

# Introduction to Tibetan Art

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FOR anyone schooled in present-day conventions of artistic appreciation, approach to Tibetan art will not be altogether easy: to catch its real spirit, a considerable readjustment of values is called for. The almost exclusively aesthetic motives evoked in most of us by the word "art," as also the current belief that "self-expression" must necessarily be a primary consideration with every artist, represent notions hardly translatable in Tibetan terms. As far as the Tibetan artist's conscious attitude to the products of his skill is concerned, they one and all come under the heading of utilities, various in kind and degree of significance, "utility" here being taken to cover both the practical use of any particular object of human manufacture and also its symbolical suggestiveness, as a "reminder" of the sacred Doctrine and of the unique opportunity provided by this "human life hard to obtain"; regarded in this way, not only objects obviously serving what one would call "a religious purpose" but also things supplying the humblest needs of everyday life are able to become links between that life and "the one thing needful," that on which all subordinate utilities converge and in which they will find their ultimate fulfillment. Therefore each work of art appears, to the Tibetan mind, as fulfilling this twofold usefulness, at once practical and intellectual; in assessing its quality and value a man will consequently ask himself, firstly, "is this thing well made for its purpose?" and secondly, "is this thing *correctly* made?", that is to say, does it conform to those traditional canons whereby the universal light of the Doctrine is caused to reveal itself through the particular symbolism of the object in question?

There is in fact a twofold way of recognizing such a symbolism, namely through the use for which the object is destined in the first place, whether of eating, clothing, sitting or otherwise, and also through the various ornamental features traditionally associated with its construction: here again, "ornament" must never be interpreted as meaning unnecessary decoration, luxurious in its appeal, but rather as belonging to an artistic algebra, the signs of which can be read by those who speak that particular traditional language. Where then does the aesthetic element come in, it may be asked, seeing that Art must needs have its attractive appeal, otherwise one could hardly call it by that name? The answer is that the element of attractiveness, beauty, is simply taken for granted, as a quality naturally attaching to anything properly made, so that its presence hardly needs to be stressed when discussing the merits of that thing: that is why the Tibetan language, as compared with those of Europe, seems at first sight to be deficient in expressions of aesthetic values of all sorts; it would not be easy to translate an average book of artistic criticism into Tibetan so as to render its thought intelligible to the reader.

As for the Tibetan artist himself, he knows that his own skill, be it great or small, must, on pain of being self-defeating, be both inspired by, and dedicated to, the all-determining spiritual Norm; and this Norm, on its own showing, is ego-negating, it

excludes in principle all individualistic exhibitionism. Such is the nature of artistic inspiration in the Tibetan world: the more closely we are able to identify ourselves with this point of view, the nearer we will get to understanding what Tibetan art is all about.

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Historically speaking, the motives figuring in the Tibetan tradition derive mostly from Buddhist India; Chinese influences, which made themselves felt later, only affect accessory features, especially in the field of social amenities such as official dress, cooking and domestic decoration of various kinds: for instance carpets, used for sitting or for saddlecloths, were an importation from China as proved by the nature of the designs, though these, and also the actual technique, have been characteristically Tibetanised. For certain materials entering into the construction of artistic objects, especially silk which is not produced in Tibet, and certain categories of household requisites, such as porcelain, Tibet has always remained dependent on China as its source of supply; so long as these Chinese products were of good quality, the Tibetans benefited; when, following the Revolution of 1912, the craftwork of China began to deteriorate rapidly, Tibet could not but suffer from the results, both in actual fact and through the effect on public taste. It must, however, be repeated that the basic forms and the most telling motives in Tibetan art, across all their historical transformations, still clearly reflect the original Indian influence that came to Tibet with Buddhism; an influence which subsequently got passed on to the Mongols, whose conversion to the Buddhist faith was the work of Tibetan missionaries round about the 16th century. Mongolian art has always remained an offshoot of the Tibetan artistic stem: in certain departments, such as that of sacred iconography, it is often quite difficult to tell from which of the two regions a particular object derives. Here again, it is the Indo-Buddhist forms that represent the constant element wherever the Lamaic tradition prevails.

Nevertheless, this insistence on the Indian presence must not be taken to imply that Tibetan art has ever lacked originality; the opposite is the truth, for the creative genius of the race never failed to leave its own imprint on anything the Tibetans happened to borrow from whatever quarter. Their conscious intention, however, has always been to adhere to traditional Buddhist models: "originality," in Tibetan parlance, can only mean faithfulness to the origins: the idea of intentional innovation remains alien to the spirit of this artistic-ally gifted people—or did so until, at long last, they became exposed to the disintegrating influence of the modern industrialized civilization, first through commerce and more recently through military invasion; but this is a side of the story that need not be gone into here, though it had to be mentioned lest anybody should think that the state of affairs described in this survey still prevails in any large degree, for unhappily this is no longer the case. The question of what can or cannot be preserved, or else revived, in a predictable future is not one to which a simple answer can be given.

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The stage is now set sufficiently to enable one to give brief consideration to each of the arts in which the Tibetans have been pre-eminent, starting with *Architecture*: though the population of Tibet has always been relatively sparse, so that the available labor in any one valley can but rarely have exceeded a few hundreds, the country from end to end was dotted about with monasteries, temples and minor shrines and monuments of all

sorts, often constructed on a scale that would be amazing did one not know (if one has lived in the Tibetan world) that the spirit of devotion is able to make up for the absence of material resources in a degree unheard of in places where everything has to be paid for in money; this spirit is not something confined to the distant past, for I myself while in Northern Sikkim have seen the trunks of colossal cedars lying in the forest ready for carrying on men's shoulders —some fifty to a tree—for the repair of the great temple of Sakya, to the northward of Mount Everest: this journey of some sixty odd miles involved a crossing of the main Himalayan range by a pass 18,000 feet high; each village or valley on the way took turns to offer its services, for no reward except the merit accruing to the deed —this was the same spirit in which Chartres was built, visibly being displayed in the middle of the 20th century. Having seen this much, one cannot be surprised at the magnitude of the results in other parts of the country.

Tibetan architects have all along shown a wonderful instinct both in siting their buildings and in taking advantage of the natural features of the ground: a slight slope imparted to the walls, Egyptian fashion, makes the human constructions seem as if they were growing spontaneously out of the ground. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that there exists no example of Tibetan architecture, but amounts to a masterpiece in some degree; many of the small shrines and monasteries vie with the greatest in respect of architectural perfection, and no two of these are alike. These facts give one the measure of the frightful artistic loss consequent on the Chinese Communist occupation of Tibet, with the destruction of religious buildings that followed the fighting in 1959; in the eastern parts of the country where guerilla resistance first arose, this destruction started earlier. It is small consolation to be told that, according to the accepted Communist practice, monuments of recognized "cultural" importance have been spared and even repaired where they had suffered damage in the fighting: the Potala, for instance, and other well-known buildings close to Lhasa, do not stand in any danger at present. This in no wise offsets, however, the far more widespread loss of buildings of no particular renown but not necessarily of lesser artistic merit, many of which, as refugees have testified, have either been destroyed outright, or desecrated and turned into barracks for the troops or else abandoned to the action of the weather and to the desultory quarrying of their materials: the all-over architectural loss is beyond computing.

To imagine what all this amounts to, in artistic wastage, let us for a moment picture an England fallen under similar occupation by a godlessly totalitarian enemy (*quod absit*) who would despoil and destroy most of our parish churches while meticulously preserving as "national monuments," a few specially selected cathedrals: what value would attach to the message vehicled by these few privileged examples once they had been isolated from the whole where properly they belong? Such has been the fate of Tibetan architecture in the last few years; it is only in certain favored districts lying in Indian territory that it survives intact, especially in Ladak (often called "Little Tibet") which is a district attached to Kashmir. To this must be added whatever is to be found in the cis-Himalayan States such as Sikkim and Bhutan, where the architectural style is akin to that of the Tibetan motherland, but modified in various ways in response to climatic differences, such as the replacement by a high pitched roof of the flat roofing usual on the central plateau, where rainfall is very small: in Ladak, on the other hand, conditions are so similar that the buildings there could just as well be found on the plateau itself.

While on the subject of architecture, something should be said about its domestic side: compared to many others, the Tibetans have been very well housed; even people reckoned as being relatively poor have possessed solid dwellings of sun-baked brick or stone or, in mountain districts situated at lower altitudes, of wood after the manner of Alpine chalets. Some of the larger farmhouses, in Ladak and also (judging by photographs) in the eastern region of Kham, are planned on an ample scale and often attain to great architectural beauty. To this must be added the fact that every Tibetan homestead has a focus, at once devotional and artistic, in the shape of the family altar placed either in the principal living-room or else in a room set apart. For the furnishing of this consecrated corner many arts come together; painting, image-casting, wood-block printing (of books), metalwork (bowls and lamps) and rugs for officiating clergy to sit on. From this it will be apparent that artistic participation is something open to people of every degree, it never could become an exclusive luxury of the well-to-do. Though obviously the great feudal manor-houses, splendid edifices disposed round an open court where horses and mules could be tethered, would contain more, and more costly, artifacts than the homes of the ordinary folk, there was no unbridged gulf between the respective ways of living; fundamentally they had a similar character, despite difference of social degree. Life in Tibet may have been simple, and even hard in some respects—for those accustomed to our soft living, the unheated houses of the Tibetans, rich and poor, during the intense winter cold would be trying—but it was a life full of interest and surrounded by beauty on all sides, both the beauty of Nature and the beauty of man's handiwork under many forms; being always steeped in beauty people had felt no great incentive to define their experience of it in words, any more than fish feel the need to coin a name for the water they swim in. Ugliness has now invaded Tibet on a large scale, as part of the price to be paid for the Chinese Communist "liberation" of what, prior to their coming, was one of the most contented countries in the world.

From architecture the step to *Painting* follows naturally, inasmuch as one of the primary uses of the latter art, in Tibet, has been the covering of the interior walls of temples with scenes from religious history and with the symbolical portrayal of celestial states. Surviving examples of very early Tibetan wall-paintings display a style of Buddhist art of unsurpassable purity and perfection, comparable to that of the cave temples of India. Mrs. Govinda, a gifted Parsee artist who in 1948, in company with her husband, visited Tsaparang in Western Tibet and took tracings of paintings in the old temples there, has thereby preserved for the world a priceless record; these buildings had long been suffering from local neglect, and who knows what may have happened in view of the political upheavals that have occurred since? Fortunately, some examples of this early style are also to be found in Indian territory, notably at Tabo in the Spiti valley. It is to be hoped that the Indian Archaeological Department will do all that is possible to safeguard these unique paintings, thus providentially placed under its care. Given the very dry Tibetan climate, the chief thing needed to preserve a set of ancient paintings is to keep the building in a decent state of repair. In Tibet itself, the chief cause of disappearance of the many fine early paintings that must have existed there is almost certainly their later repainting in a style which, though still good, falls short of the primitive inspiration. The kind of meticulous touching-up by experts, intent on changing as little as possible, which our own "museum-mindedness" rightly demands in such cases is alien to the habits of simple people living entirely in the present and taking their own

traditional art for granted; by and large this is a healthy attitude, but "the exception that proves the rule" is difficult to fit in to this otherwise desirable viewpoint. All the world over, priceless things have disappeared from this cause, and it is difficult to see how this could have been prevented.

Passing to our own time, it can fairly be claimed that some quite fine series of wall paintings have been executed by artists who are still living: I am thinking of a particular case, at P'hiyang, in Ladak. Because of the much broader treatment required when dealing with large surfaces, the quality had on an average remained at a better level than in the case of the *thankas*, or painted scrolls mounted on Chinese brocade, that form the other great branch of the painter's art as practiced in Tibet. In the latter case, there is more call for subtlety, both of line and coloring, and likewise more is asked in the way of facial expression where human figures are concerned. It must be admitted that since the turn of the present century this type of painting has been in steady decline, even though many capable professional exponents were still kept fully busy in supplying the needs of the population all over the country; to which number must be added many Lamas of high rank who painted as a spiritual exercise and whose work was by no means amateurish. Among signs of decline that meet the eye in most of these recent *thankas* might be mentioned a generally more stereotyped handling of the traditional forms, a noticeable predilection for cruder (often excessively light) coloring and an almost total disappearance of finer shades of expression in the faces: when one looks back even a hundred years, let alone to the rapturously inspired religious painting of the 17th century, one is made aware of how much quality has been lost meanwhile. *Thankas* are not easy to date with precision; but it is nevertheless roughly true to say that the 18th century still produced a lot of *thanka* painting splendid both in composition and technique, the 19th some that was outstanding and much that conformed to a good average; whereas in the 20th century deterioration on all counts has been rapid, and favorable exceptions, though not absent, have been comparatively few, especially after the first two decades had passed.

The technique of *thanka* painting follows everywhere much the same pattern: a piece of cotton cloth is inserted into a frame, rather like those used over here for embroidery, where it is kept taut by a thread running all round when the cloth sags, this thread can be further tightened. The surface is then coated with fine plaster mixed with glue, thin enough to allow of its being rolled up on occasion; the plaster, once dried thoroughly, is polished with an agate. After that, figures and other main features of the composition are drawn in, fairly roughly, with charcoal. Painting then begins, in body colors prepared from various earths and other mineral substances including fine gold. When the whole surface has been covered, finer details are added over the existing colors, including the features of the faces, which are among the last details to be put in.

Training for this art involves apprenticeship with a senior artist, who may also be one's spiritual instructor, in the case of a young monk, or else a lay professional. At first the pupil watches his master and aids him in routine jobs such as grinding paints and preparing canvases; almost unconsciously he imbibes many of the technical manipulations he will use later. Drawing will be learned by copying designs and figures either set out by his own teacher or else reproduced in the standard books for the use of painters, where the canonical proportions of each Buddha figure or other sacred motif are

given in detail. In fact, every such figure, however free it may appear in the result, fits into a framework determined by the rules of "Sacred Geometry"; relative measurements and points of intersection of the various guiding lines are all laid down. Of particular importance are certain focal points in the figure corresponding to the symbolical centers of consciousness as used in *yogic* meditation; these points are often marked on the back of the canvas (which is semi-transparent), their positions being indicated by a sacred monogram or syllable. The whole creation, though it delights our eye, partakes as much of an exact science as of an art; to a Tibetan eye, the beauty it exudes is but the splendor of the truth there symbolically indicated. In this respect a picture and a book hardly differ for a Tibetan: I remember an occasion when I tried to buy a painting entitled "States of the Way (to Deliverance)" and the owner, who said he did not wish to part with it, added "But I can let you have a book on the same subject. This will come to the same, won't it?"

Closely related to painting, as far as intention and usage are concerned, is the *Plastic Art*, the art of modeling images of Buddhas and Saints, the materials employed being either a kind of *stucco* (especially for larger figures) or else brass, which afterwards is gilt: as in medieval and renaissance Europe, the gilding is charged for separately, according to the amount of gold required. *Stucco* figures are always painted, while in the case of metal ones the hair and certain other features are often picked out in color. True sculpture, by a direct chipping of stone, is an art that has fallen into abeyance with the centuries: magnificent examples in black basalt exist in some of the earlier temples and one meets figures in relief, also of early date, on rock faces in unexpected places; but for the most part the three-dimensional images one sees in Tibet are modeled, not hewn.

The art of *Metal Casting* in Tibet appears to owe much to Newari masters from Nepal, many of whom crossed the Himalaya during past centuries in order to ply their craft in the lands to the north. The iconographical principles governing the making of plastic figures follow the same lines as in painting: symbolical proportions, postures, gestures, weapons and other attributes of each divine image or saintly portrait are all traditionally determined and each has its precise meaning; the art is to give effect to them in the best possible manner so that the message thus to be conveyed shines forth with the brightness of a true icon. Each statue, when the artist has completed his work, receives its "heart" in the shape of a strip of paper bearing a sacred formula, placed in a hollow inside the image which afterwards is sealed. So long as that text is present there, the image is "alive," it can be recipient of the worship intended for whatever personage it represents; if, through any accident, this text is taken out of the image (curio dealers often do this thinking they might find jewels there) then the image is "dead," it becomes a mere shell however beautiful it may seem to the profane eye; to "reanimate" it, a fresh dedication by a qualified person is required, which will of course include the insertion, once again of an appropriate text: these details have been given partly for the sake of those who possess or purchase Tibetan figures that have been robbed of their "hearts."

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Having now touched on those major arts that are most closely associated with the religious life of the Tibetans, one can pass on to consider briefly those other arts, such as woodwork, metalwork and weaving, which though not absent from the temple, find their place commonly in the home: to these can be added pottery, which in Tibet was glazed but otherwise undecorated; it deserves mention chiefly because of the classical perfection

of its forms, reminiscent of ancient Egypt and Hellas. This art, of which one of the important centres was a certain district in the central Brahmaputra valley, was an entirely domestic amenity, and its products, usually of large size and consequently heavy, rarely found their way outside their country of origin. Hardly any foreign writers about Tibet seem to have noticed these truly splendid examples of the potter's art in very dark bronze or else, for teapots, golden yellow; nor do they figure commonly in our museums. One can do no more than just notice the existence of this craft here.

In all the above mentioned branches of craftsmanship the Tibetans have excelled; indeed there was no Tibetan home, even if only a nomad herdsman's tent, but contained a few examples of craftwork, always of some merit and often outstandingly so. Sharing in what the arts can bring to human life (one cannot say this too often) was a common factor throughout Tibetan society, one that should not be overlooked when trying to estimate, in comparison with what exists elsewhere, the quality of living of this monstrously ill-used people.

Taking *Woodwork* as next on our list: apart from its place in architectural construction, where it supplies the spreading capitals of the supporting piers of temples etc., carved often with great boldness, and also rails, window-frames and other incidental features, this craft is commonly applied to a number of household objects chief among which are the small folding tables called *chogtse*, at which people sit while taking their meals and so on; the back of the table is open, facing the sitter, but the other three sides are solid and these are carved and often pierced and colored as well. To these should be added the chests and cupboards found in Tibetan houses, these being usually painted with attractive floral designs; similar painted decoration is also often to be seen on friezes and pillars both outside and inside the house. Among smaller objects, mention should be made of painted bowls with a lid to contain the *tsampa* or parched barley-meal which, for the Tibetans, takes the place of bread. Every Tibetan possesses a wooden teabowl which he carries about in the pouch formed in his gown above the sash that secures it round the waist; these teabowls are beautifully shaped and when made out of specially fine figured wood they fetch high prices. In some cases they are silver-lined and, more rarely, also mounted in finely worked silver: the latter is rather a Mongolian than a Tibetan custom, commoner therefore in the north-eastern parts of the country. Lastly must be mentioned the use of thick wooden boards to protect the sheaf of long, loose leaves that form the Tibetan book. Each volume is wrapped in silk or cotton and placed between the two boards which are held together with a ribband of some sort. In most cases these boards are carved to some extent, the pattern being picked out with gilding. The great volumes of the Scriptures, whether manuscript or, more commonly, printed from wooden blocks, are often enclosed between boards magnificently carved, showing elaborate figure compositions with Buddhas occupying the chief positions. Wholesale destruction of books by the Communists as part of their anti-religious campaign must by now have accounted for a very great quantity of these carvings; a number of examples collected by foreign travelers have, however, found a place in museums over here, enough, that is to say, to make one aware of how much more has been lost.

Like woodwork, *Metalwork* plays an important part in everybody's life, supplying as it does, besides altar vessels and lamps, copper and brass vessels of every kind and size, chief among which are the capacious teapots which every Tibetan family is continually

using from morning till night; nor must one forget those teapots of huge proportions from which tea is poured out to each monk at stated intervals during the daily services: these pauses for relaxation and refreshment are a regular feature of temple worship and exemplify a certain down-to-earth attitude very characteristic of Tibetan piety. Many smaller teapots are adorned with bands of silver, richly chased: this mixing of metals is a favourite device of the Tibetan smith. Usually the spout is made to issue from between the jaws of a sea monster, while the handle is formed out of a dragon: the variety of forms assumed by this common domestic utensil is very great, as one might expect in view of the place tea-drinking fills in the day-to-day life of the people.

In the same connection, other articles of common use are the copper or silver teacup-stands and lids made to fit Chinese porcelain, or, in exceptional cases, jade cups. In another department of metalwork one might mention knives and weapons of various kinds, of which the hilt and scabbard are often very finely worked. A long sheath-knife, that looks like a dagger, is regularly carried by Tibetan men but, in point of fact, it is a general purposes implement, chiefly for cutting meat while on travel, and has no offensive purpose. The Khambas (of Eastern Tibet), who have a certain warrior tradition behind them that goes with an extreme sense of local and personal independence, carry immense swords, the blades of which are masterpieces of the armourer's craft, with everything else to match. Though excellent craftsmen in metal are to be found in every corner of the Tibetan world, the Khambas are those who, by general admission, excel in this art as they do in many other things. In recent times Kham has given to Tibet, besides artists, a great number of men of heroic virtue, both physical and contemplative, and it is to the spiritual centers in Kham that persons of high aspiration from other regions have tended to go for instruction. Khamba skill and ardor has even expressed itself at times in the field of brigandage: such familiar Shakespearian characters as "first and second murderer" (who also figure in classical Tibetan drama) are often presented on the stage wearing Khamba costume, a joke which everybody in the audience is able to appreciate! It is therefore not surprising that it was in Kham that resistance to the Chinese first broke out in open warfare and that many leaders of the patriotic movement belonged to that region.

An account of Tibetan metalwork would not be complete without some reference to the vast amount of jewelry, varying in design with the district, which was in use all over the country —charm boxes, necklaces, ear-rings, rings and many other such pieces of jewelry were in common circulation, mostly made of silver though often gilt as well. Decoration took the form of fine filigree, coupled with a skilful use of turquoise, coral and small pearls; jade or onyx beads were also common. Another metal object, which though not exactly jewelry, was commonly carried on the person when traveling was a small silver shrine in which to house one's patron deity; a man would sling his portable shrine from the shoulder much as we would carry a camera.

This brings us to the craft with which the present inevitably rather schematic account of Tibetan art must be concluded: the craft of *Weaving*, which includes the making of rugs in woolen pile. First, however, one should speak about weaving in the ordinary sense, of materials for clothes and also of blankets, of which the Tibetans employ a large variety.

Of all the crafts found in Tibet weaving was the most universally practiced one. Practically every house had its loom and a very large proportion of the population, both male and female, could claim competence in this respect, with the result that the Tibetans have been among the most adequately clothed peoples in the world. Great houses kept a large number of weavers employed in supplying the household with woollens of all kinds ranging from rolls of ordinary cloth and bedding to the incomparable material known as *shema*, made from selected portions of the fleece and which, once dyed an "off-black" color, went into the gowns of the gentry and wealthier merchants: so close is the weave as to render this material almost rain-proof; it will even turn a mastiff's teeth on occasion, as this author can testify—they did not mark the cloth itself, though they drew blood underneath. This best of all cloths was expensive even in Tibet—one gown made from it cost the equivalent of about £20—but against that must be set the fact that such a garment is expected to last for several generations: thus regarded, it is not all that costly. But even apart from such high-class materials, the ordinary homespuns worn by the population at large were excellent, as well as pleasing to the eye; one can but repeat it, Tibetans of all ranks were well supplied in regard to the three basic necessities of food, clothing and housing; since the Occupation they have known shortage for the first time in their history.

The monastic population whose habit, in Tibet, is of a dark maroon, not yellow as in most Buddhist countries, naturally absorbed a considerable weaving output, being supplied in this respect by their own families or else by well-wishers who, in this way, stood to gain merit by contributing to the welfare of the *Sangha*.

Something should here be said about dyes: apart from indigo, which was only obtainable from India, the Tibetans used the following dyestuffs: for red, madder and also lac, an insect product obtained from Bhutan; for yellow, rhubarb, a plant abundant on the Tibetan hills—when combined with indigo this gave all possible shades of green; for browns, walnut is the dye used, it comes from the alpine valleys. Latterly, Tibetans had begun to bring in chemical indigo and other aniline products stocked by the bazaars on the Indian border, to the great detriment of the weaver's craft in all its forms.

As regards his basic material, wool, the Tibetan weaver had access to the best possible sources of supply, since sheep living under the hard conditions of his native land tend to grow a wonderful quality of fleece; even when it feels soft to the touch it retains a resilience that enables it to stand up to the hardest wear; moreover Tibetans do not make the mistake of depriving it of too much of its natural oil, that is why their materials are ideal for wearing in a very cold climate. Tibetans do not work in silk or cotton, being entirely dependent for these on China and India respectively; as both are in considerable demand for several types of clothing, their importation ranks among the more important items of Tibetan trading.

So far, only plain materials of various kinds have been mentioned: it now remains for us to consider the one branch of the weaver's art where the Tibetans have gone in for elaborate patterning and variegated colors, namely the art of making carpets in pile; it should be said, in passing, that neither tapestry nor embroidery was ever developed in Tibet and where silk-embroidered *thankas* in Tibetan style are met with, these will almost certainly be the work of Mongolian monks, who originally will have got the idea from the Chinese.

Tibetan rugs are used exclusively for sitting on; never as floor coverings. Mostly they are of small size, oblong or square, being placed upon a low mattress of corresponding shape or else on a divan. The only carpets of considerable size are the long runners used by the rows of monks when engaged in chanting their choral offices; these are thick and rather shaggy and the colors, though pleasant, are kept on the sober side. The ordinary Tibetan rugs are often brightly colored but never garish; at least they never were so while the traditional designs and methods of dyeing prevailed. In recent times there has been a change, about which more later.

The introduction of this craft into Tibet can certainly be ascribed to contacts with China; the designs indicate this clearly, being for the most part based on a field carrying one, or more often three circles each of which has a square inscribed in it, this being also a common Chinese practice. The various borders running round the carpets also show evidence of a Chinese origin, including, as they do, the "key-pattern" and other familiar features found on Chinese rugs of similar form. In fact, even after the Tibetans began to make their own rugs in a style very much their own, they continued to import a large number of fine Chinese rugs of a type made at Ning-hsia, in Kansu province, and it is probably there that the original parentage of the Tibetan craft of carpet-making is to be sought. In particular, fine Chinese examples were to be seen in Tibet in the form of shaped saddlecloths as well as small oblong carpets laid over the hard saddle itself; these rugs were much prized and they certainly added a lot to the bright appearance of any pony whose master could afford them.

A peculiar feature of Tibetan rugs is the actual manner of creating the tufts that form the pile. Of the two classical carpet "knots," the Turkish and the Persian, it is the latter that was used in China and therefore one would have expected to find it also in Tibet; but such is not the case, for the Tibetans, for reasons unexplained, developed their own type of pile, made by winding the various strands of colored wool round a stick, the loops being sheared to form tufts only after a whole row has been completed; following which the row is secured by a weft thread. Another special feature, common both to Tibetan and Chinese rugs, is connected with the aim of producing definition in the design. In all carpets belonging to Islamic peoples definition is obtained by outlining; that is to say, a pale line of knots is run round a dark shape in the design and vice versa. In Chinese and Tibetan rugs, on the other hand, there is no such outlining and definition is obtained in quite a different way, namely by "undercutting" with scissors so as to deepen the shadows at required points, thus causing the design to stand out. This undercutting is a highly skilled operation; as a method it is very effective when kept within the limits imposed by its purpose; when exaggerated into a mannerism it merely becomes vulgar, as can be seen in modern Chinese commercial carpets.

Two of the principal centers of rug-making in Tibet were Gyantse, on the trade-route between India and Lhasa and, in a smaller way, Kampa Dzong which many will remember as one of the stages on the way to Mount Everest, situated on the edge of the plateau facing the main Himalayan chain. Kampa Dzong rugs are of relatively coarse texture, as befits their simple but very attractive designs; the classical Gyantse type of rug, on the other hand, shows a much finer knot-count.

This erstwhile flourishing craft has unfortunately been in continual decline since about 1930, when the first commercialization of Gyantse rugs began to affect their

quality. The situation deteriorated far more rapidly, however, about the time of the Second World War, when there was an influx into Tibet of neo-Chinese products of the most vulgar and inartistic kind. High society at Lhasa, whose members for better or worse were in a position to lead public taste, fell for all sorts of foreign novelties: in fact for the first time, the idea of "old fashioned" versus "up to date" gained a hold on the minds of many of the richer Tibetans, with catastrophic results on their powers of discrimination; this is a psychological phenomenon, typical of modern times, that has affected many lands and always has the same causes behind it and leads to the same results. Owners of genuine Tibetan carpets suddenly lost the taste for them and contemptuously handed their best examples over to their servants to be used up in the kitchen. In place of these pieces, which we ourselves might well have wished to place in a museum, they filled their houses with hideous products of a tightly packed board-like texture, displaying on a borderless field various sprawling motifs of a pictorial kind, such as dragons, tigers or fantastic birds, dyed in hit-you-in-the-eye aniline colors. Any one of these changes was enough to ruin the art, the worst being the loss of texture, for in all weaving this is the most essential factor of all; in a rug the "lie" of the tufts determines both its feel and the way the colors will catch the light and even a good design will be ineffective if the texture be not right. For anyone who thinks of producing any kind of rug, this is the first point to which he must give his attention: this is said for the benefit of anyone who thinks that the revival of this, or any other Tibetan craft using refugee labour will be an easy task. The practical problems are bound to be very great and their solution, to be even possible, requires a clear facing of the issue, without the least attempt at evasion either at the level of knowledge or of execution. The Lamas teach that Wisdom and Method, for any spiritual enterprise to be successful, must go hand in hand, they cannot be parted. The same applies in the arts: the idea must be right and so must the technique, otherwise one will produce a travesty, if not worse.

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In giving this account of Tibetan arts and crafts under many different aspects the aim has been, all along, to avoid a too abstract presentation, as if the objects described were only meant to be viewed across the protective glass of a collection or classified according to periods under cover of some sumptuously printed book. One has tried to show both what lies behind the very idea of Art, in Tibet, as also what place the creations of art have filled in the lives of the Tibetan people, serving their practical needs and enriching them inwardly at the same time.

One would gladly have had an opportunity of saying something about the three mobile arts of music, dancing and the drama, since these too have entered intimately into the artistic experience of Tibetans great and small and at all levels, from that of popular merrymaking to mystery plays of high spiritual import; but it would take a separate article to do anything like justice to them.

Ultimately the Spiritual Life itself is the sphere where the highest artistry of all is called for: for a Tibetan, religion is as much a matter of "skill" as of "will," this is a characteristic trait of his outlook. The supreme work of art, in Buddhist eyes, is Enlightenment itself; the human art of living, with all its component arts, is as a bow bent to speed an arrow to that target.

(Original editorial inclusion that followed the essay:)

*Man has only to look within himself to find God.*

'Attar.