

**Tibetan silk appliqué thangka:
every stitch is a prayer**



Manjushri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom. Detail of silk appliqué thangka, 2009. Private collection

Tibetan silk appliqué thangka

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Submitted by Edith A. Young

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I certify that this thesis is my own work and that all sources have been acknowledged.

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Ethics Protocol

The ethics protocol (Protocol number 2008/230) for this thesis was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Australian National University.

Explanatory notes.

Phonetic spelling has been used for Tibetan and Sanskrit words. These are italicised only when they first appear. The glossary explains Tibetan and Sanskrit terms. For Wylie transliteration of Tibetan words, refer to the List of Tibetan terms with their transliteration. Bhutanese Dzongka language is a dialect of the larger Tibetan language system, and many Bhutanese words are the same as the Tibetan. In some quotes Tibetan words appear according to the Wylie transliteration system, in which case phonetics are given in []. The modern Chinese Pin Yin has been used for Chinese words. Many words from the Sanskrit are now frequently used without diacritics, and I have followed this convention. Foreign words are not made plural by adding 's'. I have not systematically given Tibetan equivalents for Sanskrit words, such as the names of deities. My intention is that the reader will be able to understand the sound of the words, with meanings glossed in the text and footnotes as appropriate.

ABSTRACT

The topic of this thesis is the traditional Tibetan Buddhist art of appliquéd and embroidered hanging scrolls (*thangka*). An examination of the historical background as well as the social and ritual purpose for Tibetan silk appliquéd *thangka* provide the context for an investigation into the revival and transmission of this highly valued and significant art form. Although little is known or documented on the subject, I discovered, during field work in Dharamsala and Kathmandu in 2009, that silk appliquéd art for Tibetan Buddhist ritual and ceremony is enjoying a strong revival, and shows evidence of a high level of technical skill, aesthetic vision and creativity. Information was gathered from observations of workshops and interviews with Tibetan master appliquéd artists and senior monks. The spread of Tibetan Buddhism and the continuity of Vajrayana ritual practices have supported the demand for and patronage of silk appliquéd art. In addition, there is a strong motivation to maintain Tibetan traditional culture in exile in the face of loss, destruction and continuing limitations placed upon cultural practices in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and Tibetan ethnic minority areas in the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). I also examine silk appliquéd art in Mongolia and distinct regions within the larger Tibetan cultural arena such as Bhutan, and Ladakh (Jammu Kashmir, India). A detailed examination of the materials and techniques reveals the unique qualities of the silk appliquéd *thangka* and the strength and continuity of the tradition today.

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Images and photographs referred to in the written material are in the accompanying Volume II

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Introduction

The journey to Sherabling Monastery, the seat of Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche, situated in the hills below the towering Indian Himalayas, was through orderly tea plantations and meadows of spring flowers. On arrival at the monastery, I entered the large enclosed courtyard in front of the brightly coloured entrance to the main prayer hall. Spread out across the wide expanse of the courtyard was the enormous design for a new giant appliqué thangka. Dark outlines of fifteen foot high robed and crowned figures were marked out on white canvas. The courtyard was deserted except for five young men, who were busy tracing the design on to enormous sheets of synthetic material. There was an air of quiet concentration and careful focus. This small team and the tall confident appliqué master, Tenzin Gyaltzen, who was leading the project, were close to finishing the first stage in the production of a giant appliqué thangka, which would take nearly two years to complete. The production of giant appliqué thangka, a uniquely Tibetan art form, for the purpose of granting blessings to large crowds of pilgrims, has continued since at least the 15th century.

Later visiting a workshop in Dharamsala I watched as twelve young men and women sat at low tables placed under tall windows, carefully stitched pieces of silk, couching the silk wrapped horse hair cords with tiny invisible stitches, to outline each piece. Now and again a young apprentice would approach the master and show him a piece she was working on, for him to check. The production of silk appliqué thangka, from hand-stitched pieces of brightly coloured satin silk and gold patterned brocades essentially has not changed for centuries.

The topic of this thesis is the traditional Tibetan Buddhist art of appliqué and embroidered hanging scrolls (thangka). These are sacred images in a hanging scroll format which are stitched using precious brightly-coloured silk damasks and silk and gold brocades. Silk appliqué thangka are framed in luxurious silk brocade, in the same traditional format as painted thangka, so that they can be rolled up, carried and stored easily. Embroidered or appliqué thangka are two-dimensional images of Tibetan Buddhist (Vajrayana) deities and enlightened beings, similar to Tibetan painted thangka. More precious than painted thangka, large silk appliqué thangka represent part of a monastery's most valued treasures, commissioned by high-ranking lamas and kept for display during special rituals and annual festivals. Smaller appliqué thangka are also commissioned and are hung in household shrine rooms or donated to monasteries. These art forms, which measure from 120 cm high to as much as 35 metres high, are the largest cloth images in the world, and are still being made today.

In this thesis I look in depth at Tibetan silk appliqué, a significant art form (along with painted thangka and sculpture) integral to Tibetan religious practice. I explore the origins and functions of this religious art form in the past and its continuities into the present. Through an examination of Tibetan silk appliqué art, I demonstrate that the spread of Tibetan Buddhism beyond the borders of Tibet was a major factor influencing the development of art in Tibet

from the 12th century to the 19th century, and that this process still influences the production and survival of appliqué art in the 21st century.

Furthermore, in this thesis I demonstrate that Tibetan silk appliqué art survives not for purely aesthetic reasons or traditional 'appeal' but to meet the demand for Buddhist art required for Tibetan Buddhist practice around the world. The art of Tibetan Buddhism is found wherever the teachings of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism have been adopted. Whereas for several centuries these regions were confined to Central Asia and the Himalayas, this area is now globalised, consequent to the diaspora following the Chinese invasion in 1959.

The term 'Tibetan silk appliqué thangka' in this thesis refers to the appliqué thangka which form a part of the cultural and artistic traditions of Tibet, Mongolia and the Himalayan kingdoms of Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh¹ and Mustang (now in Nepal),² where they are used in Vajrayana Buddhist practices. Ethnic and cultural Tibet spreads well beyond the borders of political Tibet, defined today as the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) within the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). The Tibet Autonomous Region includes the Tibetan provinces known as Ngari (western), U (central) and Tsang (southern Tibet), previously ruled from Lhasa by the Dalai Lamas.³ Over half of ethnic Tibetans live in the Eastern Tibetan regions, Amdo and Kham, now within Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces in China. (See map next page.)

Today, as in the past, it is Tibetan Buddhism and not political boundaries that strengthen and define the cultural unity of ethnic Tibetan farmers and nomad pastoralists who are spread across the vast high plateau territories of Central Asia and in the high valleys of the Himalayas.⁴ ⁵ Large numbers of Tibetans have escaped into India and Nepal since China took control of Tibet in 1959. Monasteries and settlements have been established in northern India around Dharamsala, the seat of the Tibetan government-in-exile and the home of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, as well as in South India where monasteries of the major Tibetan Buddhist schools have been rebuilt in India. In addition, monasteries and settlements have been established in Boudhanath in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal. Tibetan Buddhism has also become widespread internationally. Thus the Tibetan Buddhist appliqué thangka are found in a wide range of countries, and are not confined to Tibet.

¹ Sikkim and Ladakh are former Himalayan Buddhist kingdoms, which are now within the borders of India.

² People from Mustang, Dolpo and Solu Khumbu (Sherpa populations) are Tibetan ethnic groups whose homelands are now within the political boundaries of Nepal. The Newars of the Kathmandu Valley also practice Vajrayana Buddhism, have a sophisticated thangka painting tradition, and traditionally have worked as artists within Tibet for centuries, but do not have a tradition of appliqué thangka.

³ Kapstein, Matthew. *The Tibetans*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, p.4.

⁴ Aris, Michael. *Lamas, Princes and Brigands: Joseph Rock's Photographs of the Tibetan Borderlands of China*. New York: China House Gallery, 1992, p.13.

⁵ Samuel has also suggested that the relative cultural unity amongst those spread out across the vast Tibetan plateau is due to the extensive practice of pilgrimage, travelling monks and traders. Samuel, Geoffrey. *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*. London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993, p.43.

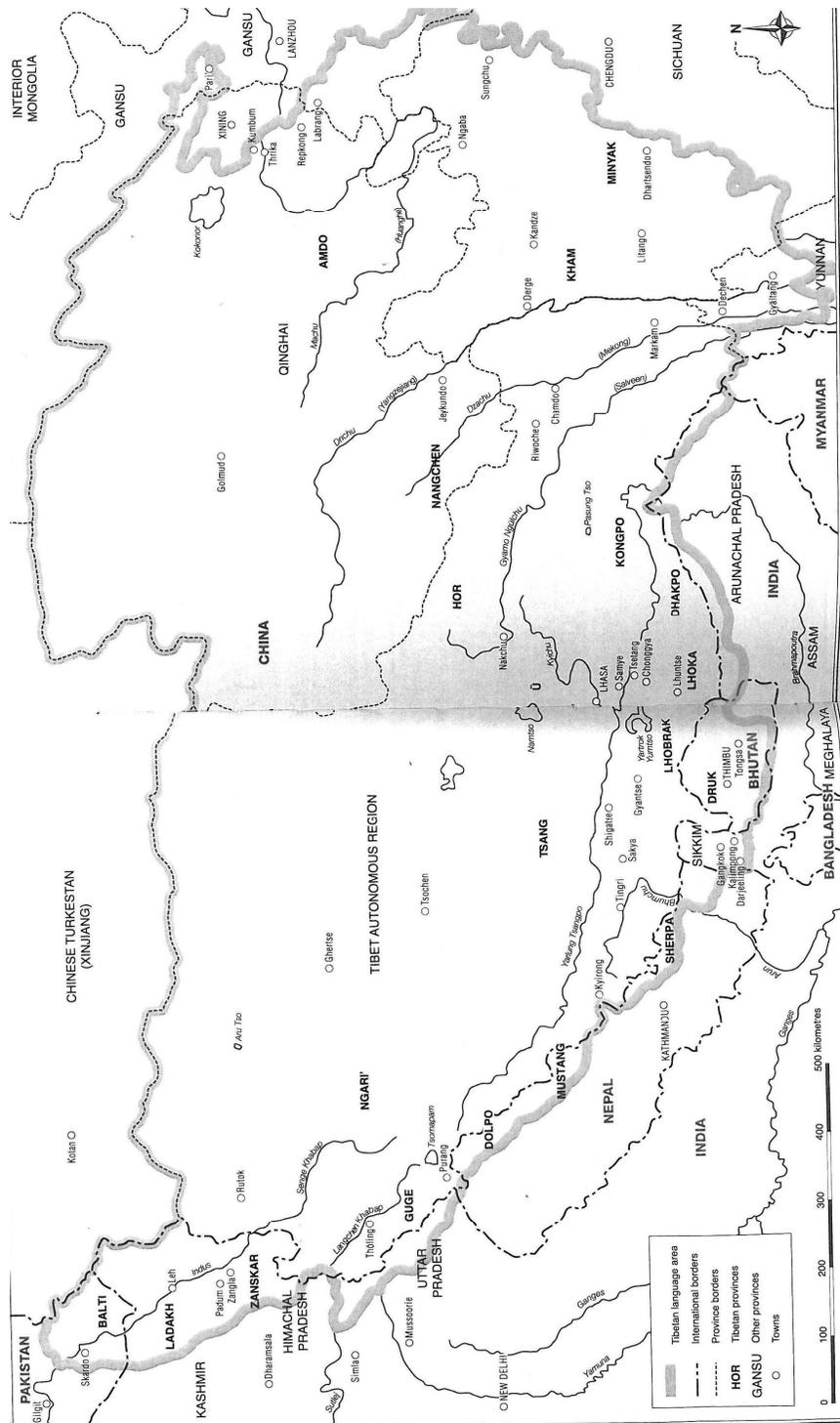


Diagram 1. Map showing the Tibetan language area.

This includes Himalayan regions, the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Tibetan provinces within the Chinese provinces, Gansu, Qinghai and Sichuan.

Map from Teissel, Michel. *Tibet. The Secret Continent*. London: Cassell Illustrated, 2005, pp 10 – 11.

Although there are records of giant appliqué thangka made from the 13th and 14th centuries onwards, and they have received some attention in Western art histories of Tibet, there has been little written about the tradition and their production. In spite of a growing interest in Tibet and Tibetan art there are comparatively few art historians who have written on this subject. Pioneering work on the Tibetan art of silk appliqué can be found in studies by Olsen,⁶ Reynolds,⁷ Pal,⁸ Tanaka⁹ and Jones.¹⁰ Mongolian appliqué thangka are mentioned in the essay by Bartholomew in the exhibition catalogue for 'Mongolia: The legacy of Chinggis Khan' with descriptions of appliqué works that appeared in the exhibition. Scholars who have looked at the history of appliqué thangka, have focussed mainly on the display of giant thangka for festivals; there has been little attention to other types of appliqué thangka, such as the large thangka measuring four to five metres high, hung on special occasions in the courtyards and great prayer halls of monasteries, and which form part of the monasteries' treasures, or the smaller appliqué thangka hung in household shrines. Myers examined religious scrolls and banners from Bhutan in 'From the Land of the Thunder Dragon'.¹¹ Bartholomew described embroidered and appliqué thangka from Mongolia¹² and from Bhutan.¹³ Most studies give only brief descriptions of a few appliqué works in distinct collections. The only sustained study of silk appliqué thangka is Jones' doctoral research (unpublished), which examined the Tibetan silk appliqué as a living tradition and gave details of the transmission of techniques and the materials used in 1992. Her study was from a practical, experiential and technical perspective. She learnt the technique from a monk artist in the Nechung monastery in Dharamsala. As a result of her fieldwork in Tibet, Ladakh and Dharamsala she concluded that the tradition was in danger of being lost due to non-Tibetan influences, and also due to the fact that fewer monks were taking up the work. Since presenting her thesis in 1994, there has been a considerable revival of the art, as I discovered on my study trip to Dharamsala and Kathmandu, in 2009. What may have been considered rare and 'endangered' at that time, practised by very few, has now grown into a much larger and thriving artistic production by several workshops in Dharamsala and Kathmandu, where numbers of lay Tibetans have been learning the techniques. Her study did not take into account, workshops active at the time in Dharamsala,

⁶ Eleanor Olsen, "Tibetan Appliqué Work," *Bulletin of the Needle and Bobbin Club* 34 (1950).

⁷ Valrae Reynolds, "Ritual Textiles," in *Art of the Himalayas*, Pal, P. (ed.). 1991, pp185-90; Valrae Reynolds, "Fabric Images and Their Special Role in Tibet," *MARG* 48, no. 1 (1996): pp 244-57; Valrae Reynolds, "Luxury Textiles in Tibet," in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*, Singer, Jane Casey and Denwood, Philip (eds.). 1997, pp129-31.

⁸ P. Pal, *Art of Tibet*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1990 ; P. Pal, "Tibetan Religious Textiles, Use of Textile in the Temples and Monasteries of Tibet," *Hali*, no. 61 (1992).

⁹ Yuko Tanaka, In *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 6th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Fagernes, 1992*. Kvaerne Per (ed.), pp 873-876. Oslo: Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, 1994.

¹⁰ Gayle Curtis Jones, "The Fabric Thanka of Tibet: Aesthetic Inquiry into a Living Tradition" (PhD Thesis, New York University, 1993).

¹¹ Diana K. Myers, *From the Land of the Thunder Dragon: Textile Arts of Bhutan*. (New Delhi: Timeless Books, 1994), pp 155-56.

¹² Bartholomew, Terese Tse. "Introduction to the Art of Mongolia," in *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan* ed. Berger, Patricia and Bartholomew, Terese Tse (eds.).1995, pp 83-84.

¹³ Bartholomew, Terese Tse. "The Art of Bhutan," in *The Dragon's Gift, the Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, Bartholomew, Terese Tse and Johnston, John (eds.). 2008, pp 42-57. 'The Dragon's Gift', the catalogue of an exhibition of rarely seen works from Bhutanese monasteries and temples, includes some large and outstanding examples of appliqué and embroidered thangka.

which are covered in this thesis. From an art historical perspective, however, an in-depth study of historical and contemporary silk appliqué thangka production within the Tibetan tradition has not yet been carried out.

Art historical studies scarcely mention Tibetan art produced after 1959, when the Dalai Lama and several thousand Tibetans left Tibet after the Chinese invasion. Nevertheless, Tibetan artists living in exile continue to produce paintings, painted thangka and silk appliqué thangka. While silk appliqué thangka made in Tibet before 1959 have been investigated by a few scholars, as mentioned above, this bias extends to collections, as it is also noticeable that very few curators, collecting institutions and private collectors mention Tibetan appliqué art made after 1959. The silk appliqué thangka which appear in art institutions, museums or private collections and are described in exhibition catalogues and journal articles are from the previous centuries. Tibetan art from the second half of the 20th century (after 1959) and in the 21st century has not been studied except for work by Harris,¹⁴ who does not mention silk appliqué art at all, and Jones.¹⁵ Harris also points out that pan – Asian surveys of contemporary art do not include Tibetan art after 1959: for example, John Clark's *Modern Asian Art* (1998).¹⁶ "When a work by a Tibetan does appear in publications, it is likely to be designated as Chinese, or as an example of art in exile and somehow hovering in space unrelated to the country in which it was produced (such as India) [and unrelated to the cultural background from which it was produced]."¹⁷

Furthermore, examples of appliqué art from Tibet held in Chinese collections, outside the Buddhist cultural context, have been subject to Chinese systems of ranking works of art and Chinese propaganda. Earlier pre 1959 examples made in Tibet are labelled, for example, as Qing dynasty, or the Republic of China, even though they are produced inside Tibet, as part of the process of appropriation and subjugation; and cultural destruction, (in order to re-enforce the party line that Tibet was always part of China). An example of Tibetan art given Chinese provenance and dating can be found in the Chinese catalogue of an exhibition of Tibetan art in 1992.¹⁸ Post 1959 Tibetan Buddhist art inside China is considered 'folk art', since from the Han Chinese point of view all art and literature produced by ethnic minorities in China is 'folk art' and 'folklore'.¹⁹ This concept of 'folk' art, or 'folklore', has been described by Foucault as an 'hypocrisy', used by ethnic groups who consider themselves 'civilised' to describe others whom they consider 'uncivilised'. According to Foucault they hide (their refusal to see them as

¹⁴ Harris, Clare, *In the Image of Tibet: Tibetan Painting after 1959*. London: Reaktion Books, 1999, p.12.

¹⁵ Jones, "The Fabric Thanka of Tibet".

¹⁶ Harris, Clare, *In the Image of Tibet*, p.10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp11-12.

¹⁸ The Management Committee of Cultural Relics of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, *A Well- Selected Collection of Tibetan Cultural Relics* (Beijing: The Forbidden City Publishing House of the Palace Museum 1992). In this publication every item, from the Tibet Autonomous Region, is described using Chinese dynastic period, e.g. 'of the Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644)' or 'made at the time of the Republic of China (1911 – 1949)', where Western catalogues simply state the century. Many of the objects, clearly made in Tibet, including contemporary Tibetan dress, are from the Potala Palace collection, or the Norbulingka Summer Palace in Lhasa.

¹⁹ Mark Stevenson, "Art and Life in Amdo Reb Gong since 1978," in *Amdo Tibetans in Transition: Society and Culture in the Post-Mao Era : Piats 2000: Tibetan Studies : Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Leiden 2000*. Huber, Toni (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 2002, p.212.

equals) behind the veil of 'respect' by using the term 'folk lore', or in this case 'folk art', suggesting that it is somehow 'quaint' and 'charming'.²⁰

Harris, in studying the work of Tibetan contemporary painters, explains that 'without a homeland, with no place to attach it to, it appears as though Tibetan art does not exist.'²¹ Tibetan refugees identify with a cultural heritage which is no longer grounded in 'place' but now, through the spread of Tibetan Buddhist cultural practices, their cultural heritage continues to be developed globally. Notably Harris does not mention appliqué art. She expands on how Tibetan material culture has functioned within Western mythologies of Tibet and 19th and 20th century collecting and exhibiting, suggesting that Westerners prefer to use Tibetan objects collected in the past as better representing Tibet.²² This may also help to explain the lack of interest in contemporary appliqué art.

It is worth noting that while present studies of Tibetan art represent it as only existing in the past, Tibetan (or Vajrayana) Buddhist art in Bhutan, which dates back to the time of the early Tibetan kings (7th – 9th centuries), is represented as a living tradition. Studies of Bhutanese textiles by Myers and Pommeret,²³ and Ison²⁴ include the art of embroidered and appliqué thangka, which belong to the broader Tibetan Buddhist tradition and closely resemble Tibetan appliqué thangka in form, style and iconography. Originally brought from Tibet, this art form in Bhutan has the same purpose and meaning, as they are made for Vajrayana Buddhist practices. Today as in the past there is considerable interaction between Bhutanese artists and Tibetan artists. Bhutanese artists travel to Ladakh and Sikkim to work for monasteries. Tibetan artists in India and Nepal create appliqué thangka for monasteries in Bhutan.

Why are silk appliqué thangka relatively unknown and rarely included in studies of Tibetan art, which are mostly concerned with painting, sculpture, and architecture? In the light of the growing interest in and study of Tibetan art, why are they seen as ancillary to these better known Tibetan art forms which are covered in numerous publications?²⁵ Whereas detailed analyses of paintings, murals and sculpture fill volumes of scholarly texts, exhibition catalogues and books on the subject of Tibetan art, there has been no such detailed study on Tibetan silk appliqué thangka. However, publications from the Norbulingka Institute, Centre for the Arts, in Dharamsala, have detailed information on the production of appliqué thangka in the institute

²⁰ Foucault, Michel. "Veilleur de la nuit des hommes", 1963, in Foucault, Michel. *Dits et Ecrits*. Vol1, Paris; Gallimard, 1994, p. 232.

Quote (in French): "Le terme "folklore" n'est qu'un hypocrisie des "civilisés" qui ne participent pas au jeu, et qui veulent masquer leur refus de contact sous le manteau du respect devant le pittoresque...". Since Tibetans are considered by the Chinese as a 'minority' ethnic group, expressions of Tibetan culture and tradition such as their art, dance performance and festivals are denigrated by being considered as 'folk art' and are valued only as tourist attractions.

²¹ Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, p.10.

²² *Ibid.*, p.38.

²³ Dianne K. Myers and Françoise Pommeret, "Cut and Stitched: Textiles Made by Men," in *From the Land of the Thunder Dragon: Textile Arts of Bhutan*, Myers, Diana K. and Bean, Susan S. (eds.). 1994, pp 154-56.

²⁴ Barry Ison, "The Thirteen Traditional Crafts," in *Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods*. Schicklgruber, Christian and Pommeret Françoise,(eds.) 1997), pp 101-31.

²⁵ For example Amy Heller, *Tibetan Art: Tracing the Development of Spiritual Ideals and Art in Tibet, 600-2000 A.D.* (Milano: Jaca Book. 1999.

demonstrating the importance given to the tradition.²⁶ In effect, once removed from its religious context as a monastery's sacred treasure and important religious icon, is the silk appliqué thangka, as a textile, considered less important than paintings and sculpture? Is it given a minor role because collectors and curators tend to focus on painting and sculpture which are more important in Western art hierarchies? There may be a number of reasons why there is very little work done on the subject, and there have been no studies of the revival of silk appliqué art today.²⁷ Clearly, the Western view of art is not the only way of looking at art. In this thesis I will look at how Tibetan artists and patrons view appliqué thangka as fine art, as they understand it, in the context of Tibetan Buddhist practice. The revival of cultural practices, such as the production of silk appliqué thangka, is based on Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism which is now spreading around the world. High ranking patrons, such as His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and other leading lamas, have recognised that after more than fifty years in exile, without a homeland to support cultural identity, cultural revival and resilience must be developed in this broader globalised context, incorporating innovative materials and technologies, whilst maintaining cultural form. They drive this revival by establishing training centres, supporting artists and sponsoring projects with funds collected internationally.

In this thesis I aim to fill these gaps and omissions and address inconsistencies found in earlier studies by examining in depth the practice of Tibetan silk appliqué thangka today, in its broader cultural context, and the transmission and revival of appliqué art by Tibetan artists in exile. The main part of the research comprises interviews with Tibetan appliqué artists and observation of appliqué works in progress and on display in Dharamsala, India and Kathmandu, Nepal, carried out in 2009. These interviews with artists and senior monks and my observations revealed that Tibetan appliqué art is thriving and growing, and gave insights into the rich variety and quality of work produced today for traditional religious purpose. Tibetan appliqué art is therefore deserving of recognition and study, and inclusion in current studies of Tibetan art. Leading Tibetan master appliqué artists were interviewed including Phuntsok Tsering, *Namsa Chenmo*, the Grand appliqué master and tailor to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama; Dorje Wangdu, Director of the Tibetan Appliqué Art Centre in Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala; and Tenzin Gyaltzen, appliqué master in Sherabling Monastery, India. In addition, conversations with senior monks revealed insights into the ritual use and significance of these artworks in the context of Tibetan Buddhist practice. Besides these interviews, the first hand account of Gyeten Namgyal, the former Namsa Chenmo to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama also provided an understanding of the status of silk appliqué art in Lhasa up until 1959.²⁸

Research for this thesis also includes study of the production of significant giant appliqué artworks for the Tsurphu monastery inside Tibet. Terris Temple and Leslie Ngyuen Temple,

²⁶ Jeremy Russell, *Norbulingka the First Ten Years of an Adventure*. New Delhi: Norbulingka Institute, 2006; Jeremy Russell, *Celebrating Kalachakra through Art*. New Delhi: Norbulingka Institute, 2005; Gyeten Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale," *Cho Yang: The Voice of Tibetan Religion and Culture* No 6 (1994).

²⁷ Jones, "The Fabric Thanka of Tibet".

²⁸ Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale." Gyeten Namgyal became Namsa Chenmo to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Lhasa for a short time until 1959, after serving the Thirteenth Dali Lama. He was unable to escape with the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959. This record of his reminiscences spoken to and written down by Kim Yeshe, provides first hand information about large silk appliqué thangka projects, the organisation of workshops, the Tailors' Guild and the status of silk appliqué art up until the Chinese occupation of Lhasa, 1959, as well as his experiences in Lhasa after 1959. He came to Dharamsala in 1980, and taught at Ghadong monastery.

artists from the United States and the United Kingdom, trained in the art of Tibetan thangka painting, were requested by the abbot of Tsurphu Monastery to take on this challenging project.²⁹ This case study illustrates the willingness of Tibetans to engage non-Tibetans, and, furthermore, demonstrates the way in which 'Tibetan' cultural forms are easily developed in the context of Tibetan Vajrayana practice beyond the boundaries of place and ethnicity.³⁰ These two non-Tibetan artists are working with Tibetans within China to achieve several major Buddhist art projects and contributing to the revival of appliqué arts within Tibet.

Other sources of information include a film in Tibetan, made in 2009 by Dorje Wangdu, Tibetan appliqué master and director of the Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre in Dharamsala, which describes the work of the Centre and shows many large silk appliqué thangka being produced.³¹ In this documentary, which informs Tibetans about this traditional art form, several highly respected lamas, speak about the work being done at the Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre, and the significance of silk appliqué thangka in the context of Tibetan art and religious practice.³² In addition, the Norbulingka Institute in Dharamsala, established in order to train young Tibetans in traditional art practices, has published books³³ and journals which tell of the recent revival of Tibetan arts and crafts, the production of appliqué art and their use in the Kalachakra ceremony.³⁴ There has been a growing awareness and emphasis on 'revival' as being critical for Tibetan cultural continuity in the last twenty years, which may not have been the case when Jones carried out her research. The establishment of centres for teaching art practices, such as the Norbulingka Institute and the Tibetan Appliqué Art Centre (Dorje Wangdu) are examples of the efforts to encourage training in art practices.

Finally, Western textile and silk appliqué thangka artists, Leslie Rinchen Wongmo (who trained and worked with Dorje Wangdu and Tenzin Gyaltzen in Dharamsala) and Terris Temple, the Tibetan-trained thangka painter interviewed for this project, both provide valuable information from their personal experience and insights into the production of traditional Tibetan silk appliqué thangka, on their websites.³⁵

Chapters One and Two illustrate the significant role that Tibetan silk appliqué thangka has played historically, and how it is highly revered by Tibetans and considered rarer and more valued than painted thangka art. Chapter One investigates the historical background to the

²⁹ Interviewed in Chiang Mai, Thailand in 2009. See appendix 9.

³⁰ Examples of other Western thangka painters are Andy Webber and Robert Beer.

³¹ Dorje Wangdu, *"The Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre"* (India: 2009). (You tube 2009)

³² In another cultural context this film may be appear to have a commercial motive, but in the context of Buddhist culture, this is not the case. Rather his motivation is to inform Tibetans of the significance of this art form, and perhaps attract more young people to take up the profession. Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, 2009.

³³ Russell, *Norbulingka the First Ten Years of an Adventure*. As above, this publication is produced with the motivation to inform the general public about the activities of the Norbulingka Institute which is to support the revival of traditional arts and crafts. While the Institute does have galleries and a shop, sales of thangka support the core purpose, the ongoing expenses of the training facility, the teachers, and the students, making it possible to provide training in painting and appliqué thangka, wood-carving and the making of sculpture.

³⁴ Russell, *Celebrating Kalachakra through Art*.

³⁵ Leslie Rinchen- Wongmo, (2010, [cited 31 May 2010]); available from <http://www.silkthangka.com/>.; and Terris Temple, (2010 [cited 31 May 2010]); available from <http://www.tibetcolor.com/>.

introduction and the production of silk appliqué thangka in Tibet, and the spread of this art form with Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism throughout Central and East Asia and the Himalayan region. In this chapter I argue that the spread of Tibetan Buddhism and close relationships between Tibet, the Mongols and China, during the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties (from the 13th to 19th century) were major factors in the development of silk appliqué thangka art. This discussion includes the tradition of silk appliqué thangka in Mongolia, Bhutan and Ladakh.

Chapter Two explores the purpose and meaning of appliqué thangka, the production of art to serve religious and ritual functions within Tibetan cultural life, and the Tibetan view that the highest forms of art are those which represent the 'body' or the embodiment of the enlightened mind of the Buddha and other Buddhist concepts. In this chapter I examine the traditional use of giant appliqué thangka in large annual festivals and ceremonies that bring people together to receive blessings, building cultural unity and identity.

In Chapter Three I investigate the transmission of the technique, demonstrating the pivotal role played by a small number of master artists, living in exile in India, in the revival of appliqué thangka art today. This chapter introduces some important appliqué artists, who are the main players in this story of revival, and their work. The study revealed that there were two significant factors in the sustainability of silk appliqué thangka: firstly, the high value placed by ethnic Tibetans on this art form; and secondly, the demand for appliqué today which links directly to the role of patrons, particularly the revered Tibetan Buddhist lamas who maintain this demand by commissioning appliqué thangka. Besides the master artists who produce fine silk appliqué thangka, patrons and sponsors also play a major role in the continuity of this art form. The continued demand for ritual artworks of high quality for Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in Tibet, in India and around the world has supported the revival of silk appliqué art.

Having examined the art of silk appliqué thangka from a broad perspective, Chapters Four and Five bring details of the art into sharper focus by examining the materials and techniques. In Chapter Four I consider the materials used in the production of fabric thangka today, showing the extent to which the main materials, silk and gold, carry links with the past. These superior quality silks and brocades continue to be used because of the traditional religious use of appliqué thangka as offerings to the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

Chapter Five investigates the techniques employed in production of appliqué thangka today. There is an emphasis on maintaining the traditional skills and the strength of the tradition today is testament to that. The traditional techniques demand a high level of refined skill and 'solid craftsmanship'.³⁶ Tibetan artists in exile place great value on the continuity of tradition because the purpose of the artwork is Vajrayana Buddhist practices and ceremonies. They are motivated to preserve and sustain important artistic traditions which may be lost, threatened or compromised within Tibet.³⁷ Also there is the realisation that after fifty years their identity

³⁶ "Static societies may tend to value solid craftsmanship and the refinements of skill." Although Gombrich explains that it is difficult to support such generalisations about static societies, and to judge societies on the basis of their arts, as this thesis shows, Tibetans do value highly skilled workmanship and the traditional skills required to make the appliqué thangka. Ernst Gombrich, "Style," in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* ed. Donald Preziosi, *Oxford History of Art*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p.137.

³⁷ Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu and Tenzin Gyaltsen, April 2009. See appendices 5 and 6.

depends on cultural vitality rather than deriving their identity from living in their homeland and from place. This chapter shows that appliqué artists are also experimenting and innovating. They make creative choices while working within the traditional format.³⁸ Using examples, I argue that the production of appliqué thangka is not simply a copy of a painting. In fact, it is the high level of technical skill attained by the senior appliqué masters which makes these creative and imaginative expressions possible.

An examination of the materials and techniques reveals firstly, the strength and continuity of the tradition today, and, secondly, the extent to which the artists have adapted to deal with the challenge of reviving this art in exile. It also highlights the importance of using traditional materials in the context of the Tibetan Buddhist practice, and the production of enormous giant thangka up to 35 metres high. The study of the historical background and context, the purpose and meaning of silk appliqué thangka and the materials and techniques explored in this thesis provide insight into the resilience of this remarkable art form.

³⁸ The artist must at the same time adhere to the iconographic and iconometric rules in order to produce something that can be consecrated and effective in a ritual context, explained in Chapter 2.

Chapter One Historical background

In this chapter I investigate the historical background to the production of Tibetan silk appliqué thangka. I explore how the close relationships which developed between Tibetan religious elite, the Mongol Khans and Chinese emperors in the 14th and 15th centuries were to have a profound influence on Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhist art and in particular, silk appliqué thangka. During the Yuan (1260 – 1368) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties the production of Buddhist artworks and the resulting cultural exchange between the three cultures, Tibetan, Mongol and Chinese, were major factors in the development of silk appliqué thangka art in Tibet. Later, in the seventeenth century, in response to threats from Mongol neighbours, the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Regent sought to strengthen their position and unify Tibet, revitalizing Buddhism to bring ethnic Tibetans together and build alliances within Tibet. The Dalai Lama and his Regent revived and established religious ceremonies which encouraged large groups of pilgrims to gather together and at the same time enhanced their prestige and power as the theocratic rulers of Tibet. These ceremonies were later supported by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama for similar reasons in the early twentieth century, when the threat to Tibet was from China. Ceremonies often took the form of public festivals with outdoor displays of giant appliqué thangka. The Fifth Dalai Lama, and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, both encouraged the visual arts in association with this revitalisation of Buddhism as an agent of building ethnic identity. The Fifth Dalai Lama established workshops and guilds for the production of works of art required for offerings, rituals and ceremonies.

The origins of silk appliqué thangka

Just as Buddhism originated in India so too did the various forms of Buddhist art which spread to Tibet. These have developed within Tibet for more than twelve centuries, with influences from neighbouring regions – Nepal, Central Asia and China. Although the origins of painted thangka and sculpture can be found in India, there are no records that ‘cloth thangka’ (*kö thang* Tib.), in silk appliqué form, came from these regions. Painted thangka were introduced together with Vajrayana Buddhism into Tibet from India in the 8th century and are thought to have originated from the portable paintings used for teaching, called *pata-citra*.³⁹ Using strict iconometric compositions and iconography of the deities of Vajrayana Buddhism from India, Tibetan lamas and artists combined their visions and creative imagination and, over time, adopted elements of artistic styles from Newari, Mongolian and Chinese artists to create a uniquely Tibetan art. During the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, Vajrayana Buddhism and related art forms, intrinsic to Tibetan Buddhist practice, spread beyond its borders to China, Central Asia and throughout the Himalayan region, including Bhutan. The patronage of Tibetan Buddhist schools began with the great Mongolian leader Khubilai Khan (1215-1294), who became the first Yuan emperor of China in the early 13th century and continued with the Yuan dynasty imperial courts. The ‘priest- patron’ (*chodyon* Tib.) connections continued for centuries between Tibetan religious leaders and the Mongol Khans, the Chinese Ming Dynasty

³⁹ M. N. Rajesh, *Gompas in Traditional Tibetan Society*. New Delhi: Decent Books: 2002), pp.104, 146.

(1368 – 1644), in particular the Yongle Emperor (r. 1403 – 1424),⁴⁰ and later the Manchu Qing (1644 – 1911) dynasty. Kapstein points out that although the reciprocity of the patron-priest relationship, in which the Tibetan hierarchs conferred religious legitimacy on the Mongolian and Chinese rulers in exchange for material gifts, grants, seals and titles of authority, was an important factor in these relations, this exchange also promoted cultural and commercial interactions for centuries well beyond the official gift granting and initiations exchanged.⁴¹

The first appliqué thangka is believed to have been produced in the 14th century by the fourth Karmapa Rolpe Dorje (1340-1383 AD), hierarch of the Karma Kagyu school, who wished to realise the dream of one of his students, the princess Punyadhari of Minyak.⁴² Silk appliqué thangka produced in Tibet from around the 14th century reflect influences from Mongolia and China.⁴³ Reynolds writes that the techniques used in silk appliqué “can be connected to embroidery techniques and textiles of Central Asia, where it has been used for animal trappings, tent decorations, domestic furnishings and altar decorations, and the embroideries of China.”⁴⁴ The appliqué techniques are likely to have come from the nomadic Mongols of Central Asia, but the layering of the appliqué pieces to form the figures which appear to be dressed in the rich brocade silks, is possibly a distinctly Tibetan modification of their simple appliqué technique.⁴⁵

Three factors which may have influenced the beginnings of silk appliqué technique in thangka format in Tibet are linked to Tibet’s close relations with the Mongolians and Chinese rulers and their patronage of Tibetan Buddhism.⁴⁶ Firstly, gifts from the Mongol Khans and later Yuan Emperors of woven and embroidered hangings of Tibetan Buddhist images⁴⁷ brought to Tibet

⁴⁰ An especially close relationship developed between the Yongle Emperor and the Karmapa, Dezhin-Shegpa, and was considered the cause of ‘endless Tibetan missions to China during the Yongle and Xuande periods’. H Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art*. Warminster Aris and Phillips, 1975, pp.74-75.

⁴¹ Matthew Kapstein, "Introduction," in *Buddhism between Tibetan and China*, Matthew Kapstein (ed.), 2009, p.4.

⁴² Karma Thinley, *The History of the Sixteen Karmapas of Tibet*. Boulder: Prajna Press, 1980, pp. 66-67. The princess had dreamt of a huge thangka of Shakyamuni Buddha. Rolpe Dorje, mounted on a horse, traced the perfect measurements of Buddha’s figure, with the horse’s hoof-prints and the image was transferred to silk. It took five hundred people thirteen months to complete the thangka.

⁴³ The question of dating the earliest silk appliqué thangka is further confused by the citation in Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp, “Book Review, Untitled,” review of Xizang Wenwu Jingcui [Bod kyi rig dngos snying btus, *A Well-Selected Collection of Tibetan Cultural Relics*] by The Management Committee of Cultural Relics of the Tibetan Autonomous Region, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 2 (1994): p.308. This was quoted by Tanaka in 1994, suggesting that 12th century was the oldest silk appliqué thangka. In fact, a 12th century textile thangka, dated by inscription, is inaccurately described as silk appliqué in the above-mentioned Chinese exhibition catalogue of Tibetan ‘Cultural Relics’, and cited in Leonard W.J. van der Kuijp’s book review. It is, in fact, an embroidered and woven tapestry not an appliqué thangka.

⁴⁴ Reynolds, “Fabric Images and Their Special Role in Tibet,” p.83.

⁴⁵ Jones, “The Fabric Thanka of Tibet.” pp 72-73.

⁴⁶ The artistic language of Vajrayana Buddhist deities with mainly a Newari (or Nepalese) aesthetic, practised by Tibetan artists, was adopted by China and Mongolia, and incorporated into Buddhist art produced in the Imperial workshops of the Yuan dynasty, and later the Ming.

⁴⁷ Reynolds, “Luxury Textiles in Tibet.” pp 123-24.

the idea of a material format for religious hangings more durable than paintings, which could be easily transported and scaled up to a large size.⁴⁸

Linrothe mentions examples of the artistic exchange which took place between the Tibetans and the Mongols during the Yuan Dynasty:

Mongol rulers of the Yuan dynasty recognised (the value of kesi tapestry) and famously commissioned both imperial portraits and Tibetan style mandala in the kesi⁴⁹ medium. During the Yuan dynasty the Tibetan lamas were commissioning the workshops in Hangzhou to produce portraits and images of deities.⁵⁰

Reynolds also suggests that the large embroidered and silk tapestry (*kesi*) Buddhist hangings sent to Tibetan religious and secular leaders from Mongolian and Chinese rulers may have been precursors to the Tibetan silk appliqué hangings and an inspiration to Tibetan artists.⁵¹

Secondly, the availability of large quantities of Chinese silk and brocades, first received as tribute during the 8th century and then as gifts to Tibetan religious leaders from the Mongolian Yuan and then Ming emperors provided the precious materials suitable for religious images. The enormous quantities of silk made the production of huge thangka possible. It was customary throughout Central Asia and China to exchange or offer valuable gifts to strengthen political relationships and loyalties. For example, the Chinese emperor, Suzong (r. AD 756 – 762) sent fifty thousand pieces of silk annually as tribute to the Tibetan king, Trisong Detsen during the Tibetan Yarlung dynasty (677 – 863 AD).⁵² Precious gifts from the Yuan and later the Ming emperors to the Sakya abbots of Gyantse consisted of numerous large bolts of silk, as well as embroidered hangings or banners. The ‘priest- patron’ relationship that had begun with the Mongols and the Sakya lamas of Tibet in the 13th century was continued when the Ming emperor invited Tibetan Buddhist leaders of other schools to the imperial court. When the Fifth Karmapa, Dezhin Shegpa (1384-1415) of the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism visited the Ming imperial court, invited by the Yongle Emperor, he received generous gifts of silk, gold, silver, horses and furnishings as well as Buddhist images from the Emperor.⁵³ Tibet also traded horses for silk from Ming China.⁵⁴ Consequently there was a good supply of silk available for the large scale thangka as well as smaller artworks and banners for offerings for Tibetan monasteries.

Thirdly, the influence of Chinese artistic styles on Tibetan Buddhist art which emphasised flowing robes of multiple patterned fabrics with draped folds,⁵⁵ became evident from the 13th

⁴⁸ Although painted thangka were placed in a brocade frame in order to roll up easily to carry, and to protect the painting, frequent rolling and unrolling meant that eventually the paint would crack and fall off.

⁴⁹ Chinese silk tapestry weaving technique *kesi*, which means ‘carved silk’, uses colour wefts to produce the pattern and form pattern outlines so the effect is as if the silk was cut. Ref. Gao Hanyu, *Chinese Textile Designs*. trans. Rosemary Scott and Susan Whitfield. London: Viking, 1992, p.261.

⁵⁰ Rob Linrothe, *Paradise and Plumage*. Chicago: Rubin Museum of Art and Serindia Publications. 2004, p.31.

⁵¹ Reynolds, “Fabric Images and Their Special Role in Tibet.” p.81.

⁵² Reynolds, “Ritual Textiles,” p.106.

⁵³ Heller, *Tibetan Art: Tracing the Development of Spiritual Ideals and Art in Tibet, 600-2000 A.D.* p.143.

⁵⁴ Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art*, p.72.

⁵⁵ During the Yuan Empire and then early Ming, particularly artworks from the Yongle Emperor, were gifted to Tibet during his reign (1403 – 1424), which influenced the paintings at Gyantse. Heller, *Tibetan*

century⁵⁶ and may have inspired the creation of appliqué silk images that appear to ‘dress’ the deity in brocades. The influence of Chinese style on Tibetan Buddhist painting and sculpture became more pronounced when Newari and Tibetan artists were brought to Beijing to produce Buddhist artworks for the Yuan dynasty, working alongside Chinese and Mongolian artists. The distinctively Chinese drapery of flowing scarves and the rich brocaded folds of robes worn by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas started to appear in Tibetan paintings murals and sculpture, alongside Newari styles.⁵⁷ (See figure 2.) These are the style of robes worn by deities and Buddhas in silk appliqué thangka which may have started around the same time. Thangka painters delighted in painting the brocade patterns in fine gold outlines. Beer notes the incorporation of Chinese brocade designs into Tibetan art: “Tibetan artists developed a repertoire of favoured brocade designs, which ranged from groups of dots (‘fish-egg patterns’) to intricate patterns which mimicked the real brocade silks from China, often with Chinese lucky symbols and characters.”⁵⁸

The popular Menri painting style, considered the first Tibetan style to incorporate both Chinese and Newar styles of painting and the style most used in designs for the silk appliqué thangka, was developed by the great Tibetan painter Menla Dondrup (1409-?), in Gyantse during the 15th century. This style retains some Newari elements, but ‘dresses’ the deities in flowing robes in the Chinese style. Menla Dondrup also produced large appliqué thangka which have been recorded in the biography of the First Dalai Lama.⁵⁹

In 1468, the first Dalai Lama dGe-‘dun-grub [Gendun drup] invited Menla Dondrup with his students to Tashilhunpo.⁶⁰ Menla Dondrup directed the making of a great appliqué image of Buddha, measuring approximately 90 feet long and 60 feet wide [24.3m x 16.2m]. The Manthang – pa [person from Manthang refers to Menla Dondrup] continued to work at Tashilhunpo in the following year, 1469, making a smaller image of Tara that measured six by eight fathoms.⁶¹

The Prince of Gyantse, Rabtan Kunsang (1389-1442) who ordered the construction of the monastic complex in Gyantse in 1418, also commissioned a giant silk appliqué thangka.

On the thirtieth day of the third month in the Earth Dog year (1418) thirty-seven artisans started to make a large scroll with pieces of coloured silk placed upon a support of cotton material, for which three hundred and thirty bolts of cotton were used. It was based on drawings made by the great master sPal-‘byor Rin-po-che [Paljor Rinpoche] and it took twenty-seven days to complete it. It depicted Shakyamuni Buddha flanked by Sariputra and Maudgalyana.⁶²

Art: Tracing the Development of Spiritual Ideals and Art in Tibet, 600-2000 A.D., pp.144, 146. ;Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art*, p.84.

⁵⁶ This influence became more pronounced later on during the Yongle period of the Ming dynasty (r. 1403 – 1424). Karmay, *Early Sino-Tibetan Art*, p.84.

⁵⁷ Heller, *Tibetan Art: Tracing the Development of Spiritual Ideals and Art in Tibet, 600-2000 A.D.*, p.146.

⁵⁸ Robert Beer, *The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs*. London: Serindia, 2004, pp.363-66.

⁵⁹ Reynolds, “Fabric Images and Their Special Role in Tibet,” p.81.

⁶⁰ This great monastery at Shigatse south west of Lhasa, was founded by the First Dalai Lama in 1447.

⁶¹ Tanaka, “A Note on the History, Materials and Techniques of Tibetan Appliqué Thangkas,” p.873.

⁶² (‘Jig-smed-grags- pa 1481), manuscript in the Library of IsMEO, Rome pp132-141; and Myang chos-‘byung 1983, p 52. Lo Bue, Erberto F and Ricca, Franco. *The Great Stupa of Gyantse: A Complete Tibetan Pantheon of the Fifteenth Century*. London: Serindia, 1993, p.20.

The following account, attributed to Taranatha, a Tibetan historian and writer of the 17th century, gives a description of large appliqué thangka, included in the history of the Gyantse.

In the ninth month of the Earth Pig Year 1419 on the occasion of the Kalachakra festival, Rab-brtan-kun-bzang [Rabtan Kunsang] consecrated a huge scroll depicting the Buddha of the Future, Maitreya, and a number of other deities made from twenty-three bolts of silk. Another appliqué scroll, representing Manjushri surrounded by several deities was completed in one month and eight days in the same year.⁶³

The display of giant appliqué thangka, possibly the largest two dimensional artworks in the world, became part of annual ceremonies which attracted large numbers of pilgrims – nomads, farmers and townspeople, from around Tibet. (See figure 3.) The production of appliqué thangka and such immense works of art was the result of the close relationships between the Mongol and Chinese emperors and Tibetan high-ranking lamas and the exchange of artworks. Large quantities of silk and brocades required for such huge projects were already stored in the monastery repositories inside Tibet from tribute and gifts received over the centuries. Gifts from Chinese emperors continued during 16th century as did the silk trade between China and Tibet. Giant fabric thangka were commissioned to commemorate significant events and provided a focus for large outdoor ceremonies which were integrated into the cultural and religious life of Tibet.

Artworks for monasteries made during the 16th and 17th centuries would have included appliqué treasures for ritual ceremonies. A giant appliqué thangka made during the time of the Ninth Karmapa, Wangchuck Dorje (1556 – 1603), was among the appliqué treasures of Tsurphu Monastery, lost during the Cultural Revolution.⁶⁴ The revitalisation of Buddhist traditions, which started in the seventeenth century and continued through the theocratic period (1650 – 1959), was another factor likely to have stimulated the production of large size appliqué artworks. New Geluk and Kagyu monastic communities were founded throughout Tibet and particularly in the eastern and north eastern border regions of cultural Tibet.⁶⁵

The Fifth Dalai Lama

The centre for the production of arts moved to Lhasa when power in Tibet shifted to the Geluk monasteries and the Fifth Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso (1617 – 1682), described by Dowman as a 'political giant'.⁶⁶ Although the country was once again unified, Tibet was caught in the struggle for power and territory between the Qing and the northern Mongols. Dalton argues that the Fifth Dalai Lama re-vitalised Buddhism and re-invented traditions on a grand scale to "enhance the prestige and power of the powerful Geluk monasteries"⁶⁷ in order to

⁶³ Ibid., p.21.

⁶⁴ Jackson, David. *A History of Tibetan Painting*. Wien: Verlag der Osterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1996, p. 177.

⁶⁵ The Geluk School gained ascendancy under the Fifth Dalai Lama, and was deliberately patronised by the Qing dynasty, to control the frontier peoples, who were fiercely independent from Central Tibet and China. Aris, Michael. *Lamas, Princes and Brigands: Joseph Rock's Photographs of the Tibetan Borderlands of China*, pp.13 – 14.

⁶⁶ Dowman, Keith. *The Sacred Life of Tibet*. London: Thorsons, 1997, p.79.

⁶⁷ Dalton, Jake. "Recreating the Nying Ma School," in *Power, Politics, and the Reinvention of Tradition : Tibet in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Piats 2003: Tibetan Studies : Proceedings of the Tenth*

strengthen his position and alliances within Tibet. Dalton claims that, "One of the principle strategies employed by the Dalai Lama was his institution of annual festivals and public rituals."⁶⁸ From the Tibetan point of view, annual festivals, some of which continue today, have important ritual meanings: of purification, invoking deities to protect Tibet and its people from invasion, and removing obstacles or negative influences which would bring misfortune to the people.

This revitalisation of Buddhist traditions was sometimes expressed in elaborate processions and the display of giant thangka. The grand festivals of Lhasa were arranged by the Fifth Dalai Lama or his regent, Desi Sangye Gyatso (1653-1705). These festivals were witnessed centuries later by Richardson, who spent ten years in Tibet during the 1930s and 1940s. His view was that these were established by the Fifth Dalai Lama and his Regent "with the clear intention of enhancing the grandeur of the new regime imposed by the conquering army of the Oirad Mongols chieftain Gushri Khan, and the prestige and stability of the position of the Dalai Lama and the Gelukpa, Yellow Hat church."⁶⁹

The Fifth Dalai Lama initiated the construction of the Potala Palace in Lhasa (1646) and supported the construction of new monasteries and was a great patron of the arts. He introduced a system of artists' guilds, which included appliqué artists (tailors),⁷⁰ many of whom were engaged in the production of appliqué thangka as well as elaborate temple banners and ceiling friezes to decorate the large prayer halls and chapels of the newly built monastic colleges and numerous small monasteries during this period. The Fifth Dalai Lama recorded in his own writings, the account of a large appliqué hanging.⁷¹ Supported by the Dalai Lamas, the numbers of skilled and specially trained tailors producing high quality works grew and Lhasa became well-known for such artworks, a reputation which continued well into the 20th century. The Golden Procession (*Sertreng* Tib.) incorporated the display of two giant thangka commissioned by the Fifth Dalai Lama's regent Sangye Gyatso. The celebrations of the Golden Procession continued into the twentieth century. Descriptions of this festival by Sir Charles Bell and Hugh Richardson, who both witnessed it during the twentieth century, bring to life the traditions of the past. The enormous silk thangka were unfurled and hung on the face of the impressive Potala Palace, which dominated Lhasa. (See figure 5.)

... a spectacular ceremony, the Sertreng, in which hundreds of participants marched round the Potala with banners, religious objects and music. ... the Koku – "The Silk Image" – a great appliqué banner which covers the lower face of the Potala for a space of some 75 by 40 feet [20.5 m x 10.8 m]. It consists of two panels, one rather larger

Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Oxford Cuevas, Bryan J. and Schaeffer, Kurtis R. (eds). Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, 2006, pp 92-93.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Richardson, Hugh Edward. *Ceremonies of the Lhasa Year*. Aris, Michael (ed). London: Serindia, 1993, p.7.

⁷⁰ Those who make appliqué thangka are called tailors because, besides large appliqué thangka, they sew robes for monks and lamas, altar cloths, temple banners and costumes for the religious cham dances, required by the monasteries.

⁷¹ Olsen, "Tibetan Appliqué Work," p.16.

*than the other; in the centre of which is a huge figure of the Buddha surrounded by many deities and bodhisattvas.*⁷²

Processions, great prayer festivals, lama dancing and teachings continued to be part of the annual festivals held throughout the year in Lhasa. The three major Geluk monastic colleges, Drepung, Sera and Ganden also held annual festivals where giant thangka were unfurled for a short time on the day. The great monastery at Tashilhunpo, the seat of the Panchen Lama, in Shigatse, south west of Lhasa, has an enormous wall which was built to display their giant thangka. (See figure 6.) This festival continues today and takes place over several days, with a different thangka displayed each day.

Dowman explains that between the rule of the Fifth Dalai Lama (d. 1682) and that of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama (1876-1933), in Central Tibet, in the absence of a strong successor “the centre of vitality and creativity appears to move to the east,” to Kham and Amdo.⁷³ Kapstein also writes of a cultural renaissance in Kham, centred on Derge, in the nineteenth century.⁷⁴ It is most likely that appliqué thangka would have been produced for the great monasteries in these areas, and therefore it is unlikely that Lhasa was the only centre of production. A photograph taken circa 1930 shows a large appliqué thangka unrolled down a hillside at Labrang in Amdo, Eastern Tibet.⁷⁵ (See figure 7.)

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama

Descriptions of the production of appliqué thangka during the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, who created a ranking system for the artisans and craftsmen at the time, reveal the importance placed on silk appliqué thangka. The Namsa Chenmo (‘Grand Master of Clothes’ or ‘Master Tailor’) was the head of the Tailors’ Workshop where the appliqué thangka were made and was ranked second after the monk who wrote down the Dalai Lama’s activities.⁷⁶ Gyeten Namgyal, the former Namsa Chenmo to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, describes the workshops, the materials, the status of the Tailors’ Guild and the status of appliqué art in Lhasa during the early twentieth century.⁷⁷

Other monasteries around Lhasa also employed tailors to produce appliqué thangka which included large scale giant thangka, elaborate ceiling friezes and temple banners. Besides brocade thangka and banners for new monasteries there were large restoration projects. For example, the restoration of the brocade hangings and pillar decorations for Samye monastery took two years.⁷⁸ There are three important occasions in the life of a Dalai Lama when brocade and painted artworks and new furnishings are required for the shrines and *lhakhang*, (shrine room) within the existing monasteries: the enthronement of the Dalai Lama; his passing of the *geshe* examinations, the highest academic qualification in the Geluk tradition; and after his

⁷² Richardson, *Ceremonies of the Lhasa Year*. pp74-81. Tsongcho Sertreng was instituted by Sangye Gyatso in memory of the Fifth Dalai Lama. The Sertreng procession is said to represent a dream the Dalai Lama had.

⁷³ Dowman, *The Sacred Life of Tibet*, p.82.

⁷⁴ Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p.167.

⁷⁵ David Jackson and Janice Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*. London: Serindia, 1984, p.11.

⁷⁶ Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale," p.32.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

death.⁷⁹ When the Thirteenth Dalai Lama passed away in 1933, eighty tailors were required to make the brocade decorations for the stupa, which was built inside the Potala Palace. Amongst these were two floor- to- ceiling brocade curtains with representations of sixteen dragons, eight on each, representing the Sixteen Arhats,⁸⁰ which were hung on the east and west walls around the stupa.⁸¹ For the enthronement of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, new decorations were ordered for Drepung, Sera and Ganden, the three largest and most powerful Geluk monasteries in and near Lhasa. Appliqué art was clearly deemed to be one of the most important religious art forms, considering the status of the appliqué ‘tailors’ and the large numbers of tailors (up to 150) working for the Dalai Lama up until 1959. According to Tibetans visiting the US in 1948, Lhasa was the main centre for silk appliqué thangka production at that time.⁸²

Travellers to Tibet in the early twentieth century described display of giant appliqué thangka at special events and festivals. Li Gotama Govinda travelled in Tibet with her husband Lama Anagarika Govinda between 1947 and 1949. During Tibetan New Year they attended the Great Prayer Festival (Tib. *Monlam Chenmo*) held at Dungkar Gompa,⁸³ in the Chumbi Valley, Southern Tibet. During the first week an immense appliqué temple ‘banner’ of Shakayamuni Buddha and two disciples, two stories high, was hung from the roof. Li Gotama Govinda describes an altar set up in front of the banner where butter sculptures of dragons and floral designs painted in bright colours were placed as offerings, and dancing was performed.⁸⁴ This account confirms that such festivals were not confined to the major monasteries, and that even smaller monasteries like Dungkar had their own appliqué treasures which were displayed on special occasions.

Old photographs and records kept by British army officers and travellers in Tibet also mention the display of giant silk appliqué thangka. (For example, see figure 4). During the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama relations with China began to break down. The Chinese had invaded Tibet during the early 1900s during which time the Dalai Lama had fled to Mongolia in 1904, and then to India in 1910.⁸⁵ However, it was the Chinese invasion of Tibet in the early 1950s that had the most destructive consequences for the artistic and literary heritage of Tibet, that had been held in monasteries which were “the repositories of a profound religious cultural

⁷⁹ Personal communication with Tenzin Nyimalha, senior monk in the office of the Dalai Lama’s monastery, Namgyal Monastery, in Dharamsala, India 2009.

⁸⁰ Arhat or arahant (Skt.) (Lohan. Ch., Netan. Tib) a group of fully realised saints or sages, disciples of the historic Buddha, who attained freedom from the cycle of birth and death. They are often depicted in series of paintings or appliqué images as examples of enlightened beings.

⁸¹ Namgyal, “A Tailor’s Tale,” p.36.

⁸² Olsen, “Tibetan Appliqué Work,” p.20. Members of the Tibetan trade delegation who came to the United States in 1948, informed Olsen that “larger pieces, depicting figures of at least life-size and usually heroic proportions, ...are exported from Lhasa to the various lamaseries throughout Tibet, western China, Mongolia, Ladakh, Bhutan and Sikkim.”

⁸³ Monastery of the White Conch

⁸⁴ Li Gotami Govinda, *Expedition of Central Tibet: Tibet in Pictures*, vol. 1. Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1979, p.18.

⁸⁵ Dasand Damdul Tsarong, “The Autobiography of Tsarong as Told to Raptan Kazi, Interpreter for the Schafer Expedition,” in *Tibet in 1938-1939, Photographs from the Ernst Schaffer Expedition to Tibet*. Isrun Engelhardt (ed.) 2007), pp 103-07.

tradition.”⁸⁶ By the end of the Cultural Revolution less than 10% of the 6,250 monasteries were left standing. Considering the treasures that would have accumulated in each monastery over four or five centuries the loss is enormous. Convoys of the Chinese Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA) trucks loaded with Buddhist statues from monasteries in Tibet, transported hundreds of tons of gilt copper, burnished bronze and brass statues to foundries in China to be melted down.⁸⁷ Precious statues of gold and silver disappeared as well as priceless thangka some of which later appeared on the international market.⁸⁸

Many lay people in Tibet today are not aware that the monasteries’ appliqué thangka treasures existed. The traditional appliqué art and the knowledge and skills to produce them were very nearly lost. While “the most distinguishing characteristics of Tibetan culture and national identity were attacked and destroyed,” Smith uncovers evidence which points to the fact that

*The destruction of monasteries and other cultural and religious monuments and the confiscation of wealth of the monasteries and individuals was not the final liberation of the serfs and the re-distribution of wealth purported as the purpose of democratic reforms, but rather the disenfranchisement of the Tibetan state, nation, and people.*⁸⁹

Taking this into consideration it is easy to draw the link between revival of traditional Tibetan Buddhist art such as appliqué thangka, and the rebuilding and restoration of Tibetan cultural and national identity. Since escape to India into exile, great efforts have been made by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, the Tibetan government- in- exile in Dharamsala and other high ranking lamas to promote the preservation and revitalisation of Tibetan Buddhist artistic tradition outside Tibet.. The transmission of the silk appliqué thangka techniques and efforts to support the revival of this art form, play a significant role in the recovery of Tibetan cultural identity and are examined in detail in Chapter Three.

Just as the previous Dalai Lamas held festivals and events which brought Tibetans together, the present Dalai Lama performs non-sectarian rituals and large public events which bring ethnic Tibetans together. These ceremonies require sacred consecrated appliqué thangka as well as other artworks.⁹⁰ Events like the Kalachakra initiations and teachings performed around the world by the Dalai Lama and other respected Tibetan Buddhist teachers are now often

⁸⁶ Dowman, *The Sacred Life of Tibet*, p.5.

⁸⁷ Smith, Warren W. Jr. *China's Tibet? Autonomy or Assimilation*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008, pp 116-17.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.118-119.

The ideology of the democratic reforms of the early 1950’s – the re-distribution of wealth, in fact meant the re-distribution of wealth amongst the Chinese, not amongst the Tibetan people. Smith shows that the looting of valuable Tibetan religious art and the destruction of Tibet’s literary heritage, attributed to the Cultural Revolution, was in fact an earlier planned and systematic destruction of Tibet’s culture and national identity, to secure Chinese control.

⁹⁰ The Dalai Lama held the Kalachakra Empowerment following the great Prayer festival in Bodhgaya, India in December 1985. Tens of thousands of pilgrims came from Himalayan regions of Ladakh, Lahaul and Spiti, from Bhutan, from Tibetan settlements in India and Nepal, and from Tibet. The border between Tibet and Nepal was open temporarily, and people travelled from Lhasa and from the eastern provinces– Khampas and nomads from Amdo. Russell, *Celebrating Kalachakra through Art*, p.109. For a full list of performances of the Kalachakra, see Appendix 2.

accompanied by large appliqué thangka. These events bring Tibetan Buddhism and an awareness of the Tibetan culture and artistic heritage to the world. The role of large appliqué treasures in rituals and these large public events further illustrates their significance within the Tibetan cultural context. This claim is expanded on in the next chapter, on the purpose and meanings of Tibetan Buddhist artworks.

Bhutan

In contrast to the destruction in Tibet, it appears that appliqué thangka in the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan may have continued without interruption since their introduction from Tibet in the 17th century.⁹¹ Many of the large monasteries have sacred appliqué and embroidery thangka treasures which are centuries old.⁹² Large thangka called '*throngdroel*' in Bhutan, which means 'liberation on sight', are displayed during annual ceremonies, for example, to commemorate the birth of Padmasambhava,⁹³ or the founding of the monastery. (See figure 8).

Myers and Pommaret describe appliqué thangkas, brocade altar cloths, banners and hangings made for monasteries using luxurious Chinese silk textiles including damasks and brocades. These 'cut and stitched' textiles made by men are related to Tibetan Buddhism traditions and are quite distinct from the Bhutanese indigenous woven textiles made by women in Bhutan.⁹⁴ Vajrayana Buddhist teachings arrived in Bhutan in the seventh century, but major growth started in the eighth century when the Indian teacher Padmasambhava came to Bhutan. Since the 12th century the Nyingma tradition, the oldest of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, has thrived in Bhutan. In the 13th century, teachers from the Drukpa Kagyu, a sub school of the Kagyu tradition arrived from Tibet to propagate the teachings of their tradition. Drukpa Kagyu master, Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594- 1651), united the valley-based rulers of Bhutan in the seventeenth century.⁹⁵ Appliqué thangka in Bhutan most often depict Padmasambhava with his consorts or with his Eight Manifestations; Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal; and other important teachers who founded monasteries. Today traditional arts, such as the art of embroidery and tailoring which includes the art of appliqué, are well supported. Much value is placed on continuing their practice. Beautiful hangings for display in the temples and monasteries, dance costumes and altar cloths, are made in bright Chinese silks and gold

⁹¹ Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1651), the unifier of Bhutan, brought appliqué thangkas with him when he came from Tibet in 1616. Bartholomew, Terese Tse and Johnston, John (eds.), *The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, Chicago: Serindia Publications in association with the Honolulu Academy of Arts and the Kingdom of Bhutan, 2008. p.57

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Guru Rinpoche* (Tib.), Precious Teacher, second only to the Buddha in popularity in the Tibetan cultural arena, and especially popular among the Nyingma school. He is associated with the first translation period of Vajrayana teachings coming to Tibet and the Himalayas in the 7th century.

⁹⁴ Myers and Pommaret, "Cut and Stitched: Textiles Made by Men." p.154

⁹⁵ Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal was descended from a Tibetan noble family that historically provided the Chief Abbot of Ralung monastery in southern Tibet and is known as the founding father of the kingdom of Bhutan. Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal built fortress monasteries in each valley and laid the foundations of the Bhutanese state as it exists today. By far the most celebrated Tibetan master, he is the most depicted in Bhutanese Buddhist paintings and sculpture. The Tibetan Buddhist Drukpa Kagyu school became the state religion of Bhutan and has had a strong and lasting effect on the religious, political and cultural life of Bhutan. Schicklgruber, Christian and Pommaret, Françoise (eds.) *Bhutan: Mountain Fortress of the Gods*, London: Serindia, 1997. p 154

brocades in the same way as they were traditionally made in Tibet. Red, green, blue and yellow silks are stitched together in a repeated patchwork format to make pillar banners and wall friezes.⁹⁶ The art of appliqué thangka has enjoyed continuity over the centuries in Bhutan, due to support from their large monasteries and the Bhutanese royal family, during the 20th and early 21st centuries.

Mongolia

In Mongolia, Tibetan Buddhism has also had a profound effect on the cultural and artistic heritage. However, like Tibet, it also suffered considerable loss in the 1930s when the Mongolian Peoples' Revolutionary government set out to destroy monastic Buddhism and the Mongol patronage of Tibetan Buddhism. While Tibetan Buddhism was mainly practiced by the Mongol Khan and the elite from the 13th century., the nomadic Mongolian people continued their shamanistic practices and beliefs. So when the Yuan dynasty fell, and the relationship with Tibetan Buddhist religious leaders declined, the religious life of the nomads of Mongolia was little changed. However, there was a resurgence of interest in Buddhism in the sixteenth century when the Altan Khan invited the leading lama of the Tibetan Geluk tradition, Sonam Gyatsho (1543 – 1588) to re-establish Tibetan Buddhism as a state religion for the Mongol population, and gave him the title Dalai Lama.⁹⁷ The great Mongolian artist and sculptor Zanabazar (1635 – 1732), who studied in Tibet under the Fifth Dalai Lama, was the first in a line of Mongolian incarnate lamas (Bogdo Gegen), who continued to hold religious authority amongst the Mongol Buddhists.

Historically, textiles and embroidery have been an important part of Mongol nomadic life and everyday items are beautifully decorated— clothes, hats, boots and saddle blankets. Their motifs are a combination of Tibetan, Chinese and Mongolian, using geometric and animal designs.⁹⁸ Their skills in embroidery and appliqué were easily adapted to the Buddhist appliqué thangka and the Mongolian examples are large scale, two to three metres high, with intricate needlework, an exciting sense of colour and design, using combinations of plain satin silks, Chinese brocades and *kesi* tapestry fabric.

Mongolian artists studied art within the Geluk framework, and the Central Tibet tradition, which was closely followed by the Geluk school, influenced Mongolian painting and likewise the production of appliqué thangka. Artists attached themselves to monasteries or travelled wherever there was a demand. The strong connection between Tibetans and the Mongols, due to their adoption of Tibetan Buddhism, is reflected in their art.

However, Buddhist purges started with the creation of the Mongolian Peoples Republic and the adoption of Russian communist policies aimed to wrest power and influence from the monastic institutions in Mongolia. The result was extreme cultural and spiritual losses similar to the destruction waged in Tibet by Communist China during the 1950s and 60s. In Mongolia during the 1930's many thousands of monks were killed and monasteries and art treasures were destroyed. Today the loss of cultural heritage and traditions is being felt and Wallace has

⁹⁶ Myers and Pommaret, "Cut and Stitched Textiles: Made by Men" pp 155-59

⁹⁷ Sonam Gyatso was given the title the Third Dalai Lama by the Altan Khan from Mongolia, who wished to model himself on the Kubilai Khan. '*Dalai*' is the Mongolian translation of Gyatso, which means 'ocean'. Sonam Gyatso's previous incarnations were posthumously given the titles First and Second Dalai Lama.

⁹⁸ Bartholomew, "Introduction to the Art of Mongolia," pp 83 -84.

pointed out that since the late 1980s, with new independence from Soviet Russia, the current Mongolian government is now taking steps to revive Mongolian Buddhist traditions, as a way to recover cultural and national identity.⁹⁹

Large appliqué thangka are displayed during the *tsam* (Mongolian) dance, essentially an exorcist ritual, performed to frighten demonic forces and adopted from the Tibetan Geluk rituals.¹⁰⁰ Here, as in Tibet, the revival of traditions and re-creation of festivals and ceremonies to revitalize Buddhism includes the production and display of giant appliqué thangka. According to Wallace, the decree by former President Bagabandi to hold ceremonies every four years to worship the Buddhist holy site of Olgontenger Mountain, is an example of Mongolian government involvement in this process. The mountain located in the mid-west of Mongolia is considered the abode of Buddhist protector Vajrapani who has been reinstated as the protector of the Mongol state.¹⁰¹ Mongolia is once again recognised as the land of Vajrapani, and together with Tibet, the land of Avalokitesvara, and China, the land of Manjushri, forms the unified landscape of the three Buddhist protectors (Tib. *rigsum gon po*) which represent the qualities of power, compassion and wisdom respectively.

In 2007 the President of the day, Enkhbayar, commissioned a large fabric thangka to be displayed on the side of the mountain in 2010, to 'bring merit and prosperity to the nation'. The iconography of this giant thangka is significant as it depicts these three protectors of Buddhism and also the three famous Khans: Chinggis Khan, emanation of Vajrapani; Khubilai Khan and Ogodei Khan, who all symbolise stately strength and power.¹⁰² This is another example of the role that these enormous appliqué artworks play in Buddhist ceremonies to reinvigorate cultural and national identity, after devastating loss.

Ladakh

The extent of Tibetan Buddhist art reached Ladakh, an independent kingdom whose cultural influences were mainly Tibetan, before it became part of India.¹⁰³ In the late ninth century Ladakh was part of the Western Tibetan Gugé kingdom and many of the early monasteries were built at this time by Tibetan Buddhist masters, the most famous being Rinchen Zangpo. Ninth century paintings and murals in monasteries in Ladakh reflect the Indian artistic style of the period. Tibetans continued to support the monasteries in Ladakh, decorating them in the Central Tibetan styles developed within Tibet. Situated as it is between India and Tibet, the Tibetan influence on Ladakh artistic tradition has been constant. "Tibetan civilisation as a

⁹⁹ Vesna A. Wallace, "Mediating the Power of Dharma: The Mongols' Approaches to Reviving Buddhism in Mongolia," *The Silk Road* 6, no. 1 (2008): pp 48-49.

¹⁰⁰ The elaborate dance costumes also have detailed appliqué embroidery and brightly coloured gold brocades, similar to the Cham dance costumes in Tibet.

¹⁰¹ Wallace, "Mediating the Power of Dharma: The Mongols' Approaches to Reviving Buddhism in Mongolia," p.49.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*: p.50.

¹⁰³ In the 19th century the Maharaja of Jammu, north India, attacked and occupied Ladakh and it became part of Jammu. After Indian Independence, when Jammu was absorbed into the new Indian state, Ladakh became part of India.

whole has become so remarkably uniform largely as a result of its determined adherence to certain forms of Buddhist religion.”¹⁰⁴

Today the main Tibetan Buddhist sects and the southern branch of the Drukpa school from Bhutan¹⁰⁵ support monasteries in Ladakh, and there is no separate Ladakh Buddhist order. Hemis Monastery, founded in 1630 in Ladakh, has an enormous appliqué thangka, embroidered with pearls, measuring 12 metres wide, which is displayed once every twelve years.¹⁰⁶ It was last displayed in 2004. It is shown for only two or three hours in the morning, during the festival for the birthday of Padmasambhava in June. Indicating the value placed on giant appliqué thangka, the monk who takes care of it in the monastery is designated the key keeper of the ‘Precious Treasures’, or the key keeper of Ornamented Thangka and key keeper of ‘Costly Ritual Objects’.¹⁰⁷

To sum up, the appliqué thangka of Tibet symbolise the close relationships between Tibet, the Mongols and China of the past. Silk appliqué thangka most likely arose out of the Chinese influence on Tibetan art, which had previously displayed a strongly Newari aesthetic, from the Yuan period onwards. The silk creations of that period suggests the international flavour of Tibetan art which combined Pala Indian, the iconographic base for their depiction of deities, Central Asian, Newari and Chinese styles with a distinctive Tibetan aesthetic. From the 15th century onwards a particularly rich expression of the Menri style was created from the splendour of the plain satin silks and gold brocades. These luxury materials were sometimes combined with embellishments of precious stones and pearls. They were most suited to sacred offerings to the Buddhas and enlightened ones, and as such were created for special functions within the practice of Tibetan Buddhism. As it was possible to make them on a giant scale, thangka were made which could be hung from monastery walls, and down mountain sides, attracting large crowds to receive blessings from the Buddhas. The display of giant silk appliqué thangka as part of annual festivals brought together Tibetans from far and wide. Such gatherings reinforced the sense of cultural cohesiveness and affinity amongst Tibetans who belong to different religious orders within Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, speak different dialects, and are generally spread out across the vast landscape of the high Tibetan plateau. The organisation of large numbers of tailors and appliqué craftsmen into the Sokhang, the Tailors’ Guild, in Lhasa by the Fifth Dalai Lama indicates the extent of the demand for silk appliqué thangka and brocade decorations for monasteries from the late monastic period (1250 – 1650) onwards. In the following chapter I describe in detail the purpose and meaning of silk appliqué thangka in the context of Tibetan Buddhist practice. This helps to explain the continuing demand for these traditional art forms today.

¹⁰⁴. Snellgrove, David L. and Skorupski, Taduesz. *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh*. vol. 1. Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1979, p.6.

¹⁰⁵ Drukpa Kagyu originated in Tibet and the Lho or Southern Drukpa is in Bhutan. Some of the Drukpa in Ladakh are associated with the Bhutan branch but others with the Tibetan branches.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, “The Fabric Thangka of Tibet”, p.235.

The researcher Gayle Jones saw it inside Hemis monastery hung from the ceiling rolled and tied up, so there is no measurement for the length.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p.53.

Chapter Two Sacred art in Tibetan culture: Purpose and meaning

This chapter investigates the social and ritual context of Tibetan art, in general, and the role of silk appliqué art, in particular. Tibetan art from the viewpoint of Tibetans exists within a distinct art world, one quite separate from Western ideas of the 'fine arts', or from the kinds of values placed on artworks by collectors in the context of provenance, period or rarity. In the Tibetan art world, value is placed on artworks according to an entirely different set of criteria, relating to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism is inextricably entwined in Tibetan culture. "For over twelve centuries Buddhist teachings guided and influenced all aspects of Tibetan life and culture. Eventually the discipline of Buddhism became pre-eminent in all levels of Tibetan life."¹⁰⁸ Keeping this in mind, the function of Tibetan art is both ritual and didactic.¹⁰⁹ Kapstein states: "Tibetan fine art is closely tied to ritual. Temporary and permanent artworks are required for ceremonies of initiation, funerals, meditation retreats, festivals of all kinds and much more."¹¹⁰

The large-scale appliqué thangka used for rituals within the monastery and for outdoor annual ceremonies are evidence that appliqué thangka play a significant role in Tibetan cultural life. Silk appliqué thangka are highly revered in the Tibetan religious cultural context and the value placed on Buddhist art works is connected to their use in religious rituals and practices.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Journey: Buddhist Practice as Daily Life*. Boston: Shambhala, 1995, p.43.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.,

¹¹⁰ Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p.255.

¹¹¹ The connection between Tibetan art and ritual is covered in Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, pp 244-61.; Janet Gyatso, "Image as Presence" in *From the Sacred Realm: Treasures of Tibetan Art from the Newark Museum* ed. Reynolds, Valrae. (ed.). 1999, pp171-249.; Dowman, *The Sacred Life of Tibet*, pp89-105.; Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*, pp 5, 9-11.

Discussions with senior monks and artists in Dharamsala also provided information for this chapter.

The meaning of art in Tibetan Buddhism

Art works, from the Tibetan perspective, are systematically classified within *zorik* (Skt. *shilpavidya*) the 'sciences of manufacture',¹¹² from treatises brought from India over ten centuries ago, which also included treatises on the iconometry of deities that define their proportions.¹¹³ In Tibetan culture, the highest forms of '*zorik*' are representations of the Buddha's enlightened Body, Speech and Mind, and, within those, artworks which are the 'Buddha's Body' (Skt. *rupakaya*) are most revered.¹¹⁴ They are 'support' or a container for the Buddhas and deities to enter and also "a support or a source of inspiration for spiritual practice."¹¹⁵ For this reason they are called *küten* or 'body support' (Tib, *ku* = body/image and *rten* = support, abode of the deity or Buddha). These images are respected and revered as the 'embodiment' of the Buddha, or the qualities of a Buddha (one who is enlightened).¹¹⁶ They are not representations of a 'creator' or 'provider' to be worshipped. Images of enlightened beings, such as saints, sages and highly revered lamas are also considered as 'support' or inspiration. In Buddhist practice, the devotee uses external objects such as religious artefacts to develop the mind. As Lopez points out, "a Tibetan image is not, in an important sense, a representation of the deity at all, but is the deity itself."¹¹⁷

Production of art: making it sacred

Iconography and iconometry

Tibetan teacher and scholar, Tulku Thondup Rinpoche explained:

*In all Tibetan art forms there are strict and creatively ordered patterns to which the icons must conform. Each of the different figures in sacred art has a clearly defined set of dimensions, forms, colours, positions, gestures, symbols, and significances.*¹¹⁸

The importance of maintaining the traditional compositions and colours in the appliqué thangka, and the prescribed measurements of the deities and the Buddhas according to the texts was also emphasised by master appliqué artist, Dorje Wangdu. The reason for continuing the traditional designs and compositions in appliqué is linked to the religious purpose of this art.¹¹⁹ They become enlivened when they are consecrated and are no longer simply artworks but become the support (*rten*) for the body of the deity, or the deity in physical form. This is essential for the Vajrayana rituals and practices performed in the space where they are hung.

Thangka artists (painters) draw up the design and composition for the appliqué thangka according to the prescribed iconography and proportions for each classification of deity described in religious texts (iconometry). This is done in order to create the ideal bodily forms

¹¹² Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p.255.

¹¹³ The presence and power of the deity are held within the mathematics of these proportions which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

¹¹⁴ The physical manufacture (*zorik*) also includes more mundane crafts, metal working, ornaments and clothing, but the religious arts are more highly valued and revered.

¹¹⁵ Thondup, *Enlightened Journey: Buddhist Practice as Daily Life*. p.49.

¹¹⁶ Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*. p.9.

¹¹⁷ Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangrila*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p.10

¹¹⁸ Thondup, *Enlightened Journey: Buddhist Practice as Daily Life*. p.43.

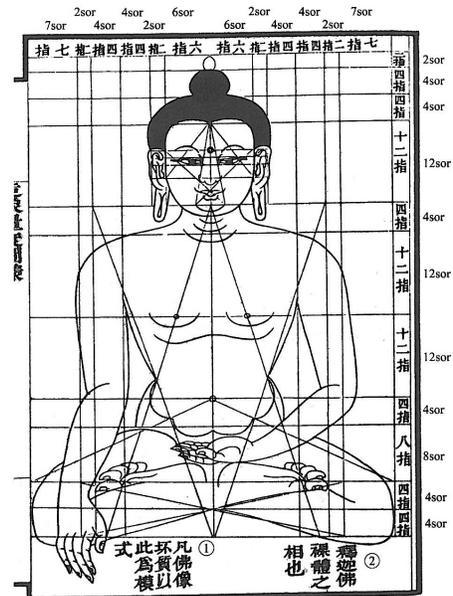
¹¹⁹ Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, 2009.

of enlightened beings.¹²⁰ The numerous deities of the Tibetan Buddhist pantheon were classified into a number of iconometric classes – Buddhas, peaceful Bodhisattvas, goddesses, tall wrathful deities, short wrathful deities and humans for lineage portraits. (See diagrams 2 and 3)



Figure 1 - Exemplified diagram of iconographical measurement

- (1) All Buddha's incarnated images, except mudrā (ritual gestures of the hands), way of sitting, and ritual signals, should use this as a general model.
- (2) Image of Śākyamuni with cloth.



- (1) All buddhist images base should follow this model.
- (2) Nude image of Śākyamuni.

Diagram 2. Iconographical proportions of Buddha Shakyamuni.

These two line drawings are from 'The Buddhist Canon of Iconometry', c. 1742, which was translated from Tibetan into Chinese by the Mongol scholar Gömpojab (1669-1750). The Tibetan text deals with the 'Regulations and rules on making statues and images'. On the left is a line drawing of seated Shakyamuni Buddha. On the right is the iconometric drawing for all Buddhas of this type.¹²¹ (See figure 9.)

¹²⁰ Henss, Michael. "Introduction," in *The Buddhist Canon of Iconometry by Zaixiang Liangdy Jing*, (ed.) 2000, p.26.

¹²¹ Ibid: Gömpojab, *The Buddhist Canon of Iconometry with Supplement: A Tibetan-Chinese Translation from about 1742*, 2000, pp 54-55.

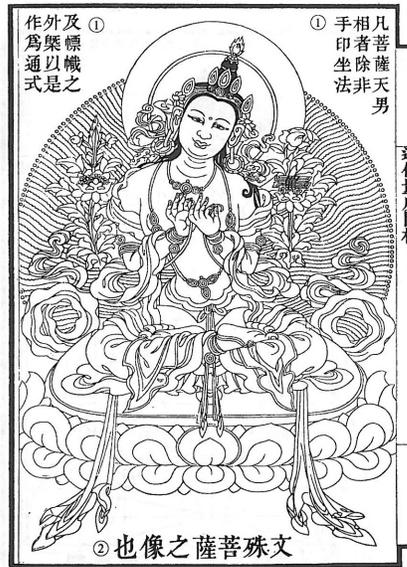
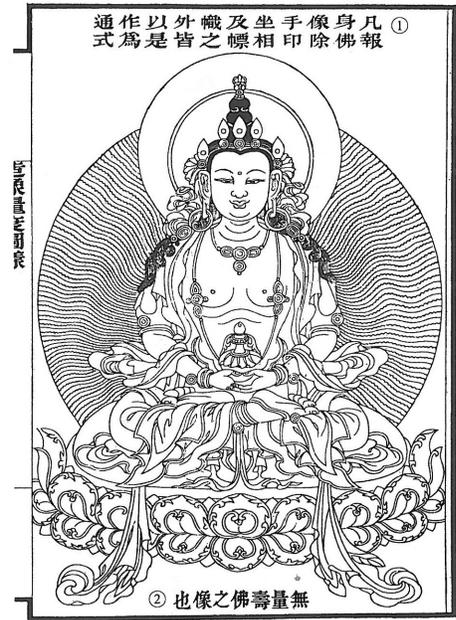


Figure 2 - Exemplified diagram of iconographical measurement

- (1) All Bodhisattva with male deva appearance, except mudrā (ritual gesture of hands) way of sitting and ritual signals, should use this as a general model.
- (2) Image of Mañjuśrī.



- (1) All Buddhas of bliss body, except mudrā (ritual gesture of the hands), way of sitting and ritual signals, should use this as a general model.
- (2) Image of the Buddha of Infinite Life (Amitayus).

Diagram 3. Iconographical proportions of male Bodhisattvas and Buddhas of bliss body.

These are examples of two other classes of deities, c. 1742. On the left, a line drawing of a seated male Bodhisattva (in this case, Manjushri, Bodhisattva of Wisdom) with the correct posture and proportions for this 'type' On the right a seated Buddha of the *sambhogakaya* 'type', (Amitayus, (Skt.) Long Life Buddha).¹²²

The bodies of the Buddhas are classified into three types –*Dharmakaya* (Skt.) ('absolute body'), *Sambhogakaya*, (Skt.) ('enjoyment or bliss body') and *Nirmanakaya*, (Skt.) ('manifested' or 'emanation body'). Sambhogakaya, or Buddhas of the bliss body, wear flowing robes and jewellery, and fall into two categories, peaceful and wrathful. Nirmanakaya are forms of the Buddha manifested as earthly forms, such as Buddha Shakyamuni who wears monk's robes (diagram 2). The proportions for the peaceful and wrathful Sambhogakaya, and *Nirmanakaya* forms are all clearly differentiated. Nirmanakaya forms include Buddhas (such as the historic Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha who wears monk's robes), Bodhisattvas, ascetics and monks. Bodhisattvas such as the princely *Manjushri*, (Skt.) Bodhisattva of Wisdom, on the left, are dressed in princely costumes like the Sambhogakaya forms.¹²³

The creation of sacred art is dependent on these defined iconometric proportions and there are serious consequences if they are not followed. As the commentary to the Cakrasamvara Tantra says,

A sacred image that possesses the required characteristics, that has the qualities of peacefulness and so forth, and is beautified by its measurements and exact proportions, will become imbued with transcendent awareness. In this world,

¹²² Ibid., pp56-57.

¹²³ TulkuThondup, *Enlightened Journey: Buddhist Practice as Daily Life*, pp 44-45.

*deficiencies in measure and proportions in image- making will cause death, illness, loss of wealth and separation from near ones. But an image which is perfect in every detail is the best thing for pacifying all such evils. A sacred image that possesses the correct dimensions and is neither insufficient nor excessive may be worshipped.*¹²⁴

Thus strict adherence to the rules concerning iconometry and the use of various symbols in the composition are necessary in order to create sacred art.

*Perfection, one of the essentials of Tibetan art, is pursued not primarily through the aesthetics of formal beauty, but through the transcendental quality of measure and proportion, of composition and harmony. Perfection is based on iconometry. Only if measures and proportions correspond to the standard, the perfect image can reflect the inner perfection of its divine essence, the perfect presence of the true Buddha nature.*¹²⁵

The appliqué artist must also be familiar with the iconography of the deities. Texts describing the deity practices of Vajrayana Buddhism and detailed descriptions of the deities and their symbolic meanings (iconography) were part of the body of knowledge brought from India during the 11th century (Pala period). The distinguishing characteristics of the deity – their posture, *mudras* or hand position, attributes, (what they hold in their hands), the number of arms, the colour of their skin, and, in some cases, the animal or vehicle on which they are mounted – must be correct in the artworks, as they serve as reminders for visualisation practice. They are part of the symbolic language relating to that deity taught to initiates by the lama.¹²⁶

Ritual during production

Ritual is followed during the production of artworks for religious use. “If we see art as simply ‘serving’ ritual we miss the point that producing art and the process of creating art is also an element of the ritual process. The value of the art, the status, divine agency and power of the artwork is defined during the process of production.”¹²⁷ Kapstein argues that accompanying progressive steps in the production of art with explicitly defined rituals are a way to ‘re-order’ the world.¹²⁸ The qualities and motivation of the artist are also a consideration during the production of sacred art. Venerable Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi explains,

The motivation for the production of Buddhist art is different from that of any other art genre due to its relation to the laws of karma and subsequent accumulation and dedication of merit....The artisan is considered to be far more than merely a virtuoso at his craft; he/she is no longer just an ordinary person, but instead is an actual emanation of a Buddha who is producing divine art for the benefit of all sentient beings. ...The art resulting from such a compassionate selfless motivation is regarded

¹²⁴ T.L. Gyatsho, *Gateway to the Temple: Manual of Tibetan Monastic Customs, Art, Building, and Celebrations* trans. David Paul Jackson (Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1979), p.81.

¹²⁵ Henss, “Introduction,” p. 28.

¹²⁶ Deity yoga is a key Vajrayana practice in which the practitioner visualizes himself as the deity.

¹²⁷ Matthew Kapstein, “Weaving the World: The Ritual Art of The ‘Pata’ In Pala Buddhism and Its Legacy in Tibet,” *History of Religions* 34, no. 3 (1995): p.245.

Kapstein uses the 8th century Indian text the *Manjushrimulakalpa* (Skt.) as the resource for this article, which details ritual practices followed when producing paintings on cloth (*pata*. Skt.) , and argues for the legacy of this practice in the production of art in Tibet.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

*as free from any negative influence, and is viewed as a channel for boundless, divine, primordial wisdom.*¹²⁹

Venerable Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi emphasises that ‘as an emanation of a Buddha the artisan’s focus is on the liberation of all sentient beings’, and that ‘the artist who creates these sacred objects is not motivated by the desire to be wealthy or famous’.¹³⁰ The artists fully participate in ritual during production, and collaborate with lamas who advise and assist in this process.¹³¹ By observing these practices, the whole project is blessed and will go smoothly without obstacles. For example, at the commencement of the project to produce giant thangka, particular rituals and prayers are performed to protect all those working on it. The rituals protect them from any negative karma or danger that may come as a result of walking on the thangka, as it is laid out on the ground. This act, which is normally considered disrespectful, incurs serious karma.¹³²

The lama, who commissions the thangka, also participates in rituals which are performed during its production. Tai Situ Rinpoche who commissioned the giant Padmasambhava thangka at Sherabling monastery makes the first tracing mark in a ceremony at the commencement of the project. (See figure 11.) Special practices are required on the day when the artist stitches the eyes and face of the deity, the most sacred part of the figure. Firstly, an auspicious day is chosen in consultation with the lama involved with the project. In the morning the artist will bathe, say special prayers and perform special practices to prepare him for this important stage.¹³³ However, when an apprentice is practising sewing the eyes and faces of deities, under the instructions of a master, it is not required for the apprentice to perform these special ceremonies. If the artist is not a practitioner and is not initiated into the practices of the deities that he is producing, then he will work very closely with either a master artist or lama who is.¹³⁴

While the production of artwork is considered good karma for the artist, it is not considered a personal meditation practice.¹³⁵ However, the artists hold a special reverence for their work, aware that they are creating sacred artworks that will eventually contain the Buddha or the

¹²⁹ Ven. Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi, “Engaging Buddhist Art Along the Path to Enlightenment,” in *The Dragon’s Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, Bartholomew Terese Tse and Johnston John, (eds.). 2008, p.37.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ The motivation for some of the artists that I interviewed was clearly to connect their profession, their daily work, in some way with their own Buddhist faith as lay practitioners. Personal communication with appliqué artist, Urgyen Sonam: when asked why he chose to become an appliqué artist, he responded; “My mother is a devout [Buddhist] practitioner and I felt I wanted to do something so that I could be like her” [that is, follow her Buddhist life in some way].

¹³² Personal communication with Tenzin Gyaltsen, appliqué master working on the giant thangka being produced at Sherabling, 2009.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ The appliqué master, Dorje Wangdu, was formerly a monk. He explained that because he has received the initiations of the deities that they are making, it was not important for his students to be initiated while working under his instructions. Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, 2009.

¹³⁵ Chogyam Rinpoche Trungpa, *Visual Dharma. The Buddhist Art of Tibet*. London: Shambala. 1975, p.24 ; Kapstein, “Weaving the World: The Ritual Art of The ‘Pata’ in Pala Buddhism and Its Legacy in Tibet,” p.244.

deity which will bring blessings to many. Recalling her experience in Dorje Wangdu's workshop, Leslie Rinchen Wongmo explained:

Sacredness was implicit in everything we were making, but religion was not taught at the workshop. It was the backdrop.....The work was always to be undertaken with a beneficial motivation– primarily to offer excellent and sincere effort for the support of others' spiritual advancement. One's own profit, fame or acknowledgement should be secondary, if considered at all. To keep positive motivation in mind, many artists will create their own ritual for focusing their attention in the morning, by saying a prayer, lighting incense, or making offerings....It is also good to dedicate the positive energy of one's work at the end of the day. Reflecting on the meaning and the benefit of the work is encouragedMy lama also suggested that I use some of my stitching time to recite mantras and to occasionally visualise light emanating from the image I'm working on, sending blessings to all beings.¹³⁶

Leslie Rinchen Wongmo, who spent more than eight years studying and making silk appliqué thangka in Dharamsala, (Appendix 10) suggested that the special rituals mentioned above may be specific to the making of giant thangka. Apart from the recommendations by her lama, she was never instructed to do any special rituals or ceremonies, other than the consecration upon completion, which is often handled by the patron rather than the artist.¹³⁷

The final ceremony of consecration is performed by the lama to transform the artwork into the deity. For the consecration of a small fabric thangka small patches which are inscribed (in ink or embroidered) with the sacred syllables *OM*, *AH* and *HUNG* are stitched in place on the reverse of the main image at the forehead, throat and heart chakras (which are the respective centres of their Body, Speech and Mind). In preparation for the consecration of the Tsurphu Monastery giant thangka in Tibet, the sacred syllables, cut out of fabric, were stitched to the back, at the forehead, throat and heart of each of the nine figures. A fragment from the original thangka, the Bodhisattva's head, was placed behind the Buddha's heart as a relic.¹³⁸ From the time of consecration, the object ceases to be an 'artwork' and becomes the Buddha or the deity. Kapstein explains: "The notion of art in Tibet is essentially concerned with tangible formation, and not mere representation, of the body of the Buddha."¹³⁹ Once consecrated the thangka is treated with utmost respect and care and is ready for use in Buddhist practices, such as offerings, initiations and display for ceremonies.

Purpose of *küten* in the context of Tibetan Buddhist practices.

As explained above Tibetan Buddhist art has a distinct role to play in Buddhist practices. Thangka, murals and sculpture – *küten* – are commissioned to make offerings, gain merit and to dispel negative forces, or obstacles. Painted, embroidered or appliqué thangka are required for rituals and prayers associated with particular deity practices, for initiations by the lama or the initiate's deity yoga practice as recommended by the lama; public ceremonies or festivals where large numbers gather to receive blessings. These will be examined below.

¹³⁶ Interview with Leslie Rinchen Wongmo in *Buddhist Art news*, <http://buddhistartnews.wordpress.com/2010/04/02/traditional-tibetan-applique/>. Accessed 13/07/2010

¹³⁷ Personal communication with Leslie Rinchen Wongmo, August, 2010.

¹³⁸ Personal communication with Terris Temple, Chiang Mai, 2009

¹³⁹ Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p.257.

Offerings and Merit

The importance of making offerings and gaining merit is expressed by the Indian teacher, Shantideva, who came to Tibet in the 7th century to teach Buddhism:

*Offerings made to those with loving minds,
Reveal the eminence of living beings.
Merit that accrues from faith in Buddha,
Shows in turn the Buddha's eminence*

- Shantideva, 7th century¹⁴⁰

The demand for painted and appliqué thangka and other religious objects continues inside Tibet, and within Tibetan Buddhist communities outside Tibet because of belief in the benefits of making 'merit' (Tib. *sonam*). Tibetan lamas recommend commissioning sacred objects such as thangka, stupas or statues when there is sickness, some troubles or a death in the family. They are also ordered by lamas and lay people to offer to a monastery in order to generate merit for a better rebirth, particularly after the death of a loved one. When a thangka is commissioned both the artist and the sponsor receive merit for making it.¹⁴¹ Making merit is considered the only way to create future benefit or happiness, and is associated with belief in karma (cause and effect). Merit is generated by doing good deeds, such as acts of generosity and kindness, meditation, chanting mantras, and making offerings or donations. The results of such acts bring good fortune and happiness, by removing negative influences, such as obstacles to enlightenment and mental and physical health, and by providing protection from malevolent spirits.¹⁴²

After commissioning a thangka, the merit is dedicated to the enlightenment of all beings to seal the meritorious act of offering.¹⁴³ This dedication of merit may take the form of a special ceremony and reciting prayers. Because images of the Buddhas and other enlightened beings are presented as offerings, materials of exceptional quality are used if possible.¹⁴⁴ The appliqué thangka are made of precious and luxurious materials such as silk and gold. Brocade robes and jewellery are also offered to statues within a shrine or monastery.

Vajrayana ritual and practices.

The image of a deity may be commissioned for a particular religious practice. For example ceremonies performed by a lama to initiate devotees into a particular deity practice, or the initiate's practice and visualisation recommended by a lama, require an image (küten) which 'supports' the practice.¹⁴⁵ A large silk appliqué thangka may be commissioned for the purpose

¹⁴⁰ Shantideva, *The Way of the Bodhisattva: A Translation of the Bodhicaryavatara*, trans. Padmakara Translation Group. Boston: Shambala, 2006, p.93.

¹⁴¹ Terris Temple, American thangka painter, was told by his Tibetan teachers: "don't sell stuff in the market. There is no merit from these kinds of sales." In Lhasa students however are doing it differently. The artworks are brought to Lhasa and then taken to India to sell. (Personal communication with Terris Temple, American thangka artist and teacher, Chiang Mai, 2009)

¹⁴² Personal Communication with Palden Lama, Dharamsala, 2009

¹⁴³ Jackson and Jackson. *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*, p.10.

¹⁴⁴ However, if a person of humble means has strong intention, even though their offering may be of lesser material value, it is possible that the merit they accrue may be greater than a wealthy person's offering made with incorrect or lesser intention.

¹⁴⁵ Jackson and Jackson. *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*, p.11.

of Vajrayana ritual performed by monks in the monastery.¹⁴⁶ The size of appliqué thangka can vary from 75 x 50 cm to 55 x 47 metres and is determined by its purpose and where this ritual will take place. If it is within the prayer hall of the monastery the appliqué thangka are from 3.3 metres to 4.2 metres high. (The artists measure them in feet, usually 12 to 15 feet high.) Smaller appliqué thangka for a home shrine are usually around the same size as a painted thangka (70 to 80 centimetres high and 1.5 metres high with the brocade frame). If large appliqué thangka are to be hung in the monastery courtyard they are usually two or three storeys high. (See figure 12). Tibetans often describe the height of a large thangka by the number of storeys, determining the height by the location of its display rather than measuring it in feet or metres.

Besides images of deities, portraits of historical figures, kings and famous teachers such as Milarepa, Padmasambhava and Tsongkhapa (founder of the Gelukpa tradition) are the subject of appliqué thangka and especially giant thangka. (See figure 13.) Protector deities often appear in the lowest register in a composition with many figures. (See figure 12.)

Large silk appliqué thangka, measuring from 3.3m to 4.5 high, (from 12 to 15 feet high) from the collection of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama's monastery, Namgyal Monastery, have a key function in regular rituals. Namgyal Monastery is non-sectarian and, at the Dalai Lama's request, many rituals of other lineages besides Geluk, the lineage to which the Dalai Lama belongs, are regularly performed.¹⁴⁷ By being inclusive, cultural unity is encouraged and sectarian differences are diminished.¹⁴⁸ The Dalai Lama has commissioned large appliqué thangka for each of these rituals.

One of these is the large *Vajrakilaya* (Skt.) appliqué thangka which is hung in Namgyal Monastery for a ritual practice held every two years to bless Tibetan medicine. Enormous containers of traditional medicine are placed in the large prayer hall and, in the presence of *Vajrakilaya*, monks chant prayers to bless the medicine continuously for three weeks.¹⁴⁹ Other large appliqué thangka in the collection of Namgyal Monastery depict as the main deity

¹⁴⁶ Personal communication Tenzin Nyimalha, a senior monk in Namgyal Monastery administration, Dharamsala, 2009.

¹⁴⁷ "Namgyal Monastery is the personal monastery of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and as such is non-sectarian and responsible for maintaining ritual practices and teachings of all the four main lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. The monastery is performs annually the sacred rites and rituals established by the successive Dalai Lama for the temporal and spiritual benefits and prosperity of Tibet and its people, and for world peace in general." From Namgyal Monastery website, [cited 5 June 2001]; available from <http://namgyalmonastery.org/monastery>.

¹⁴⁸ Nowak explained that "Personal loyalty to Dalai Lama played a key role in the government-in-exile's efforts to strengthen the sense of a unified Tibetan identity." Nowak further added: "The Tibetan government-in-exile was faced with the task of actively forging a clear Tibetan identity that would override the regional and sectarian differences that kept the Tibetans divided amongst themselves", Margaret Nowak, *Tibetan Refugees ; Youth and the New Generation of Meaning*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984, pp 65-66 and pp 24-31., cited in Matthew T. Kapstein, "Concluding Reflections," in *Buddhism in Contemporary Tibet, Religious Revival and Cultural Identity*, Goldstein, Melvyn C. and Kapstein, Matthew T. (eds). 1998, pp.144 and 146.

¹⁴⁹ *Vajrakilaya* (Skt.), (*Dorje Phurba* Tib.), a wrathful tantric deity associated with the Nyingma school, is the personification of the three-sided ritual dagger – *phurba*. Keown, Damien. *Dictionary of Buddhism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p.322.

Guhyasamaja, (Skt.) *Yamantaka* (Skt.) and *Kalachakra* (Skt.). Each one is displayed, with a painted mandala thangka relating to that deity, for two weeks every month in association with special tantric *puja* (Skt.) (ritual offering) connected to that deity.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Gyuto Monastery, the Tantric College in Siddhipur, close to Dharamsala, has a number of large appliqué thangka (measuring 4.5 m x 3.2 m) which are hung in the enormous prayer hall for specific practices.¹⁵¹

Appliqué thangka for Kalachakra Initiation and teachings

There are six very large appliqué brocade thangka (some more than 4 metres high) which are displayed during the Kalachakra (Wheel of Time) initiation and teachings performed by the Dalai Lama, a ceremony which lasts for more than twelve days. (See figure 14). Offerings consisting of water bowl offerings, flowers and *torma* (offering cakes made with roasted barley flour (Tib. *tsampa*) are placed in front of the large appliqué thangka, and the creation of a sand mandala prepares the ground for the ceremony. When the Dalai Lama travels overseas to perform the Kalachakra teachings and empowerment, he takes these six large appliqué thangka with him. Five of them have been made by Dorje Wangdu and his team – the Buddha as the main figure (4.27 metres), the Kalachakra Mandala, (4.59 metres), Kalachakra deity, White Tara (3.24 metres) and Padmasambhava (3.24 metres).¹⁵²

Revival of public display of appliqué thangka in Tibet

Religious practices that were banned in the years that followed the Chinese Communist invasion of Tibet have been revived since the 1980s when the Chinese loosened, to some extent, the tight controls on the religious activities of the Tibetan population. Monasteries have been rebuilt and religious practices have been revived in the Tibet Autonomous Region (around Lhasa) and the Tibetan Autonomous prefectures in Gansu, Sichuan, and Qinghai. Today traditional annual festivals are held where giant appliqué thangka are displayed and many thousands of Tibetans travel some distance to receive blessings. (See figures 15, 16 and 17.)

An eyewitness account of the celebration of Losar or Tibetan New Year in 2002, in Labrang monastery, Gansu, describes the gathering of thousands of pilgrims and the unfurling of a giant thangka for the ‘sunning the Buddha’ ceremony:

Annually, thousands of Tibetans make the sometimes week-long trek by truck, bus, cart, or donkey to celebrate the arrival of New Year. Some start off much earlier, and spend months prostrating themselves, with leather covered hands and knees encased in padding, along a ritual journey to the focal point of their religion. Losar, as it is known to the Tibetans, is a sacred festival of thanksgiving, veneration, purification, and preparation for the coming year. Young and old gather at Labrang to light butter lamps in darkened, mysterious temples, and burn juniper boughs and other aromatic herbs in large burners at the entrances to various halls and temples...

¹⁵⁰ Personal communication with Tenzin Nymalha, 2009, and observation of the ritual at Namgyal Monastery in April 2009.

¹⁵¹ Observation of these large thangka after the rituals, April 2009.

¹⁵² Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, 2009. See Appendix 5. A certificate from the Department of Religion and Culture, Central Tibetan administration of H.H. Dalai Lama, declares that he was the first artist to make a brocade appliqué thangka of the Kalachakra *mandala* in Tibetan history.

*The Sunning of the Buddha is a spectacular sight for any traveller to witness. The morning begins with Cham dancing, performed by monks in splendid robes and hats, some wearing fearsome masks and others with their faces painted in ferocious expressions. The dances are slow and grotesque, accompanied by doleful brass horns, cymbals and drums, and are intended to dispel all evil spirits. After hours of dancing, praying and chanting of scriptures, a 30 by 20 meter roll of multi-coloured appliqué and embroidered thangka is proudly and reverently paraded through the streets from the monastery to the hillside across the river. All along the route, faithful Buddhists scramble to press their foreheads and hands against this sacred image, while mounted riders laughingly clear the way by snapping their whips as their spirited horses rear and snort. As the procession reaches the bridge that crosses the Daxia River, thousands scatter to find the most perfect vantage point for the sunning ceremony...*¹⁵³

(See figure 17)

These activities also contribute to the cultural life and unity of Tibet, and is one aspect of the Tibetan practice of pilgrimage to sacred sites, which is seen by Matthew Kapstein as ‘a major factor in the organization of Tibetan culture overall.’¹⁵⁴

Monks perform chanting and ritual dances (*cham*) during the ceremony which accompanies the outdoor display of large appliqué thangka. Offerings and sometimes large butter sculptures are placed on a large altar in front of the thangka. The display of the thangka is just one part of the entire ceremony which may take the whole day or last for several days. It is unfurled in the morning usually as the sun strikes the courtyard, or the mountain side, and then packed up around midday. Crowds gather for this brief opportunity to receive blessings.

The display of the giant thangka annually by monasteries on particular festival days in the Tibetan calendar is an opportunity for pilgrims from miles around to come to the monastery and view the giant thangka. The act of ‘seeing’ the huge thangka is deemed to bring blessings and purification to the pilgrim, and plant the seeds of enlightenment. The term for this display, *thondrol* means ‘liberation through sight’.¹⁵⁵ Giant thangka can measure from 25 m to up to 70 m high and when one is displayed out in the open, on the side of a mountain, thousands of people can see it. It is also known as the ‘sunning of the buddha’.

Today giant thangka displays take place in Tibet at Tsurphu monastery, north of Lhasa; Tashilhunpo monastery in Shigatse; Ganden, Sera and Drepung monasteries in central Tibet; Labrang Monastery, Gansu Province, Wutun Shang Monastery near Rebgong, Qinghai Province, as well as in Ladakh, Bhutan and Mongolia. Up to a hundred people carry the giant appliqué thangka to the site for display, often up a large hillside, believing that it brings them

¹⁵³ Susan Trimble, *Tibetan New Year Celebration at Labrang Monastery* (2002 [cited 22 June 2010]); available from <http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/English/e2002/20022/for.htm>.

¹⁵⁴ Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p.243.

¹⁵⁵ “In Tibetan Buddhism the doors of our six senses are all ‘paths to liberation’— sight, sound, smell, taste, touch and thoughts, or mind, are the six senses. And in Buddhist philosophy art expresses the Buddhist universe, and thus has the potential to transform the adept through sight.” Personal communication with Terris Temple, thangka painter and teacher, Chiang Mai, 2009

blessings. (See figure 15) Onlookers touch it or walk underneath it as they make their way to the site where it will be unfurled.¹⁵⁶

Since the creation of the giant appliqué thangka for Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet, every year thousands of nomads and pilgrims make the journey to Tsurphu, northwest of Lhasa, to camp and share in the celebrations on Saga Dawa, the day that the giant thangka is displayed. The people believe that they receive blessings not from a silk thangka but from the Buddha himself. The three or four thousand pilgrims, who travel to see the brief display of the giant thangka, are testament to the meaning and significance of the giant thangka within the culture. Saga Dawa is the most important day in the Buddhist calendar, when Shakyamuni Buddha's birthday, enlightenment and passing into nirvana (Skt. *parinirvana*) are remembered. It takes 70 people to carry the new Tsurphu giant thangka which weighs one tonne, and it depicts Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha. Past and present teachers connected to the meditation, teaching and reincarnation lineages of the monastery are depicted in the thangka as well. The abbot of Tsurphu Monastery, Venerable Drupon Dechen Rinpoche, clearly expressed the spiritual and ritual meaning of the Tsurphu giant thangka: "it is no longer an art form but a powerful presence, imbued with the power to bestow blessings."¹⁵⁷

Many of the monasteries in Bhutan have large appliqué thangka depicting Padmasambhava (Guru Rinpoche) who brought Buddhism from India, in the eighth century. It is brought out for display during the Tsechu (10th lunar day) festival, held annually at different monasteries at different times of the year, to coincide with the anniversary of the founding of the monastery. According to Ardussi, "Bhutan's famous Tsechu traditions of monastic ritual and dance were brought from Nyingmapa monasteries in Tibet."¹⁵⁸ Ardussi also suggests that the Tsechu performances, which invoked protector deities for protection from external enemies,¹⁵⁹ were held to bring people together, in the same way the Fifth Dalai Lama had done in Lhasa. The Tsechu festivals were held throughout Bhutan at different monasteries to create a sense of national unity. The Tsechu festivals continue to be performed today in Bhutan.

This chapter has noted the significant role of artwork in the ritual life of Tibetan Buddhist societies, and silk appliqué thangka in particular. While Tibetan Buddhism is practiced and supported by Tibetan populations and the growing number of devotees around the world, the survival of the art form is assured. The giant thangka, created for display at annual ceremonies, bring large numbers of pilgrims together and are a unique aspect of Tibetan art. Although not well-known or documented, this tradition survives today. In the next chapter I explain the transmission and revival of the Tibetan silk appliqué tradition. Both patrons and artists are motivated to support the revival of this unique Tibetan art, not for commercial reasons, but as an important aspect of the Tibetan culture. Buddhist practitioners commission artwork for offerings and to gain merit. While they continue to be supported by teachers like the present Dalai Lama, and other lineage holders, their faith and devotion is unwavering, and the practice of offerings continues.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid

¹⁵⁷ Ibid

¹⁵⁸ Ardussi, John "Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye (1638-1696), Artist Ruler of 17th Century Bhutan," in *The Dragon's Gift: The Sacred Arts of Bhutan*, edited by Bartholomew, Terese Tse and Johnston, John. 2008, p.92

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

Chapter Three Transmission and Revival of silk appliqué arts in 21st century

This chapter examines the transmission of the traditional technique and the revival of the art of silk appliqué, which is supported vigorously not only by the artists, but also, importantly, by the patrons, such as the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan government- in- exile and other leading Tibetan Buddhist teachers and lineage holders who commission many appliqué projects. This effort is related to the high value and significance placed on appliqué art in the context of Tibetan Buddhist practice, as explained in the previous chapter. The conditions which have made this revival possible are twofold: the transmission of the appliqué technique by experienced and high ranking appliqué masters, and continued support for the tradition in the form of commissions for silk appliqué thangka from Tibet, Tibetans in exile and patrons from around the world.

Jones states that ‘there is a direct relationship between apprenticeship and the preservation of any living tradition’.¹⁶⁰ Undoubtedly oral transmission of the technique to preserve the tradition is a critical factor. Nevertheless, the preservation of the living tradition is also dependent on the continued need for that tradition within the social or religious practices of the community.¹⁶¹ The sustained demand for appliqué thangka, in Dharamsala alone, for use in ritual and ceremony, demonstrates this.¹⁶² The production of appliqué thangka is thriving due to commissions from religiously motivated individuals, not just to preserve traditional arts and crafts, but who wish to make offerings and generate merit. High-ranking lamas support the production of artworks for offerings, ritual, initiations and ceremonies such as the display of the giant thangka for the purpose of giving blessings to large numbers of people.

Firstly, this study will consider the transmission of the techniques in Tibet before 1959 and then today, and the revival of the tradition in exile and in Tibet. It is significant that the considerable revival of appliqué thangka art in the last fifteen to twenty years has been possible due to the oral transmission of the technique by two highly qualified appliqué masters and tailors: Gyeten Namgyal (1912 – 1996) and Phuntsok Tsering (1937-). (See appendix 4.) Both were former members of the Government Tailors’ Guild in Lhasa. These two men were responsible for bringing the knowledge and skills required for production of appliqué thangka to the exile community in Dharamsala, from where it has spread widely. Patronage by the Dalai Lama and support for Gyeten Namgyal by the Ghadong Oracle when he eventually came to Dharamsala are significant aspect of this revival. I discuss this later in this chapter. Even though there is an active embroidery and appliqué tradition in Bhutan, for the large numbers of Tibetans living in exile in India, the contribution by these two men and their sponsors is

¹⁶⁰ Jones, “The Fabric Thanka of Tibet”, p.5.

¹⁶¹ Gombrich, “The Art of Art History “, p.131. Gombrich makes the point that traditional methods are “retained within certain limited contexts of ritual and ceremony.”

¹⁶² For example, the Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre, directed Dorje Wangdu, one of the workshops in Dharamsala, has commissions to make appliqué ritual thangka for Tibet, Taiwan, Dharamsala and other Tibetan institutions in India which will take the next two years.

important. Accounts of their early experiences illustrate how vital the production of appliqué artworks was before 1959. Their work teaching young Tibetans in exile has been crucial to the continuity of the art and technique of making appliqué thangka. Today, this transmission is led by master appliqué artists taught by either Gyeten Namgyal or Phuntsok Tsering with the support of important patrons as mentioned above. The artists interviewed during my research, now the next generation of appliqué artists who are focussed on the revival of the tradition, were all taught by one of these two men, or were taught by those who had been taught them.

Transmission of the techniques in the past

In this section I will examine the status of appliqué technique and art in Lhasa during the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the early years of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in Tibet, up until 1959. The *Sokhang* (Tailors' Guild) in Lhasa had a key role to play in the transmission of appliqué technique. Like Jones, Harris also mentions the importance of oral transmission: "The oral delivery of ideas and knowledge was the key to the transmission of many cultural activities of pre 1959 Tibet."¹⁶³ Tibetan silk appliqué is an excellent example of oral transmission. Appliqué artists in Tibet (and in Bhutan today) were also tailors, and the work of cutting and sewing fabric is considered one of the *zorik*, the 'sciences of manufacture'.¹⁶⁴ In most cases men would learn sewing skills from a young age from their fathers or their uncles. Gyeten Namgyal, Namsa Chenmo (Grand Master tailor) to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, was born in 1912 and learnt to sew from his father, a skilled tailor, from the age of eight. His father had learnt sewing from the former Namsa Chenmo, and was the secretary in the Sokhang head office. Gyeten Namgyal showed exceptional talent at a very young age and his father would take him on his sewing trips.¹⁶⁵ Gyeten Namgyal started his apprenticeship in the Sokhang aged twelve and joined the government tailoring unit. According to Gyeten Namgyal, the first four months were spent learning to hold the needle, practising sewing hems and edges and training hard through competitions, to improve the speed and quality of work.¹⁶⁶ Even today the apprentice will practice holding the needle and stitching sometimes even without any thread for three or more days. Later the student practices the stitches on inexpensive cotton cloth.¹⁶⁷

After training in all the basic skills, a tailor could work in any field of tailoring. Unlike in the West where tailoring and embroidery are quite different skill sets, in Lhasa these were combined in the training of apprentices. Good tailors could stitch and embroider appliqué thangka as well as make clothes, although some tailors developed areas of specialisation. Working in the Sokhang, tailors were asked to work on many government sponsored jobs, sewing appliqué thangka, banners and ceiling friezes for government buildings, temples and other public buildings. When the Thirteenth Dalai Lama passed away in 1933, Gyeten Namgyal was among the eighty tailors selected to make the many brocade decorations required for the

¹⁶³ Harris, *In the Image of Tibet*, p.59.

¹⁶⁴ The 'sciences of manufacture' texts came from India (*shilpavidya* Skt.) and were divided into the three Buddhist categories of body, speech and mind. Manufacturing relating to the body is concerned with religious images. Kapstein, *The Tibetans*, p.255. In Bhutan cutting and sewing, (including appliqué and embroidery), is considered men's work. Ison, "The Thirteen Traditional Crafts." p 124

¹⁶⁵ Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale." p.29

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ This method of training is still used today in Dharamsala. Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, 2009. See appendix 5.

Potala Palace. He was awarded the title of 'Grand Master of Appliqué', (Tib. *Ki gyu Chenmo*) when he was just twenty two years old.

Phuntsok Tsering, (1937 -), Namsa Chenmo to the present Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, also learnt the skills from his father who worked as a tailor for the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.¹⁶⁸ He started working as a tailor in the Sokhang in Lhasa when he was fifteen years old. Tailoring and appliqué skills had been passed down through his family for generations.

Throughout the Tibetan cultural region, painters and appliqué artists (or tailors), often travelled to monasteries to work on specific projects and moved around the countryside. Some lamas travelled with their personal appliqué masters. As the power and wealth of the large monastic institutions increased so did demands for appliqué and tailoring. The construction of large monasteries and the ritual demands of their abbots and other high lamas also meant further demand for appliqué thangka and brocade decorations for the prayer halls. Some monasteries had their own appliqué workshops. When a monastery required tailors and appliqué artists to work on large projects, they would travel and stay at the monastery where they were well taken care of and well paid.¹⁶⁹

The high status enjoyed by appliqué artists and tailors is revealed in the story Gyeten Namgyal tells of his life working for the Sokhang in Lhasa for the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.¹⁷⁰ The Thirteenth Dalai Lama created a ranking system for the different craftsmen of the various guilds, which had been set up by the Fifth Dalai Lama in the 17th century.¹⁷¹ Appliqué artists and tailors ranked above painters and sculptors, which suggests that a higher value was placed on appliqué artworks than on painting and sculpture. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama used to closely inspect the work done by tailors and demanded excellence.¹⁷² When Gyeten Namgyal joined the Sokhang to enter the government tailoring unit, there were seven hundred registered tailors in Lhasa and an elite group of one hundred and thirty who worked in the government unit for the Thirteenth Dalai Lama.¹⁷³ There were only men in these workshops; no women are mentioned. According to Gyeten Namgyal, the Tailors' Guild which was established in the 17th century had its headquarters and main workshops in the Tsuglakhang, within Jokhang temple in the centre of Lhasa. It was an institution of high prestige, occupying one of the best areas in the temple; with its own kitchens, workrooms, toilets, resting areas and ample storage space for the work in progress. No other guild enjoyed such privileges.¹⁷⁴ Judging by the status enjoyed by the tailors who made them, silk appliqué thangka seem to

¹⁶⁸ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Dharamsala, 2009. See appendix 4.

¹⁶⁹ The artist from Amdo whom I interviewed made the point that he found it easier to work in Tibet for this reason, rather than in Dharamsala. In Tibet the monastery would provide accommodation and meals, and the artists are treated well. In Dharamsala he had difficulty making a living. He works on his own and has travelled to South India to work on a giant thangka there. I discuss this later in more detail. See transcript of interview in appendix 7

¹⁷⁰ Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale." pp 31-45

¹⁷¹ Ibid.: p.31.

¹⁷² Ibid.: p.33. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama often "visited the sewing rooms. He walked around among the tailors who sat bent down over their work. Gyalwa Rinpoche [Thirteenth Dalai Lama] watched them cutting, scrutinizing every detail of the work"

¹⁷³ Ibid.: p.31.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

have been more important than painting or sculpture amongst the artworks made for religious practice in Tibet.

Revival in exile

Considering the loss of Tibet's heritage of treasured appliqué thangka artworks and the fact that so many tailors and artists were unable to continue working on appliqué thangka after the Communist Chinese invasion of 1959, it is testament to the efforts of only two or three teachers that the art has been revived to the considerable level that is evident today. After Lhasa was occupied by the Peoples Liberation Army, tailors and senior staff of the government workshops were interrogated and imprisoned because tailors who worked for the Dalai Lama were considered reactionaries by the Chinese. The government workshops were destroyed and the stores of brocade and silk were confiscated, looted or sold in the market. The elaborate brocade hangings and the ceiling friezes in the Tsuklhakang (the main hall of the Jokhang temple) were looted and divided among the Communist party people. The beautiful brocade thangka made for the Tsongcho Sertreng festival (The Golden Procession) had disappeared well before the Cultural Revolution.¹⁷⁵

In spite of the destruction of thousands of Tibetan monasteries and the hardship and suffering endured by Tibetan artists and craftsmen, those Tibetans who live in exile have been able to continue their work, and pass on their knowledge of techniques to younger generations. Large numbers of young men and women have been trained in silk appliqué thangka techniques in Dharamsala in the last twenty years. Jones wrote of her concern that: "The appliquéd and embroidered thangka is in danger of critical change through non-Tibetan influences."¹⁷⁶ However, in Dharamsala in 2009, more than sixteen years after Jones wrote her doctorate, the five master appliqué artists I interviewed were adamant that they were making appliqué thangka and teaching the technique as it was done in the past. The few changes were not ones that would change the appearance, or reduce the quality of the work.

In the last few years the tradition has not only been revived but considerably strengthened by the quality of work produced by such masters as Phuntsok Tsering, Namsa Chenmo to the Dalai Lama, Dorje Wangdu, Director of Tibetan Appliqué Art Centre, Temba Choepal from Norbulingka Institute and Tenzin Gyaltsen, appliqué master working at Sherabling Monastery, Bir in India.¹⁷⁷ These appliqué masters are all determined to maintain the tradition and the quality of the work. They continue to use costly and valuable materials, and do not cut corners in any way. They prefer to use hand loomed silk brocade and continue to hand sew the majority of the work. Artists such as these bring their own unique artistic and creative vision to their work. They not only pass on their knowledge of Tibetan traditional techniques to new students, but they are exemplars of discipline, dedication and devotion which they also pass on to young students.

Transmission of the technique: Gyeten Namgyal's legacy

Gyeten Namgyal arrived in Dharamsala from Tibet in the 1980's. Although he had suffered at the hands of the Chinese, and had been imprisoned in labour camps, he did not forget his skills. He was a talented artist, and had shown extraordinary skills from a young age, producing

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.: p.60.

¹⁷⁶ Jones, "The Fabric Thanka of Tibet". p. 5

¹⁷⁷ There may be other appliqué masters but I mention the teachers known to me through the artists and senior monks I met in Dharamsala.

special artworks for major monasteries and the Potala Palace in Lhasa. When he came to Dharamsala, aged seventy, his eyesight was good and he was still able to teach. Requested to teach by the Ghadong Oracle,¹⁷⁸ who could see that here was an important opportunity to pass on the tradition, Gyeten Namgyal taught young students in the Ghadong Monastery in Dharamsala for six years. Tenzin Gyaltzen, the appliqué master at Sherabling Monastery today, was amongst his students. (See Appendix 6)

Tenzin Gyaltzen was born in Tibet and came to Dharamsala when he was eighteen. His uncle, the Ghadong Oracle, encouraged him to study appliqué with Gyeten Namgyal and to 'take on the special responsibility to continue his work'.¹⁷⁹ Tenzin Gyaltzen would not have had this opportunity back in Tibet, as it was no longer taught there. For almost eight years (from 1986 to 1993) he studied under the guidance of Gyeten Namgyal. He also taught for a short time at Norbulingka Institute (see below) and since 2000 he has been the resident appliqué master of Sherabling monastery, the seat of the Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche. Here he is working on several large projects including a giant thangka of Padmasambhava, with a team of five young men. (See figures 18 and 19)

In 2003, one of Gyeten Namgyal's students from Tibet, Temba Choepel, set up the appliqué workshop in the Norbulingka Institute, near Dharamsala. The Institute was founded in 1996 to preserve and support the teaching of Tibetan arts. It is under the jurisdiction of the Department of Religion and Culture of the Tibetan Government in exile. Temba Choepel was trained as a thangka painter, but for a short time he had received instruction from Gyeten Namgyal in Tibet, before he came to India. He combined both painting and appliqué work, and set up a training program in which apprentices learnt the fundamentals of thangka painting together with the art of appliqué.¹⁸⁰ In a large workshop within the Norbulingka Institute, appliqué thangkas are made for monasteries, lamas, private commissions and for their gallery. The thangkas in the gallery are available to buy so that foreigners who appreciate the aesthetic and spiritual value of these works can purchase them.

Transmission from Phuntsok Tsering within Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala.

In 1959 Phuntsok Tsering was the only one of the group of 150 tailors working for the Tibetan government in Lhasa who escaped to India with the Dalai Lama. Government officials, who knew of his skill, appointed him to serve as the Namsa Chenmo (appliqué master and personal tailor) to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama in exile in India. He was 22 years old. Since then, for more than fifty years, he has been working for the Dalai Lama, in his small workshop within Namgyal Monastery. Phuntsok Tsering has passed on his knowledge and produced some highly refined appliqué thangka for ritual use within the Dalai Lama's monastery. The continuity of traditional techniques and materials is important to him.¹⁸¹ In the interview, he was resolute that he has maintained the traditional techniques that he learnt from his father and while working in the

¹⁷⁸ Ghadong Oracle is the second Oracle for the Tibetan government.

¹⁷⁹ Personal communication with Tenzin Gyaltzen, Bir, India, 2009. See appendix 6.

¹⁸⁰ Russell, *Norbulingka the First Ten Years of an Adventure*, p.113

¹⁸¹ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Namgyal Monastery, Dharamsala, April 2009. See appendix 4

elite Tailors' Guild. He has taught more than 400 students in exile.¹⁸² However, some did not complete their training. There are both young men and women in his workshop. There are no special prerequisites to join his workshop. He gives anyone a chance who wishes to learn.¹⁸³

Phuntsok Tsering is important for the Tibetan appliqué tradition. As Namsa Chenmo, 'Grand Master Tailor', he is familiar with the traditional techniques as they were taught to the highest level of skill in Lhasa. While in Lhasa he worked on a new giant thangka that was hung from the front of the Potala for special festivals. Since coming to India he has made several huge thangka. One was 25 feet high (approx. 7 metres high) for Dorje Drak Monastery in Simla, India, where it is displayed once a year, hung from the roof. One of Phuntsok Tsering's students, Tendar Kunchok has become a well-known appliqué artist in Nepal. He taught Pasang, who was interviewed for this study in Boudhanath, Kathmandu. Pasang has also produced many large appliqué thangka for monasteries and Dharma centres.¹⁸⁴

Tibetan Appliqué Art Centre, the workshop and training centre directed by Dorje Wangdu.

Dorje Wangdu is a highly accomplished master of Tibetan appliqué work. He was born in Tibet in 1962 and came to India in 1972. At fourteen he became a monk in Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala and was taught appliqué techniques, (most likely from Phuntsok Tsering who has been at Namgyal Monastery since 1959), showing natural talent from an early age. Although he is no longer a monk, the studies he completed as a monk in Namgyal Monastery gave him a depth of knowledge of the iconography and complex symbolism used in the images of deities in appliqué thangka. According to Dorje Wangdu he is mostly self-taught in the art of appliqué.¹⁸⁵ He is the Director of the Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, which he started in 1988 to train younger Tibetans and preserve the appliqué thangka art tradition. Over 150 students have trained at his workshop and some special students have become extremely skilled.

It takes five or six years to become skilled enough to 'graduate', meaning that the students are able to work on their own; but, according to Dorje Wangdu, this also depends on the individual's skill. In order to become qualified the artist must be able to stitch and embroider every part of the thangka and to manage every aspect of production.

¹⁸² I interviewed one of his students, Ugyen Sonam, who studied with Phuntsok Tsering for five years. He received his qualification certificate and is an accomplished appliqué thangka artist, now living in Australia.

¹⁸³ Jones, "The Fabric Thangka of Tibet", p.5.

Jones also makes the point that the threat to the preservation of these particular forms of thangka is in some way related to the diminished number of Tibetan youth entering the monastery for religious study. In fact, those who are apprenticed and working in appliqué workshops in Dharamsala and Kathmandu Nepal, are young lay Tibetans, men and women. Their teachers had been monks, like Dorje Wangdu, but the teachers are now also lay Tibetans. This makes it clear that the survival of this art does not depend on monks.

¹⁸⁴ Pasang Bhutia, (2010 [cited May 31 2010]); available from <http://www.tibetapplique.com/>.

¹⁸⁵ He may be a re-incarnation of a former appliqué master tailor, who deceased in 1959.

Dorje Wangdu would like to promote appliqué art because it is not well known even amongst Tibetans¹⁸⁶ and he has recently made a documentary in Tibetan on the work of his Centre and on Tibetan appliqué art.¹⁸⁷ There are at least twenty seven people working for him, which is about the maximum number for the space in his workshop. His students come from South India, Nepal and Tibet, as well as some from overseas such as Japan. Some of his students have gone to live in the US and Canada, and although it is difficult for them to continue their work overseas, according to Dorje Wangdu, some of them are doing so. The number of students is growing and Dorje Wangdu is confident about the future of Tibetan appliqué art.¹⁸⁸ He expressed his belief that “teaching this art form to the younger generation of Tibetans is also important since most of the trained artists in Tibet have passed away.”¹⁸⁹ He sees the art of appliqué as very much alive, not as a dying art or ‘endangered art form’, contrary to Jones’ findings¹⁹⁰ Indeed, the number of craftsmen and women are growing. His workshop has commissions in hand now which will take more than two years to complete.

Training and workshops today

In the workshops I visited, both men and women were working and many were training as apprentices. In the past, as mentioned by Gyeten Namgyal, appliqué work was done only by men, as in Bhutan today.¹⁹¹ Jones observed in 1992 that in Tibet, China and Ladakh all those who made appliqué were men. “Nowhere has the female entered the scene as a performer of these tasks”.¹⁹² This was not the case in workshops that I visited in Dharamsala and Kathmandu in 2009. There are roughly equal numbers of men and women in the workshops of Phuntsok Tsering and Dorje Wangdu and at Norbulingka. I found that there are only men in some smaller workshops with only four or five craftsmen, such as the workshop of Pema Norbu, a former Norbulingka trained artist, and Tenzin Gyaltsen at Sherabling. In Boudhanath, Nepal there were around eight men and women working in Pasang Bhutia’s workshop. While tailoring and stitching seems to have been a male domain in the past, both in exile and in Tibet (TAR) today the profession is open to both women and men.¹⁹³

Jones also makes the point that the threat to the preservation of these particular forms of thangka is in some way related to the diminished number of Tibetan youth entering the monastery for religious study.¹⁹⁴ In fact, those who are apprenticed and working in appliqué workshops I visited in Dharamsala and Boudhanath, Nepal, are young lay Tibetans, men and women. Their teachers had been monks, like Dorje Wangdu, but the teachers are now also lay Tibetans. As mentioned by Gyeten Namgyal, in the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama it was possible to be apprenticed to a master outside the monastic system. Appliqué artist like thangka painters often came from artisan families, and even if they were not ordained,

¹⁸⁶ According to Dorje Wangdu this is because, before 1959, these thangkas were mainly inside monasteries and ordered by government officials and lamas, but lay people did not get to see them. Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu in Dharamsala 2009. See Appendix 5

¹⁸⁷ Wangdu, “Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre.”

¹⁸⁸ Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, April 2009.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Jones, “The Fabric Thanka of Tibet”, p.5.

¹⁹¹ Myers and Pommaret, “Cut and Stitched: Textiles Made by Men.” p.143

¹⁹² Jones, “The Fabric Thanka of Tibet”, p.35.

¹⁹³ Women from the White Conch factory in Lhasa worked on the giant thangka for Tsurphu monastery..

¹⁹⁴ Jones, “The Fabric Thanka of Tibet”, p.5.

knowledge of the deities and iconography was considered part of the training.¹⁹⁵ Today, as in the past, the survival of this art does not depend on monks.

Leslie Rinchen-Wongmo

Leslie Rinchen Wongmo is an example of a non-Tibetan who has studied Tibetan silk appliqué art with Dorje Wangdu. Leslie Rinchen-Wongmo is from California, USA and a highly accomplished artist. She trained in Dharamsala for eight years. See Appendix 10. As a non-Tibetan, she also contributes to the revival of silk appliqué thangka, with her mastery of the skills, and her promotion of the art outside Dharamsala, in the United States.

In Dharamsala, Leslie Rinchen-Wongmo was initially taught by Tenzin Gyaltzen for several months and then by Dorje Wangdu for four years. Under his guidance, she focused on increasing her skills to the point where she would be able to work on her own. She remained in Dharamsala for another four years, working independently. She now produces significant works in the United States. Her story is one of dedication and patient devotion to the art.

As Tibetan Buddhist scholar, Robert Thurman pointed out in the documentary 'Creating Buddhas',¹⁹⁶ the Tibetans have no problem with Westerners taking up the tradition, as long as they are respectful, and follow the iconographic rules for the making of appliqué thangka. As far as I know, Lesley Rinchen Wongmo is the only non-Tibetan who has reached this high standard and is producing quality silk appliqué thangka in the Tibetan tradition.

Revival in Tibet

There is a revival of the religious arts within Tibet (TAR) and the culturally Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham within Chinese provinces Gansu, Sichuan, Qinghai and Yunnan, particularly since the mid-1980s, when the Chinese government began to relax its strict isolationist policy in TAR. Rebuilding and restoration of monasteries is taking place throughout the country along with the revival of rituals and ceremonies. An example of how the demand for artworks for these monasteries is driving the revival of religious arts is the making of the giant thangka for Tsurphu monastery, in Tibet (TAR). In 1994, Venerable Drupon Dechen, the Abbot who had supervised the reconstruction of Tsurphu Monastery, commissioned a giant Buddha Shakyamuni thangka, thirty-five metres high.¹⁹⁷ This was to replace one of the appliqué treasures that had been kept at Tsurphu monastery since the 17th century and was lost in the Cultural Revolution in 1968. The previous giant thangka (*ki-gyu* or *köku*) had been displayed on a special site across the river from the monastery. Venerable Drupon Dechen requested American thangka artist, Terris Temple, and Leslie Ngyuen Temple from the United Kingdom, to design and organise the production of this thangka in Tibet. (See appendix 9). They found a decorative appliqué tent-making factory in Lhasa, and a group of women willing to take on the challenge of making this giant silk thangka, in spite of not having made anything like it before. A former appliqué thangka tailor also from Lhasa provided them with guidance in assembling the appliqué. He and his father had been members of the former Tibetan government Tailors' Guild and his father had worked on one of the large appliqué thangkas for the Potala Palace in Lhasa for the 13th Dalai Lama.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Drokpa, artist from Amdo in Dharamsala. See transcript in Appendix 7.

¹⁹⁶ Isadora Gabrielle Leidenfrost, "Creating Buddhas: The Making and Meaning of Fabric Thangkas," (USA: Soulful Media Productions, 2008).

¹⁹⁷ The seat of the Karmapa, the lineage holder of the Karma Kagyu sect, situated two hours northwest from Lhasa. The current incumbent is the Seventeenth Karmapa.

The case study of a Tibetan-trained American thangka painter, Temple and his artist wife, Nguyen Temple, working with a Lhasa appliqué tent factory in TAR is a tale of collaboration and dedication to preserving the Tibetan appliqué cultural tradition. Terris Temple, who has been painting and teaching Tibetan thangka painting for forty years, designed and directed the production of the new giant thangka, assisted by Leslie Nguyen Temple. Besides this giant Shakyamuni Buddha thangka created for outdoor display during the Saga Dawa celebrations, three other large silk appliqué projects were added to this project: a large scale Mahakala thangka which measured 9 x 9 metres and two large ceiling friezes (*drawa drachey*) each measuring 2 x 40 metres.

Temple and Nguyen Temple were motivated to take on this complex task by their passion and dedication to preserve Tibetan culture.¹⁹⁸ Temple had been a student of with the Sixteenth Karmapa (1924–1981), the reincarnate lineage holder of the Kagyu school. In 1992, when the Seventeenth Karmapa was recognised by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, it was the first time that an important lineage holder was recognised by both the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. Because of the Chinese support for the Seventeenth Karmapa, at the time, the Chinese gave permission for the two Westerners to travel and work in China (TAR) for this project for the Seventeenth Karmapa's monastery. It may seem curious to Westerners that two non-Tibetans were chosen for this important task. According to Temple, "This was never questioned by Tibetans. It had been confirmed by divination, so there was no question. It was not an issue."¹⁹⁹ Terris described the situation within Tibet at that time (1992)

*It is important to remember that little work of this kind and of this scale had been done in Tibet, as far as we know, since the Chinese invasion, and the escape of the Dalai Lama from Tibet in 1959. Many of the appliqué tailors and artists had either been killed or imprisoned, or had escaped from Tibet into India.*²⁰⁰

The White Conch Factory in Lhasa that Temple approached to make the giant Shakyamuni thangka for Tsurphu displayed considerable flexibility. They make appliqué tents, used by Tibetans for summer gatherings and celebrations, and also religious items for monasteries, traditional opera costumes, temple hangings and banners. There were six women, experienced sewers, who agreed to make the giant thangka, together with Temple and Nguyen Temple. Temple explained: "The six women from the White Conch Factory had all done appliqué but had not worked on a thangka before. For them it was like a dream, for all of us it was like a dream"²⁰¹

In Repkong in the Tibetan cultural region of Amdo, in Gansu Province, the artistic revival is supported by the Chinese government which has set up artist training centres. Appliqué art is taught there with thangka painting, although the appliqué artwork done in this area is not covered in detail in this thesis. Some research has been done on the teaching institutions in Repkong and the painting revival but not into appliqué art in particular.²⁰² However, an artist from Amdo, interviewed for this study in Dharamsala had studied both painting and appliqué

¹⁹⁸ Temple, *The Giant Thangkas of Tsurphu* (cited).

¹⁹⁹ Personal communication with Terris Temple, Chiang Mai, 2009. See appendix 9.

²⁰⁰ Temple, *The Giant Thangkas of Tsurphu*.

²⁰¹ Personal communication from Terris Temple, Chiang Mai 2009

²⁰² Stevenson, "Art and Life in Amdo Reb Gong since 1978."

in Amdo.²⁰³ He had learnt from his father and used to travel with his father, his uncle and three brothers from place to place, working for monasteries on painting and appliqué thangka commissions in the region. His account suggests that the appliqué tradition (most likely the cut and glue technique), is also alive and well in the Tibetan minority region of Amdo, Gansu Province, PRC.

There are festivals in TAR, and parts of Kham and Amdo in the ethnic Tibetan provinces, still celebrated today. Giant thangka are rolled out on occasions such as Saga Dawa and the Yoghurt Festivals at the three great monasteries near Lhasa— Drepung, Sera and Ganden. Also the great monastery in Shigatse, Tashilhunpo, has giant thangka which are displayed once a year for its festival. These days, within China, these giant thangka festivals have become popular not only with Tibetans but also with Han Chinese and international tourists and have become something of an arts festival with Tibetan opera performances and performances by visiting dance troupes from the various ethnically Tibetan regions within PRC.²⁰⁴ As further evidence of the revival of appliqué thangka in Tibet, a small training centre started recently in Lhasa. Painters and tailors from the former workshops of the Dalai Lama have been engaged to teach thangka painting and appliqué to homeless youth.²⁰⁵

Patrons and artists active in the revival

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the revival of Tibetan silk appliqué thangka owes much to the continued demand for traditional artworks for use in ritual and ceremony. As previously discussed, the reconstruction of monasteries and the return since the mid -1980s to religious practices in TAR, and amongst other ethnically Tibetan minorities in PRC, has also had an effect on the demand for brocade and appliqué arts. Patrons, such as revered teachers, high- ranking Tibetan lamas, commission large thangka to donate to their monasteries and make offerings, in order to bring blessings to their communities. Most work for the artists I interviewed comes from commissions of this kind. Revered lamas who have ordered work from them are mentioned on their websites. (See figures 21 and 22.)

From the website of Pasang Bhutia from Boudhanath:

*Within a few years of its inception, The Art of Tibetan Appliqué Thangka had already supplied many important and famous Appliqué Art thangkas in various sizes to the Monasteries and Dharma Centres world wide. Prominent lamas especially H.E. Tenga Rinpoche, Ven. Lakha Rinpoche and Ven. Drupgyud Rinpoche have personally visited The Art of Tibetan Appliqué Thangka [Pasang's workshop] and placed orders for new Appliqué Art Thangka.*²⁰⁶

Since 1987, Dorje Wangdu, from the Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre in Dharamsala, India, has completed major projects involving the production of many large thangkas for the Dalai Lama and other important Tibetan religious leaders. He has made forty- two thangkas for the Dalai Lama, including five very large thangka which are displayed during the Kalachakra initiations,

²⁰³ Personal communication with Dokpa from Amdo, Dharamsala, April 2009.(See appendix 7.)

²⁰⁴ Holly Hayes, (2009 [cited 26 July 2010]); available from <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/tibet/lhasa-drepung-monastery>.

²⁰⁵ Personal communication with Ani Nydon, whose brother has started this school in Lhasa. NSW 2010

²⁰⁶ Pasang Bhutia. (website)

discussed in detail below. He has received numerous commissions from South India and Tibet, and, as previously mentioned, commissions for the next two years. Some of the large thangkas are between three and four metres high. These are hung inside the Dalai Lama's temple when special rituals associated with the deity depicted are taking place.

Dorje Wangdu has also produced appliqué thangka for monasteries in TAR, and in the West. For example, Sogyal Rinpoche ordered three large thangka for his monastery in the United States, and these are displayed when he travels to Europe to give teachings. Dorje Wangdu has produced a giant thangka for a monastery in Taiwan.

The Kalachakra empowerment ceremony performed around the world by the Fourteenth Dalai Lama is an example of the international spread of Tibetan Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism is the vehicle by which Tibetan culture becomes accessible to thousands of people. The Kalachakra ceremony is also an example of the use of ritual and ceremony to bring communities and large numbers of pilgrims together for unity and solidarity, as mentioned in the first Chapter. The Dalai Lama performs public Kalachakra initiations and empowerments around the world with the intention of benefiting others and removing obstacles to world peace. Thousands of people attend the ceremony, which extends over a number of days, to listen to the Dalai Lama's teachings, participate in the prayers, initiations and view the sand mandala of the Kalachakra mandala. Five or six large appliqué thangka are carried for these occasions and hung in the consecrated space which is prepared for the Kalachakra empowerments. (See figure 14)

The Kalachakra ceremony was first performed by the current Dalai Lama in 1954 and 1956 in the Norbulingka Palace, Lhasa. Since 1970 he has held the Kalachakra empowerments on many occasions, and it has been attended by hundreds of thousands of people. (See appendix 2) There are five important large appliqué hangings; four made by Dorje Wangdu and one made by Phuntsok Tsering, which are displayed during the Kalachakra teachings, wherever it takes place. These include an appliqué of the Kalachakra Mandala made by Dorje Wangdu which is the first appliqué of the mandala ever made. (See figure 14) The Dalai Lama has performed these sacred rites around the world. In 1985 over 200,000 pilgrims came to Bodhgaya, India, including large numbers of Tibetans from around the Himalayas and the Tibetan plateau.²⁰⁷ The Kalachakra ceremonies have taken place four times in the USA, in Switzerland, Spain, Mongolia, Australia, Austria and Canada. The last time was in Amaravati, India in 2006, when 100,000 attended.

Giant thangka have been commissioned by monasteries and organisations from TAR and throughout the Tibetan Buddhist world from the appliqué workshops in Dharamsala and Nepal. As mentioned previously Dorje Wangdu has been commissioned to make giant thangka for TAR in PRC, Taiwan and Tibetan Buddhist monasteries within India. Pasang Bhutia, in Kathmandu, has made several large thangka including the large Shakyamuni thangka for a monastery in TAR. This thirty- three foot thangka was ordered by a monk in Boudhanath and jointly funded by the monk and his father, who offered it together to a monastery in TAR. It was displayed at Lumbini, Nepal, for eight days during the Monlam Prayer festival. The thangka, which measured a total of 15 metres (55 feet) with the brocade border, was signed

²⁰⁷ Russell, *Celebrating Kalachakra through Art*, pp 112-14.

and consecrated by the Sakya lineage holder, Sakya Trizen Rinpoche. Pasang Bhutia also made a large thangka about the same size for Kopan Monastery near Boudhanath. (See figure 20)

Tenzin Gyaltzen is at present making a giant thangka commissioned by Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche, head of Sherabling Monastery, India. The project was begun in April 2009, and I observed the first steps in the process of transferring the design to the tracing paper. This giant thangka, depicting Guru Rinpoche and his eight manifestations, is for a monastery in Kinnaur, Himalchal Pradesh in northern India. Tenzin and his team of five will take two years to complete it. (See figures 23 and 24)

In Bhutan, new large silk appliqué thangka (or *throngdroel*,²⁰⁸ 'liberation by sight' the preferred Bhutanese term for these giant thangka) continue to be made, supported by the Bhutanese Royal family, the government, high- ranking Buddhist teachers and lay donors. For example, a new Sampa Lhuendrup²⁰⁹ throngdroel for Gangteng Monastery, was completed in late 2008, commissioned by Gangteng Tulku Rinpoche. (See figure 25)²¹⁰ It depicts images of Guru Rinpoche surrounded by his eight manifestations, with up to twenty five figures. It measures 12 x 16 metres (45 x 59 feet). It took nine artists more than sixteen months to complete, and will be displayed at a festival at Gangteng Monastery in September, 2010. Gangteng Tulku Rinpoche funded the throngdroel at a cost of \$51,000 USD. International support for these artworks and other projects is significant. Since the 1980s Gangteng Tulku has established retreat centres in US and Europe where he has gathered financial support for numerous projects in Bhutan, including the restoration of the 400 year old Gangteng monastery.²¹¹

Giant thangka are not exclusively made in Bhutan for Bhutan. In fact they are sometimes made outside Bhutan, and Bhutanese artists travel elsewhere to produce art. Pasang Bhutia, the Tibetan appliqué master I interviewed in Boudhanath, is working on a commission for a new monastery being built in Bhutan, which will be finished next year. This Drukpa Kagyu lineage tree throngdroel has over one hundred figures and will measure approximately 26m high including the brocade border when complete.²¹²

The largest throngdroel in Bhutan, Khyunkhen Pema Karpo, was completed in late 2007 at Trashicho dzong. It was funded by the Bhutanese government and private donations.²¹³ The enormous thangka measures 31 metres high and 29 metres wide and thirteen artists took two years to complete it. A new large throngdroel of Shakyamuni Buddha and the Sixteen Arhats was completed and consecrated by the spiritual leader of Bhutan, Je Khenpo, at Trashigang dzong in 2009, to commemorate the Silver Jubilee of the King of Bhutan's coronation. It was

²⁰⁸ The name, 'throngdroel', can be applied to all giant silk appliqué thangka in Bhutanese and Tibetan.

²⁰⁹ 'Wish-fulfilling Prayer' - a powerful protection prayer written by Padmasambhava.

²¹⁰ Gangten Tulku Rinpoche is the ninth incarnation of Pema Lingpa (1450 - 1521), revered as the patron saint of Bhutan.

²¹¹ Rinzin Wangchuk, *New Throngdroel for Gangteng Gompa* (Kuensel Newspaper, 2008 [cited]; available from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=11171>

²¹² Personal communication with Pasang Bhotia, Boudhanath, Nepal 2009. See appendix 8

²¹³ Rinzin Wangchuk, "Khuenkhen Pema Karpo *Throngdroel*," *Druk Air inflight magazine Tashi Delek* 2008.

funded by contributions from the Dzongkhag staff, the business community and residents of Trashigang.²¹⁴

These examples show that the production of giant thangka is continuing for monasteries inside and outside TAR and ethnic Tibetan regions of PRC, in Bhutan and in Taiwan. Although the earlier production of silk appliqué thangka in pre-1959 Tibet was in part supported by gifts of silk and tribute from the Yuan, Ming and Qing emperors, it is possible that it did not entirely depend on these relationships. The end of this relationship with the Qing for example, did not in anyway hinder the production. The activities of the appliqué ‘tailor-artists’ of the Tibetan government in Lhasa during the time of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, described in Gyeten Namgyal’s account, reveal a vibrant and active tradition supported by the Dalai Lamas, and also the continuing need for brocade hangings and appliqué banners by many of the large Geluk monasteries. It was the destruction of monasteries and artworks, and the banning of religious activities on the other hand, that dealt a serious blow to the Tibetan culture and the production of Buddhist artworks inside Tibet.

The above examples of commissions for giant thangka show that there is considerable financial support coming from a variety of sources to help this revival. It has come about as a result of the support of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, other Tibetan Buddhist lineage holders, Tibetan lamas and the dedication and motivation of the few Tibetan artists who pass on the techniques. Those Tibetan Buddhist masters, who teach and perform ceremonies and initiations internationally, receive income and donations which they use to ensure that the art of silk appliqué thangka endures. As in the past, the vibrant Buddhas and deities represented in the appliqué thangka are thought to spread their blessings to an ever-widening audience. In the following chapters an examination of the materials and techniques shows the strength and resilience of a tradition in exile in the 21st century, and the Tibetan determination to maintain the high quality required for these precious offerings to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

²¹⁴ Rinzin Wangchuk, *New Throngdroel: Auspicious Sign for Buddhists* (2008 [cited]); available from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2793>.

Chapter Four Materials

Textiles play an important role in Tibetan cultural life, as indicated by the exchange of white silk scarves (*katak*) as a traditional symbol of respect. Luxury silks, plain satins, damasks and brocades, originally traded or sent to Tibet from China as tribute to early Tibetan rulers, and later as imperial gifts for high lamas and monasteries, have been used for centuries to enhance the interiors of Tibetan monasteries and shrine rooms.

Pillar banners made of red, blue, yellow, green and white brocade patchwork, and damask silk streamers flow from appliqué monster faces (or faces of glory) which hang from the enormous pillars rising to the ceilings. Cylindrical banners of cascading patch-worked chevrons of silk brocades, intricate appliqué ceiling friezes or rows of thangka, painted hanging scrolls framed in precious brocades are hung around the walls of prayer halls and temples, large and small, throughout the Buddhist world of the Himalayas. Statues of Buddha and Bodhisattvas placed on the high altars are robed in specially-made brocade robes or draped in silk; distinctive altar cloths and seat covers for the high thrones of important lamas are stitched in patch-worked or appliquéd silks. These brightly coloured silk brocades, shine and glow, catching the flickering light of butter lamps, and create an other-worldly 'pure realm' ambience in the darkened halls of the white-walled, fortress-like monasteries set amongst the mountain landscapes of the Himalayas or the dry plains of greater Tibet.

The continued use of traditional luxury materials in the production of Tibetan appliqué thangka is an indication of the value placed by the artist and the patrons on maintaining the traditional appearance of silk appliqué thangka. The use of superior quality silks, and the ordering and revival of designs of old brocades, is primarily because of the religious function of the appliqué thangka. Religious artworks, which are revered as the embodiment of the Buddha and the deities, and regarded as offerings, require precious materials – silk, gold and precious stones. There is no thought to use inferior materials. The priority for the Tibetan artist, the lama and the patron is to make something that is suitable as an offering, and is, therefore, made of the finest materials. In other words, because the ritual use of appliqué thangka has remained unchanged, the artists are mindful of the requirement to continue to produce them in traditional materials and in the traditional manner. Having said this, however, the artists interviewed agreed that they had made some changes in materials, but emphasised that these changes did not change the appearance.

The most important material for these artworks is silk and gold. In this chapter I explore the sources and varieties of silk and brocade used in the past and today. This examination of the materials used in the production of fabric thangka also reveals the unique aspects of Tibetan silk appliqué thangka such as the use of silk wrapped horse-hair cords for line work.

The strength and resilience of the tradition today is achieved, to some extent, through the willingness of the artists and the patrons to engage with the wider world, just as they did in the past. A detailed study of the materials used in the production of Tibetan silk appliqué, demonstrates this flexibility and adaptability in sourcing suitable materials. For example, when silks were not available from China, the Thirteenth Dalai Lama turned to Russia, and, now in

exile in India and Nepal, the artists from Dharamsala and Kathmandu obtain their silk from Varanasi, India. In the past the physical qualities of Chinese luxury silk, which was readily adopted as the material of choice, represented status and prestige, and therefore it was suitable for making offerings, and adorning the Buddhist deities and the *lhakang*, (shrine rooms) within Tibetan monasteries.

An explanation of the range of weaves and designs of silk fabrics used demonstrates the numerous choices available to the artists, which have made possible the rich creativity and expression found in these artworks. The variety of sources for these materials exhibits the 'multi-cultural' aspect of an art form considered uniquely Tibetan, reflecting its eclectic nature. The luxury silks of China, transformed in the Tibetan context from symbols of prestige and imperial power to symbols of spiritual power,²¹⁵ have been recreated with the same Chinese designs in India by Muslim weavers, for a distinct Tibetan market. The detailed examination of materials also reveals how, in some special cases, modern materials have been introduced to substitute where original traditional materials are hard to obtain. The artists I interviewed showed some preferences for traditional or modern substitutes, but the end result is still perceived to be identical to the traditional forms.

Appliqué thangka, including the giant ones, are made entirely of silk and gold, except for the cotton cloth used to back the silk.²¹⁶ The unique characteristics of silk – bright jewel-like colours and the sheen as they catch the light – give the Buddhas and deities a radiant and luminous quality. The gold and silver in the fine brocades shimmer. The appliqué thangka are hung in monasteries where the flickering light from butter lamps, in the dark spaces of the prayer halls, bring the detailed and lively figures to life. When the giant thangka are brought outdoors for their annual display, the brilliant sunlight in the clear high altitude air of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas causes the entire thangka to shine. The designs call for a luxurious combination of rich gold and silver brocaded silk, plain coloured satin weave and damask weave silks and with motifs from the shared language of Buddhist and Chinese textiles.

Tribute, gifts and offerings

The question is where did all this silk come from? Particularly where did the considerable quantities come from that were required to produce the enormous silk brocade thangka (*köku* Tib.), recorded as being made from around the 14th and 15th centuries, referred to in Chapter One?²¹⁷ The answer to these questions may be found in the spiritual, political and secular relationships between Tibet and neighbouring countries, the territories of the Mongol Khans and China which sustained tribute and trade.

During the Yuan and Ming dynasties silk was highly valued as a form of currency. In fact, during the Ming dynasty, 'treasury satin' (*ku duan*, Ch.), also referred to as 'tribute satin' (*gong duan*, Ch.), was produced to be used by the treasury for tribute and gifts. The silk was mostly plain and tightly woven, so that the material was thick and durable.²¹⁸ Silk was traded for

²¹⁵ John E. Vollmer, *Silks for Thrones and Altars*. Paris: Myrna Myers, 2003, p.114.

²¹⁶ Some particularly fine silks are backed with stiffer cotton, for durability and to create a smoother surface.

²¹⁷ Giant thangka often measuring up to 27 x 18 m. (see Chapter 1)

²¹⁸ Gao Hanyu, *Chinese Textile Designs*, p.19.

horses and presented as gifts or tribute, to retain friendly relations with political allies.²¹⁹ In the past large quantities of silk were offered as gifts to Tibetan religious leaders and regional rulers who held considerable influence and power. The motivations for such generous gifts were both pious and political.²²⁰ The Ming emperors, for example, were anxious to keep good relations with Tibetan leaders because the Tibetans' close relationship with the Mongol Khans, formerly Yuan emperors, was still considered a threat to the Ming Dynasty. They sent gifts of silk and invited Tibetan teachers and aristocrats to their court. Emperors from the Yuan and later Ming and Qing dynasties made donations and invited Tibetan religious teachers to their court to perform Buddhist rituals and initiations that would protect them and bring good fortune, longevity and peace to the Empire. Linrothe cites an example in the early Ming period, of lavish gifts of silk robes and one hundred and fifty bolts of silk sent to the Prince of Phagmo Drukpa, Dragpa Gyaltsen (1374 – 1432), who did not even visit the court.²²¹

An eyewitness account of the Sixth Panchen Lama's (1738–1780) visit to the Qing court in 1780 mentions "one hundred pieces of curious silks" given at one stage of the journey, "one thousand pieces of brocade and two hundred pieces of yellow silks" at other stages. When the Sixth Panchen Lama arrived at the Summer Palace of the Qianlong emperor, the emperor presented him with "many hundred pieces of curious silks on one occasion and four thousand pieces of brocade on another."²²² Monasteries also engaged in trade and commerce, trading horses for silk from China.

These vast quantities of silk were kept for centuries in the storehouses within Tibetan monasteries and were the materials used for appliqué thangka. In the early 20th century, before the destruction of the monasteries and their treasures by the Chinese, large quantities of silk were kept in the repositories of the Potala Palace and in the Norbulingka Treasury in Lhasa for use by the tailors who worked for the Dalai Lama and the government. Valuable stores of Ming and Qing brocades were kept within the Tsuglhakang, in the Jokhang Temple in the centre of Lhasa, where the Tailors' Guild workshops were located. Gyeten Namgyal recalled that 'the brocades for the robes of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama came from the Norbulingka treasury. These were accumulated offerings made to the Dalai Lamas over the centuries, many from the Manchu emperors.'²²³ Gyeten Namgyal also recounted:

*The Norbulingka treasury also stored beautiful brocades that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama had ordered from Russia some years before. He had sent a monk to Russia, to St Petersburg with a large order. When he arrived he found that the mills were closed, he persuaded them to re-open and waited in Russia for six years for the order to be processed.*²²⁴

²¹⁹ Dr Hweifen Cheah, 'Fabric of Life' lectures, Australian National University, 2008.

²²⁰ Anning Jing, "Financial and Material Aspects of Tibetan Art under the Yuan Dynasty," *Artibus Asiae* 64, no. 2 (2004): p.217.

'Yuan emperors and empresses were the most lavish patrons of Tibetan monks in history. Their patronage was predicated not only on personal qualities. It was more importantly political strategy, religious manoeuvre, spiritual need and practical concern'.

²²¹ Sperling "Early Ming Policy", pp 156-159 in Linrothe, *Paradise and Plumage*, p.30.

²²² Linrothe, *Paradise and Plumage*, p.31.

²²³ Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale" p. 42.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.34.

Silks for special projects were also purchased from China. Soon after the recognition of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Gyeten Namgyal also supervised the making of two new giant thangka for the Potala Palace, which were displayed during the annual Sertreng festival. Some of the materials for this came from China – ‘forty boxes of brocades, ten or eleven rolls of Takshun brocade each and from Tashilhunpo Monastery, in Shigatse - fifty boxes of plain brocade.’²²⁵

According to Phuntsok Tsering, who had worked in Lhasa, the silk used in appliqué thangka came from China and Russia, and then more recently India.²²⁶ The silk brocade from India is discussed later in this chapter. Appliqué artists today do not have these vast treasuries to draw upon. All was lost when the Chinese finally took control in Tibet and destroyed monasteries during the period of ‘democratic reforms’ and the Cultural Revolution. Major monastic institutions had vast quantities of silk treasures in their storerooms at that time. Besides these stores of silks and brocades, the silk appliqué treasures of the monasteries were also lost, cut up and the fabric sold in local market. When Phuntsok Tsering was living in Tibet, as a member of the government Tailor’s Guild, he worked on a giant thangka (kyi-gu) for Yongme Monastery, situated close to Lhasa. It was completed just before 1959. He remembered: ‘When the Chinese came they cut it into small pieces and gave it to local people. Someone gave me a fragment of brocade that I recognised from that thangka, which they had obtained in the street in Lhasa.’²²⁷

Silk and brocade for appliqué thangkhas today are sourced from China and India. Whereas, in the past, much of this silk would have come from the monasteries’ storehouses stocked with silk from centuries of tribute and trade, today it is purchased with donations. As explained in Chapter Two, earning merit, by donating and making offerings of religious art is considered important practice for Tibetan Buddhists. As mentioned previously, offerings and donations to purchase the materials for religious art works come from around the world. The growth of international donations to monasteries and Tibetan religious teachers also reflects the international spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the 21st century. Silk for making the giant thangka for Tsurphu Monastery came largely from donations from Taiwan and support from silk manufacturers in Hong Kong, as well as from the international foundation set up to support the reconstruction of Tsurphu Monastery.²²⁸

The three types of woven silk found in Tibetan appliqué thangka today are silk brocade, damask weave silk and plain satin weave.

Silk brocade

The pattern or design is woven into the base cloth using extra weft threads of different colours or gold and silver threads. There are different techniques for weaving the brocades, each dealing with the extra weft in a different way. The most intricate is ‘embroidered brocade’,²²⁹ where each colour in the pattern has its own shuttle. Shuttles float behind when not required. Although any fabric can be decorated in this way, brocade usually refers to silk fabrics woven

²²⁵ Ibid.: p.40.

²²⁶ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, April 2009.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Personal communication with Terris Temple, Chiang Mai, 2009.

²²⁹ The name ‘brocade’ comes from the Latin word ‘*brocare*’ meaning prick, which suggests needle work. It is often defined as embroidery weaving or loom embroidery.

with gold or silver thread.²³⁰ The brocades used today are mostly from India where the silk is hand woven. Some Chinese silk brocade which has been made on mechanised looms is used. Chinese silk is sometimes blended with a percentage of polyester. Artists interviewed for this study prefer to use hand loomed satin from Varanasi which is one hundred percent silk. The brocade from Varanasi is also hand woven.²³¹

A brocade technique called '*Urtu*', a specialty of the Varanasi weavers, creates special textures as the pattern weave is manipulated using multiple weave techniques such as satin, plain or twill.²³² The variety of textures is incorporated into the pattern. The brocade of this type is often used today on the brocade border of large thangkas, appliqué and painted, as well as within the appliqué thangka. In many examples a gold silk in twill weave is used for the body of the Buddha and the body nimbus. (See figure 26) Richly coloured brocades with gold and silver are used particularly for the robes of the deities, protector deities and the guardian kings. (See figures 27 and 28)

As mentioned above heavy silk brocades were originally brought from China and Russia, but, after the Bolsheviks closed down the brocade weaving establishments, it was sourced from India. Highly skilled and versatile Muslim weavers have been working in India since the Mughal period (16th – 19th century). After Indian Independence many weavers left for Pakistan, and the demand for traditional textiles declined. The mostly Muslim Varanasi weaving industry had been struggling as a result. Muslim silk weavers in Varanasi have been producing ceremonial and Chinese style brocade for Tibetan monasteries in India and Tibet since a revival of Chinese brocade by Hazi Moinuddin of Pilkothi in the 1940's.²³³ The brocade designs are called '*gyasar*' and were copies of the ceremonial Chinese brocade used in Buddhist monasteries, decorated with Buddhist religious symbols and Chinese motifs such as dragons and stylised cloud patterns.²³⁴ Hazi Moinuddin found that this Buddhist market was growing especially with the closing down of the Russian factories, and the decline in demand for brocades within China with the introduction of Mao suits.

A Muslim family silk weaving business in Varanasi has been selling brocades to the Tibetan monasteries for several generations. Every appliqué artist or master that I spoke to in

²³⁰ Agrawal, Yashodhara. *Silk Brocades*. New Delhi: Roli & Janssen BV, 2008, p. 59 and described by Dorje Wangdu, personal communication, Dharamsala, April 2009.

The gold or silver thread used in brocade (called '*zari*' in India) is commonly produced by winding thin silver or gold wire around a core of coloured silk thread. The fine wire is made by drawing it through progressively smaller holes in an iron plate. To create the fine gold 'wire', at the final stage of pulling the silver wire through the hole, gold is placed around the holes so that it melts with the heat caused by the friction of the wire, as it is pulled through with a spinning wheel. This creates the gold thread. Fine silver wire is wound around a white silk thread, and fine gold coated silver wire, or gold '*zari*' is wound around a yellow silver thread. Another less common method of producing the thread is flattening gold or silver wire and using it without a core; this type of *zari* is not preferred because it cracks and goes dull.

²³¹ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Dorje Wangdu and Tenzin Gyaltsen 2009. Also personal communication with silk vendor in Boudhanath, 2009.

²³² Agrawal, *Silk Brocades*, p.59.

²³³ *Ibid.*, p.129.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.133.

Dharamsala and in Nepal obtained brocade from “The Kasim Silk Emporium” in Katehar, Varanasi.²³⁵ These Muslim weavers are able to make any designs that are requested.

Past tradition is preserved by using original brocade designs, specially made by Kasim for appliqué work. Both Phuntsok Tsering and Dorje Wangdu bring him their own designs. Since a few old appliqué thangka came out of Tibet in the 1980s, Phuntsok Tsering has had access to the old brocade designs. From just a small piece of brocade from these old thangka he is able to recognise brocade patterns that he used to work with in Lhasa before 1959, and from this he can make a drawing of the complete design. He sends this drawing or fragments to Varanasi, where the silk weavers make up the silk brocade. Phuntsok Tsering is responsible for re-establishing several traditional designs, and there are up to six brocade designs which bear his name.²³⁶

Satin weave silk

Where plain colours are required in the design, the appliqué artist chooses satin weave silk. The shining and shimmering qualities of silk are shown at their best in this type of weave,²³⁷ where the play of light on the silk is uninterrupted. The fine plain satin silks used in appliqué thangka need to be stiffened with glue, or backed with cotton cloth. The stiffer brocade which has many layers of threads does not require as much stiffening and lasts longer than plain satin silk fabric.

Damask satins

Damask satins are monochrome silks woven with intricate patterns. The weft threads are carried across several warp threads to create a design with different textures, which catch the light in different ways to create patterns in lights and darks with the same coloured thread.²³⁸ Many traditional motifs are woven into damask silk such as longevity symbols, medallions with dragons and stylised Chinese characters for long life or double happiness.

Silk has been treasured not only for its sheen and touch but also for the wide range of colours that it can absorb. The palette chosen for the giant appliqué thangka made for Tsurphu monastery in Tibet used over seventy shades of colour.²³⁹ Natural dyes used for centuries included indigo, turmeric, pomegranate skin, *lac*²⁴⁰ and colours from various flowers. The chemical aniline dyes invented in Europe in 1868 were brought to China and India soon

²³⁵ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Dorje Wangdu, Tenzin Gyaltzen, Norbulingka staff and Pema Norbu in Dharamsala, and Pasang in Kathmandu.

²³⁶ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Dharamsala, 2009. This conversation revealed how important the traditional designs are for the creation of fabric appliqué thangka today. In fact other workshops also order those brocades designed by Phuntsok Tsering, from Varanasi. He said that in the past it was possible to bring old fabric thangka from Tibet, but now it is very difficult. See appendix 4.

²³⁷ The weft threads are brought across the surface and picked up with single warp every five or six threads so that the thread is more on the surface than at the back. The warp threads are so fine that they are not seen where they appear on the surface.

²³⁸ Agrawal, *Silk Brocades*, p.26. Originally Chinese patterned satin silks were copied at Persian and Syrian textile centres. Damascus became famous for making this patterned silk fabric and it became known as damask satin.

²³⁹ Personal communication with Terris Temple, Chiang Mai April 2009

²⁴⁰ A red dye made from resin deposited by the *lac* insect on to twigs of trees in southern Asia.

after.²⁴¹ Old textiles from Chinese *kesi* robes and pieces from important thangka no longer used are sometimes incorporated into the appliqué. An important thangka from Mongolia has pieces of valuable Chinese *kesi* tapestry from a dragon robe with a bright pattern of dragons and clouds incorporated into the work. (See figure 30) Some appliqué thangka from Bhutan also use Chinese *kesi*, Chinese and Bhutanese embroidered silk, which is pieced and appliquéd into the composition. (See figure 31) The silk brocade frame for painted and appliqué thangka often has a square of silk in fine *kesi* tapestry from Chinese dragon robes in the lower section of the frame, which represents the 'door' to the thangka.

The addition of precious stones and pearls creates a rich and three-dimensional aspect to the appliqué thangka. (See figure 32.) Turquoise, lapis lazuli, crystal, seed pearls and coral may be incorporated into the design of appliqué thangka to increase the value of the offering to the Buddha and thereby increases the merit.²⁴² For example, this appliqué thangka from Bhutan uses pieces of embroidered satins from China, and exquisite details such as the embroidered multi-lobed lotus throne, and lotus blossoms surrounding the figure. The red and blue stylised cloud patterns above the halo are also embroidered. These embroidered details and the 'frothy' lotus throne are typical of Bhutanese silk appliqué thangka. (See figures 32 and 33)

A unique feature of Tibetan silk appliqué thangka is the use of silk wrapped horse-hair (Tib. *tangchet*) for outlining and for other linear details on robes, scarves and the faces of the figures. The horse hair used by Tibetan artists comes from ponies from Kham in eastern Tibet, where the horses have longer tails. Although the use of horse hair is favoured by some artists over substitutes, because it easily catches and holds the silk as it is twisted around it, it is not always easy to obtain. The appliqué thangka artists at Norbulingka Institute use only a single horse tail hair for each cord, and the result is extremely fine. Other artists prefer to use three strands of horse hair to create more three dimensional character, as the line stays round and sits up higher on the surface.²⁴³ Horse tails are not long enough for the outlining detail on the large thangka (around 4 metres high) and artists use nylon fishing line instead. They may continue to use horse hair cords for details such as the faces of the deities.²⁴⁴ (See figure 29 and figure 36) Before nylon fishing line was available the technique of using strips of silk tape, as for the giant thangka,²⁴⁵ was used. In order to get the silk thread to catch onto the smooth nylon filament, a synthetic white craft adhesive called Fevicol is smeared lightly on to the line

²⁴¹ Agrawal, *Silk Brocades*, p.57. The colours are brilliant but often fugitive— i.e. they are not stable and 'run' easily when wet or washed. The advantages of the aniline dyes are the range of colours, the low cost and the simple dyeing techniques.

²⁴² Berger, Patricia Ann and Bartholomew, Terese Tse, (eds.) *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*. 1995, p.84. Bartholomew describes the addition of gems as "a purely Mongolian practice not found elsewhere" which is not actually the case, as she would have discovered writing for the catalogue for the Bhutan exhibition, *The Dragon's Gift* 2008.

Tibetan and Bhutanese appliqué thangka also have seed pearls, and coral added.

²⁴³ Leidenfrost, "Creating Buddhas." (DVD)

²⁴⁴ Dorje Wangdu explained that he uses nylon line in place of horse hair, mainly because the work that he does is large and the horsehair would not be long enough. He explained that it is not easy to get enough horse hair for the large amount of work that he does. He uses horsehair cord for fine details, such as on the face.

²⁴⁵ See Chapter Five on technique for an explanation of the line work in giant thangka using strips of plain silk.

before twisting the silk thread around the line.²⁴⁶ In a detailed survey of Chinese embroidery techniques by Gao Hanyu, couched gold thread and appliqué method is mentioned, but the use of horsehair is not.²⁴⁷ This suggests that perhaps the use of horse hair is confined to Tibetan, Bhutanese and Mongolian appliqué work.

Silk thread is used for all stitching in the appliqué process. As demonstrated by Leslie Rinchen-Wongmo in the documentary '*Creating Buddhas*', the thread is un-plyed before twisting on the horsehair so that it is completely smooth.²⁴⁸

Stiffening the fabric

Traditionally raw meat was rubbed over the cloth to stiffen it before cutting and stitching, so that it would stay smooth and not wrinkle. The use of raw meat in India is not popular as it attracts flies. Artists seem to prefer to use Fevicol for many of the steps: preparing the cloth to stiffen it slightly before working with it; turning down the edges; and assembling the appliqué pieces to hold them in place before stitching.

Photocopy machines and digital printing

Photocopy machines and printers for enlargements all help the artist, who is now able to make multiple copies and enlarge the line drawings provided by the artist to scale up images for appliqué designs, particularly for large thangkas. The enlarged digitised drawing can be printed onto large polyester banner canvas to make the design guide for giant thangka. (See figure 34)

Tibetan appliqué artists are flexible and are adapting their techniques according to available technologies. Due to the continuing religious significance of silk appliqué thangka, the use of luxury materials, and the value placed on fine workmanship means these thangka have not changed in appearance a great deal. The artists continue to source beautiful silks and brocades and have also recreated designs (pre 1959) for brocades in order to help create an authentic thangka. While donors and sponsors provide the resources, the artists continue to make they continue to make silk appliqué thangka of the highest standard.

²⁴⁶ Personal communication with Urygen Sonam, appliqué artist, Narooma, 2009

²⁴⁷ Gao Hanyu, *Chinese Textile Designs*, p.33.

²⁴⁸ Leidenfrost, "*Creating Buddhas*." (DVD)

Chapter Five Tibetan silk appliqué technique

In this chapter I give a detailed examination of the traditional techniques used in workshops in Dharamsala and Kathmandu. This is based on observations and interviews with Tibetan artists. There are two reasons for my approach here: in order to fill a gap in the literature; and so that the complexity of the process and the skills required can be fully appreciated.

Firstly, the technique has never been fully described before. This description of the complete process clears up any misunderstanding or earlier misinterpretation of the method of production. Tanaka describes the method briefly but does not explain the actual steps.²⁴⁹ Art historians have used examples of silk appliqué thangka held in Western collections as the resources for the published literature on the subject which is limited. It is difficult to ascertain the method of production simply by looking at the completed work. The order of steps in the production for creating and assembling the individual pieces has been surmised from studying the completed work and mistakenly described.²⁵⁰ Art historians who focus on painting styles and iconography in Tibetan art have not been equipped to discuss textile techniques, and historians of textile technology have not ventured into the area of Tibetan Buddhist art.²⁵¹ However, while this aspect of the appliqué art is left unexamined, the unique qualities of the art are missed.

Thus the second reason to examine the technique in detail is to reveal these qualities – for example, the use of silk wrapped horsehair cords and the layering approach in assembling the pieces which adds a layered and slightly three-dimensional appearance. Learning how they are made brings a true appreciation of the complexity of the process and skills required to complete an appliqué thangka. The technological challenge of creating giant thangka, measuring up to 35 metres high, is another aspect of appliqué thangka worth exploring. In this chapter I will explain how images of such enormous size have been produced, and show the differences in technique used for giant thangka compared with smaller appliqué thangka.

Today Tibetan silk appliqué artists are producing possibly the largest two-dimensional art in the world and also smaller-sized, fine, detailed artwork in traditional silk and brocade, using techniques which have been employed for hundreds of years. Before examining these techniques, it is important to consider the attitude and approach which the artists bring to the making of appliqué thangka. It is the artists' sincere dedication to Buddhist philosophy which gives these art works meaning, and this also engenders their commitment to fine

²⁴⁹ Tanaka, "A Note on the History, Materials and Techniques of Tibetan Appliqué Thangkas."

²⁵⁰ For example, the method of outlining with silk wrapped horsehair cord has sometimes been described as being done after assembling of the pieces, when, in fact, the horsehair cord is attached at a much earlier stage. Attaching the couched line after stitching the appliqué pieces to the backing cloth may have been the methods for Chinese embroideries, and an assumption has been made that the same method is used in Tibetan appliqué.

²⁵¹ Sheng, Angela. "Review of When Silk Was Gold," in *Ars orientalis* (1999), p.155.

Sheng refers to the fragmentation of studies of Chinese textiles, but these comments may also be applied to the study of textiles in Tibet.

workmanship. Because the focus required to achieve such quality is positively valued, they are not interested in changing to a quicker, more economical, mechanised technique. The Tibetan attitude to art-making is associated with this deep focus of the mind, which is embedded in the profound meaning of Buddhist philosophy. The artists I spoke to have an apparent humility and palpable contentment in creating beautiful offerings to the Buddhas and enlightened beings. They also expressed delight in the beauty of the form, the colours and the materials and in bringing them to completion so that they become the deity. Furthermore, they expressed their pleasure of bringing joy and blessings through these artworks to many people, and, in the case of giant thangka, to many thousands of people.

The technique and materials provide continuity with the past both for the artist and for the Buddhist practitioner who views the art, but as artists they are also very much in the 'present'. The work of creating, sewing and assembling large appliqué thangka is 'being present', working 'alone' stitching the detail of the face of the deity, the jewellery or the tiny offerings; gathering them and stitching them together to be placed 'before' the deity in the composition; piecing together the petals of the lotus throne; stitching down the gold thread which traces the outlines of the leaves, the outlines of a flower, or the clouds. Then, working together as a team, bringing it all together, artists assemble the pieces which are joined, glued and then stitched, to become part of the whole. At this point the task may require several people to carry the now completed deities to their place on the large thangka. At times the work is solitary and at other times collaborative – it is being alone with the hand or face of the deity, and then it is being with the 'crowd of deities' when the entire team is needed to carry and gather them together.

As Kapstein describes in his article 'Weaving the World' the actions of 'gathering' and 'assembling' (and consecrating) during the production of artwork is 'not the creation of an artefact alone, but the 're-ordering of our world'. Kapstein writes that 'as the world becomes more 'disorderly' the local and personal order generated by these rituals and the actions creating art, become more important.' This is particularly relevant for Tibetan life in exile. Although Kapstein refers to the ritual of the production of painted thangka, I suggest that it also applies to silk appliqué thangka.

The reassembling and transformation of rich silks into sacred images of deities, adds further layers of meaning, as the artwork also carries with it Buddha's teachings of asceticism and humility. The custom of piecing together cloth for monastic robes is also steeped in Buddhist philosophy. Originally using cast-off or rejected cloth, the assembled pieces of cleaned and purified cloth were stitched together to create a robe or mantle, called *kasaya* (Skt.) meaning 'impure coloured', which symbolised the monk's vow of poverty and humility.²⁵² 'Wearing the mantle transferred the Buddha's teachings symbolically onto the shoulders of the monk.'²⁵³ Lavish gifts of sumptuous silks and brocades, representing secular luxury and status, are transformed into objects of spiritual value by the process of cutting, piecing and stitching together.

The technique described below was consistently followed at all the workshops I visited. The artists and sponsors place considerable importance on following the traditional technique. However, they also displayed creative approaches, within the prescribed iconographic rules

²⁵² Vollmer, *Silks for Thrones and Altars*, p.113.

²⁵³ Ibid.

and format for religious icons, taking full advantage of the special characteristics of the appliqué technique.

Definitions of appliqué

The term appliqué is defined as cutting pieces of plain or patterned cloth, which have been cut into shapes to form the image, and stitching them to a backing cloth.²⁵⁴ The method used in Tibetan silk thangka is does not strictly conform to this definition. The pieces are not stitched to a backing cloth but are attached together and assembled by overlapping one another, stitching one piece on top of another, to form a complete figure. This figure is then attached to the backing cloth. In some cases the coloured silk that goes behind the images does not go entirely across behind the figure, so it is not exactly a 'backing' cloth. For this reason, Leslie Rinchen Wongmo suggests that using the term 'appliqué' to describe Tibetan silk stitched thangka is misleading.²⁵⁵ Unable to find an equivalent technique in Western textile history, art historians may have chosen the term 'appliqué' as the closest technical term to describe the Tibetan technique. '*Lhan'drub*' (patchwork) is the Tibetan term for appliqué.²⁵⁶ Nowadays the term 'appliqué' is commonly used by Tibetans themselves when referring to the silk appliqué thangka in English.²⁵⁷ Tents and domestic furnishings are decorated using the appliqué technique, as defined above, stitching the pieces of coloured cloth directly to the backing cloth. There is minimal layering except where the design is complex and then the technique is similar to that used for appliqué thangka.

The technique of Tibetan silk appliqué thangka as it was practised in Central Tibet (Lhasa)²⁵⁸ combines embroidery stitches from China with the appliqué work that can be found on Mongolian and Central Asian domestic items such as saddle blankets and boots. Phuntsok Tsering believes that the technique started in the 9th century and that it is related to the Mongolian tradition which the Tibetans adopted.²⁵⁹ According to Reynolds, the techniques appear to have come from Central Asia.²⁶⁰ Pal, on the other hand, suggests that the technique came from China, but 'the style and content are Tibetan', and that appliqué thangka are 'technically and conceptually Tibetan'.²⁶¹ The embroidery stitches used are Chinese, but the characteristic use of coloured cords made by wrapping silk around horsehair is not mentioned in books on Chinese embroidery.²⁶² In Chinese embroidery, chain stitch or another short stitch

²⁵⁴ Crabtree, Caroline and Shaw, Christine. *Quilting, Patchwork and Appliqué : A World Guide*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2007, p.8.

²⁵⁵ Email communication with Leslie Rinchen Wongmo, 2008.

²⁵⁶ Tanaka, "A Note on the History, Materials and Techniques of Tibetan Appliqué Thangkas," p.875.

²⁵⁷ For example, 'The Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre' is the name of the workshop and training centre run by Dorje Wangdu in Dharamsala.

²⁵⁸ As distinct from the silk appliqué cut and glue technique from Amdo, Eastern Tibet.

²⁵⁹ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Dharamsala, 2009.

²⁶⁰ Reynolds, "Fabric Images and Their Special Role in Tibet."

²⁶¹ Pal, "Tibetan Religious Textiles, Use of Textile in the Temples and Monasteries of Tibet," p.113.

²⁶² The following books, which are comprehensive studies of techniques in Chinese embroidery, describe in detail all the types of stitches used in Chinese embroidery including outline stitch (stem stitch) and couched gold threads used for outlining. They do not mention horse hair cords. Josaine Bertin-Guest, *Chinese Embroidery Traditional Techniques*. Iola: Krause Publications, 2003; Gao Hanyu, *Chinese Textile Designs*, 1992; Ya-jung Wang, *Chinese Folk Embroidery, Chinese Art and Culture Series*. Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1987; Young Yang Chung, *The Art of Oriental Embroidery: History, Aesthetics, and Techniques*. New York: Scribner, 1979.

is most commonly used to attach the pieces of pattern to the base material when using the appliqué technique. Outlining in Chinese embroidery was frequently done using couched gold thread, but not coloured cords made with horsehair core. Young, in *The Art of Oriental Embroidery*, mentions couching of tightly twisted yarn in the same colour to create a line in Chinese embroidery.²⁶³ Stem stitch is also referred to as 'outline stitch' in the context of Chinese embroidery.²⁶⁴

Continuity of technique

The technique described here has been passed on orally and demonstrated to students who train and work in workshops in Dharamsala and Kathmandu producing thangka for monasteries and patrons from both within TAR and ethnic Tibetan minority areas in PRC and internationally. This technique was taught by appliqué masters who worked in the appliqué workshops of the Dalai Lama in Lhasa, (see Chapter Three.) According to the artists I interviewed it has not changed over time. In fact they were adamant that the techniques had not changed. Although they conceded that there were some small changes as digital processes and modern materials were incorporated, these did not affect the appearance of the work. As Gombrich suggests, the techniques will remain constant "as long as it meets the needs of the social group"²⁶⁵ and "older methods are retained within certain limited contexts of ritual and ceremony".²⁶⁶ Since the religious purpose and meaning of the thangka, as described in Chapter Two, have not changed, the traditional technique continues to be taught to those training to become appliqué artists. The focus for these artists, in terms of the technique, was to develop the skills of stitching by hand to the highest standard, not to find easier or quicker ways to do it. They were not interested in changing the process of the work s that they could be made entirely on sewing machines, or in changing the technique in any way. Sewing machines are used for some steps of the process for giant thangka and large scale thangka, such as the first stage in attaching the silk strips for the outlines and line work and for attaching the huge brocade frames. However, most of the work is stitched by hand.

Tibetan appliqué technique

Embroidery stitches such as couching,²⁶⁷ satin stitch and stem stitch, similar to those used in Chinese embroidery, are worked in silk thread, and are an integral part of the design of Tibetan silk appliqué. The couched silk wrapped horse hair cord is used for linear detail to edge the silk pieces, which are attached to one another by oversewing this cord with the same colour thread, un-plied, so that the stitches are invisible. Coloured horsehair and silk cords (*tangchet* Tib.) are couched to create distinct raised lines to outline the pieces, as well as lines within the design. Fine details to create the eyes and other facial details are also made with this fine cord or with embroidery stitches in coloured silk thread. (See figures 35 and 36.)

²⁶³ Young Yang Chung, *The Art of Oriental Embroidery: History, Aesthetics, and Techniques*. p.142

²⁶⁴ Josaine Bertin-Guest, *Chinese Embroidery Traditional Techniques*, p.91; Gao Hanyu, *Chinese Textile Designs*, p.32.

²⁶⁵ Gombrich, "The Art of Art History", p.133.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.131.

²⁶⁷ Couching is the method of attaching a cord or thread to the surface of the silk fabric by stitching over it with a finer thread.

Satin stitch, a traditional Chinese embroidery stitch, is used for covering areas, often blending tonal colours to create a shading effect. It is called *ril-tsem* in Tibetan, which means 'fill stitch'. It is used for details such as the jewel forms that can be seen in the golden border of the body nimbus of the Buddha and in the foreground as offerings to the deity. This stitch is also used for the corners of the eyes using the palest pink shades. (See figure 37.) The stitching of the eyes and the facial details is the final and most important skill to be learnt by an appliqué artist. It takes months of practice and an artist may spend a whole year embroidering eyes and faces.²⁶⁸ This is also true for thangka painting. "Of all the finishing details, the facial features demand the most attention, and among these it was the eyes that received the greatest care".²⁶⁹ In thangka painting the eyes are painted at the end and at this moment the Buddha or deity enters the thangka. When making a fabric appliqué thangka it is not possible to leave the eyes to last. (See figures 37, 38a and 38b.) The embroidery of the eyes must be done early in the process, before the pieces are assembled, but it is still accompanied by ritual at the time. According to Tenzin Gyaltzen the mood of the artist can be seen in the face of the appliqué deity.²⁷⁰ So before stitching the eyes the artist will meditate and bring his mind to a state of peacefulness so as to produce these qualities in the face he sews. The same can be said for the faces of deities in painted thangka. Andy Weber, thangka painter, writes:

*I discovered how closely linked to state of mind were the clarity and the flow of the lines upon which the beauty of the image depended. If I was upset or unhappy this would always be expressed somehow in the resulting drawing. Each Buddha face was like a self portrait, a mirror in which aspects of my being were clearly reflected.*²⁷¹

Stem stitch (*kang-yu*) is used for linear details supplementing the horse hair cord. An example is the red embroidered thangka by Tenzin Gyaltzen. This unusual image is made almost entirely of line-work using silk wrapped horse hair cord (*tangchet*) and stem stitch in different colours on red silk. It is based on the *marthang* or red thangka. (See figures 39 and 40.)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, some appliqué thangka are embellished with pearls and semi-precious stones such as turquoise, amber and coral, adding to the value of the thangka as an offering. These may embellish the thrones of the Buddha, the jewellery adornments of the deities or the offerings appliquéd and embroidered in the foreground. (See figure 41)

Technique for making smaller thangka

Firstly, in order to illuminate the complexity of the process, the technique for making the smaller size appliqué thangka is described, followed by a description of the technique for making giant thangka. At each point in the process the choices the artist makes reflects their adherence to tradition. The process of transferring the design to different coloured silks and brocades starts with a line drawing of the design. This is obtained from a thangka painter,²⁷² which is then scaled up to the size required for the thangka. Two patterns are prepared: one cloth and one paper (for tracing). The scaled up design on cloth is copied using tracing paper.

²⁶⁸ Leslie Rinchen Wongmo in Leidenfrost, "Creating Buddhas." DVD

²⁶⁹ Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*, p.13.

²⁷⁰ Personal communication with Tenzin Gyaltzen April 2009.

²⁷¹ Jonathan Landaw and Andy Weber, *Images of Enlightenment, Tibetan Art in Practice*. Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1993, p.204.

²⁷² Some appliqué artists are also painters and make the line drawing themselves.

After tracing the complete drawing on to the tracing paper, unless the tracing paper has carbon, or self inking, holes are made at intervals along the line on the tracing paper, using a needle.²⁷³ Before marking out the lines on the relevant coloured silk, the fine satin silk is made slightly stiffer and stronger using a thin application of synthetic white adhesive. In some cases a backing cloth of cotton is glued to the reverse side. The lines are then transferred to the silk from the tracing paper, specifically to different coloured silks for each piece of the design. The tracing paper is placed over the silk and chalk is rubbed onto the lines so that it goes through the holes to leave a dotted outline on the coloured silk— a technique called ‘pouncing’. (See figure 42). The lines of the design are drawn on the silk using a ballpoint pen. Each silk piece is cut leaving a generous allowance outside the lines. The coloured horse hair cord (*tangchet*) is couched over the outline which has been traced from the line drawing on to the silk. The line work with the horsehair cords is a feature of this appliqué technique and the horsehair cord will stand as a raised line at the edge of the coloured pieces, as well as represent lines and folds in the robes.²⁷⁴

When much longer cords are required for larger figures, where the horsehair would not be long enough, artists use nylon fishing line in place of horsehair.²⁷⁵ A hole is made with a larger needle at the beginning of the line where the horsehair cord will be attached and the cord is passed through the line so that the end of the cord is at the back of the fabric. So that the stitches do not show, the cord is attached using thread the same colour as the silk thread wrapped around the cord and the stitches cross diagonally in the same direction as the silk that was twisted around the horsehair. Then the outside edge of the silk piece is trimmed so that there is about two centimetres of silk outside the cord line. This narrow allowance is cut in places at right angles to allow the edge to lie flat when it is turned under, particularly at curved edges. By turning this allowance under the horsehair cord now sits exactly on the edge of the piece. This is significant as it means that the stitching over the cord at the edge, in order to attach it to the piece below, is also invisible. (See figure 43). Each piece is prepared in this way and joined using the same coloured silk thread as that wrapped around the cord. This process is repeated many times as the pieces build up into the complete figure of the deity with nimbus and lotus throne.

The line drawing design on cloth is used to work out how the pieces will fit together. In some cases the pieces may have a raw edge, which is not turned under because this edge will be underneath an overlapping piece. For example, the individual lotus petals, which form the lotus throne, will overlap adjacent petals. In this case the entire petal need not be edged in horsehair as part of the edge will be hidden beneath the adjacent overlapping piece, and the edge is not glued back. (See figures 44 a, b, c and d.)

A coloured photograph or photocopy of the painting is also used to help sort the pieces, which are laid together on top of the design to see how they fit together. (See figures 45a and 45b). If

²⁷³ Pricking and pouncing is a common method in Chinese embroideries.

²⁷⁴ The cord is made with one or three strands of horsehair. Three strands of horse hair will give a thicker cord and the use of one strand of horse hair is for fine linear details on the face, around the eyes.

²⁷⁵ Urgyen explained that he puts a small amount of glue on the fishing line to hold the silk and prevent it from slipping. This is not required when using horsehair. Personal communication with Urgyen Sonam, Narooma, 2009

there is more than one figure in the composition, each deity figure is made in this way first before attaching to the background. The components of the background are prepared in the same way and then stitched in place to the background. By overlapping the pieces, Tibetan appliqué is much more three-dimensional and sculptural than regular appliqué. The deities appear to stand out from the background.

Technique for making giant thangka

In order to create silk appliqué thangka in the giant format, where even the smaller deities can measure up to 15 meters or more, the appliqué artist faces some huge challenges. (See figure 47). These challenges involve scaling up the image to the size required, gathering the materials and finding a suitable space to assemble and attach the large deities onto the background. In response to the question as to whether the materials or technique for giant appliqué were different because they are so large, the artists explained that the technique is essentially the same except for some slight changes – for example, the use of bias strips of silk instead of horsehair cord or fishing line cord for the line work. As far as the materials are concerned, the best materials— silk and brocade – are used, because they want it to last a long time. Phuntsok Tsering pointed out, “we do not use materials of lesser quality simply because a larger quantity is required”.²⁷⁶ The design of the brocade for the deities’ robes, however, needs to have larger motifs to be in proportion to the large scale of the deities’ bodies.

Scaling up the design and making the pattern for a giant thangka also presents challenges. Often when making a giant thangka, stones were laid out on the hillside to mark the size of the thangka and the proportions of the huge image. An experienced appliqué master like Phuntsok Tsering calculates the size and plans the entire layout of the thangka in his head!²⁷⁷ Usually the artist draws the design in ink on cotton, scaling up the original line drawing using a grid. This was the method Terris Temple used for the giant Tsurphu thangka in Tibet. The size of the giant thangka, 35 metres x 24 metres with the brocade borders, was determined by the display site on the hillside across the river from the monastery. A line drawing of the composition on a grid was used as a mock design and was scaled up with one square millimetre equal to one square metre. In this way the design was transferred to a large white cotton cloth. This was used initially to trace the outlines of the designs for cutting the silk pieces and then later as a guide to assemble the pieces.

Nowadays some workshops use advanced digital printing technology to scale up the line drawing design. For the giant thangka being made at Sherabling monastery by Tenzin Gyaltzen, the preparatory drawing was digitised, then enlarged and printed on the widest possible strips of poly-canvas, normally used for advertising banners. (See figures 47 and 48.)

Although this may sound easier, there is still the challenge of handling these large banners and finding the space to prepare the tracing. The Sherabling monastery courtyard, which is large enough to allow at least half of the giant thangka to be spread out, has a newly constructed canopy covering the entire courtyard. This means that the courtyard can be used in all weather, and provides a suitable place to work on the giant thangka at certain stages. Many Tibetan monasteries feature a large courtyard and spaces outside suitable for these tasks. (Smaller hermitages and smaller monasteries do not have suitable courtyards.) In the drier

²⁷⁶ Personal communication with Phuntsok Tsering, Dharamsala 2009. See appendix 3.

²⁷⁷ Ibid

climate of Tibet the weather is not so much of a concern as it is in India.²⁷⁸

All artists mentioned this challenge of finding a space big enough to work on the thangka, either at the beginning when tracing out the design or when putting the project together in the final stages. Production of the giant thangka for Tsurphu which started in the White Conch Tent factory in Lhasa, moved to a courtyard and finally to a gymnasium to assemble the larger pieces. In Dharamsala Dorje Wangdu and his staff move to the roof of Namgyal monastery.²⁷⁹ Even though the scale of the giant thangka is enormous, there is little difference in the technique compared with smaller thangkas, and most of the work is still done by hand. Dorje Wangdu explained how he substituted silk cords made from horse hair or nylon fishing line with strips of plain coloured silk for the lines on the giant thangka.²⁸⁰ With a small seam allowance one edge of the strip is attached using a sewing machine, and then the raw edge of the tape is folded backwards and tucked under, ironed and stitched by hand.²⁸¹ The silk strips, which can be made much wider than the horsehair-cords, are therefore more suitable for the large scale images. All the artists that I interviewed did this.²⁸² (See figures 46a and b, 49 and 50.)

When the giant thangka is completed the brocade border and then the curtain or veil for the thangka are attached using a sewing machine.²⁸³ For the giant thangka for Tsurphu, according to Temple, the veil which covers the entire thangka, took one thousand metres of silk. The finished thangka, including the backing cloth and brocade borders, weighed one tonne.

As for all thangka for religious practice, the composition for the large appliqué thangka follows established cultural practice and is usually dictated by the lama who commissions the thangka. The arrangement of the figures can vary from a principal figure with two attendant smaller figures on either side, to many figures surrounding the main figure in the centre. The design for the Tsurphu giant thangka, chosen by Venerable Drupon Dechen Rinpoche, the Abbot of Tsurphu, is based closely on the original Shakyamuni thangka belonging to the Tsurphu monastery that had been lost. Shakyamuni Buddha, the largest figure nine metres high, is in the centre. The Bodhisattvas Manjushri and Maitreya, each seven metres high, are placed on either side of him. Vairocana is in the centre at the top, and a wrathful protector is the central figure in the lower register. In the upper corners are the First and Second Karmapa, lineage originators of the Karma Kagyu school. In the lower corners are two additions that were not on the old giant thangka; the Sixteenth Karmapa, (1924-1981), and the Third Jamgon Khongtrul, one of the 16th Karmapa's four heart sons, (or lineage holders) who died in 1992. This updating of the lineage in the composition of the thangka is typical in Tibetan art practice. Tibetan animals are also depicted on the thangka. George Schaller, the nature writer and

²⁷⁸ Personal communication with Drokpa, artist from Amdo, in Dharamsala, 2009.

²⁷⁹ See TAAC film by Dorje Wangdu on Youtube. Wangdu, "Tibetan Applique Arts Centre."

²⁸⁰ Dorje Wangdu made a giant thangka, 21.34 metres (70 feet) high, for Khamtrul Rinpoche which was sent to a Dharma centre in Taiwan. Personal communication with Dorje Wangdu, Dharamsala, 2009.

²⁸¹ Because the silk strips are cut on the 'bias', they can be easily stretched and stitched around curved lines in the detail of the design, so that it lies flat. This method is used for lines in the design as well as for the edges of the silk pieces.

²⁸² This method is used for the rainbow lines around the head nimbus of deities in smaller thangka as well.

²⁸³ The fine silk veil, which is attached to the top of the frame provides a cover to protect the thangka from dirt and to keep it covered until it is ready to be unveiled.

author, gave advice on endangered species of Tibet's wildlife (yaks, asses, white-lipped deer, antelopes and blue-horned sheep) which have been incorporated into the design.

Some appliqué thangka, for example, some by Dorje Wangdu for the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, have very complex compositions. Even the main figure involves a complex composition and the assembly of many pieces of silk for its creation. Pasang in Boudhanath described his next project, 'The Karma Kagyu lineage tree', which will have more than one hundred figures and will be 13.5 metres (50 feet) high.

Many painted and appliqué thangka are made in sets. There have been sets of appliqué thangka made which are then joined together to form a long 'frieze' hung around the walls of the main prayer hall. These images are joined by a pattern of simple jewel forms, lotus blossoms and other auspicious symbols, connected to one another but not stitched to a backing cloth. The long (horizontal) ceremonial appliqué banners or ceiling friezes are called in Tibetan *drawa drachey*. Tsurphu Monastery in Tibet originally had two enormous drachey or ceiling friezes which have been taken to Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim.²⁸⁴ Temple and Nguyen Temple have been requested to assist with the production of two drachey, each measuring 2.14 metres x 45.7 metres as part of the appliqué projects for Tsurphu. These will be displayed in the assembly hall at Tsurphu on special days when rituals are being performed. The first of these, the Norbu drachey has been completed. (See figures 51, 52a and 52 b, examples of drachey by Dorje Wangdu.)

The production of drachey demonstrates another large scale application of the technique. Phuntsok Tsering and members of his workshop completed a large scale ceiling frieze (*drachey*) for a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in South India in 2008. The drachey depicted the thirty five confessional Buddhas, Medicine Buddha, Bodhisattvas, seventeen disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni and several scholars from Nalanda University. Many individual fabric thangka are joined together into one long horizontal hanging by an intricate design of jewels and auspicious symbols that surround the images. Twenty staff took more than one year to complete it.

Brocade pillar banners, and hangings for the assembly halls of monasteries are also produced by appliqué workshops in Dharamsala. The 'face of glory' or monster face appliqué often forms the uppermost panel of these hangings from which hang short chevron-shaped pieces of brightly coloured brocade. (See figure 53).

Appliqué technique from Amdo: cut and glue technique

The cut and glue technique is a variation on the appliqué technique, and used for the production of appliqué thangka in Amdo, eastern Tibet. The technique, known in Tibetan as *tre jar* ('cut and glue'), has no sewing and uses mainly plain satin silk fabric, with some very fine brocade. The design is traced onto fine white cloth (cotton tabby). Each piece is cut exactly to the size according to the design, and then glued to the back of the coloured silk required for the image. The silk is then trimmed leaving a small allowance of silk around the white cloth, which is cut in places so that it can be folded flat, turned under and glued. These pieces are then assembled and glued in place. Often the details of the face and hands are painted onto the silk. (See figure 54).

²⁸⁴ Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim is the seat of the Karma Kagyu lineage in exile.

Lesley Nguyen Temple has created Buddhist thangkas for lamas, Dharma centres, individual practitioners and art collectors using this Amdo *tre jar* (cut and glue) technique. She has also created her own abstract compositions using this method and colourful Thai silks from Chiang Mai.

Sculptured appliqué.

There is a style of appliqué where the bodies, in particular the faces of the figure, are stuffed with silk or cotton from behind and produce a more three dimensional, sculptured look. (This technique is known as *trapunto* in Western embroidery terminology.) As a young man, Gyeten Namgyal was asked to work on the construction of an elaborate ceiling frieze, a design with the three Great Kings of Tibet. "I was looking for a chance to show off my talents." Determined to do something special he went to the Tsuglakhang and stood before a statue of Songsten Gampo, one of the Three Great Kings, hoping for inspiration. "The next morning when I awoke the roundness of the King's face struck me as the prevalent feature and I made it in relief, something which had never been attempted before." He believed that this innovation contributed towards him being awarded the title of *Köku Chenmo*. (*Chenmo*, Great appliqué master)²⁸⁵ This particular style of appliqué can be seen on the dramatic aprons worn during the Black Hat Dance, which depict the face of White Mahakala, complete with borders of skulls. (See figure 55). Further research is needed to establish if there are any connections between Gyeten Namgyal's innovation and this Mongolian example of the technique used on the dramatic aprons.

Creativity in traditional art

Appliqué artists use the coloured silks and brocades in ingenious and original ways to create tonal and linear effect. The adaptability and versatility of the appliqué artist can be appreciated by comparing these techniques with those commonly used in painted thangka. Painted thangka do not have light and shadow, with a light source coming from a particular direction as in western painting. Earlier styles had little or no shading, but more recently styles show tonal transitions on single objects within the painting such as clouds, flowers or the lotuses and the nimbuses of the deities. For appliqué thangka artists, the creative use of silks in a variety of colours, plain satins and gold patterned brocades can have a similar but often much more dramatic effect than thangka painters achieve with their shading technique. For example, to show the round forms of the jewels, which appear in the offerings placed before the deity, up to three different shades of red, green or blue satin silk are selected and stitched in bands with the lightest colour at the top, sometimes finished with white. Clouds in soft shades of grey or pink satin, with white clouds are another example, and create an effect of clouds layered and receding into the distance. Using coloured silks with varying degrees of tonal value, the appliqué master produces shading in a manner quite different from the thangka painter, who shades single clouds using washes. Petals of a flower are stitched using a selection of plain silk satin in pinks, or blues of different values, together with white. Expressing tonal value in this way shows the creativity and skill of the appliqué artists.

Placing slightly deeper pink behind the soft palest pink used for the lotus blossoms on which the deities are seated, also produces an effective tonal shadow. This technique using light and dark shades in the cut and glue technique can be found on the lotus thrones. In the cut and glue technique from Amdo, there is much emphasis placed on selecting tonal combinations of

²⁸⁵ Namgyal, "A Tailor's Tale," p.36.

colour, to create depth. This is also used to great affect with the shading of the aura where rainbow colours are selected for the radiating rays of light emanating from the deity. The appliqué artist does not attempt to exactly recreate the effects produced by the thangka painters. He has at his disposal such a wide range of colours of plain satin silks and brocades so that his creativity can come into play, particularly in the landscape and background details of the composition.²⁸⁶

Some of the appliqué and embroidery thangka from Bhutan, in the recent exhibition, “The Dragon’s Gift, The Sacred arts of Bhutan”, appear to have much more embroidery than the Tibetan or Mongolian thangka. The fine embroidery consists of shading using satin stitch, which gives a light frothy appearance to the flowers and the lotus throne, as seen in the portrait of Jamgon Ngawang Gyaltzen (1647 – 1732). (See figure 33). This large embroidered and appliqué thangka depicts the renowned lama who was regarded as the incarnation of Maitreya, The Buddha of the Future. He is depicted holding the lotus blossoms with the attributes of Maitreya, a stupa and a blessing vase (*bhumpa*). The multi-lobed lotuses of the lotus throne and the flowers in the thangka are embroidered in satin stitch. The base of the petals is a deep red and the shading starts from a deep red through to a soft pale pink. The colour pink is often a distinguishing feature of Bhutanese painted and appliqué thangka.

Patterned brocade silk is carefully chosen from a dazzling array of layers and textures for the pieces that make up the flowing robes of deities and lamas. The selection of the brocade is important because the size of the pattern in the brocade needs to be in proportion to the size of the figure wearing the robes. If the figure is small then often the brocade selected has a pattern repeat of a small design which can be clearly recognised. A simple pattern of small gold dots and tiny eight-petalled flowers is often selected for the smaller attendant figures in combinations of red and gold, and green and gold, whereas the larger principal figure will have robes in a brocade with a more complex pattern with larger flowers and leaves in gold against a bright red, orange, or blue. These designs are often stylised peonies, lotuses, or auspicious Chinese symbols. The artists know how to explore the special qualities of the materials. Sometimes the curious and imaginative use of brocade amongst rocks, as a dark but glittering shadow adds to the drama of the landscape. In the same way red and gold brocade may be used in amongst the plain red and orange silks of the flaming aureole of a large wrathful deity, adding ‘sparkle’ and ‘glow’ to the flames. The unexpected use of brocade instead of plain satin in various details shows the inventiveness and creativity of the artist. (See figure 65). Patterned brocade is also used for the lotus throne, where the artist may choose alternating shades of red and blue brocade with gold patterns on the lotus petals. Layered over darker blue and gold brocade behind the front row of lotus petals, the lotus throne stands out against the background. Combining the light and dark brocades with the layering effect also makes the figures stand out and adds another dimension. The three-dimensional effect can be further enhanced by using dark colours behind and then lighter colours on top, or in front. The limitless combinations of plain silk and brocade silk mean that there is much scope for creative and imaginative work using this layering technique.

²⁸⁶ The manner in which the background and landscape is represented in thangka painting is also where there is the most innovation in thangka painting. The iconographic details and iconometric proportions of the figures are already set.

Linear effects and line work using horse hair cord.

As well as the choice of silks and brocades for the tonal effects and areas of colour, the application of coloured (silk-wrapped) horsehair cords for linear effects is where the special qualities of the appliqué thangka stand out. The brilliant coloured silks outlined with contrasting coloured silk cords produce visually dramatic images. Silk cord lines also show the folds and fullness of the robes and the lines of billowing scarves. Besides the use of coloured silks of graduating tonal values to show the roundness of form, embroidery in fine satin stitching, blending shades of colour also create the jewels. (See figure 57).

Sometimes another line in gold silk thread is couched parallel to the outer darker outlines of nimbus, flowers, leaves and rocky crags in the landscape and clouds. Where the thangka artist paints these in gold, the appliqué artist makes these lines in the finest of gold thread. (See figure 36). The linear detail in appliqué thangka, as in painted thangka, results in a number of visual effects. Firstly, coloured cord outlines make the figures stand out against the surroundings, and, since the outlined piece of silk is also raised, sitting on top of the piece below, the effect is slightly three dimensional. Secondly, where the silk wrapped cord is attached within the form, it delineates folds in the robes, the detail of swirling flames, or defines a detailed foliate pattern on the band of gold which forms the outer nimbus of the deity. Fine silk and horsehair cords indicate fine detail, which in a painting would be executed with a very fine brush. The details for the face, such as the eye brows, the eyelashes, the nose and mouth, and also fine jewellery, necklaces and ornaments are all executed using the fine horse hair cord. (See figures 61 and 63.)

Tenzin Gyaltzen from Sherabling Monastery has created embroidered thangka made up almost entirely of coloured horsehair cords. He uses silk pieces for the face and attributes, and stitches the thangka on coloured silk – red, white or black. Almost all the work is linear work in a combination of couched silk covered horsehair cords and stem stitch. These embroidered and appliqué thangka are based on particular types of painted thangka where the images were painted in gold on red background or in coloured lines on a black background.²⁸⁷ (See appendix 1 and figure 39, discussed earlier in this chapter). Some examples of his unique embroidery style are White Tara on a white silk background, (figures 56 and 57) and Four - armed Mahakala. (See figures 58a and 58b). By reproducing these rare painted thangka styles in exquisitely fine embroideries, using a combination of couched silk wrapped horse hair, silk thread embroidery stitches and appliqué, he has expanded and made a valuable and original contribution to the appliqué art of Tibet.

The expressive use of line work using the horsehair cords can be seen in a large early twentieth century silk appliqué of Mahakala from Mongolia. (Figure 59.) Mahakala is the wrathful form of Avalokitesvara, and one of the eight Dharmapala, Protectors of the Dharma.²⁸⁸ In this thangka the lines have been used to good effect to show his six thick muscular arms and two strong legs, and the strong and muscular feet, in a manner which is almost cartoon-like. Although his long toenails suggest his wild nature, the feet, detailed with such expressive line work, somehow remove any fear in the viewer. His face is expressive, with three embroidered

²⁸⁷ Amongst the class of thangka paintings of limited colour, the black paintings (*nag thang*) usually depicted wrathful deities and were more common than the vermilion (*mtshal thang*) or the gold (*ser thang*) Jackson and Jackson, *Tibetan Thangka Painting: Methods and Materials*, p.75.

²⁸⁸ Berger and Bartholomew, *Mongolia: The Legacy of Chinggis Khan*. p.236.

bulging eyes and his wild flame-like hair, couched in gold thread. Mahakala is trampling on a white Ganesha and the line work on Ganesha's legs, torso and arms brings him to life, squirming as he does beneath the extraordinary bulk of blue Mahakala. Ganesha is portrayed with his attributes, a skull cup of jewels. The artist has also enjoyed depicting faces in the necklace of heads worn by Mahakala, again showing his skill in the use of line.²⁸⁹ The main figure of Mahakala fills the space, and the middle band of the composition contains the most detail. As if to keep our focus there, the offerings, which would normally be placed in the lower part of the thangka, have been embroidered and appliquéd on to the brocade border below. (See figure 60.) This innovation is not possible in painted thangka. These animals, the typically Mongolian 'five snouts', Tibetan mastiffs and birds show exemplary use of gold line on black. The space below the Mahakala is well balanced, however, by the multi-coloured lotus throne, with six different colours and shades to each petal and a line of couched gold threads parallel to the outlined edges.

Unlike thangka painting where the linear details are the final touches to the painting, in appliqué thangka the coloured horsehair cords are stitched (couched) to the silk pieces in the first stage of preparing the silk pieces. In paintings, vermilion lines on gold outline the details of the jewellery and the stylised cloud patterns on the gold outer nimbus. Appliqué artists use a deep red silk, the colour of vermilion, to wrap around the horse hair cord, and then stitch the cord to the surface of the gold brocade. In many thangka of the Buddha Shakyamuni, and other peaceful deities such as Avalokitesvara, Manjushri or White Tara, the gold brocade twill weave chosen for the jewellery and the encircling nimbus is a heavier texture than the smooth satin used elsewhere. (See figures 61 and 62.) The patterns stitched in the vermilion colour cord stand out on the gold. Where the thangka painter would use gold, which is important in the production of painted thangka, the appliqué artist selects beautiful patterned gold brocade. (See figure 63.)

The colour palette in silk appliqué

The colour palette is usually very bright. These thangka hang in the dark spaces of large prayer halls lit by butter lamps, the gold and the silk catch this light and the bright colours shine like jewels; the effect is splendid. When the giant thangka are displayed outdoors for public ceremonies the bright coloured silk catches the sunlight and shines and shimmers. Gold brocade or gold couched thread embroidered into the detail both add to the reflective shimmer and to the value of the thangka as an offering. Lines of couched white cord are used for water, waves, and waterfalls. Small symbolic jewels which appear amongst the waves are embroidered. In the thangka of the five mountain goddesses, the principal figure, the protectress Tseringma, rides a snow lion, whose soft green mane is stitched with many parallel lines of couched horse hair cords in brown on the soft green to convey the texture of the mane, in expressive curves and curls. (See figure 64.)

The artist must use colours where they are specified in the texts. For example the colour of the bodies of the deities is an important aspect of the iconography. Medicine Buddha is blue, Manjushri is orange, and Guhyasamaja is blue with red and white faces. The Buddha's body is gold and he wears monks' robes that are orange and red. The artist also follows the texts when the colours of the robes are specified. However, in many cases the artist is free to select the brocade for the robes. The artists interviewed indicated that there is some freedom to add and

²⁸⁹ Portraits of his friends or enemies perhaps?

create within the thangka design, and this was demonstrated in examples of their work. The composition of the background landscape design is partly left up to the artist, but must include particular elements for peaceful deities, such as flowers, water and clouds. For wrathful deities, the landscape consists of wild and inhospitable terrain, rocky landscapes with rugged cliffs and swirling dark clouds.²⁹⁰ Dyeing the silk so that there is a gradation of colour within the background of the appliqué is an innovation, which was introduced by Temba Choepal²⁹¹ to the Norbulingka Institute, and is also used by Pasang Bhotia.²⁹²

Although some of the techniques to create silk appliqué thangka have come from Mongolia (appliqué) and China (embroidery), the Tibetan artists have created a unique art form and a recognisable Tibetan style. The appliqué artists of Mongolia, Amdo and Bhutan also display distinct characteristic palettes and styles, showing regional variation within the wider cultural arena. While adhering to the iconometric proportions and iconography required, the Tibetan appliqué artists in exile and artists from TAR, Amdo, Bhutan and Mongolia have explored a wide range of creative expression. The exquisite peaceful deities seated on colourful lotus thrones dressed in a gorgeous variety of gold brocade robes and set within the 'pure lands' of verdant and exquisite landscapes of flowers, trees and waterfalls, contrast with the fiery wrathful deities surrounded by bright masses of flames, whose lively posture and expression exudes energy and power. The creative and expressive ideas evident in the richness of the various styles and forms of Tibetan silk appliqué are possible because the artists have developed their skills to a high level of workmanship. As explained above, the artists are motivated to maintain the traditional techniques, and more interested in bringing their skills to a very high standard than to find easier ways of producing the appliqué thangka. What is possibly the greatest achievement is the production of the giant thangka, using almost the same techniques.

²⁹⁰ Personal communication with Pasang Bhotia, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2009

²⁹¹ Temba Choepel, painter and appliqué artist, who set up the appliqué workshop in the Norbulingka Institute introduced this technique. And Pasang, interviewed in Kathmandu, also uses this technique. He asks someone to dye the silk for him.

²⁹² The Karma Gardri style uses washes to create gradual shading. The sky is painted with the blue stronger towards the top of the painting and lighter towards the horizon where it meets the land, usually green. The green of the land is also shaded so that the stronger darker green is at the horizon, getting lighter further down the painting. Personal communication with thangka painter/artist, Terris Temple, Chiang Mai, May 2009.

Conclusion

Silk appliqué art is a highly revered art form by Tibetans in the context of Tibetan arts, yet there is surprisingly little written on the subject by Western art historians, particularly in a contemporary context. The contribution of this thesis is the exploration of contemporary silk appliqué art, based largely on fieldwork in Dharamsala and Nepal, and meeting with Western artists practising this art form.

In this analysis of contemporary Tibetan silk appliqué thangka, I firstly considered the historical background and the social context – its purpose and meaning – as it relates to silk appliqué thangka. These chapters provided the context for an examination of the revival and on-going transmission of the art form, and the materials and techniques used. Factors which inform contemporary Tibetan silk appliqué art today provide possible answers as to how and why it is now enjoying such a vibrant revitalisation. As shown in this study, these factors include the creation of workshops for training, development of upcoming artists' skills and the cultural transmission of techniques to a new generation of artists. As explained this depends on the continued demand for silk appliqué art for religious purposes. Related to this is the support from patronage by the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan government-in-exile, revered lineage holders and lamas from all the major Tibetan Buddhist schools and the increasing number of practising Vajrayana Buddhists around the world, both Tibetan and non-Tibetans.

Furthermore, this study revealed some surprising and interesting aspects to the revival and transmission of silk appliqué art. One remarkable feature is the flexibility and adaptability of those involved with the production of the art form in exile whilst maintaining the prescribed iconometry and continuing to make the silk appliqué by hand, apart from some minimal use of sewing machines for certain aspects of large thangka. The transmission of the art form has also been assisted by the inclusive attitude of the Tibetan lamas and appliqué masters who teach and invite non-Tibetans to participate in the production of silk appliqué. Another surprising aspect, found in this study, was the degree to which the spread of Tibetan Buddhism, both within Asia and around the world, has supported this revival. My analysis has also shown two important factors contributing to the resurgence in the production of silk appliqué thangka. The first is the resumption of Tibetan Buddhist practices of prayer, meditation and, in particular, pilgrimage amongst ethnic Tibetans in PRC. The second is the determination of Tibetan refugees to maintain these practices while in exile. In particular, there is resurgence in production of new giant silk appliqué thangka for annual festivals in Tibet,²⁹³ Bhutan and Tibetan monasteries in India. There is strong motivation to train and teach Tibetan traditional arts, such as these, in order to maintain Tibetan cultural identity in the face of the destruction and loss of their cultural, artistic and literary heritage at the hands of the Communist Chinese.

The historical background presented in Chapter One has parallels that can be explored today. As the examples of silk appliqué thangka show, Tibetan leaders, high-ranking lamas and appliqué artists have apparently fluidly and adaptively engaged with their neighbours in the past. Today, they reach out to the wider globalised world. Through this study of Tibetan silk

²⁹³ TAR, and other provinces of the PRC with ethnic Tibetan minorities, such as Amdo, Gansu.

appliqué I argue that, in spite of the wholesale destruction of monasteries, the looting of valuable artworks and the loss of cultural heritage in Tibet, the expansion of Tibetan Buddhism today, as in the past, has been a major factor in the development, sustainability and resilience of the art in the 21st century. Both inside and outside Tibet, the Buddhist tradition has remained strong in spite of the attempt by the Chinese Maoist regime to completely annihilate it during the 'democratic reforms' and the Cultural Revolution of the 1950s and 60s. The total assimilation of Buddhism into Tibetan cultural identity has also meant that support for the revival and production of traditional Buddhist art is closely connected with the efforts to maintain cultural identity both inside and outside Tibet.

In addition to an analysis of the revival, this study brings an awareness of the high level of technical skill, aesthetic vision and creativity which is evident in Tibetan silk appliqué art, through detailed explanation of the rich silk and brocade materials and techniques. Besides the considerable activity in this relatively unknown area, the discovery of the exquisite beauty of the art and the scale of the artistic endeavours is inspirational.

The unique aesthetic of Tibetan art, characterised by fluid style, fine delicate line and imaginative detail in composition, which is familiar in thangka paintings, is found expressed in yet another dimension in silk appliqué art. The use of rich, coloured silks, gold brocade and a technique which gives the deities an almost three dimensional form, brings them to life. It is hoped that by shedding light on the beauty, refinement and rich variety of these art forms, further appreciation and study will be forthcoming.

Appendix 1 Classification of Tibetan thangka

From Tulku Thondup, *Enlightened Journey: Buddhist Practice as Daily Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995)²⁹⁴

Two kinds of thangkas: *göthang* and *tri thang*

- A. ***göthang*** silken pictorial scrolls (four categories according to the technique):
1. *tsemtrubma* hand embroidered pictorial art form using threads of different colours
 2. *thagtrubma* woven by hand with different silk threads (silk tapestry for example *kesi* (Ch.).
 3. *tretrubma* stitched figures [appliqué thangka]. small pieces of silk are cut into shapes and stitched together for the different designs
 4. *lhenthabma* glued silk scroll the different coloured silks are cut into designs and glued into figures.
- B. ***tri thang*** painted scrolls (four categories of painted scrolls distinguished by the colour of the background).
1. *tsönthang* painted scroll with different colours for the background
 2. *serthang* painting having gold for the entire background colour. The figures are drawn in ink or vermilion the gold background. In some cases figures are painted on the gold.
 3. *tsalthang* painting having vermilion for the background on which the design is drawn in gold or ink.
 4. *nagthang* painting having black for the background colour, on which the figures are drawn in gold and sometimes vermilion, and occasionally painted with various colours

Three other types of painting: differ from others with respect to design, size and use.

1. ***kyil khor*** *mandala* (Skt.): literally means 'assemblage'. Mainly a floor plan of the residence of tantric deities, Buddhas and their retinues.
2. ***tsakli*** miniature paintings of upright and rectangular shape. For use in empowerment ceremonies for the transmission of Buddhist esoteric powers.
3. ***kyanglha*** wall paintings or frescoes. Made in various colours and painted directly onto the walls, and sometimes on canvas affixed to the wall.

²⁹⁴ Thondup, *Enlightened Journey: Buddhist Practice as Daily Life*, pp 41-43.

Appendix 2 Kalachakra Initiations by the Dalai Lama

From website (<http://www.dalailama.com/teachings/kalachakra-initiations>, (accessed 31 May 2010))

No.	Date	Place	Audience
1.	May 1954	Norbulingka, Lhasa, Tibet	100,000
2.	April 1956	Norbulingka, Lhasa, Tibet	100,000
3.	March 1970	Dharamsala, Himachal Pradesh, India	30,000
4.	January 1971	Bylakuppe, Karnataka, India	10,000
5.	December 1974	Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India	100,000
6.	September 1976	Leh, Ladakh, India	40,000
7.	July 1981	Madison, Wisconsin, USA	1,500
8.	April 1983	Dirang, Arunachal Pradesh, India	5,000
9.	August 1983	Tabo - Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India	10,000
10.	July 1985	Rikon, Switzerland	6,000
11.	December 1985	Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India	200,000
12.	July 1988	Zanskar, Jammu & Kashmir, India	10,000
13.	July 1989	Los Angeles, USA	3,300
14.	December 1990	Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, India	130,000
15.	October 1991	New York, USA	3,000
16.	August 1992	Kalpa - Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh, India	20,000
17.	April 1993	Gangtok, Sikkim, India	100,000
18.	July 1994	Jispa - Keylong, Himachal Pradesh, India	30,000
19.	December 1994	Barcelona, Spain	3,000
20.	January 1995	Mundgod, Karnataka, India	50,000
21.	August 1995	Ulan Bator, Mongolia	30,000
22.	June 1996	Tabo - Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India	20,000
23.	September 1996	Sydney, Australia	3,000
24.	December 1996	Salugara, West Bengal, India	200,000
25.	August 1999	Bloomington, Indiana, USA	4,000
26.	August 2000	Kyi - Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India	25,000
27.	October 2002	Graz, Austria	10,000
28.	January 2003	Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India	200,000
29.	April 2004	Toronto, Canada	8,000
30.	January 2006	Amarvati, Andhra Pradesh, India	100,000

Appendix 3 Interview questions

Name:

Date:

Location of interview:

(Interviews were recorded and transcribed.)

YOUR EXPERIENCE

Where and when were you born?

When did you come to India? How old were you?

For how many years have you been practising appliqué technique?

When did you start?

How old were you when you started?

How did you find a teacher? Or Under what circumstance did you start to study appliqué technique?

What kind of work did you do at the beginning? Was it difficult?

How did you develop your skills?

Where were you living at the time?

Giant thangka

Did you work with your teacher on the production of giant thangka?

What were these for? For which monastery? Who commissioned these?

What is the purpose of the large thangka for annual ceremony:

For example? What is the ritual use of the appliqué thangka?

For example, are the display of thangka and offerings accompanied by lama dances?

Technique

Do you see any changes in the techniques changing over time?

When did they change? For example?

Please describe the technique that you use to produce these artworks.

How do you prepare the pattern?

Who are the artists who produce the design and composition?

What is the method of preparing the thangka design for cutting out the pieces of silk?

Any differences in technique for the giant thangka?

What is the method of transferring the design pattern to cloth?

Does this method change when the thangka is very large?

How do you scale it up for the large thangka?

Are there different methods for different sizes?

Large vs giant?

(For example) For the giant thangka, an electric heated 'stick' is used to perforate the lines by melting holes, in the plastic tracing paper.

The tracing paper with the design of the giant thangka is divided into sections?

How to create the design for each separate deity across the paper?

How to determine the sections?

How is the design transferred to silk material?

What determines the selection of colours and fabric (satin or brocade)?

How do you choose the colours?

Which colours are prescribed?

Is this copied from an original painting or is the choice of colour left to the fabric thangka artist?

Landscape and background details?

Method

How do you prepare the silk fabric?

What medium are you using to stiffen the fabric, where does it come from?

Why do you stiffen the silk ?

Does this method change when the thangka is very large?

Materials

Where do they come from?

SILK is from where?

Where did the silk come from in the past? Russia? China? Varanasi?

Why does the silk come from Varanasi?

Which silk was preferred and why? and today?

Where do you get it from?

Quality? What kind of quality do you use?

Is it the same quality for large thangkas?

Brocade patterns?

Are some preferred for particular deities?

for particular types of robes. eg for bodhisattvas, or for monks, lamas

Are different materials used to day because of availability, cost?

Why changes?

What do you use for the base? backing cloth? Where does this come from?

Use of paper and cloth pattern for assembling the pieces?

HORSEHAIR for the silk-wrapped cords.

Where does this come from?

Do you use horse hair here?

Substitutes?

Horse hair cording? How do you make the horse hair cord?

Method of application?

Where do you use this technique in the design?

Three strands of horse hair? or less?

Do you use horse hair to create the gold cord? Gold thread wrapped around horsehair?

then couched, applied with what kind of thread?

What details are embroidered?

What embroidery stitches do you use?

Other types of stitches used? for what details? for example the eyes, folds in the cloth?

Horsehair cord? couched ?for line ?for details.

What stitching techniques are employed? For example for applying the line.

Where do you use the horsehair cord, and where do you use another embroidery stitch?

How do you creating the line on giant thangka?

Joining the pieces

What method do you use to join the pieces?

What stitch is used for this?

Ask about embellishments with gold, precious stones, pearls, beads?

Sizes of different thangka

Small size : measures ? approximately

Function of each size?

How long does it take to make it?

Medium: measures ? with silk brocade borders?

Giant Thangka e.g. 37 feet x 28 feet (Image is 22 feet x 15 feet) up to 70 feet for example.

What determines the size of the large thangka? The place where it will be hung?

How often is it displayed? For ceremonial days once a year?

How long to produce the giant thangka?

Several artists working on one piece?

Use of sewing machines?

For which tasks, and since when?

When did machines replace hand stitching? For attaching piping / bias? strips.

For which particular sewing tasks does using the sewing machine make it easier?

Tailors and craftsmen and women.

Many trained in this profession?

Is demand increasing?

Many good artists leave the profession when they leave Tibet, or leave Dharamsala, and go to the US.

How many in this workshop?

How many men? women?

Different division of labour according to gender? No

How are the skills passed on?

How old are the craftspeople in this workshop?

How do you feel about the differences between the past and the present.

Has there been an increase in demand for thangkas?

From monasteries outside Tibet compared to inside Tibet?

Is there a 'house style' for your workshop?

Previously tailors made clothes, altar cloths, and robes for dance and ritual.

Do you make these as well?

Is the technique for the silk appliqué thangka the same as that for other works in appliqué?

For example, dance costumes indoor banners, ceremonial tents, etc?

Lay craftsmen and women, not ordained.

Are they initiated into the deity that is depicted? or just the master tailor/painter?

Appendix 4 Phuntsok Tsering: Interview summary

The summary of the interview conducted with Phuntsok Tsering, Namsa Chenmo to the Dalai Lama, in his workshop in Namgyal Monastery in April 2009, with the assistance of Tenzin Nyimalha.

Phuntsok Tsering was born in Tibet in 1937. When he was 15 years old he started working as a tailor in the Tibetan government Tailors' Guild in the Potala. He had learnt the skills required for this work from his father. The technical knowledge and the skills of tailoring and appliqué were held by the family and passed down through generations. His whole family were tailors, and his father worked as a tailor for the 13th Dalai Lama, travelling with him wherever he went. In 1959 there were more than 150 tailors working for the Tibetan Government, and he was the only one of that group who had the chance to escape to India when the Chinese occupied Lhasa. He was well known to the government officials, who knew of his skill, so they appointed him to serve as the Namsa Chenmo (Master Tailor) to His Holiness, when he escaped from Tibet in 1959. He was 22 years old. Since then he has been working as the appliqué master and personal tailor to his Holiness, a period of more than fifty years. In Tibet, the Namsa Chenmo was the highest position in the Tailor's Guild and was in charge of over one hundred and fifty tailors who were employed by the Tibetan government. The former Namsa Chenmo, Gyeten Namgyal, was unable to leave Lhasa when the Dalai Lama escaped, though he did manage to come to Dharamsala in the late eighties.

Phuntsok Tsering set up his small workshop within the Dalai Lama's monastery, Namgyal Monastery, in Dharamsala, India, in 1959, the year that the Dalai Lama left Tibet and moved to live in exile in India, and he has been there ever since. As the oldest surviving appliqué master from Tibet, Phuntsok Tsering is highly respected. He has taught many students in exile, and been able to pass on the skills and the techniques he learnt as a young man in the elite tailoring workshops of the Potala, in Lhasa. In the last fifty years he has trained about 400 students, although he says that not all of them are perfect! Some gave up before they had completed their training. (I interviewed one of his students, Ugyen Sonam, who lives in Australia. He studied with Phuntsok Tsering for five years, long enough to receive his qualification certificate, and is now an accomplished appliqué thangka artist.) There were both young men and women in his workshop and there are no special prerequisites to join his workshop as an apprentice. He gives anyone a chance who wishes to learn. After they have been with him for some time, a year or so, he is able to tell whether they have the potential to develop further.

Phuntsok Tsering stated that some say appliqué in Tibet began in the 7th century but he is sure that this technique started in the 9th century. According to his understanding, the technique is related to the Mongolian tradition, and Tibetans learnt these techniques from Mongolian artists. Initially the silk for the production of appliqué thangkas came from China, Japan and Russia and then later it came from India. Nowadays he says that it is very easy to get the right materials from India.

Phuntsok Tsering makes his own brocade designs, and also recreates designs from old pieces of silk brocade, which he has made up in India. Even if there is only a small piece of old brocade, which he says comes from Tibet, he is able to imagine the complete design. He draws this design for the silk weaving company in Varanasi that supplies all the appliqué artists in Dharamsala and Kathmandu. He has also sent fragments of very old brocade to Varanasi, where the designs are copied exactly, and so Phuntsok- Tsering is responsible for re-establishing several traditional designs. There are five or six brocade designs which bear his name. The conversation with Phuntsok Tsering revealed how important the traditional designs are for the creation of fabric appliqué thangka today. In fact, I was told that other workshops also order from Varanasi those brocades designed by him. He said that in the past it was possible to bring old fabric thangka from Tibet, but now it is very difficult. There was a time in the early eighties when a few old appliqué thangkas were brought from Tibet. This was when the first contact between Tibetans in PRC and those in exile occurred.

He spoke about his experience working on a giant thangka. When he was working in Lhasa he worked on the huge thangka that was hung on the front of the Potala for special festivals. Each monastery in Tibet had an auspicious day, on which they display their own large thangka. He said that every monastery in Tibet would have a huge thangka for their monastery's festival. The occasion to display giant thangka depends on the monastery's festival. Sometimes it is displayed during Losar, Tibetan New Year, or during Saga Dawa, Buddha Shakyamuni's birthday.

Phuntsok Tsering related how he had made a large scale ceiling frieze (*drachey*) for the prayer hall of a large Tibetan Buddhist monastery in South India, which was completed last year (2008). The drachey depicted the thirty five Confessional Buddhas, Medicine Buddha, Bodhisattvas, seventeen disciples of Buddha Shakyamuni and several scholars from Nalanda University, India. In order to create this large size drachey, many individual appliqué thangka are made and then joined together into one long horizontal hanging, with an intricate design of jewels and auspicious symbols surrounding the thangka of Buddhas, deities and teachers. A time-consuming project like this is very costly, and the silk satin and hand loomed brocades used are expensive. It took twenty of his staff more than one year to complete. It was paid for by the monastery (in South India), in fact by several sponsors, some of them *geshe* or teachers, who each sponsored a Buddha, or section of the ceiling frieze. Before coming to India in 1959, Phuntsok Tsering made a similar ceiling frieze for Gyomed Monastery. During the Cultural Revolution the Chinese cut it into pieces. Someone gave him a piece from this frieze and he recognized his work.

When he came to India he had made a large thangka 25 feet high (6.75 metres) for Dorje Dhak Monastery in Simla, India. When it is displayed it is hung from the roof of the monastery building. He explained that if the monastery is not high enough they erect a frame to extend the display space. The thangka is displayed for the duration of the *puja*, (the prayers and chanting ceremonies), which forms part of the ritual. In Tibet the puja may last all day, but in India it can be cut short because of bad weather. There are silk appliqué thangka slightly smaller than the huge ones, which measure 5 - 6 meters high, that are displayed for a whole month inside the temple, but the display of the giant thangka depends on the weather conditions.

I asked him if there was any difference to the technique because it is large? Almost the same technique is used for the construction of the giant thangka, and they use the best materials because they want it to last a long time. He wanted to be clear that lesser quality materials are not used simply because they need a larger quantity.

How does he determine the measurements for the large thangka? He calculates the size and plans the entire layout of the thangka in his head.

Appendix 5 Dorje Wangdu: Interview summary

The biography is the summary of the interview conducted with Dorje Wangdu, Director of the Tibetan Appliqué Art Centre (TAAC) in Namgyal Monastery in April 2009, and from material (copies of certificates) which he provided.

Dorje Wangdu is an accomplished master of Tibetan appliqué work. He was born in Tibet in 1962, came to India in 1972. When he became a monk in Namgyal Monastery in Dharamsala, aged fourteen, he started learning appliqué techniques. As a monk he memorized all the ritual for important Tantras and Deities, and passed his oral exams before the Dalai Lama. He also studied the philosophical curriculum and completed subjects of Logic, Epistemology and Dialectical Philosophy, studies which included the tenets of non-Buddhist and Buddhist philosophical schools. He completed training in meditation, drawing and construction of *mandala*, ceremonial rituals including chanting, dancing and playing ritual instruments. He was a monk till 1994 when he disrobed.

Mostly self taught in the art of appliqué, he runs the Tibetan Appliqué Arts Centre in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, which he started in 1988. Here he trains many young Tibetans and promotes the appliqué art form. He has recently made a documentary in Tibetan on the work of his Centre and on Tibetan appliqué art, which is now on 'You tube'. He would like to promote appliqué art because it is not well known even amongst Tibetans. He believes the reason for this is that up until 1959 these thangkas were mainly inside monasteries, ordered by government officials, and lamas, and lay people did not have the opportunity to see them.

He is very confident about the future of appliqué art. Here in Dharamsala he sees the numbers of students growing. There are around twenty seven people working for him, which is about the maximum number for the space in his workshop. His students come from South India, Nepal, Tibet, as well as some from Japan. He has taught many students, some have whom have gone to live in the US and Canada. He says that it is difficult for them to continue their work overseas, but some of them are doing so.

Since 1987 Dorje Wangdu has completed some major projects involving the production of many large thangkas for the Dalai Lama and other important Tibetan religious leaders. He has made forty two thangkas for the Dalai Lama. He has numerous commissions, from South India, and from Tibet. But some will have to wait two years, as he is busy with commissions till then.

Some of the large thangkas that he makes are between 8 to 12 feet high (2.16m to 3.24 metres). These are hung inside the prayer hall of the Dalai Lama's monastery when special rituals associated with the deity depicted are taking place. Also when the Dalai Lama travels, sometimes to Europe and the United States, to perform the Kalachakra teachings and initiation he takes six large appliqué thangka with him. These are hung in the special area prepared for the Kalachakra rituals.

Five of these large thangka have been made by Dorje Wangdu and his team. These large thangka include the Buddha as the main figure, 195" x 138"; the Kalachakra Mandala, 204" x 150"; the White Tara as the main image, 144" x 85"; and Guru Padmasambhava as the main image, 144" x 85".

According to a certificate that he received from the Department of Religion and Culture, he was the first artist to make a brocade appliqué thangka of the Kalachakra Mandala in Tibetan history. He has received recognition and appreciation from The Office of Religion and Culture of the Central Tibet Administration of H.H. The Dalai Lama – “for his extra-ordinary skills of Tibetan appliqué art and his great contribution towards the preservation of this unique Tibetan Buddhist art.”

He has also produced appliqué thangka for monasteries in Tibet, and for monasteries in the West. For example, Sogyal Rinpoche ordered three large thangka for his monastery in the United States, which are displayed when he travels to Europe to give teachings,

Dorje Wangdu explained the importance of maintaining the traditional compositions and colours in the appliqué thangkas, and that the measurements of the deities and the Buddhas should be correct. The reason for continuing the traditional designs and compositions in appliqué is linked to the religious purpose of this art. A thangka artist (painter) does the design, and composition according to the prescribed iconography so that the work conforms to religious texts. Dorje Wangdu explained that because he has received the initiations, it was not important for his students to be initiated into the practices of the deities that they were working on under his instructions.

He made a giant thangka 70 feet high (19 metres), commissioned by Khamprul Rinpoche, which was sent to a Dharma centre in Taiwan. He said that the techniques are the same for the giant and the small thangka. One of the problems is finding a space big enough to assemble the giant thangka. He goes to the roof of the Namgyal Monastery nearby. The lines for the giant thangka are made with strips of silk fabric not cord.

The silks and brocades that he uses come from Varanasi, and he often orders his own designs from the Kasim (name of the business) brocade weavers there. He uses nylon line in place of horse hair, mainly because the work that he does is large and the horsehair would not be long enough, and it is not easy to get enough horse hair for the large amount of work that he does. He sometimes uses horsehair for fine details, such as on the face. He stiffens the thin silk with cloth glued to the back, and does not need to stiffen the thick brocade.

Appendix 6 Tenzin Gyaltsen: Interview summary

The summary of the interview conducted with Tenzin Gyaltsen, in his workshop in Sherabling Monastery in April 2009, with the assistance of Tenzin Ringpaonsang. The interview took place on Friday 17 April 2009, Palpung Sherabling Monastic Seat, Bir. Himalchal Pradesh, India. Since July 2009, Tenzin Gyaltsen has also added to this biography, and clarified points that had been discussed in the interview.

Tenzin Gyaltsen is the resident appliqué master artist at Palpung Sherabling, monastic seat of Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche in India, where he has been since 2001. He is dedicated to producing exquisite high quality appliqué artworks for the monastery, and commissions for Palpung Sherabling, and has 25 years experience working in appliqué technique.

Tenzin Gyaltsen was born in Tibet in 1969. He completed his education in Tibet aged fifteen. He always had a passion for art and especially thangka painting, and wanted to study art, but in Tibet he had no opportunity to study drawing and painting. So instead he began painting wooden household items, such as altars and furniture, in traditional Tibetan style.

Tenzin Gyaltsen explained in detail about how he came to learn the art of appliqué thangka, and spoke highly of his teacher. When he was eighteen, Tenzin Gyaltsen's uncle from Ghadong monastery, in Dharamsala, India, suggested that he come to India, in 1985. His uncle, Tenzin Wangdak, a member of the Ghadong family, is a medium and deity oracle. The Ghadong family have had a long relationship with the Dalai Lama, since the first Ghadong oracle was appointed by the Fifth Dalai Lama over 400 years ago. Since that time the Ghadong lineage has continued unbroken, and the position of oracle has been continuously filled by members of his family ever since. When Tenzin Gyaltsen arrived in India aged eighteen, his uncle recommended that since he was too old to go to school, he should study some kind of craft. Although Tenzin Gyaltsen really wanted to study thangka painting, his uncle said there are many thangka painters and recommended that he study appliqué under the appliqué master, Gyeten Namgyal. He was the former Namsa Chenmo (Master tailor) to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, (and for some time to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama before the Dalai Lama left Tibet in 1959), and had arrived in India five years earlier. This unique opportunity to study under such an accomplished appliqué master, would not have been available to Tenzin Gyaltsen back in Tibet.

Gyeten Namgyal, had been imprisoned in Tibet by the Chinese for twenty years, and because of his imprisonment another Namsa Chenmo, Phuntsok Tsering, was appointed to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. So when the former Namsa Chenmo arrived in Dharamsala, he did not have a specific role to fill. Tenzin Wangdak, Tenzin's uncle, the oracle at Ghadong Monastery in Dharamsala, knew him from back in Tibet and invited him to teach appliqué skills at the monastery. By then he was about 70 years old, and Tenzin Wangdak was concerned that there was a chance that his knowledge and skills may be lost, because of Gyeten Namgyal's age. At that time he was physically healthy and his eyesight was still good. Tenzin Wangdak thought it was important to preserve his knowledge as he was one of the most famous appliqué masters from Tibet, and asked him to teach appliqué skills to the monks at Ghadong Monastery. Tenzin Wangdak asked his nephew, Tenzin Gyaltsen to take on the special responsibility to learn appliqué technique from the former Namsa Chenmo in order to maintain continuity of this

specialist Tibet art. For almost eight years Tenzin Gyaltzen studied Tibetan appliqué art (from 1986 to 1993) under the guidance of Gyeten Namgyal, who passed away in 1996 aged 83. Tenzin Gyaltzen was his last student.

Tenzin Gyaltzen produces appliqué thangka of exceptional high quality and fine detail. He says that the main reason for the high quality of his work is due to his teacher, Gyeten Namgyal, and the second reason is that appliqué is his field of specialisation. He has spent twenty five years concentrating on the skills of appliqué, improving and practising his craft. For the last twenty years he has been focusing on how to improve his work, and as a result his work and his skills are continually progressing.

After studying with Gyeten Namgyal, Tenzin worked privately from 1993 and began making a living making appliqué thangka. In 2000, he joined the Norbulingka Institute in Dharamsala which was set up to preserve Tibetan culture and the arts, where he worked for one year as a teacher. From his experience he found that it was not particularly satisfying to work privately on his own, making appliqué thangka on commission, finding sponsors and commissions. Although he sold his work and received money, he did not feel totally satisfied. He wanted to have a base where his work could be viewed by others so that they too can learn about his art.

Before Tenzin joined the Norbulingka Institute, Palpung Sherabling monastery used to order thangka from them. He was asked to work on an order from Palpung Sherabling. The project was a five foot high White Tara coloured thangka. The secretary of Sherabling Monastery was impressed by Tenzin Gyaltzen's workmanship and commissioned him to make more thangka for Palpung Sherabling Monastery, projects that would take fifteen or twenty years. Tenzin was excited to take up this offer, as this was exactly the dream that he had for his work in the future. 'It was a miracle to me" [to receive this offer to work for the Palpung Sherabling Monastery]

He prefers to work hard and produce works of high quality that may be preserved in one place, like Sherabling Monastery, and in that way preserve the tradition of appliqué art. When he learnt of Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche's vision to make Palpung Sherabling Monastery a place to preserve Tibetan philosophy and artistic tradition, he agreed to come and he has been resident artist there since 2001. Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche has a grander vision for Sherabling Monastery beyond the thangka and woodwork required for the monastery. He sees Palpung Sherabling Monastery as a place of learning: preserving Tibetan philosophy, culture and texts, and also a place where all kinds of traditional Tibetan art are preserved and nurtured: thangka painting, appliqué and embroidery, and wood carving. This is important because of the present situation and threats to the survival of Tibetan culture.

Since coming to Sherabling Monastery, Tenzin Gyaltzen has been producing silk appliqué thangka for the monastery under instructions from Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche. He enjoys making appliqué thangka for the monastery, where he can concentrate on producing appliqué works of high quality. In line with his complete focus and specialisation in this field, he is not concerned at all about how much time and effort he has to put in. His dedication reflects his sincere motivation to contribute to the Buddha Dharma. Since he started working at Palpung Sherabling he has had opportunities that he never had before, for example, working on the huge thangka. He feels that it is a great privilege and a great opportunity to contribute and be involved in one of the largest thangka projects in Tibetan history. He has a team of eight young artists working with him on the production of this enormous thangka. If this huge project

comes to fruition it is not just a great achievement for Tenzin Gyaltzen, but also he considers it an opportunity to contribute to the Buddha Dharma. He feels that his dreams are being fulfilled.

Besides the large thangka Tenzin also works on beautiful embroideries at home. These are unique designs based on earlier and now rare Tibetan painted thangka forms; *nag-thang* (black thangka for wrathful deities line drawings painted in gold on black silk), *mar-thang* (red thangka which were painted in gold on red silk) and gold and white thangka. Tenzin has creatively translated these painted designs into a unique combination of appliqué and embroidery. These artworks consist of lined work in couched silk- covered horsehair cord, with additional lines embroidered in stem stitch in silk thread. Further details are worked in a variety of embroidery stitches, with some small finely embroidered appliqué sections. For example, the face of the Guru Padmasambhava is embroidered on white silk, to which is attached his embroidered hat in red silk. This piece is worked separately and then applied, using fine stitching over the couched cords which edge the piece to the red background. These works are done on coloured silk to match the deity, for example White Tara on white silk, and Guru Rinpoche stitched on red silk.

Tenzin Gyaltzen would like to share the treasure of appliqué art with the outside world as well, but so far he has not had the opportunity. This art is unknown to many people, including Tibetans. It has not been particularly accessible and, according to Tenzin, even those who do have access to this art, may only have access to appliqué art of inferior quality, completed by those with little training and experience.

Through the display of the giant thangka he will be able to share these treasures with the general Tibetan community. He feels that it is important to show the value of the art and 'to show that it is part of our Tibetan culture'. The giant thangka will be seen by many people. Tenzin also wants to demonstrate that it is possible to progress and achieve something in this field of Tibetan art. He would like to share this Tibetan art form with non-Tibetans as well.

Appendix 7 Drokpa from Amdo: Interview transcript

Transcript of interview recorded Monday 20 April, 2009, assisted by Lama Palden Gyatso, lama and artist from Amdo.

Date: Monday 20 April

Location : Mcleod Ganj

Drokpa's background and experience.

He was born in 1970 in Sengeshong (Tib.), Wutun (Ch.), Sekichon in Repkong, (Tongren, Ch.) Northwestern Qinghai Province.

He studied in the Repkong district of Amdo where there are many artists.

He started school when he was 8 years old. After finishing school he came back home because his father was an artist, and his father taught him how to draw and paint.

Under what circumstances did you start to study appliqué technique?

He learnt appliqué technique at the same time he learnt painting from his father. He also learnt how to make sculpture and mural painting for the monastery. When he was 17 he was invited to work at Rongo monastery, the biggest monastery in the region. It was being rebuilt and they needed many artists to paint religious artworks. For twenty years he has studied by himself. He was a monk from the age of 13 to 24.

When did you come to India? In 1998 aged 28 years.

How did you develop the skills required?

There is a progression of learning the different skills required. The primary skill is that of thangka painting. First he learnt drawing and painting. These are the primary skills for painting thangkas. It is very difficult.

Where were you living? When he was a monk, he was living in the monastery. Traditionally he made his own robes, while he was monk, but he did not study how to make robes, or other clothes. He is not a professional tailor. Nowadays these are separate skills.

What did you do when he came to Dharamsala?

He stayed 6 months and painted thangka. Then he went to Delhi for two months, and then he went on a pilgrimage. He lived in South India for 8 years. He lived in Sera monastery, South India, in the section where he made paintings and appliqué. Since there are over 4,000 monks at Sera, the monastery is divided into sections. He was in the section for creating religious objects such as appliqué thangka. He worked as the main director of the art section in a workshop with other artists. When he received an order for large thangka, like the large one commissioned for Ladakh, he organised assistants to help and taught them what to do to help him.

How do you see the survival of this art? Is it growing or getting less?

From his point of view the art is continually progressing.

When he was younger in Tibet [late 1980s and 1990s] he travelled from Repkong district to many provinces and many districts, He would go to many places and get a lot of work in Tibet, with his father and four brothers. As a group of six he travelled all over Tibet with his family working in monasteries. After that he travelled with other artists working around Tibet.

While in Sera monastery in South India, he produced a large thangka for a monastery in Ladakh. A *geshe* introduced him to a monk from Leh who requested the large thangka to be made for Tongde Monastery, Ladakh. He made it in South India and sent it to Leh. The large thangka took eight artists, 2 months and 15 days to make.

Have you made thangka for other monasteries? Or for lay practitioners? Besides monks or monasteries, do lay Tibetans order fabric thangkas?

He receives orders for thangkas from lay people as well as monks, and also for western Buddhists. Lay people may request a thangka to be made when their parents die, and they consult a lama who gives instruction as to which deity and which other details are required on the thangka. There are several deities that are very commonly produced for this situation. They might show him a picture, or they may simply say the name of the deity or the Buddha and he knows what to make. Because the artist had been a monk he is very familiar with all the deities and which colours to use.

What do you see as the differences between how this is practised in Tibet and in India?

From his point of view, it is more convenient to work in Tibet, where the monastery provides food and accommodation for the artists, out of respect, due to the official standing of artists. Artists have a more respected position and are treated well by the monasteries and the sponsors. In Tibet he would receive extra bonus at the end of the work, and special courtesies for having done a good job, as the one who orders the thangka shows appreciation and respect to the artist. The position of an artist in Tibetan society is well respected. The one who orders the thangka always give extra bonus for courtesy for a good job. Here in India you have to cover all your own expenses, food etc, and there are no bonuses.

The materials used in Tibet are no different from those used here in India. Here silks come from Nepal and Varanasi. There are also Chinese silks which are very thin and easier to use, but generally there is no difference in the materials. They are easy to come by.

Do the monasteries have a store of silk or do they order it in?

If it is a really big giant thangka then the artist would go to buy the silk from somewhere else more cheaply and get a better price. If it is for a smaller thangka they buy it locally.

It is more typical for monastery to have painted thangkas made for the *gompa* [prayer hall]. For a large gompa, many detailed thangkas are required to cover the three walls and it is easier to make more intricate thangka in painting media than appliqué. For this reason perhaps there are fewer appliqué thangka and less demand.

Who prepares the pattern?

The artist who is also a thangka painter can produce the design and composition, as well as make the appliqué thangka. He will carry out the design according to the instructions of the client who is following instructions from the lama.

Then the thangka artist (painter) does the design and composition according to the prescribed iconography. The deity is usually chosen by the lama who has been approached by the lay person, for example, when he needs to do something for his deceased parents, or under instructions from the lama regarding compensation for negative deeds, or to prevent illness etc.

The colours of the deities are determined by the iconography. But the artist can choose the colours of the landscape elements. For example: the colour of flowers etc are determined by the painter or the silk thangka artists.

How do you prepare the silk fabric? What do you use to stiffen the fabric? Drokpa uses glue (synthetic adhesive PVC) and paper to stiffen thin silk.

Why do you do this? To hold the shape and it is easier to attach and work with. The edges of each piece are trimmed then folded back and glued.

HORSEHAIR. *Does Drokpa use horsehair and silk thread?*

No. It is easier for places like Norbulingka (Institute) to use horsehair because there are so many workers, and the tasks are divided up. To make the horsehair threads and apply them takes a long time. He is able to do this and it is easy for him to make horse hair threads. But it takes such a long time that he considers it makes it too costly. He works on his own these days. According to Drokpa, it takes a long time for him to use the horsehair thread, and to attach (couch) that and he cannot get any value. He used strips of silk and piping instead. Painting is used as well. He sometimes paints in the eyes or finer lines.

What is his dream for the future?

He is happy to continue making silk appliqué. No other. He is just happy to continue working as an artist. He just depends on his skills. He has no particular goal or dreams. He is just happy to continue his job. He enjoys his work.

Does he get plenty of orders to keep him busy? Yes Sometimes when he has no orders he makes thangka to sell in a shop otherwise he is filling orders. Sometimes he constantly has orders.

Appendix 8 Pasang Bhutia: Interview summary

The summary of the interview conducted with Pasang Bhutia, Boudhanath, Nepal May 2009.

Pasang was born in South India in 1973, of Tibetan parents. He started studying appliqué technique fifteen years ago in Boudhanath with the appliqué master Tendar Kunchok, a student of Phuntsok Tsering. Pasang studied for seven years then worked in a small workshop for eight years. Now he works for himself and has a small workshop with eight staff. He receives many commissions from monasteries (lamas) and some from businessmen.

There were no artists in his family before. When I asked him why he took up the profession of appliqué thangka he told me that because he is an 'uneducated man', his mother recommended that he should learn a handicraft, and in that way he would always be able to find work. He considers that this choice and his success in this field is his good fortune ('my lucky').

Some characteristics of his technique:

He uses a cloth backing applied with only a little glue to strengthen thin silk (satin) where it is used for the background, or the body colour. Plain coloured silk is much lighter than the heavy brocade, and this technique also helps balance the weight of the plain silk with that of the brocade used for the robes.

He also has silk dyed so that there is a gradation of colour for the landscapes, and for the sky. He also uses a pale green/gold satin silk for the ground in the landscape, which gradually changes from dark near the horizon to light at the bottom of the thangka. And blue silk for the sky background also subtly changes from a dark hue to lighter towards the horizon. The choice of brocade and colours is the artist's choice, particularly for the background. His work displays particularly detailed and imaginative landscapes, and the outlines are double lines. The line which is traditionally done in horsehair cord is 'shadowed' by a line of gold thread also couched to the surface. This gives the thangka a very rich feel.

Pasang also showed me a very large black thangka with white and gold lines in the format of the painted black thangkas, which usually are reserved for wrathful deities. This thangka is of Padmasambhava in peaceful form.

Pasang has completed many large-scale thangkas, including a thirty three foot thangka which was ordered by a monk in Boudhanath and jointly funded by the monk and his father, who offered it together to a monastery in Tibet. It was displayed at Lumbini for eight days during the Monlam Prayer festival. The thangka, which measured a total of 55 feet (14.85 metres) with the brocade border was signed and consecrated by the lineage holder of the Sakya sect, Sakya Khon Rinpoche. Pasang also made a large thangka about the same size for Kopan Monastery, near Boudhanath. This large thangka is hung from the roof of the monastery, on the occasion of Saga Dawa.

Pasang is now working on a large thangka of the Kagyu lineage tree with over one hundred figures, more than 50 feet high (13.5 metres), not including the brocade border. It will measure

approximately 75 feet high (20.25 metres) when complete. This has been commissioned for a new monastery being built in Bhutan which will be finished next year. He has a space problem and is trying to find a space to assemble the thangka.

From his website : The Art of Tibetan Appliqué Thangka

The Art of Tibet appliqué is highly blessed by described lamas. Our appliqué family highly respect to them and cordially thanks to all lamas for their immense interest in appliqué thangka and always been so kind to us.—H.E. Tenga Rinpoche, Ven. Drupgyud Rinpoche, Great Dzongchen Master, H.H. Sakya Khon Trizin.

Appendix 9 Terris Temple: Interview summary

The summary of the interview conducted with Terris Temple, in Chiang Mai, Thailand in May 2009. I travelled to Chiang Mai in May 2009 to interview Terris Temple and Leslie Nguyen Temple to learn more about their motivations and their work: the appliqué restoration projects for Tsurphu Monastery, Tibet; how this project came about; and how they brought it to a successful conclusion.

Terris Temple lived in Kathmandu from 1966 to 1976, and studied thangka painting, initially from the thangka master painter, Jampa Tsedon from Lhasa, in Kathmandu. At that time, many Tibetan refugees were pouring into Kathmandu. In 1966 it was the beginning of the Cultural Revolution when there was wholesale destruction of Tibetan monasteries and the arrest and imprisonment of many monks, teachers and artists. Terris could see the threats to Tibetan art forms such as thangka painting and felt motivated to learn, before it disappeared and in order to help maintain continuity of this art form. Jampa Tsedon, the master painter who became his teacher, had only just arrived in Kathmandu from Tibet a few days before Terris met him. He painted in the Central Tibetan style of the Dalai Lama, in the Gelukpa style and he later became the Dalai Lama's main artist in Dharamsala after 1966 and he passed away in 1981.

"He impressed me, his artwork impressed me and I was really glad to become his first Western student." Terris studied with a passion all those years, over ten years with various masters. He had an underlying motive, and felt strongly that he wanted to 'hold it together while the Tibetans got it together'

'The way I look at it, I don't think I am an incredibly fantastic artist, I don't feel it anyway. I was sincere. I wanted to stay traditional. I did not want to put any of my own stuff in it, because I thought I was someone helping to hold the culture together during that difficult time...I see it more that way. I love the art. I love my teachers and I love the tradition. So basically that is what I feel. It was important to keep it alive, as an outsider.' Terris Temple.

The production of a giant thangka for Tsurphu monastery in Tibet

The thangka was made to replace a giant appliqué banner of Shakyamuni Buddha that had been kept at the Tsurphu monastery since the 17th century until it was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in 1968. Terris, who had been painting and teaching Tibetan thangka painting for forty years, designed and directed the production of the new giant thangka and was assisted on the project by his artist wife Lesley Nguyen Temple. Besides this giant Shakyamuni Buddha thangka which was for outdoor display during the Saga Dawa celebrations (35 x 24 metres), there were three other large appliqué treasures that were added to this project: a large scale Mahakala thangka which measured nine metres square, and two large ceiling friezes which each measure 2 m x 40 ms.

Tsurphu monastery, the seat of the Karmapa lineage of the Karma Kagyu sect, is situated in a valley two hours north-west of Lhasa. The Karmapa is one of the most important holders of the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism. In 1992 the Seventeenth Karmapa was recognised by both the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Chinese government. This was the first time that the Chinese government had recognised an important lineage holder, whom had also been recognised by the Dalai Lama. Construction and restoration work at Tsurphu Monastery which had begun in the 1980's was given some Chinese government support with the enthronement of the Seventeenth Karmapa. Thus permission to travel and work in Tibet for this project was easily obtained from the Chinese Government for the two Westerners.

The previous giant thangka had been displayed on a special site bounded on each side by low walls across the river from Tsurphu monastery. These walls were all that remained of the monastery after the Chinese reduced it to rubble in 1968 during the Cultural Revolution. The abbot of Tsurphu Monastery, Venerable Drupon Dechen Rinpoche, had started reconstruction of the monastery in 1980s, under instructions from the Sixteenth Karmapa who had set up the Tsurphu Foundation in the West to raise funds for this project. In the 1980s a change in the attitude of the Chinese Central government towards the Tibetans meant that some of the restrictions placed on religious activities were relaxed. In the early nineties, with the recognition and installation of the young Seventeenth Karmapa at Tsurphu, re-construction work at Tsurphu increased. This now included the project to replace four significant appliqué treasures of the Tsurphu monastery that had been destroyed or lost in the Cultural Revolution. When Terris Temple and his wife Leslie travelled to Tibet in 1992 to attend the enthronement of the Seventeenth Karmapa, they *'were asked to come to speak to the abbot of Tsurphu, about making the giant Thangka and to replace the lost appliqué treasures of Tsurphu.'*

Terris had a strong connection with the Sixteenth Karmapa since he met him in Nepal, and they had also met the abbot before. He and Leslie arrived to meet with the abbot to discuss his idea on the same day as the enthronement of the 17th Karmapa, (b. 1985). They joined over 20,000 people who had come to Tsurphu for this important occasion. The crowds were such that the monastery had closed their doors, and no one was allowed in. Terris and Leslie made their way to the monastery gate and presented their invitation to meet with the abbot and were allowed in. After a short divination, the abbot confirmed that they had been chosen and requested them to replace the original giant appliqué thangka. It may seem curious to Westerners that a Westerner, not a Tibetan was chosen for this important task. According to Terris, *'This is never questioned by Tibetans. It had been confirmed by divination, so there was no question. It was not an issue'*

'It is important to remember that little work of this kind and of this scale had been done in Tibet, as far as we know, since the Chinese invasion, and the escape of the Dalai Lama from Tibet in 1959. Many of the appliqué tailors and artists had either been killed or imprisoned, or had escaped from Tibet into India'. QUOTE from Terris Temple asianart.com article

Terris did not receive any specific instructions as to where to have the thangka made, or where to get the materials. As he and Leslie were staying in Lhasa and they thought they would first try to find a workshop in Lhasa. The first two workshops they approached said they did not have the confidence to take on such a project. Workshops involved with tailoring and appliqué at this time in Lhasa were making elaborated appliqué tents, used by the Tibetans for summer gatherings and celebrations, but not religious items for monasteries. At the third workshop they approached, the White Conch Factory, the staff said that they would be willing to take the project on. This factory also made traditional opera costumes, temple hangings and banners. There were six women, experienced sewers who took on this huge task to make create the giant thangka for Tsurphu monastery, and it was their first time to make such large thangka. They were assisted by a former appliqué thangka tailor who was able to provide them with guidance in assembling the appliqué. He and his father had been members of the former Tibetan government Tailors' Guild and his father had worked on one of the large appliqué thangkas for the Potala Palace in Lhasa for the 13th Dalai Lama. His experience and advice was invaluable.

'The six women from the White Conch Factory had all done appliqué but had not worked on a thangka before. For them it was like a dream, for all of us it was like a dream.'

Appendix 10 Leslie Rinchen Wongmo

The story of Leslie Rinchen Wongmo's experience, compiled from her website, the film *Creating Buddhas*, and personal correspondence.

Leslie Rinchen Wongmo, who is originally from California, USA, trained in the art of silk appliqué thangka in Dharamsala for more than eight years. Her story is one of dedication and patient devotion to the art. Leslie trained initially under appliqué master Tenzin Gyaltsen for several months and then under Dorje Wangdu Tibetan appliqué master, for four years.

Leslie had trained as an urban planner at the University of California, Los Angeles, started her career in housing and community development in Boston, where she made a connection with the Tibetan community while volunteering there. After travelling to Ladakh, she felt a deep connection with Tibetan culture and decided to travel to Dharamsala. She wrote to the Central Tibetan Administration to see if she could find volunteer work in Dharamsala and was immediately offered work with their Planning Council. She travelled to Dharamsala in 1992 to work as a volunteer, intending only to stay a few months. In the course of her work with the Planning Council writing project proposals, she visited handicraft centres in Dharamsala. During a visit to the Norbulingka Institute, she first discovered Tibetan art of making silk appliqué thangka, and immediately wanted to learn. *"Few people even knew of fabric thangka even amongst Tibetans living in Dharamsala, so it was hard to find a teacher."* Leslie Rinchen Wongmo in an interview in the DVD *Creating Buddhas*.

Leslie's first teacher was Tenzin Gyaltsen, (see Appendix 6) a pupil of Gyeten Namgyal Master Tailor (Namsa Chenmo) to the Thirteenth Dalai Lama in Lhasa, and also for a short time to the Fourteenth Dalai Lama. Leslie studied with Tenzin Gyaltsen in exchange for English lessons for several months, until he was called away to work on a project and then she searched for another teacher.

She was introduced to Dorje Wangdu who had started the Tibetan Appliqué Art Centre within the Namgyal monastery in Dharamsala and had many students. Leslie showed him the work that she had already done and he saw that she was serious, and that she spoke some Tibetan. By this time Leslie had lived in Dharamsala for almost a year. He accepted Leslie as a student, and, as she said: 'it was like being adopted into a family.' Dorje Wangdu's Art Centre received many large commissions. He managed the whole process, dividing up the work amongst the students. Unlike Leslie, many of the other apprentices did not intend to become independent. *'They were there to work and learn the skills and also to learn how to make the brocade borders for painted thangkas, and they received room and board'*. Leslie's training with Dorje Wangdu, however, focused on developing her skills to the point where she could leave and work on her own. Due to the size and number of appliqué thangka projects which the Centre took on, she had many opportunities to gain important skills and experience. This meant that by the end of her four year apprenticeship with Dorje Wangdu, she became highly skilled, and was able to make an entire thangka on her own. She remained in Dharamsala for another four years, and continued working independently, *('though I did always take my finished thangkas to Dorje Wangdu for review')*. Leslie is well qualified to teach others, and has started to teach using online format. She has held exhibitions of her work. The DVD documentary *Creating*

Buddhas (2008) made by Isadora Gabriella Leidenfrost tells her story and shows the production and technique of an appliqué thangka of the Buddhist goddess, Green Tara.

Quotes from Leslie Rinchen Wongmo in *Creating Buddhas*:

"They are so meaningful to me and others value them so highly. I am doing something that I love so much and that I feel is so much a part of the spiritual path that I have chosen, that helps me to learn and grow"

The fine detailed work of Tibetan silk appliqué takes devotion, dedication and patience and Leslie is one of very few Westerners who have studied this art.

In spite of the difficulties facing the continuity of Tibetan culture, Leslie Rinchen Wongmo believes that the future of Tibetan appliqué art is bright. *"The fact that there are masters, teachers, artists doing it... the fact that there are those few and that they are willing to teach (and I am proof of that), (means that) it can be re-invigorated and re-awakened"*

"I hope my work can be a contribution to the preservation and appreciation of Tibetan culture. My art comes out of and is integrally connected with a profound spiritual tradition. Each piece should function to bless and inspire those who commission it as well as those who see it. The form itself is imbued with spirit and I try to work in such a way as to enhance that essence throughout my process and in each completed piece." From <http://www.silkthangka.com/the-tradition/technique/56-history-of-fabric-thangkas> last updated 18 Feb 2009- downloaded 6-11-09

Glossary

Explanatory notes: Phonetic spelling has been used for Tibetan and Sanskrit words. Italicised foreign words are Tibetan unless labelled Skt. (Skt = Sanskrit). 'th' is an aspirated 't', not pronounced 'th' as in 'the'.

<i>buddha</i> (Skt.)	a fully enlightened being
<i>bodhisattva</i> (Skt.)	an emanation of the Buddha devoted to the welfare of all sentient beings
<i>chod yon</i>	priest- patron
<i>chod pa</i>	offering; may be made to the Three Jewels, to lamas, or to images of deities
deity	meditational deity (<i>yidam</i> Tib., <i>ishtadevata</i> Skt.) a figure used in meditation, visualisation in Vajrayana practices. Not an external god but the symbol or manifestation of the enlightened mind
deity yoga	the practice of visualising oneself as the deity, after receiving initiation from a qualified teacher who holds the lineage
<i>dharma</i> (Skt.)	underlying unity of life, cosmic order; 'law', central law of creation and interdependence
empowerment	an initiation given in a formal ceremony by a lama transferring authority to engage in a particular practice (<i>abhisheka</i> Skt.)
<i>gang duan</i> (Ch.)	tribute satin
<i>geshe</i>	a fully ordained monk who has passed the highest academic qualifications in the Tibetan Buddhist studies
<i>gompa</i>	meditation hall
<i>kangyu</i>	stem stitch is used for linear details
<i>kesi</i> (Ch.)	silk slit tapestry, also known as cut or carved silk.
<i>köku</i>	cloth (silk) image, a huge thangka, hung outside monasteries on special occasions, or rolled down a hillside
<i>köku chenmo</i>	giant thangka
<i>köthang</i>	fabric scroll
<i>ku</i>	image or body

<i>kuduan</i> (Ch.)	treasury satin
<i>kuten</i>	body support
<i>kuthang</i>	scroll image of a person or deity (painted or cloth)
<i>lhakhang</i>	shrine hall, chapel, a monastery assembly hall
<i>lhan'drub</i>	patchwork, appliqué
<i>lhenthabma</i>	glued silk thangka
<i>mala</i> (Skt.)	rosary, or garland, (prayer beads)
<i>marthang</i>	red thangka, deity painted or stitched in gold on red background
merit	merit gained by virtuous actions, which brings about favourable rebirth, <i>sonam Tib.</i>
<i>mudra</i> (Skt.)	hand position
<i>nagthang</i>	thangka painted or stitched on a black background
<i>Namsa Chenmo</i>	highest ranking tailor, 'Grand Master of clothes'
<i>puja</i> (Skt.)	ceremony, offering prayers
<i>riltsem</i>	'fill stitch', satin stitch
<i>Saga Dawa</i>	the ceremony to commemorate the Buddha's birthday, enlightenment and death
<i>Sampa Lhuendrup</i> (Bhutan)	Prayer to Padmasambhava that spontaneously fulfils all wishes. <i>Sangwa lhundrupma</i> (Tib.)
<i>tangchet</i>	horse hair cord wound in silk
<i>thagtrubma</i>	silk tapestry thangka, woven by hand with different silk threads
<i>thangka</i>	a scroll image usually of deities or mandalas painted, stitched or appliqué (see Appendix 2.)
<i>thongdrol/ throng drol</i>	'liberation on sight', the term for giant appliqué thangka in Tibet and Bhutan
<i>torma</i>	ritual offering cake
<i>trawa trache/ drawa drachey</i>	ceiling frieze
<i>tresjar</i>	cut and glue technique (from Amdo)
<i>trestrub ma</i>	appliqué thangka, stitched figures, small pieces of silk are cut into shapes and stitched together

<i>tsalthang</i>	vermilion thangka
<i>tsem'drub</i>	embroidery
<i>vajra</i> (Skt)	thunderbolt, weapon, <i>dorje</i> (Tib.)
<i>yidam</i>	meditational deity
<i>zoric</i>	arts, 'sciences of manufacture', <i>shilpavidya</i> (Skt.)

List of Tibetan terms and names with their Wylie transliteration

NOTE: because of different dialect pronunciations some words are entered more than once, with alternatives indicated after/

n = name; Skt = Sanskrit; Ch = Chinese.

Amdo	a mdo
Bhutan	'brug yul
cham	'cham
Chenrezig	spyen ras gzigs
Dalai Lama	t la'i bla ma
Derge	sde dge
Desi Sanggye Gyatso	sde-sri sang srgyas-rgya-mtsho
Dezhin Shegpa	de-bzhin-gshegs-pa
Dorje Phurba	rdo rje phur pa
Dorje Wangdu	rdor-je dbang du
drawa drachey	drwa ba drwa che
Drepung	'bras-spungs
Drukpa Kagyu	'brug pa bka' brgyud
Dungkar Gompa	dung-dkar dgon pa
Ganden	dga' ldan
Geluk-pa	dge-lugs-pa
geshe	dge bshes
gompa	dgon pa
Guru Rinpoche	gu ru rin po che
Gyalse Tenzin Rabgye	rgyal rtse bstan 'dzin rab rgyas
Gyantse	rgyal rtse
Gyeten Namgyal	rgyas bstan rnam gyal
Gyuto	rgyu stod

Hemis	he mis
Jamgon	‘jam mgon
Jamgon Khongtrul	‘jam mgon kong sprul
kangyu	kang – yu
Karma Kargyu / Kagyu	karma bka’-rgyud
Karmapa	karma pa
Kenting Tai Situ Rinpoche	ku ‘an ting ta’i si tu rin po che
Kham	khams
Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi	mkhan po phun tshogs bkra shis
Khen Rinpoche	mkhan rin po che n of person
Khön	‘khon
Khunkhyen Pema Karpo	kun mkhyen padma dkar po
kö ku	gos sku
kö ku chenmo	gos-sku chen mo
ku	sku
ku ten	sku rten
kö chen	gos chen
kö- thang	gos-thang
Labrang	bla brang
Ladakh	la dwags
Lakha Rinpoche	lha kha rin po che
lama	bla ma
lhakhang	lha khang shrine (deity) hall of gompa
Lhasa	lha sa
lhendrub	lhan’drub
lhenthabma	lhan ’thabs ma
marthang	dmar thang
Menla Dondrup	smän-bla don-grub
Menri	smän-bris

monlam chenmo	smon lam chen mo
nagthang	nag thang
Namgyel	rnam gyal
Namsa Chenmo	rnam sa chen mo
Ngawang Lobsang Gyatso	ngag-dbang-blo-bzang-rgya-mtsho
Norbulingka	nor bug ling pa
Nyingma	rnying ma
Ogyen Trinley Dorje	o rgan phrin las rdor-je
Paljor Rinpoche	spal 'bypor rin po che
Phuntsok Tsering	phun tshogs tshe ring
Rabtan Kunsang	rab-brtan-kun-bzang
Rangjung Rigpei Dorje	rang 'byung rig pa'i rdo rje
Repkong/ Rebgong	reb gong
Rigsum gonpo	rigs gsum mgon po
ril-tsem	ril-tsem
Rinchen Wongmo	rin chen dbang mo
Rinchen Zangpo	rin chen bzang po
Rumtek	rim thig
Saga dawa	sa ka zla wa
Sakya	sa skya
Sakya Trizen	sa skya khri 'dzin
Samye	bsam yas
Sampa lhundrupma	bsam pa lhun grub ma
Sanggye Gyatso	sangs-rgyas rgya-mtsho
Sangwa duepa	gsang ba 'dus pa (<i>Guhyasamaja</i> . Skt.)
Sengeshong	?Wutun (Ch.) in Amdo, NW Qinghai Province
Sera	se ra
Ssrthang	gser thang
Sertreng	gser-spreng/ or gser 'phreng

Sherabling	shes rab gling
Shigatse	gzhis dkar rtse
Sogyal Rinpoche	bsod (nams) rgyal (mtshan) rin po che
Sokhang	bzo khang
sonam	bsod nams
Sonam Gyatsho	bsod nams rgya mtsho
Songsten Gampo	srong bstan sgam po
tang chet	tang-tchet
Tashilhunpo	bkra-shi lhun-po
Tashi gang dzong	bkra shis sgang rdzong n of place in Bhutan
Tashicho Dzong	bkra shis chos rdzong
Temba Choepal	bstan pa chos 'phel
Tendar Kunchok	bstan grags dkon mchog
Tenga Rinpoche	bstan dga' rin po che
Tenzin Gyaltzen	bstan 'dzin rgyal mtshan
Tenzin Nyimalha	bstan 'dzin nyi ma lha
thongdrol / throngdrol	mthong grol
torma	gtor ma
trawa trache / drawa drachey	gra ba grwa byed
trejar	gra sbyar
tres-trub ma	dras drub ma
Trisong Detsen	khri-srong-lde-brtsan
tsalthang	mtshal thang
tsampa	tsam pa
Tsarong	rtsa rong
Tsechu	tshe chu
tsem'drub	'rtsem 'grub
Tseringma	tshe ring ma
Tsongcho Sertreng	tshogs chos gser 'phreng

Tsongkhapa	tsong kha pa
Tsuglhakang	tshogs lha khang
Tsurphu	mtshur phu
tulku	sprul sku
Urgyen	o rgyan
U- Tsang	dbus gtsang
Yarlung	yar lung
yidam	yi dam
Zanabazar	dznya nab a dzra
Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyel	zhabs drung ngag dbang rnamgyal
zorik	bzo rig

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