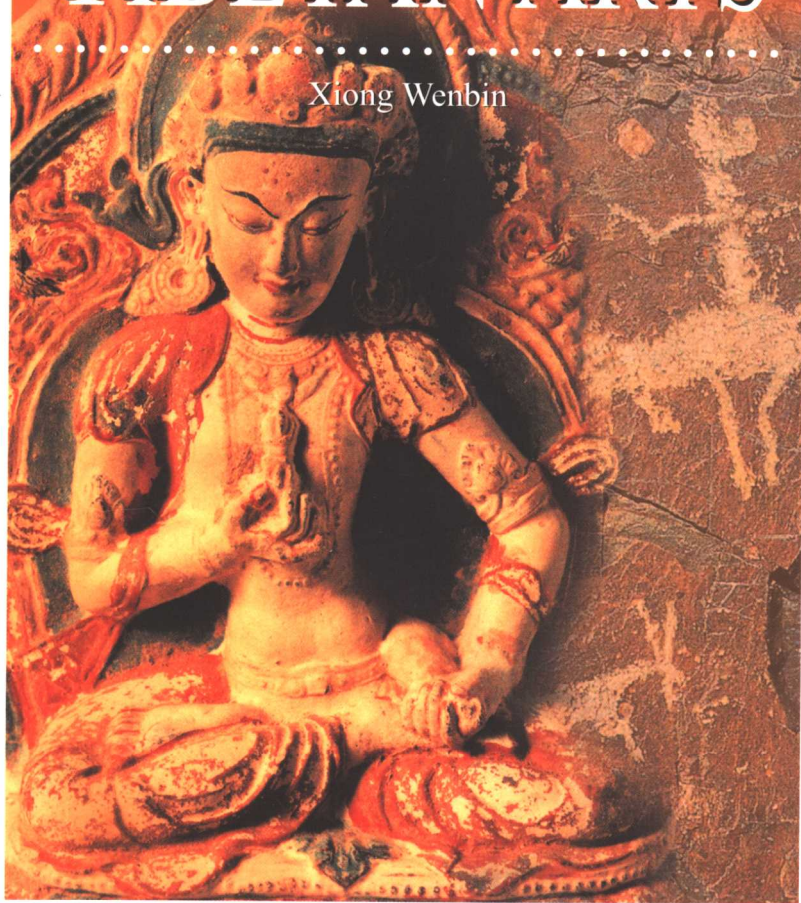


Series of Basic Information of Tibet of China

TIBETAN ARTS

Xiong Wenbin



CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS

Series of Basic Information of Tibet of China

Tibetan Arts

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The Holy Mountain of Kangrinboqe in Burang County, Nagri Prefecture

I. The Cultural Soil for Tibetan Arts

In Tibet, wherever you go, whether the relatively populated cities, towns and villages, or uninhabited grassland; whether the elevated mountains, or jade-green lakes; you will always be amazed by the artistic wonders: the magnificent monastic architectures backed by mountains, the age-old petroglyphs and petrographs depicted on wild cliffs, the prayer-flags flying over mountain passes and lakefronts, the ancient fortresses standing on peaks, the colorful and supernatural frescos, sculptures and thangkas decorated in monasteries, and the untremmelled songs and dances shown throughout the extensive pasture..... In short, where the highland dwellers set their foot, there must have been their sapiential touches left. These artistic treasures have an intransic tie with Tibetan cultures. In a sense, they are the representation of the Tibetan cultures. Tibetan arts have gone through a 5000 year history. The prehistoric art was closely bound up with the aboriginal Bon religion, while its later development relied greatly on the Tibetan Buddhist culture, therefore it has been branded with strong ethnic and regional characteristics.

Introduction

Grand View of Potala Palace



II. The Mysterious Bon Religious Culture.

Bon is the main aboriginal religion during the prehistoric civilization on Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, which was established in the fifth century B.C. by Shenrab Miwoche, the prince of Zhang-zhung kingdom in western Tibet. Around the first century A.D. the religion began to spread eastward until fully distributed in Tsang region and Lhasa region. This marked its first zenith when it almost dominated the political, economic and cultural life in the early stage of the Tubo Kingdom. Bon advocated pantheism and believed that 'every thing has a soul'. The deities, the supernatural powers of mountains, rivers, lakes, seas, the sun, the moon, stars, wind, rain, thunder, lightening, birds and beast, etc. as many as one can enumerate, govern the birth, ageing, sickness, death, events and fortune of people, who could not predict and control their own destinies. Because people are believed to be created by the deities. Tsanpo, the ruler of the Tubo Kingdom, was regarded as 'the Son of the Heavenly Deity', who had been sent for ruling the human world and would return to the heaven along the heavenly ladder after death. Two deities, the War and the Life, who attach on the body of each person, decide his or her destiny. A person, who losses

protection from either deities, will leave the living world permanently. According to Bon doctrines, there are two worlds for a person, the living world and the after-death world, the latter is full of darkness and suffer. Therefore after the death of a person, people would hold an offering ritual to redeem his or her soul from the dark and suffer-ridden world and guide it to the heaven. Based on these concepts, ‘Yung-drung’, the early sect of Bon developed a series of deity and devil system as well as the rituals for consecrating deities and driving devils, which are the cardinal contents of the four portals in the theories and activities of the famous Nine Ways of Bon. Specifically speaking, they are for fortune-telling, consecrating deities, driving devils, praying for happiness and avoiding from disaster to ensure a prosperous, rich and steady human world. These theories and activities not only brought an extensive and in-depth influence to the society of the time, but also were reflected in the prehistoric arts.

The No.1 rock painting, discovered in Rimodong, Risum District, Rutog County in Nagri Prefecture, is the most typical one. The painting is 2.7 meters high, 1.4 meters wide and 12 meters away from above the ground, in a shape of irregular triangle. There is a horse on the right top. Lower on the left there is yak with long hairs on its back and belly and an up-rolling tail. Two persons are on the left sides of the yak. On of them wears a long gown and bears something on the back, with his right hand holding his waist, and the left hand holding a long pole; another one is riding on the back of a sheep, also with his right hand holding his waist, and the left hand holding a long pole. Between the two persons, there is a ‘Yung-drung’ lucky sign. Below the person, there are the Sun, the Moon, a genital of the male and a genital of the female from left to right in sequence. On the right of the yak, there is a big fish, bowing in a circle, with its mouth touching its tail and with its belly hiding 10 small fish. On the left bottom of the big fish, there are four dancing people with bird’s head or bird’s mask. There are three small fish on the top or bottom of the dancers. Between the dancers and fish, there is a trapezoid symbol. On the left bottom of the dancers, there are 10 jars of the same shape in a row: big opening, long neck, round belly and round bottom, with decoration of verti-

An Ancient Rock Painting in
Rutog County, Nagri Prefecture



cal rope patterns. On the left side of the jars, there are persons, riding on sheep and stretching their arms and holding branches or feathers. The person on the left wears a feather on the head. On the bottom of the painting, there are 125 sheep in nine rows. From the layout of the painting, we can see two parts divided by a row of patterns of the Sun, Moon and genitals. From the Yung-drung lucky sign, the feather wearing man, who resembled a aimingat Bon shaman and, the scene of the offering ritual, we can infer that this painting has something to do with the aboriginal Bon religion, because sacrificing of yak, goat, sheep and deer to the deities, as the painting depicted, is one of the core events of the early Bon.

In addition, the consecration was also the important event aiming at prosperousness of the community. The main role of the tsanpo's shaman is to hold the rituals for eliminating disasters and bringing in happiness. According to a cliff inscription in Gongbo area, after Drigum Tsanpo was assassinated, Pude Gungyal, the then hire apparent and the next tsanpo, held a large-scale ritual, sacrificing a lot of animals prying for 'stabilizing the tribe'. From then on, all generations of tsanpos had held consecrating rituals as major events. Besides, before military actions, such rituals also were held to pray for victory. Descriptions for such kind of events can be frequently seen in the Epic 'of The King Gesar. Thus we can see, the consecration events were held both for the life and production of the ordinary people and for the major state affairs and military



An Ole Woman Turning Her
Prayer Wheel



Lamas in Zexhol Monastery
of Bon Religion

events.

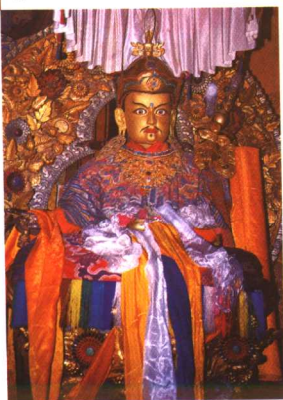
In the seventh century A.D., Buddhism was introduced to Tubo Kingdom in a large scale. From then on the history has witnessed age-long conflicting between Bon and Buddhism. Though Bon lost its dominance in the middle eighth century, it was far from being eradicated. Buddhism won land-sliding victory and was widely accepted by the Tubo society. However it has assimilated quite a lot canons and rites of Bon and passed them down till today. The theories and conventions of Bon have been represented by people of later generations.

III. The Elemental Context of Tibetan Buddhism

There are two major factions of Buddhism in China: Mahayana Buddhism and South Buddhism. Mahayana Buddhism can be further divided into two groups: Chinese Han Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism. In the seventh century, after Songtsan Gampo unified all tribes on Qinghai-Tibetan plateau and founded Tubo Kingdom, Tibetan Buddhism was introduced into Tibet massively. Songtsan Gampo married two princesses, Princess Bhrikuti Devi of Nepal and Princess Wencheng of Tang Dynasty, each brought in a statue of Sakyamuni. To enshrine the statues, under the patronage of Songtsan Gampo, the two princesses built respectively two temples, Jokhang Monastery and Ramoche Temple, the earliest of its kind in Tibetan history. These marked beginning of introduction of Tibetan Buddhism. The statue brought in by Princess Wencheng has been enshrined in Jokhang Monastery till today. Many followers pilgrim over thousands of miles to watch it.

In spite of great support from Songtsan Gampo, Buddhism, as an exotic culture, came in for vehement opposition from the tradi-

A Bronze statue of
Padmasambhava Enshrined in
Sagya Monastery



tional Bon supporters, who were still in predominant position then. This made great difficulties of the transmission of Buddhism. At the construction site of Jokhang Monastery, even the foundation laid on a day was often sabotaged at the following night. The two forces fought each other in a nip and tuck way. Until a century later, when Trisong Detsan assumed the power, Bon religion gradually lost its influence. In 763 A.D., Samye Monastery was inaugurated in Shannan, which is the first one in Tibetan history to host Triple Jewels: Buddha, Dharma and sangha, and marked that Tibetan Buddhism had its real depot.

The later successive Tsanpos continued to strongly back up Buddhism: they empowered monks to participate in the state affairs and ordered that every seven-household group should be responsible to sustain a monk's living, etc. These sharpened the social contradiction. Several opponent forces, including the residue Bon supporters, joined to break out a massive movement to eliminate Buddhism. That put an end of the two-century long Buddhism introduction and dissemination, which is referred as the 'Former Prosperity of Buddhism' by the historians.

In the later tenth century and early eleventh century A.D., Buddhism resurrected in Nagri area of Western Tibet and in an area in today's Qinghai and gradually spread toward central Tibet and its heart, Lhasa. This marked the beginning of the 'Latter Prosperity of Buddhism'. The resurrection in this period was supported by the separatist regimes of emerging local powers of different places. As different transmission chains and different understanding of the doctrines among the Buddhist followers in different places, Tibetan Buddhism had been ramified into four major sects: Nyingma Sect, Kadam Sect, Sakya Sect, Kagyu Sect and Gelug up to the 15th century. These sects had later on brought significant and extensive impacts on political, economic and cultural life of Tibetan people in progression of different period of time.

Nyingma Sect claims itself as the oldest sect in Tibetan Buddhism. They believe that their disseminating doctrines are the genuine ones passed down from Padmasambhava, the Indian tantra guru, who made great contribution in the eighth century A.D. to the introduction and development of Tibetan Buddhism. So they re-

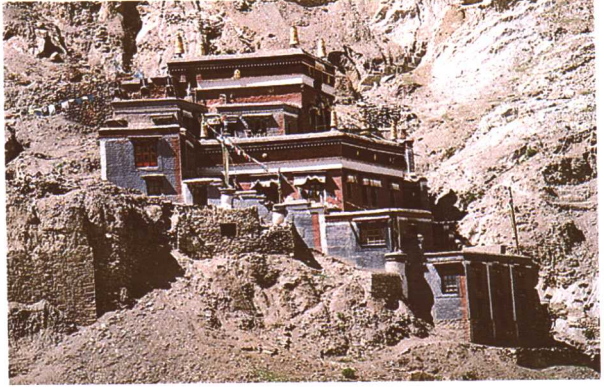


Lamalin Monastery of
Nyingmapa Sect in Nyingchi

spect him as their founding father. Nyingma Sect have been mainly engaged in transmission the ‘old tantra’, i.e. the tantra doctrines translated into Tibetan during the Former Prosperity of Buddhism, which were treasured by guru Padmasambhava and his followers during the Anti-Buddhism Movement period, and were excavated in the Latter Prospect of Buddhism. Their essence doctrine was Scripture of the Great Perfection. The missionaries were either lay devotees or monks, who passed on the doctrines from generation to generation on family or monastery basis. They believed that to obtain Buddhahood, it is not necessarily relying on theoretical teachings and meditation but on the Yoga practicing. The purpose of life is to acquire the ethic and wisdom instead of power and material entertainment. Therefore it is renowned in tantra practice and re-discovering of the tantra scriptures among the others.

Kadam Sect, compared with Myingma Sect, pays more attention to studying of the sutra theories. The sect was founded by Dromton Gyalwa’ Jungne (1005-1064). Its doctrine came from the work of the Indian master Atisha (982-1054), Bodhi Patha Pradip (Lamp of the Path of Enlightenment). Its sutra scriptures includes

Built in 1073, Sagya Monastery
is now over 900 years old



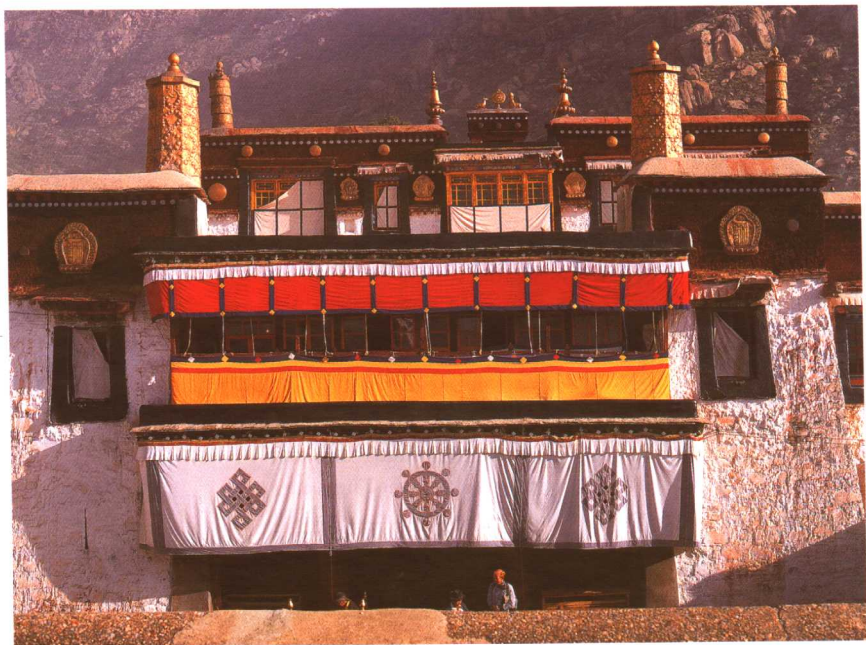
‘Six Essences of Kadam’. i.e., Mahayanasutra-lamkara, Bodhisattvabhumi-sutra, Bodhisattvacaryavatara, Jataka Sutra, Dharmapada and so on. The sutra doctrines advocated only promoting the superficial rituals instead of intensifying wisdom and other core contents. After Atisha passed away, his disciples built up Razheng Monastery as their headquarter. The sect was gradually ramified into a number of sub-sects. In the early period of Kadam, there were two important figurers, who brought great influence on the later generations of Tibetan Buddhism. One of them was Paca Nyimatra, who translated the theories about Prasangika Madhyamika created by the famous Indian philosopher Chandrakirti (600 - 650 A.D.). This gave rise to the significant influence on the development of the Madhyamika (Middle Way) theories in Tibet. Another was Laiba Sherab, who led to construct the Sanpo Monastery, and afterwards he devoted himself to translation of Buddhism Logic theories created by Dharmakirti, the famous Indian philosopher. This laid a foundation for the philosophic tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

Sakya Sect was founded by Khon Konchog Gyalpo (1034-1102). He was practicing Nyingma doctrines. Later on he transferred to practice the ‘Path and Its Fruit’ from mater Drogmi Sakya Yeshe (994-1078) and eventually placed this practice as the major practice of the sect. Though when young Sakya Sect practiced both sutra and tantra, it laid more emphasis on that of tantra. Three im-

portant sub-sects: Er, Gongar and Char were formed in Tantra. One of the major contributions of Sakya Sect to the development of tantra in Tibetan Buddhism is the translation of the four Mandalas (the four practicing stages of tantra: Kriya, Caryā, Yoga and highest Yoga). Another further divisions of Highest Yoga into three parts: Father Tantra (Pitriyoga), Mother Tantra (Matriyoga) and non-dual Tantra (Advītyayoga). Two most prominent figures in Sakya Sect was Sakya Pandita (1182-1251) and Redhawa Shonnu Lodoe (1349-1412). The former with his works, *The Treasury of Reasoning On Valid Cognition*, elevated the logic theory of Tibetan Buddhism to a new high; while the latter was renowned as the promoter of the Prasāngika-Mādhyamika philosophy of Chandrakīrti in Tibet and also had a in-depth influence on Tsongkapa, the founder of Gelug Sect, and the formation of his theories. Compared with Nyingma and Kadam Sects, this sect has another prominent feature: it was in an unrivaled position in Yuan Dynasty and its outstanding leader Sakya Pandita, in compliance with the historic direction, completed peaceful unification of Tibet. From the time of Pagpa (1239 -1280), the fifth leader of the sect, the Sakya monks had assumed the office as the Master of the Yuan Emperors, in charge of Buddhism affairs throughout China and local affairs of Tibet. The sect developed extensively, stretching its influence to Xixia Kingdom, Beijing, Shenyang, Yunnan, Hangzhou and Chaozhou, etc. Its headquarter is in North Sakya Monastery (built in 1073 under the patronage of



A Jester in Divine Dance in
Curpu Monastery



The Grand Sutra Hall of
Zhaibung Monastery

Khon Konchog Gyalpo) and South Sakya Monastery (built in 1280 under the patronage of Pagpa).

Kagyu Sect is the most ramified sect among others. There are altogether 13 branches and sub-branches in it. Dhagpo Kagyu alone had four major and eight minor branches. The sect passed on doctrines mainly through sermon delivering. Dhagpo Kagyu was founded by Gampopa Sonam Rinchen (1079-1153), the disciple of Marpa (1012-1097) and Milar Rigba (1040-1123). Milar Rigba was a legendary figure in Tibetan history, who spent a lifetime hardship to gain enlightenment. Dhagpo Kagyu was famous for its practices, such as Mahamndra and Six Practices of Naropa and so on. The others, such as Karma Kagyu founded by Dusum Khyenpa (1110-1193); Tshal Kagyu founded by Zhang Yudakpa Tsondu Dakpa (1123-1194); and Phakmo Dru Kagyu founded by Phakmo Drupa (1110-1170) were also important branches of the sect. The head-quarter of Karma Kagyu is located in Curpu Monastery. In 1283,

when Karma Pakshi (1204-1283) passed away, his men found a soul boy as his successor, creating the incarnation system of living Buddha (so called Black Hat incarnation system) as first time in Tibetan history. This practice was later on adopted by other sects. In Ming Dynasty, the sect was very influential in Tibet especially in Khan region. It had very close relation with the Central Government of Ming Dynasty. In 1406, Deshin Shegpa (1384 - 1415), the fifth Karmapa went to Nanjing to hold a Buddhist ritual for the Ming Emperor Yongle. The next year he was entitled 'King of Dharma' by the emperor.

Gelug Sect was founded by Tsongkapa (1357-1419) in 1409, which was the most powerful Tibetan Buddhism sect in Qing Dynasty. Compared with the other sects, it was distinctively characterized in two points. One is emphasizing precepts. Another is serious about the stages and orders of the practicing. It attached equal importance on both sutra and tantra, but the practicing order should be: first for sutra and then for tantra. The tantra practicing should not started until the successful completion of the sutra practicing. With respect to sutra, the sect believes that every thing starts from emptiness. On the basis of Prasangika-Madhyamika philosophy of Chandrakirti, it incorporated the theory of knowledge and logic of Dharmakirti and thus established a sound and brand-new Madhyamika philosophic system. With respect to tantra, it emphasized the sequence of practicing, from simple to complex and from lower stage to higher stage, etc. Tsongkhapa's works: Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path, Great Exposition of Tantras, are classic ones expounding essence of Gelug Sect. The second point is that the sect established the Gandain Phodrang regime in Dreprung Monastery and improved the incarnation system. The Dalai Lamas and Panchen Erdenis are two major incarnation system of living Buddhas in this sect. Since the Qing Dynasty, the canonization, approving and entitling of the incarnated successors of the two systems as well as other major systems by the central government has been formalized. The sect has six major monasteries: Gandain Monastery, zhaibung Monastery and Sera Monastery in Lhasa; Tashilhunpo Monastery in Xigazhe; Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai Province and Labrang Monastery in Gansu

A Fresco

