

## BOOK REVIEWS

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*Mongolian Buddhist Art: Masterpieces from the Museums of Mongolia*. Volume I, Parts 1–2: *Thangkas, Appliqués and Embroideries*. Edited by Zara Fleming and J. Lkhagvademchig Shastri.

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The two-part *Mongolian Buddhist Art: Masterpieces from the Museums of Mongolia* by Serindia Publications is a long overdue publication that introduces 441 Buddhist paintings from Mongolian museums. The book was produced by an able team of Mongolian and British scholars after the opening of the country to the West in 1990. The project, which lasted for a number of years, is an initiative by Mr. Tsanjid, the former Minister of Education, and began in the early 2000s under the leadership of Mr. Khishigbayar, then Director of the Center for Cultural Heritage (CCH). Notwithstanding Mr. Khishigbayar's untimely death, the team formed by him in early 2000 – consisting mainly of writers and the photographer from the CCH, now in collaboration with Zara Fleming, a British art historian of Buddhist art, and the Mongolian editor and translator Lkhagvademchig Shastri, a specialist in Tibetan Buddhism – were able to complete the long-awaited project.

The book is an elaborate two-volume catalog mainly consisting of images selected from five museums: three from Mongolia's capital Ulaanbaatar – the Zanabazar Museum of Fine Arts, the Chojjin Lama Temple Museum, the Bogda Khan Palace Museum – and two from outlying provinces – Danzanravjaa Museum and Erdene Zuu Monastery Museum. This broad selection not limited to the capital city is particularly important as objects from provincial museums typically do not ever get published.

Another fine feature of the book is that it is bilingual, with texts in both Mongolian and English side by side, making it easy for a reader to consult terms and phrases in both versions. The book is organized thematically: the images are grouped within the seven chapters: the Buddhas; the mahāsiddhas, Six Ornaments and Two Excellences; the Indian and Tibetan Scholars, Jebtsundampa reincarnations and Mongolian scholars; Tutelary deities (*vidam*), Ḍākinīs, and Dharmapālas. Each object is shown in full-page size, often with selected details shown separately to highlight them. The images are accompanied by brief entries containing identifications in four languages essential for further research: Mongolian, Tibetan, Sanskrit and Chinese. As museum cataloguing is poor in Mongolia, the meticulous work done to identify the iconography of these many images constitutes one of the many achievements of this valuable contribution.

The book addresses various audience levels, from beginners just learning about Mongolian art to specialists of Buddhism and Buddhist art interested in comparative research. The main introduction is a brief overview of Mongolian art history from prehistoric times to the modern revival of Buddhism. As it is arranged chronologically and covers a long period and diverse traditions among peoples inhabiting the territory of modern-day Mongolia over several millennia, the text is divided into sections based on the steppe confederations or empires. This system is adopted from earlier art-historical writings that follow the accepted historical chronologies. In this regard, the introduction is helpful for readers acquiring knowledge of Mongolian art at the beginning level.

For readers interested in Buddhism and Buddhist art, this book is an asset as it reveals numerous gems from Mongolian museums that otherwise remain largely inaccessible to scholars. The extensive

sets that include portraits of Tibetan and Mongolian lineages (i.e. Dalai Lamas, Tāranātha), mahāsiddhas, and Buddhist narratives, heretofore unpublished, make this volume an eye-opening publication to demonstrate the wide scope of Mongolian Buddhist art.

The majority of the images in the volume are from the nineteenth century, with only a few from the eighteenth and some others dating to the early twentieth century. As the period is characteristic of the mass conversion to Buddhism not limited to the nobility, the museum collections demonstrate aspects of deities and their forms favored in Mongolia other than, or in addition to, the typical and ubiquitous Buddhist images found across Asia. Numerous images of the Buddha Śākyamuni and Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya and Vajrapāṇi, Tsonkhapa and arhats are carefully selected to show the diversity of stylistic and artistic renderings. Some images, such as, for example, lavish portraits of Tāranātha (1575–1634) (Chapter 4) – who allegedly passed away in Mongolia according to certain Mongolian sources – and his reincarnations are very specific to the interpretation of Buddhist history and sectarian affiliations disseminated in Mongolia.

The book makes a tangible and an important effort in identifying artists for many paintings, with new names here brought to light for the first time: Chojir (p. 117), Luvsandorj (p. 523), S. Sharav (p. 531), Shagdarsüren (p. 546), and Gombojav (p. 654), and more significantly two female artists, Ichinkhorloo and Densmaa (p. 239). In the production of appliqué, which is typically based on teamwork, women usually played a big part. However, their names are almost never mentioned in the histories and they often remain in obscurity as mere artisans in the production of appliqué *thangkas*. It is therefore very welcome to see this publication fill in this gap with some female artists' names.

In references to possible workshops and schools, the book follows the art-historical categories first established in the late 1970s by a Mongolian art historian Nyam-Osoryn Tsultem (1924–2001). Thus, for instance, some previously published appliqué works such as Kālacakra maṇḍala (p. 507), Hayagrīva by an appliqué master Tsend (p. 570), as well as monumental White Tārā (p. 604) are all identified as “School (or Artists) of Ikh Khüree.”

According to Tsultem, his term “School of Ikh Khüree” aims at suggesting the existence of characteristics specific to this central monastery. Further elaborations on styles have remained a difficult task in Mongolian art as the socialist destruction of Buddhist culture in the twentieth century left behind only ruins and randomly scattered works of art in local museums. The current inaccessibility of archival and museum resources in Mongolia remains an unfortunate hindrance to scholarly research.

This book introduces new stylistic affiliations, such as “Ikh Khüree scholars” and “artists of Bogda Khan Palace”, which need more explanation, as the images selected range broadly from high-quality accomplishments, such as Uṣṇīṣavijayā (p. 635) and Mañjuhosa (p. 592) to the rarely occurring deity Nirmala Ratna (p. 599) made in a different style. Stylistic details lead the authors to attribute a truly monumental image of Amitāyus (p. 625) to Ikh Khüree “scholars” as opposed to other accomplished pieces they attribute to “artists of Ikh Khüree”, which leaves this reader in confusion: the almost identical compositional and stylistic details of this fourteen-meter-long Amitāyus (p. 625) and White Tārā (p. 604) suggest the two are not of different stylistic affiliations, but are part of the Three Long Life deities, here Uṣṇīṣavijayā extinct. This reader is pleasantly surprised with other heretofore unpublished stylistically identical images that are currently in the Erdene Zuu Museum. These are, for example, black, or *nagthan thangkas*, Vajrapāṇi and Mahākāla (pp. 731, 743); and two forms of Mahākāla (pp. 773, 775), among other stylistically connected images.

Blurry details of images frequently recurring throughout the two volumes further hinder readers in close examination. Stylistically, one outstanding image of Avalokiteśvara Siṃhanāda (p. 563) begs attention and investigation, particularly in comparison with art from Eastern Tibet. Ethnically Mongol peoples still inhabit territories outside the modern-day political borders; monastic centers in Amdo and Kham had a strong Mongol presence for several centuries. This suggests possibilities

for artistic exchange as evidenced by striking similarities in style with Tibet as exemplified by Avalokiteśvara *Siṃhanāda* and other images in the book, such as “The Portrait of the Seventh Dalai Lama Lobsang Kelsang Gyatso” (p. 323).

The translation of inscriptions in the texts is another long overdue and welcome point, which here also includes two instances of mentioning texts on the back of *thangkas* (p. 470; p. 654). As these images, here published for the first time, remain largely inaccessible for further scholarly scrutiny, it is not entirely clear whether there are other images with back and side inscriptions. At this early stage of the field, any information about images, especially inscriptions if any, continues to be critical for forming our knowledge of Mongolian Buddhist art.

By introducing these extraordinary images, this book opens new venues for research about styles as well as unique aspects of Buddhist appropriation in Mongolia. This book is of special significance as research on Mongolian Buddhism is hindered by the massive destruction of thousands of temples and monasteries in the 1930s. The socialist intolerance toward faith saved to a limited extent only two out of 1,022 monasteries – the Gandan Monastery in Ulaanbaatar that retained a strictly limited service during the socialist period, and the abandoned Erdene Zuu that gradually was turned into a museum site under the pressure of foreign visitors to Mongolia after World War II, including the American Vice President Henry Wallace (1888–1965) in 1944.

The extensive glossary, chronologies, tables of *Jeptsundampas*, and a bibliography at the end of the second part are also among the important and useful additions that previous publications of Mongolian art in the 1980s and 1990s did not include. As this two-part Volume I focuses only on paintings (*thangkas*, *appliqué*, architectural paintings), readers eagerly await Volume II, that promises to introduce three-dimensional works from Mongolian museums. This reader also hopes the price for the new Volume II will be more affordable than Volume I, currently priced \$450.

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*Translation, History and Arts: New Horizons in Asian Interdisciplinary Humanities Research*. Edited by Ji Meng and Atsuko Ukai.

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This volume contains nine research papers presented at a joint Japanese–French workshop on the theme of “Local History in the Context of Global History”. The workshop was held at the *École Normale Supérieure de Lyon* in October 2011 as one of the events organized at the biennial international *Todai Forum* under the auspices of the University of Tokyo. As Haneda Masashi explains in the preface to the volume, the aim of the workshop was to rethink our understanding of world history in terms of the coming together of originally separate regions around the world, politically, economically and culturally. This new perspective stresses the commonality of local and national histories and examines their interconnectedness fully respecting their uniqueness. The papers in the present publication share the vision of developing a new discursive narrative that perceives the world as one and constructs local histories against the backdrop of global history.

After an introductory commentary by Christian Henriot, “Paving the Way”, which expounds the de-centred, dynamic and open view of history embraced by all contributors, the volume is neatly divided into three parts. Part I, “Translation and Cross-Cultural Scientific Communication”, explores the processes that underlay the circulation and diffusion of discourses, concepts and knowledge in different regions of the world and in different historical periods. Part II, “Museums, Image and