and prevent lower rebirths (such as in the animal realm) (Zopa, 1988). It is said that when a person dies, if one recites the Namgyalma mantra twenty-one times and then blows on water, sesame seeds, powder, or perfume which is then sprinkled over the deceased, it will help prevent low rebirths (Zopa, nd.).

Therefore we see that classifying Namgyalma as a “goddess of war” is inaccurate. Her victory is not over a military enemy, but over obscurations of the mind. It is unknown whether the original letter suggested just the name, or the name as well as the categorization; in other words, was the nominator trying to shoehorn the deity into the IAU’s Western taxonomy, or did that occur at the level of the Venus Nomenclature group itself? In either case, it was the responsibility of the IAU to research the appropriateness of the name/category. It is clearly posted that “Names proposed for Venusian features must be selected from the proper category; otherwise, they are likely to be rejected”

(USGS, 2003). If the name Namjyalma were to be used at all, it would be best suited under the “miscellaneous” category.

Kurukulla Mons is a 59 km-wide volcano on the border of the Tilli-Hanum and Lowana Planitia. The feature is supposedly named after the Tibetan “goddess of wealth”, although Kurukulla is a Sanskrit name, and was taken from a Soviet encyclopedia (USGS, 2005b). Two works from 1962 (Getty; Jobes) call her Red Tara and agree with the appellation “goddess of wealth.” However, more specifically Buddhist works discuss her in a completely different light. For example, the “Praises to the Twenty-One Taras” (FPMT, nd., p. 7) give her verse as follows:

Homage to you, Tara, who with the letters TUTTARA and HUM
Fill the (realms of) desire, direction, and space,
Whose feet trample on the seven worlds
And who are able to draw all beings to you.

This semi-wrathful form of Tara is more correctly a power deity, and her four hands are equipped with various tools:

She draws a flower-bedecked bow set with an arrow [of flowers]... She shoots her victims with the arrow in order to infect them with passion, thereby subduing discursive thought; with the hook in her lower right hand she draws the practitioner close; the lasso in her lower left hand trusses the practitioner’s passion, transforming it into wisdom. She dances on the corpse of the self, signifying her selfless activity. (Simmer-Brown, 2002, p. 146)

This description certainly better fits the actual Buddhist meaning as signified by her verse of homage. Her actual Tibetan name (rarely used) is Rigjyedma, “she who is the cause of knowledge” (Reynolds, 2005). The connection with wealth cited in the IAU nomenclature appears to originate with “ritual practices of lower magic to accomplish specific goals” included in a text called the Arya Tara Kurukulla Kalpa. Among these is “amulets for enchanting and bringing others under one’s power... methods for a dissatisfied wife to subjugate her husband... spells for acquiring wealth and gaining power... [and] divinations to find a treasure...” (Ibid.). However, these attributes seem to be minor compared to her main (albeit complex) meaning, and further demonstrate the inadequacies of the IAU nomenclature system when applied to Tibetan Buddhism.

Rabzhima Corona is a 100 km-wide corona on the edge of Tinatin Planitia. It is named after the Tibetan “great mother goddess” (USGS, 2004d) and the name was suggested in the same letter that provided Namjyalma (Namgyalma). The “Praises to the Twenty-One Taras” (FPMT, nd., p. 9) gives her verse as follows:

Homage to you, Tara, O happy, virtuous, and peaceful one,
The very object of practice, passed beyond sorrow.
You are perfectly endowed with SOHA and OM,
Overcoming completely all the great evils.

She appears as a peaceful, white form of Tara, and her practice is said to “purify obstacles resulting from our negative actions and past karmas” (Sherab, nd.). According to the IAU convention, Venusian coronae are named after fertility and earth goddesses. It is difficult to see how Rabzhima qualifies as a “great mother goddess” unless this refers to her being a manifestation of Tara. If this is the case, then the IAU has defied its own edict for names to be “unambiguous”, as they have openly utilized the name of the “main” Tara, or Drölma, for another feature.

Odzerchen Dorsa is a 300 km-long ridge found on the Alma-Merghen Planitia. It is named for the Tibetan “goddess of boundless light” (USGS, 2004d). The name was suggested in the Namjyalma/Rabzhima letter. Not only are there several variations of this name in the literature (such as Ozer Chenma), but this deity is also known as Marici (alternately Marichi or Maritse). Her orange color represents the light of dawn. She is most commonly depicted with three faces, two human and one of a sow, and “drives a cart pulled by seven swine.” It has been suggested that this is meant as a representation of the Big Dipper (“Female Deities”, nd.). According to the IAU rules, dorsae are to be named for sky goddesses. While one can argue that a deity representing dawn can be counted among sky goddesses, this does not negate the fact that, as another emanation of Tara, this name is hardly “unambiguous”.

Vasudhara Corona is a 160 km-wide corona in the Bereghinya Planitia quadrangle. Its name, a “Buddhist female Bodhisattva of abundance,” (USGS, 2004d) was taken from Jobes’ *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (1962). The Jobes entry does indeed refer to her in this precise way. However, as with the deities previously explored, her true meaning is far more complex. Different sources describe her in various terms:

“The goddess of wealth” (Young, 2004, plate 9);

“Buddhist goddess of wealth, good fortune and abundance” (Smithsonian Institution, 1999);

“dispenser of material and spiritual wealth” (Dharmapala Thangka Centre, nd.);

“Buddhist goddess of riches, in origin, perhaps, an earth-goddess” (Lurker, 1987, p. 367);

“Tara Who Bestow[s] Prosperity.” (“Vasudhara”, nd.)

In the “Praises to the Twenty-One Taras” (FPMTnd., p. 9), she has the power of “Rescuing the impoverished.” Her Tibetan name is actually Norgyunma. She appears with varying numbers of arms, but in her six-armed form she holds a treasure vase, ears of corn, book of wisdom (the Prajnaparamita Sutra), and three wish-fulfilling jewels (Exotic India Art, nd.). Once source calls Vasudhara “one of the most popular household deities in Nepal. Devotees appeal to her for earthly riches and for fertility of the field and womb” (Smithsonian Institution, nd.). This last citation would fit the IAU convention that Venusian coronae be named after fertility and earth goddesses. However, in a broader

Buddhist context, Vasudhara represents far more than riches from the Earth or fertility. From her iconography, it is clear that she is truly armed so as to nourish practitioners in a material *and* spiritual manner. Therefore a much better categorization for her would have been “miscellaneous goddesses,” although as an emanation of Tara, including her already violates the edict against ambiguity.

In this section, we have considered the cases of six features of Venus named after what are assumed to be separate Tibetan Buddhist “goddesses.” It has been shown that they are, in fact, all emanations of the same goddess, namely Tara (Drölma). This violates the IAU’s mandate that names be “unambiguous.” At the same time, it has been demonstrated that other ambiguities and irregularities exist in the naming of these features. In the following section, the remaining two features and their respective deities will be considered.

Toma and Lhamo—More Misconceptions

Toma Mons is an 80 km-wide volcanic mountain in the Taussig Quadrangle of Venus. Her name is given as meaning “Tibetan goddess of intelligence and creativity” (USGS, 2004d) and its source is given as Ann and Imel (1993). She is an aspect of Vajrayogini (Dorje Naljoma), a dancing, wrathful, red-colored deity called the “queen of all dakinis” (Simmer-Brown, 2002, p. 137). As a dakini, she is, by definition, a wisdom being. But is wisdom synonymous with “intelligence and creativity”? By relying solely on the interpretation of Ann and Imel, the IAU has misrepresented Toma. For example, Ann and Imel (1993, p. 239) qualify their own identification by saying “she seems to be associated with the intellect.” An identification far truer to Buddhism is found in Simmer-Brown (2002, p.142):

Since she dwells on the charnel ground of egocentrism, she stands on the chest and lower face of a decaying corpse. As a wisdom dakini, Vajrayogini carries a hooked knife (katari, triguk) known as the hook of mercy, the weapon of nonthought that cuts the deceptions of self-cherishing. Nonthought (togme) is the most basic expression of Vajrayogini, for her mind is completely free from subconscious chatter and from the habitual patterns that give rise to obsessive thought patterns.

In another passage, Simmer-Brown (2002, p. 68) calls her “the personification of wisdom-mind itself.” Toma is therefore a representation of the mind that realizes freedom from the obscurations caused by cherishing one’s self, rejecting the ego through trampling it beneath her feet. Therefore, the categorization of Toma as a “miscellaneous goddess” is accurate, but her labeling as a goddess of “intelligence and creativity” is not.

Lhamo Tessera is a region of complex ridged terrain (CRT) approximately 800 km in size. It is found in the Lada Terra Quadrangle of Venus. The name appeared on a list provided to the IAU by George Burba of the Vernadsky Institute of Moscow (USGS, 2005b) and is said to mean “Tibetan time and fate goddess” (USGS, 2004d). As tesserae are to be named after goddesses of fate or fortune, this designation appears correct at first glance. However, upon closer reflection, there are a great many things wrong with this nomenclature. Firstly, the term “lhamo” means “goddess” – by itself it is not the name of an actual female deity. The deity intended here is Palden Lhamo, a wrathful form

“regarded as a protective deity who lends her aid to those who earnestly and devoutly seek it” (Lurker, 1987, p. 206). She is depicted as riding on a mule, who also bears the body or skin of the deity’s dead son. According to one legend, she killed her child after her husband, a king, refused to abandon warfare. She wished for him to experience the pain his actions had caused others.

Palden Lhamo is the only female member of the Dharmapalas, the eight dharma protectors. As such, she is sometimes called “Victorious Goddess-Defender of the Mahayana” (“Palden Lhamo”, nd.). Wearing a garland of severed heads, she bears various weapons and gifts, such as a hammer, lion, and serpent, which she received from other deities. Hevajra “gave her dice to determine the men’s lives” (Ibid.). Another connection to fate is her identification as the goddess of Tibet’s Oracle Lake (Lhamo Latso). All incarnations of the Dalai Lamas after the second were “traced by relying on signs from the Oracle Lake” (Mullin, 2001, p. 94).

This connection between Palden Lhamo and the institution of the Dalai Lamas is very important. Tradition has it that the first Dalai Lama, Gendun Drubpa, was led to the site where he founded the Tashi Lhunpo monastery through visions of Palden Lhamo (Mullin, 2001). According to the fifth Dalai Lama,

All the Dalai Lama incarnations relied upon Palden Lhamo, the Oracle Goddess, for their inspiration during times of doubt. Also from my side Palden Lhamo has been one of my main guardian angels throughout my life. Therefore, whenever you have doubts on what course to follow, perform a ball divination in front of an image of Palden Lhamo. (Mullin, 2001, p. 241)

Not only is she considered a main protector of the Dalai Lamas, but she and the male deity Nechung (associated with the Nechung Oracle) are freely termed Tibet’s two protectors (Office of Tibet, 1996). Including her within the Venusian nomenclature clearly violates the IAU’s own rule that “no names having political, military or religious significance may be used, except for names of political figures prior to the 19th century” (USGS, 2005a). Given the ongoing occupation of Tibet by China, Palden Lhamo certainly carries political and religious significance.

In summary,

1. There is no such goddess as “Lhamo” ; therefore the name is ambiguous and violates IAU rules;
2. Palden Lhamo’s main role is as a protector of the dharma, not a “time and fate goddess”;
3. Palden Lhamo is a political and religious feature of national importance to Tibet and therefore violates IAU rules.

Therefore the name should not, at the very least, have been used to describe a tessera feature, and most probably should not have been used for any feature on Venus.

Conclusion

The International Astronomical Union has established strict guidelines for the naming of features on individual planets, including Venus. Names can be suggested from any source and by any person, but the final responsibility for seeing that the names correctly follow the nomenclature guidelines falls to the three members of the Task Group for Venus Nomenclature. These three individuals (two from Russia and one from the U.S.) seem to have failed to adhere to these guidelines in the cases of eight features named for “Tibetan Buddhist goddesses.” Reasons for this failure include (but are not limited to)

- 1) Reliance on secondary or tertiary sources for verification of names (such as encyclopedias);
- 2) A lack of inherent understanding of Tibetan Buddhism in general, and the role of the feminine deity in that religion in particular;
- 3) An attempt to pigeonhole Tibetan Buddhist iconography into a Western pantheon (similar to the Greek or Roman gods).

The result is that six of the features are essentially named for the same deity (just different manifestations), while another should have been disqualified on political/religious grounds, and several of the eight names have been connected to the incorrect type of features (i.e. should have been listed under “miscellaneous goddesses”). This is a clear signal that the IAU needs to actively recruit members from Eastern traditions, especially for its Nomenclature groups, if it hopes to achieve its goal of an “unambiguous” and “equitable selection of names from ethnic groups/countries.”

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