

Potala Palace

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Lof-Sangh Tuf-Daenf,

Potala Palace on Dmar-Po Ri (Red Mountain), Lhasa, Tibet attained its present magnitude as a result of numerous additions made to the splendid architecture, which came into being in the time of Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po of the Thubet or Tubo dynasty in 7th century and rebuilt in mid-17th century by the Fifth Dalai Lama.

Ascending the throne at the age of 13, Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po (?-650AD) conquered various tribes in Tibet. To meet political and military needs, he moved the capital from Yalong to Lhasa. An old historical account quotes the monarch as saying "Since my forefather Tof-Tof-Yiv-Nyaef-Zaenf once lived on the Red Mountain, I shall do all beneficial things on this lucky site as I follow in his footsteps." Accordingly he built a palace on the Red Mountain, where he married Nepalese Princess Chif-Zuenf and Chinese Princess Wencheng of the Tang dynasty. Lhasa became a political and economic center of the Thubet or Tubo dynasty from that time on. Record reveals that the palace built by the monarch was on grand scale. There were three city walls surrounding the Red Mountain and 999 rooms in the palace ground. Together with the one on the peak of the Red Mountain rooms totalled 1,000. The main palace was linked to the apartments occupied by imperial concubines by a bridge made of silver and bronze. Eaves of palaces were decorated with gems. The corridors, erected structures and pavilions, with bells on ends of roofs, were stately and impressive. They present a magnificent sight.

The view of the original Red Mountain Palace had been preserved in a picture painted on the southern wall of the gate of Dazhao Monastery in Lhasa. The mural blackened due to incense burning in course of time. When the Fifth Dalai Lama rebuilt the Potala Palace in mid-17th century, the picture was traced and copied and installed on the northern wall in the corridor above the tri-range ladder. From the painting one gets an impression of the size of the palace built during the Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po era.

The Red Mountain palace was seriously damaged due to turmoil caused by war and lightning storms in the period when Mgar Stong-Brtsan Yul-Bzung (650-676AD) and Khrislon-Lde-Brtsan (755-797AD) reigned as monarchs. Only a few buildings escaped destruction and survived. The palace fell into further decay especially in the period after Glang-Dar-Ma (reigned 836-842AD), when the Thubet dynasty collapsed and there was a long period of fighting in Tibetan society. According to written history Gev Xen Kyungf Bof Chaw Sef of the Bka'-gdams-pa Sect (Kadampa or Those Bound by Precept) preached here in 12th century. Later Cuf Puf Gaaf Maf Ba and Tsong-Kha-Pa, founder of the Dge-lugs-pa Sect, and his disciples used to preach and hold religious services here as well. This shows that the Red Mountain palace had been transformed into a religious site.

I

The Dge-lugs-pa Sect flourished in Tibet quickly at the beginning of the 15th century. By mid-17th century the Fifth Dalai Lama, assisted by Gushi of Guuhri Khan, leader of the Mongolian Khoshotd Tribe, defeated the Karma-pa dynasty and established the Ganv-Daenf Pof-Zhangf dynasty. In the first three years of its rule the government set up a seat in Ganv-

Daenf Pof-Zhangf Palace in the Bras-Spungs Monastery, Lhasa. As it was against monastic rule to set up a government in the monastery, it was decided to rebuild the Potala Palace where leadership over both religious and secular affairs could be exercised. The Red Mountain palace was just the place to do that since it had been the residence of Slön-Brtsan-Sgam-Po and was close to three major temples: Sera, Dga'-Ldan and Bras-Spungs. Had the palace been removed to the White Head Mountain Palace in Qushui (as it was once thought) it would be too far from the three famous monasteries.

Potala is a transliteration of Sanskrit, meaning Mount Pu Tuo. The Potala Palace complex with the White Palace (Pof-Zhangf Gaaf-Bof) as its main architecture was rebuilt in 1645 and completed in three years. Afterwards the Fifth Dalai Lama moved his residence from Bras-Spungs Monastery to the palace ground. From that time on Potala remains the residence of Dalai Lama where he conducted political and religious affairs.

The word Pof-Zhangf Gaaf-Bof is Tibetan, meaning White Palace. The palace gains its name from its white plastered walls. The palace measures 320 meters in length from east to west and 200 meters in width from south to north. One travels from the city of the palace at the foot of the mountain through a main thoroughfare. Passing a tablet without inscription he comes up to the main gate of the eastern gate through a big zigzag slope. The main gate faces west. A covered passage, whose walls on left and right have murals, leads to the gate. The murals depict the four lokapalas. Ascending the stone steps one arrives at a flat and spacious eastern platform in front of the main gate of the White Palace. The platform measures 1,500 sq. meters. To the west of the eastern platform is the main building of the White Palace. From the eastern platform one ascends stone steps and a wooden ladder as he comes to the covered corridor leading to the gate of the main building of the White Palace. The walls of the covered corridor are decorated with murals, among which is a scene depicting the arrival in Tibet of the Chinese Princess Wencheng during the Tang dynasty. The south wall is decorated with a promulgation with a two-palm seal of Fifth Dalai Lama announcing the appointment of Sangs-Rgyas Rgya-Mtsho as the executive monk.

The main structure of the White Palace, known as the East Main Hall, faces south and measures 25.8 × 27.8 meters. All major religious ceremonies, including the inaugural ceremony of the Dalai Lama himself are being held here. The throne of the Dalai Lama is on the north side of the hall, whose walls have murals showing religious stories and historical figures.

The living quarters of the Dalai Lama are found on the top floor of the White Palace. This set of buildings is made up of an audience hall, sutra and dharma hall, hall of the guardian deity of dharma and Dalai Lama's bed room. Day to day business of religious and secular nature is conducted by Dalai Lama in the audience hall, which is not big but is richly decorated in gorgeous colors. Thang-ka (rolled painting) are hung on its walls. The paintings have Avalokitesvara as the main theme. Pillars decorated with colorful satin can be found beneath the beam. The columns of the hall have woollen coating in red. The 13th Dalai Lama built another living quarters for himself in his advancing years. He called this set of buildings East Day Light Hall, which is made up of an audience hall, sutra and dharma hall, guardian deity of dharma hall and bedroom. The original set was renamed West Day Light Hall.

The palace city wall is linked to the architecture at the mountain peak. A three-storied gatetower is found on each side of the city wall in east, south and west. The wall is built with rammed earth, protected by stones on the outside. A watchtower is seen on the south-eastern as well as north-western corners of the city wall. This layout with palaces, halls and rooms built on mountain top and castle at the foot of the mountain is a typical feature of traditional Tibetan watchtower architecture.

II

Eight years after the passing away of the Fifth Dalai Lama the construction of the Red Palace was undertaken by Sangs-Rgyas Rgya-Mtsho, who was the chief official executive. This is the second largest building project in the history of the Potala Palace.

Pof-Zhangf Maaf-Bof is a Tibetan word for Red Palace, which earned its name on account of its outer city wall, plastered in red. According to the catalogue of pagoda of the Fifth Dalai Lama the building project was launched to commemorate the deceased spiritual leader and to provide a site for the pagoda to keep his remains. From that time on the Red Palace became the pagoda shrine of Dalai Lamas of successive generations.

The construction of the Red Palace got underway from 1690 and ended in 1694. The Red Palace occupies the central position in the Red Mountain. To its east is the White Palace and to the west is the monks quarters. The cave of religious kings in meditation and the Hall of Saints, surviving structures of the Tubo dynasty lying to the west, had not been dismantled and were incorporated into the architectural complex, which is made up of palace, buddha halls and pagoda halls. The plane layout and the shape of the architecture somewhat resemble a mandala. A host of buddhist halls and sutra halls had been added in the course of building of Dalai Lama's pagoda. To a great extent this has made the Potala Palace into a religious architecture. The flat platform had been expanded, linking the original main architecture of the White Palace. Two gate towers, five and six stories high, built south of the White Palace, lead to both the White and Red Palaces. This enables the architectural complex half way in the mountain to merge into an integrated whole on a horizontal line. The architectural complex in the whole mountain, notwithstanding the fact that it was not built in one single period, thus becomes a majestic and grand organic whole, thanks to suitable handling of building projects.

The Red Palace is a multi-storey architecture. Its inner apartment is divided into the following chief structures: the main hall, buddha halls and pagoda hall.

Its main building is the West Main Hall or Siif-Xiv Puenf-Con, so-called since it lies to the west of the East Main Hall in the White Palace. It is the shrine housing the pagoda of the Fifth Dalai Lama. Siif-Xiv Puenf-Con is a Tibetan word, meaning rendering Buddhist meritorious works in heaven and on earth to complete satisfaction. The main hall stands in the center of the Red Palace, 725.7 sq. meters in area, looking oblong on plane surface. It is the biggest hall in the Red Palace. The columns are wrapped in silk, satin or woollen coatings. South of the column face hangs a streamer decorated with an animal having flat nose. The wooden beams are painted with colorful pictures or decorated with hollowed out carved wooden buddhist statues. There are various animal and floral designs. In the center of the western end of the main hall is the throne of the Dalai Lama. Above the throne hangs a horizontal board with the inscription: Yong Lian Chu Di, written by Emperor Qian Long of the Qing dynasty. Atop lintels and all round the hall as well as in corridors of the inner courtyard, can be found many wall paintings, which take up a space of over 280 sq. meters. The most famous of the wall paintings is a scene depicting the Fifth Dalai Lama being received by the Emperor Shun Zhi of Qing dynasty in Beijing. In the hall can be found a pair of hanging curtains, presented to the Dalai Lama by Qing Emperor Kang Xi and regarded in high esteem as Potala Palace's rare treasure. They were first hung on the western side of the hall during the inaugural ceremony and assumption of duties on coming of age of Dalai Lama. It took the Qing government one year to construct a factory building and make the exquisite curtain embroidered with portraits of three religious Tibetan Kings—Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po, Khrislon-Lde-Brtsan and Ral-Pa-Can as well as of Dalai Lama himself.

The Hall of Indestructibility and All Happiness (Bumiejule Hall in Chinese) or Paradise Hall, is a sutra hall. Formerly it was a sleeping quarter, 248 sq. m. in area used by the Sixth Dalai Lama, Tshang-Dbyangs-Rgya-Mtsho. It became a shrine, dedicated to his memory. Niches are built into the walls, housing 1,000 statues of the Amitayus Buddha. On the west side are a Single Coiled-Hair Goddess and the statue of Tsong-Kha-Pa. The entire hall is lavishly decorated with many canopies, streamers and banners, presenting a rich sight of unending beauty.

The Red Palace has the following main buddhist halls: Hall of the Genealogy of Dalai Lama, Hall of Dharani Illuminant Buddha, Hall of Bodhi, Hall of Bhaisajya-Samudgata, Hall of Buddha with Wheel of Time, Hall of Sakyamuni, Cave of Religious Kings' Cultivation, Hall of Arya, Hall of Amitayus Buddha, Hall of Rare Samadhi, Hall of Mandala, Hall of the Supreme Teacher, and Hall of Maitreya.

The Hall of the Genealogy of Dalai Lama enshrines statues of Dalai Lama of various generations. Standing north of the Main West Hall, it has an area of 216 sq. meters. A gold statue of Sakyamuni, weighing 1,679 ounces and a silver statue of the Fifth Dalai Lama, weighing 1,246 ounces, are in the centre. The front part is decorated with peacock, elephant, horse and Jivajiva bird, vividly carved in wood. A set of Tenjur (Bstan-Gyur) sutra is placed on the shelf within the north-eastern wall of the hall.

The Hall of Dharani Illuminant Buddha enshrines a silver statue of Padma-Sambhava in the middle. The statue is flanked by eight statues of Padma-Sambhava Smrti on the east and eight statues of the changed shapes of Padma-Sambhava on the west. On the eastern, southern and western walls of the hall are shelves, on which Bka-Gyur or Kanjur (Buddha's words) in Tibetan language are kept.

The Hall of Bodhi or Hall of Religious Sages Having Illuminated Mind enshrines smrti statues of the Yellow Hat Order and the supreme teacher of the Kadampa Sect. Tsong-Kha-Pa, founder of the Yellow Hat Order, is seated in the center. The walls on the side have niches, in cupboard-style, containing over 60 statues.

The Hall of Bhaisajya-Samudgata contains the statue of Sakyamuni, which is placed on a long table, shaped like a ladder, on the northern side. Sakyamuni is flanked by eight gilded Bhaisajya-Samudgatas. Noted medical personnel from regions inhabited by Han Chinese, Tibet, India and Nepal are found. A Bhaisajya-Samudgata mandala in gilt brass stands in the middle of the Hall. The mandala is square in shape. The base measures 240 cm on each side and is 190 cm high. It is a three-tiered structure. The three-layered eaves surround a pointed roof, on top of which rests a nectar vessel. The walls of the hall are full of pictures on the Bhaisajya-Samudgata Buddha and various medical personnel.

The Hall of Buddha with Wheel of Time contains a gilded brass mandala, whose round base measures 620 cm in diameter and 66 cm in height. The mandala was built in accordance with the canon of the Kala Wheel of Time. Three sets of structures with similar shapes but different sizes are placed one on top of the other. This hall shows the attention paid by the Tibetan people to astronomy and calendar calculation as well as their achievement in the two fields. The walls are painted with pictures portraying the Wheel of Time Sambhoga-Kaya Buddha and the genealogy of the kings of Shangrila (Xamf-Baf-Jag), calendar calculators and Smrti.

The Hall of Sakyamuni has an area of 54 sq. meters. A row of niches stands along the wall in the west. In the center of the hall is the Sakyamuni statue, flanked by eight accompanying disciples (in standing position). In the built-in book shelf on the wall is displayed a copy of hand-written Bka-Gyur or Kanjur (words of Buddha).

Built in 7th century, the Cave of Religious Kings' Cultivation is a relic of the Tubo dynasty. Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po was said to have cultivated himself here. The Tibetans regard the man as

the personification of Avalokitesvara and worship him as a religious king, who made the Buddhist dharma (or laws) popular in Tibet. The hall is rather small, roughly 26.8 sq. meters in floor space. On the northern wall are statues of Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po, Chinese Princess Wencheng and Nepalese Princess Chif-Zuenf. The statues of two high-ranking ministers of the Tubo dynasty, Garv-Dongf-Zaenf and Tuenf-Mif Samf-Bof-Zhaf are also found.

The Hall of Arya or Hall of Avalokitesvara is another relic of the tubo dynasty. It measures 48 sq. meters in area. The Candana Avalokitesvara of Loka (the finite world) is enshrined in the niche with double eaves, standing in the middle of the hall. Said to be the Satyadevata of Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po, it was sent to the religious king by Nepal in the 7th century. One of the four rare Candana Avalokitesvara, it is a treasure of the Potala Palace. Outside the hall hangs horizontal board with four-word inscription: Fu Tian Miao Guo, written by Emperor Tong Zhi of Qing dynasty.

The Hall of Amitayus is 67 sq. meters in area. In the center of the hall is buddhist seat, shaped like Π. On three sides—east, north and west, separated by wooden partitions, is a passage where Buddhist sutras are recited. There are nine statues of Amitayus plus one statue of White Tara and another of Green Tara. The walls are decorated with murals.

The Hall of Rare Samadhi measures 121 sq. meters in area. There is a single-eave niche on the northern wall with four dragons coiled on its columns. A tablet is found with the words: Long live the Reigning Monarch written in Tibetan, Chinese, Mongolian and Manchurian languages. The tablet, gift from Qing Emperor Kang Xi, is said to have been sent to the Potala by a Qing dynasty official who escorted the Seventh Dalai Lama to Tibet to conduct the spiritual leader's inaugural ceremony there. Above the tablet hangs the portrait of Emperor Qian Long in a bhiksu's dharma garment. The portrait was sent by the Qing dynasty through a special officer on the occasion of the inaugural ceremony of the Eighth Dalai Lama in 1762. Surrounding the tablet are portraits of Vajradhara, Tsong-Kha-Pa, Atisa, Seventh Dalai Lama, Fourth and Sixth Panchen Lamas, etc. A statue of Avalokitesvara with eleven faces and thousand hands is found on the west side of the hall. The statue, made of silver weighing more than ten thousand ounces, was cast by the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. The throne of Dalai Lama is found on the north of the statue of Avalokitesvara with eleven faces and thousand hands. An important place in the Red Palace, the Hall of Rare Samadhi is the scene of many major religious services. The ceremony for the drawing of lot from the golden vessel takes place in front of the portrait of Emperor Qian Long. The choice of spirit boy, the successor to Dalai Lama, is decided by lot.

The Hall of Mandala has an area of 130 sq. meters. Three stereo mandalas are found in the middle of the hall. They are founders of Victorious Happiness, Esoteric and Mahatejas (all three being Shingon Satyadevata or original honored ones). There is an inscription on the hall gate, announcing the date in which the building of the hall was completed in the reign of Emperor Qian Long, Qing dynasty. On the walls of the hall murals are seen.

The Hall of the Supreme Teacher measures 101 sq. meters in area. Prominent Tibetan Lamas are enshrined here, including Tsong-Kha-Pa, the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Eleventh and Twelveth Dalai Lamas (in seated position). The statue of the religious king of the Thubet dynasty is in the niche, in the company of several hundred portraits of sagacious personages and noted supreme teachers, on both south and north walls.

The Hall of Maitreya or Hall of All Happiness measures 107 sq. meters. The Maitreya is enshrined in the center in a seating position, with legs pendent. Numerous statues are found in the hall.

The Pagoda Hall in the Red Palace enshrines pagodas of Dalai Lamas, whose remains are wrapped in spice and then kept in pagoda to be worshipped by religious followers. With the exception of Sixth Dalai Lama, eight spiritual leaders, Fifth to Thirteenth, are kept in the pagodas in the Red Palace. Some pagodas have specially built halls to accommodate them.

The Pagoda Hall of Fifth Dalai Lama, also called Decoration of the World, is on the west

side of the West Main Hall in the Red Palace, measuring 452 sq. meters in area. It's maximum height is 16.3 meters. The pagoda is 14 meters high. It is the highest pagoda in the Potala Palace. The pagoda is in the center of the hall, flanked by the pagodas of 10th and 12th Dalai Lama. There are eight Sugata Buddha pagodas. In front of the pagoda are displayed the model of mandala, gilded lamp, incense burner, pure water bottle, butter lamp, various music instruments used in Buddhist mass, and sacrificial vessels. A fresco of the Fifth Dalai Lama is seen on the wall of a winding corridor east of the hall. In the hall itself are hung silk and satin draperies and parasols. It presents a solemn, noble and stylish atmosphere.

The Pagoda Hall of Seventh Dalai Lama takes up an area of 166 sq. meters. The pagoda is in the center, surrounded by four seated statues. In front of the pagoda is a stereo model of Mount Sumeru. Along the southern wall of the hall are found a seated statue of Maitreya with legs pendent, a niche and a bookshelf lined with books of sutras.

The Pagoda Hall of the Eighth Dalai Lama is 84 sq. meters in area. The pagoda is close to the north wall. A seated statue of Dalai Lama is at the southwest corner of the hall.

In the Pagoda Hall of Ninth Dalai Lama there is a main room, where we find the pagoda, flanked by bookshelves lined with copies of sutras. A seated statue of the spiritual leader is found in southwest corner. On two sides of the pagoda are double-floors. The west is taken up by Dharma Guardian Hall with statues of dharma guardians while the east is taken up by the Lohan Hall, with 16 lohan statues.

The Hall of the 13th Dalai Lama's pagoda is 435 sq. meters in area and 14.85 meters high. It was originally a monks' living quarters but was dismantled and rebuilt to house the pagoda, which is close to the north wall. The pagoda is 12.88 meters high, being the tallest one in the Potala Palace. From base to top the pagoda contains three stories. There is a seated statue of Dalai Lama in the front hall. A mandala made of over 200,000 pearls, valuable potteries, enameled ware, pearls, jade — being ornaments on sacrificial vessels, are placed on the table before the statue. The hall is decorated with an array of silk and satin banners with readings from sutras and curtains. In the three-storied sacrificial hall we find murals, depicting in serial the biography of the 13th Dalai Lama. Of these the most valuable historically are pictures on the visit by the Dalai Lama to Beijing, where he was received by Emperor Guang Xu and Empress Dowager Ci Xi in 1908.

Apart from the above-mentioned main hall, buddhist hall and pagoda halls, the Red Palace contains a number of other architectures, including warehouse and attendants' quarters.

In the half-century from the completion of the building to the time of the Seventh Dalai Lama, the Red Palace went through a process of maintenance and repair in a normal way. But in the ensuing half-century — from the demise of the Seventh Dalai Lama to the demise of the Ninth Dalai Lama, the top floor of the Red Palace witnessed marked changes. The northwest hall was rebuilt to accommodate the pagoda of the Seventh Dalai Lama. The walls became higher and a golden roof top was added. After the demise of the Eighth Dalai Lama the north hall on the top floor was rebuilt to become his pagoda hall. Its walls are now higher and a golden roof top has also been added.

Following the death of the Ninth Dalai Lama the hall east of the Eighth Dalai Lama's pagoda hall was again rebuilt, with higher walls and a golden roof top.

Since the Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Dalai Lamas did not reign for long, no pagoda halls were built for them. In this period there was no major construction work at Potala. The Thirteenth Dalai Lama being the longest serving spiritual leader, rebuilt bed-chamber east of the top floor of the White Palace (East Day Light Hall) in his old age. In 1934 when he died, part of the monks' living quarters was dismantled to accommodate the pagoda keeping of his remains. The hall was completed in 1936.

The Potala Palace we see today — 110 meters high and occupying an area of 130,000 sq. meters, came into being then.

III

In the completed Potala Palace are revealed the fine tradition and unique style of the architecture of the ancient Tibetan people. In concentrated manner Potala embodies the high artistic achievement of the Tibetan people in painting, sculpture, special art and craft. Painting forms the major part of the art of Potala. It consists of wall paintings, thang-ka and other colorful decorative paintings.

As art Tibetan painting has a long history and is unique in style. This art has made new developments ever since the Ming and Qing dynasties. Excellent masters emerging from various schools in Tibet gathered at the Potala to engage in mural painting during the rebuilding and expansion of the palace since the 17th century. In this long period of time tens of thousands of wall paintings have been executed and completed. This made the Potala a palace of art in name as well as in fact. Potala is an endless sight of beautiful wall paintings, which decorate all the big and small halls, vestibules and winding corridors. There are about 698 paintings alone in the corridor on the second floor in the West Main Hall. The painters take as their themes a variety of subjects, rich in content, exquisite and fine in execution, and gorgeous in color. The themes include historical figures, historical anecdotes, religious myths, stories from Buddhist sutras, folk custom, athletics and amusement scenes, all of which are full of flavor of life.

Among historical figures are: Slon-Brtsan-Sgam-Po, Khrislon-Lde-Brtsan and Ral-Pa-Can of the Thubet dynasty. Portraits include those of various generations of Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama and men like Sangs-Rgyas Rgya-Mtscho and Lhaf-Sangv, who are of great historical importance. These portraits have been executed in a true-to-life manner in their own dispositions.

Pictures on Tibetan history show among other things a scene on the arrival of Princess Wencheng in Tibet (on the northern wall of the White Palace porch), as well as scenes on Tibetan envoy to the Tang dynasty asking the hand of Chinese princess in marriage on behalf of the Tibetan monarch, putting five questions to the envoy, Princess Wencheng's farewell to Changan and her arrival in Tibet. The paintings have faithfully recorded the history of the affinity between the Tang dynasty and Tibet in 641 A.D.

Murals in the West Main Hall in Red Palace portray Emperor Shun Zhi of Qing dynasty giving an audience to the Fifth Dalai Lama. The visit to Beijing of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama is depicted in the picture in the Pagoda Hall of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama. The two pictures reflect the important political activities between the Central government and the Tibet local authority. Paintings of religious myths and Buddhist stories at Potala Palace are of an extremely mystical nature and are an expression of religious ideology in concentrated form by means of vivid images. These murals usually have a large Buddha or Bodhisattva in the center, executed in strict manner using only a few lines, but rich in color. They possess a vivid Tibetan style. Murals on architecture, folk custom, athletic activities, in particular, have a rich flavor of life. In murals on architecture, we see a large number of workers erecting brick walls and piling stones. Men are seen carrying a huge timber or heavy stone slabs, climbing hillside, as they make their way with difficulty step by step. In the forest men are seen chopping lumber. Meanwhile men are refining accessory parts to be used in architecture as they busy themselves in the construction site. These murals are scenes of construction of Potala in the 17th century and provide valuable materials for the study of ancient architecture in Tibet. Among the murals on

folk custom, athletic and amusement events we see shooting on horseback, wrestling, swimming, musical performance, dancing, farming, hunting, ferrying across the river, etc. Human images are vividly presented and the flavor of life is very rich indeed.

The art of Tibetan murals has witnessed a long process of development and change, forming itself into a unique form of expression and having its own artistic style. Some murals use single picture to express single theme. Others have long scrolls with different scenes painted in sequence. Tibetan artists for the most part uses symmetry. The scenes are laid out on a plane surface, which are spread out. The traditional Chinese method of perspective with scattered dots is employed. The paintings are vigorously executed, the lines well-proportioned. The layout is in perfectly good order as the dense areas and thin areas are quite balanced. Though influenced by Han painting in construction, coloring and line drawing, Tibetan murals contain lively human figures in various postures, which are somewhat influenced by Nepalese and Indian paintings in artistic expression. More importantly, however, ancient Tibetan artists used their own art and culture alongside what they learned from outside sources, to create vividly and strongly nationalistic paintings in Tibetan style. The mural art of the Potala Palace represents in concentrated form what is best in the art of Tibetan painting.

Thang-ka is the transliteration of a Tibetan word meaning rolled painting mounted on colorful satin. The painting can be rolled up for safekeeping or spread out and hung on wall. It is painted on silk, cotton or paper. Two wooden rollers, with silver or bronze ends, are attached to the painting. Thang-ka may be just a picture devoted to a single theme or in series, consisting of many pictures. Single-theme thang-ka are made up of portraits of Buddha, Bodhisattva, great master of Tibetan Buddhism, various generations of Dalai Lama and Panchen Lama. Thang-ka in series are usually Buddhist stories, religious creeds, mythical stories and legendary tales. Thang-ka is rich in religious flavor and can best be described as religious paintings. Nevertheless the content of thang-ka is not exclusively religious. A large part are on Tibetan history, life and custom of Tibetan people, astronomy and calendar calculation, Tibetan medical practice and Tibetan medicine. Throughout the ages, thang-ka is regarded, on this account, as a wonderful treasure of the Tibetan people.

Potala boasts to have a collection of over 10,000 thang-ka. It is usually one meter in height, the big ones sometimes reaching scores of meters. The Potala thang-ka are, for the most part, works of noted masters of various Tibetan schools of painting from the Ming and Qing dynasties. Apart from painted works, thang-ka can also be in the form of embroidery, brocade, applique and carved silk. Thang-ka of this type has a strong stereo appeal. Its art and technique are highly complicated, being the most valuable part of thang-ka at Potala.

The interior of the Potala Palace is completely decorated, with practically all walls painted with pictures. Even the border of the wall or wall corners are painted in color. Wooden sections contain extremely exquisite works of carving, added with colorful paintings. They form a very wonderful sight. The gates are decorated with bronze animal mask with knocker. The usual design of colorful pictures at Potala are: passion flower (dahlia), rosette, cloud, pomegranate, interlocking branches and scroll, dharma wheel pearl, six-word truth in Sanskrit, and eight-treasure design. The base colors are warm colors, such as vermilion, crimson, golden yellow, orange yellow, matched with cold colors, such as green or blue. The contrast is very strong.

Sculpture forms a major part of Tibetan Buddhist art. Kept in Potala is a huge quantity of sculpture of a rare kind, including gold, silver and bronze ones. They also include works in wood, stone or clay (the last mentioned is polychrome in color). Sculptures in metal form the majority. They are either cast, carved perforated or molded. The gigantic statues measure over ten meters high. The smallest measures only a few centimeters. They are done with fine

workmanship, very life-like.

The art of Tibetan gold-plating dates from antiquity. The art has been mastered by the Tibetan people as early as the Tubo dynasty. In the construction of the Potala Palace in the 17th century the technique was widely used. The numerous gilded statues and vessels coated with gold in the palace show to be fine work and still sparkle with light. This means that the Tibetan people have attained a high level of achievement in technique. The eight golden roof tops and countless gold-plated decorations on eaves remain as gorgeous as ever, glittering in the air for as many as several hundred years.

Also kept in the palace are numerous objects of art and crafts, Tibetan in flavor and in artistic tradition of the Tibetan ethnic people, including Tibetan rugs and cushions, Buddhist sutra streamers, canopies, draperies or curtains — either embroidered or with pasted designs. They are religious objects that have a distinctively Tibetan national style.

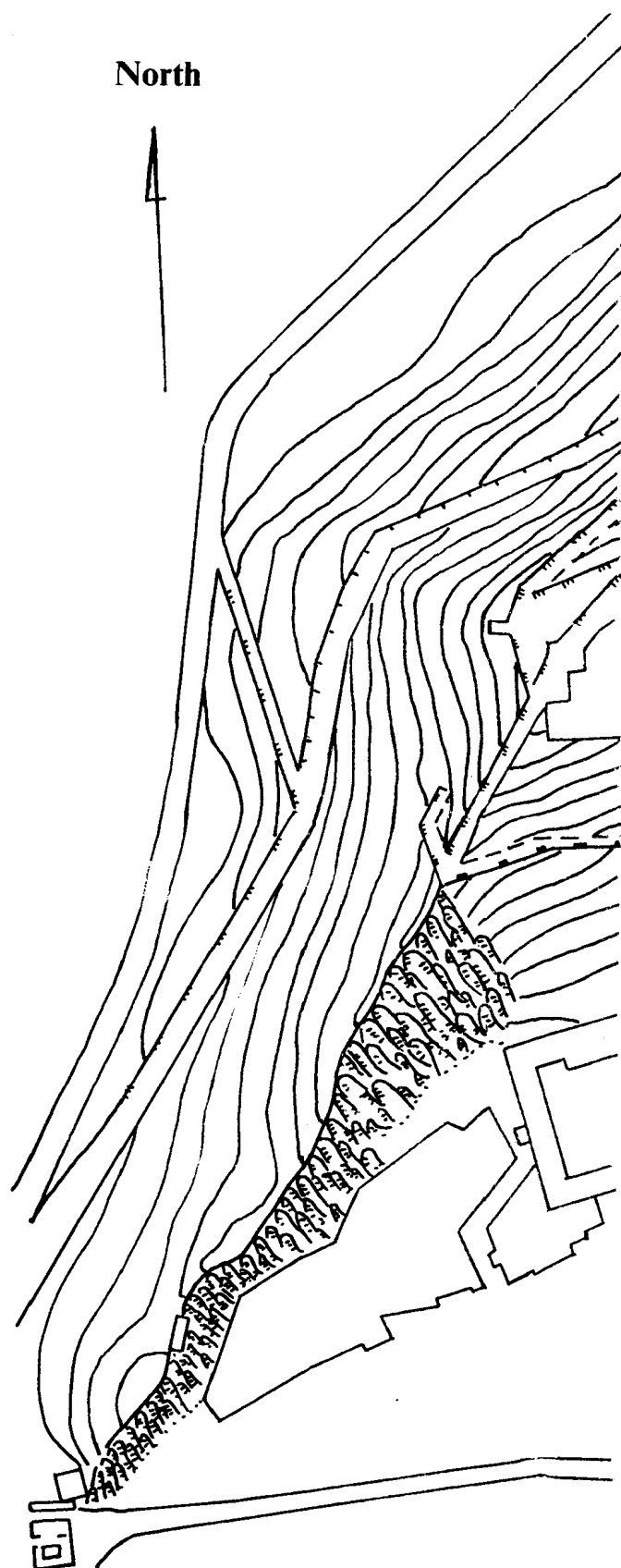
In the Potala Palace we find a rich collection of historical relics. This is because for over 300 years the palace occupies a special place as a center that combines power in politics and in religion. Apart from the mural, thang-ka, pagoda, statue and rare relics of Tibetan culture, there is a huge quantity of sutras, including Pattras, Bka'-Gyur (words of Buddha in Tibetan language) and Bstan-Gyur (translation of teachings). Of special historical value are many imperial edicts and documents from the Ming, Qing dynasties down to the Republican era, conferring titles on the Dalai Lama by the Chinese government (gold books and gold seals). These relics of history show the relationship between the Chinese Central Government and the local Tibetan government. There are valuable potteries, jade ware, gold and silverware as well.

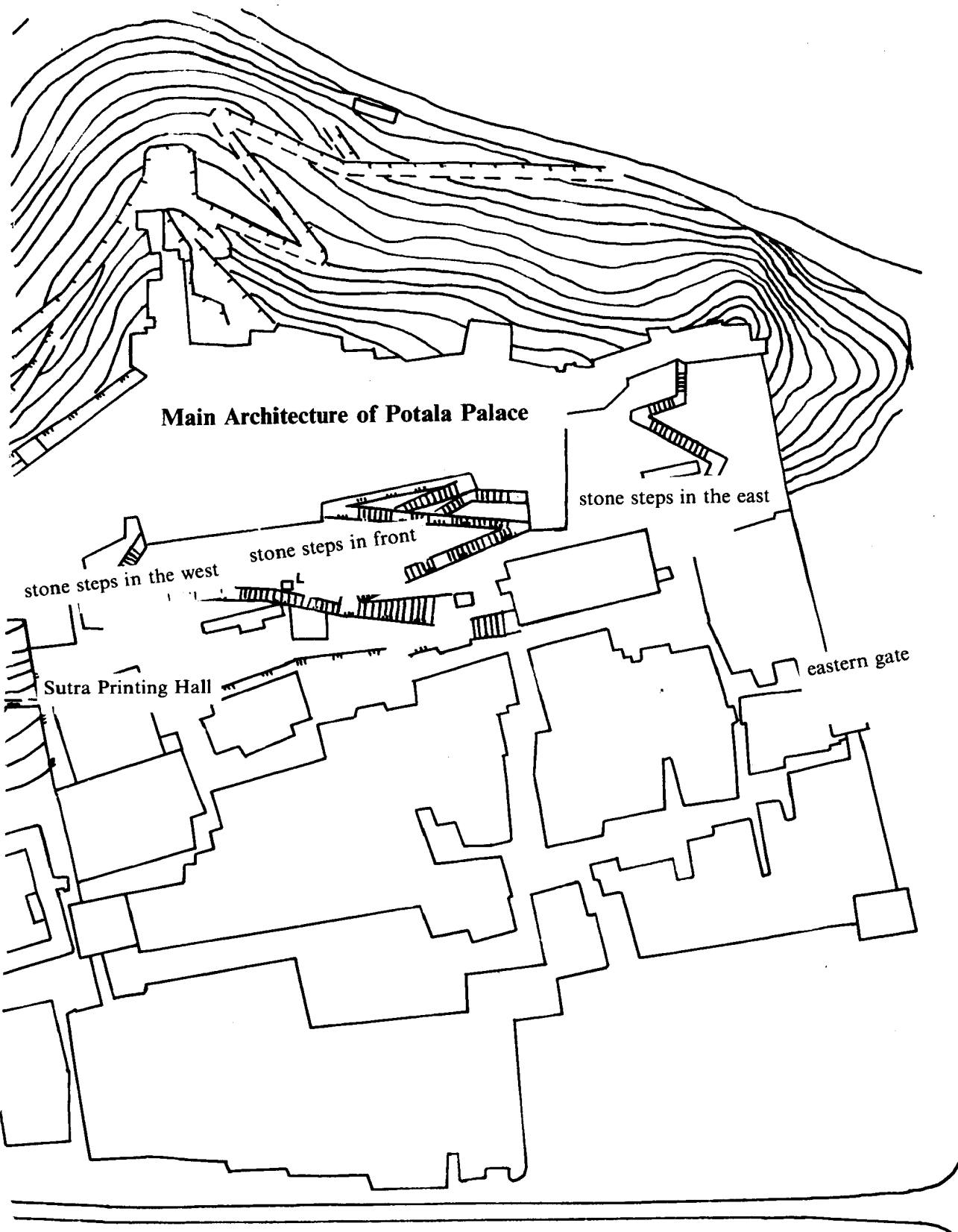
IV

Potala, built nearly 4,000 meters above sea level, is a famous ancient Chinese architecture of great fame. The palace and castle, regarded as a jewel on the roof of the world, is an embodiment in concentrated form, of the labor, wisdom and architecture of the ancient Tibetan people, when viewed from the angle of civil engineering, metallurgical refinery, sculpture, or wall painting. Vast amounts of labor, material and money were spent during the construction of the palace in the 17th century. The best and most talented artists and engineers were called into service. According to the Catalogue of the Fifth Dalai Lama's pagoda, as many as 1,559 artists or engineers, whose names could be verified, took part. The Qing government sent large numbers of Han and Manchu artists and craftsmen to participate in construction. Nepalese craftsmen, too, were invited to work on the project. In addition, several thousand uvlah or corvée laborers were conscripted to explore mines, to transport, and to undertake non-technical labor of various sorts. In other words, the building of the Potala Palace involves the joint labor and endeavor of Tibetan, Han, Mongolian and Manchurian nationalities.

The Potala Palace, magnificent and spectacular, with countless rare and valuable relics in its collection, stands on the Red Mountain by the Lhasa River and is a pride of the Tibetan people and also of the entire Chinese people. It came under national protection as a major cultural relic by the Chinese government in 1961. It is being rebuilt each year with large Chinese government fund. Each year it draws a huge influx of visitors from the rest of China and the whole world for sightseeing and tour.

Plane Sketch Map of Potala





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Potala Palace

Lof-Sangh Tuf-Daenf

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Magnificent Architecture

On top of the Red Mountain in Lhasa, Potala Palace is built entirely against the mountain, with foundation stones sinking deep into rocks. It is 110 meters high and 360 meters in length in the direction from east to west. The area is 130,000 sq. meters. Potala rises high amidst clouds in the sky. From the exterior it looks like a palace, temple and pagoda halls combined. The interior is designed in the shape of a mandala (of the Buddhist Esoteric Sect). It consists of the White Palace, Red Palace, plane platform, corner tower, monks' quarters, etc. The buildings are chiefly made of stone and wood. Golden roof tops, big and small, gold pillars and nectar vessels (amrta-kalasa) shine under the sun in great splendor. The walls, made of bef-maf shrub, form a distinct and unique Tibetan style. It shows in concentrated form the great achievement of the Tibetan people in architecture, special art and crafts, sculpture, and painting.

