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By Xiong Wenbin

The history of several thousand years has witnessed both the effulgent cultural civilization and substantial material creation achieved by the Tibetan people, among which, making of the handicrafts, such as metal wares, textiles, jade wares, wood wares and pottery wares, etc, has been on a very high level. The handicrafts with superb workmanship and typical Tibetan style are combination of the serverability and aesthetic appreciation. Being diversified in types and patterns, they reflect the unsophisticated personality of the plateau-inhibited people, i.e. soberness mixed with some agility. Well balanced in realism and romanticism, they indeed have both aesthetic value and research worthiness.

Pottery Wares

The Tibetan potting can be dated back to more than 5000 years ago. The pottery fragments and the unbroken ones of the neolithic age unearthed at the Karub Ruins in Qamdo are the earliest pottery wares ever uncovered in Tibet, from which, we can see that people had been able to make complete objects with fine details, which contain aroma of aboriginal art. The decorative patterns on

the surface of middle part of the body of the wares generally in abstract geometric shapes, such as net-, circle-, lozenge- and wave-like shapes and straight lines, somewhat clumsy and childish though, were made by pasting, carving or drawing, etc, showing the enlightened taste of the neolithic people extended from the mere function of utility. For example, the pottery jars with one or two handles were beautifully shaped and finely worked, undoubtedly revealing the potting technology in that time. The pottery wares are essential to daily life of the Tibetan people. That is especially true before metal-ware had not been extensively used. Today the pottery production has reached considerable scale and can be found almost everywhere in Tibet. The design of shapes of the wares and the decorative patterns thereon and the technologies have kept on progressing.

Currently the areas like Gyangze, Maizhokungka, Lhunzhub, Mangkang, Chanang, Chagyab, and Sog, etc, are relatively advanced in pottery making. As the regional production centers they are well known in Tibet. The categories of the pottery are diversified. There are coarse-sandy pottery, glazed pottery, red pottery, black pottery and colored pottery, etc, with different shapes and functions, such as the urn, jar, olla, stove, pot, bowl, basin, incense holder and cup, etc. They are made generally for two different usages: for religious rituals and for everyday life.

The religious objects are mainly used for worship, consecration or property buried with the dead. In the early days, they were regarded not only as the containers for offerings to the deities, but also as the symbols of the wealth and power, only used in great rituals and events, just as the bronze wares used in Xia, Shang and Zhou

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Flagons (Left: Bronze; Right: Glazed Pottery)

periods in ancient China. This can be proven from the pottery fractions unearthed from the graven and consecration sites of Tubo period (the 7th century AD). After the Tubo period, with the funeral system reform, the pottery wares were no more buried with the dead, but only used for worship. The current religious pottery wares belong to the colored pottery. The strikingly contrasted color pairs of the decorative patterns vs. background are mainly as black on red, white on red and green on red. The are mostly jars and bowls, consisting of such components as cover, neck, handle, body, feet and bottom. As an inheritance of those unearthed at the Karub Ruins, the jars are shaped as big body with small opening, while the bowls are shaped as big opening with small bottom, attached with one or two handles, and with harmonized proportion and symmetry looking from all three dimensions. The decorative patterns are usually drawn on the neck, body and feet, e.g. the bottom-up or bottom-down lotus flower patterns are drawn on the feet; the eight auspicious symbols, such as banners or shells; or the other patterns such as flowers or flames are drawn on the body; while sun and moon are drawn on the neck. The painting styles are both elaborated and bold, giving the solemn appearance.

The pottery wares used in everyday life are generally not colored. Their diversified shapes and shaping skills present enriched folk aroma. The combination pottery wares are also emerging, e.g., a pot is placed on

top of a jar, the bottom of the former being the cover of the latter, really a smart idea. There are also animal shaped wares. There is one, which by integrating the handles with the cover, present a very vivid looking. The decorative patterns are either naturalistic, such as lotus flower, sun and



*Tea Bowl with Tray and Lid
(Gold and Silver)*

moon, and dragon; or abstract, such as geometrical patterns; which are pasted, molded, inlaid or drawn. The pottery wares made in Rinpung County are unique in decorative patterns. The artisans embed the fractions of the blue and white porcelain onto surface of the green ware then place it in the kiln, obtaining the very elegant patterns. The wares are usually made as big body, large opening, short neck and long feet.

Metal Wares

The increasing demand for the household utensils, tools and religious objects, has promoted the development of the metal ware making in Tibet, which has established a complete set of metal processing system, such as smelting, forging, working and carving, etc. The metal ware making in Tibet has a long history. According to the documentation, during the reign of Nyatri Tsanpo, the first Tibetan Tsanpo (400-300 B.C.), Tibet had entered the period of making and using both bronze ware and ironware. The metal made weapons such as spears, shields and bards were beginning to emerge. By the time of Trinyan Songtsan, the 29th Tibetan Tsanpo, the technology level had been on the high side. The Tibetan people were not only able to extract silver, copper and iron and make weapons like spear, shield, sword and knife, but also capable of building the cable bridge. With the economic development and technological improvement, the metal ware making became an independent trade.

The Tibetan metal wares can be classified into three categories according to their functions and purposes: the first one is that for the household living and production, i.e. such farm implement as ploughshare, hoe and knife; and such utility devices as flagon, cup, scoop, tray, stove, pan, dan, basin, pot and jar, etc. the second is that for ornament, including bracelet, finger ring, necklace as well as



Desk with Carved Patterns(Woodcut)

knife, saddle and etc; the third is that for religious purpose, mainly as the figures of Buddha and the dharma wares like axe, terbum, ceremonial dagger, cymbal, trumpet and bell, etc. Of all the three categories, the religious objects are most typical.

Making the statue of Buddha usually needs several major processes, such as smelting, forging, carving, gilding, polishing and red presenting. The processes are rather sophisticated. First of all melt the metal into liquid state, then work it into metal sheet after cooling, hammer it to initial shape. Then outline the figure of Buddha (partial or whole, depending on the size of the figure) on the sheet with charcoal pencil, and then hammer it to the final shape (for the big statue, weld the several pieces together). As for the engraving

of the figure of Buddha, there are roughly three approaches: i.e. the light engraving, embossing and combination of boring along the outline with the embossing. For gilding, melt the gold and work to sheet after cooling, then cut it to filament and mix them with mercury and water, grind the mixture in mortar until it become magma. Clean the wares to be gilt, apply a thin layer of mercury first, and then apply with the gold magma. After that bake the ware under fire and then polish it. This method was introduced to Chinese inland area in Yuan Dynasty, according to the record. After gilding, make a special process called "red presentation", which makes the wares present red-gold shining color.

For casting of the figure of Buddha, two approaches are usually adopted, i.e.

losing-wax method or die-cast method. The latter one is more broadly used. The large sized stature of Buddha used to be cast in several pieces then joined to one piece. An alloy material dominated by copper is usually used to make the statue, which is called "Lima" in Tibetan. Like in India, the most valuable statue of Buddha is made of the alloy material consisting of eight precious metals.

Because of the demands from the everyday living, production and religious purpose, all sorts of non-official or semi-official metal ware works were mushroomed, especially the non-official ones, which were almost distributed in every drong (equivalent of the county), xika (equivalent of the town) and even township. The most developed regions were in Lhasa, Xigaze and Kham Region. Among the all, Dorjokemban in Lhasa was the center of metal smelting, processing and sculpting for the Tibetan local government before 1951.

Textiles and wood wares

The time-honored and exquisite Tibetan textile handicrafts are diversified in categories, which include such daily necessities as carpet, pulu (tweed), kadian (smaller carpet), bangdian (apron), Tibetan quilt, garment, bag, and boots, etc. as well as such production tools as bag, pack-basket, saddle and bridle, etc. The large quantity of quality flocks and herds on the vast prairies in Tibet have yielded

up affluent raw material as a mainstay for its textile handicrafts industry. The main processes are usually as: clipping, option, spinning with the spindle, weaving with the loom, dyeing, tailoring, treating and garment making, etc. The woolen textiles are durable, soft and good in warmth retention, so they are mostly favored by the plateau-inhabited people. The Tibetan aprons are nature-oriented, with their color patterns looking like rainbows. The carpets and kadians are soft, fine, harmonious in colors and enriched with patterns and textures. Carpets made in Gyangze, Lhasa, Gonggar, Nanggarze, Nang, Dingqen and Chagyab; aprons made in Gyaideixiu Town of Gonggar; and the traditional quilt made in Nanggarze; all the most famous.

The pulu and aprons are the main feed for the Tibetan attires and the representation of the Tibet textiles. The usual width of the pulu is 25 cm, while its length varies. It can be divide into the following seven categories. The first one, called Xiegma or Koyang, has the superb quality made of cashmere, and was used as costuming for the Tibetan aristocrats before the peaceful liberation. Among the all, the products made in Gyaideixiu town of Gonggar, Shannan Prefecture are the best. The second, called Puchu, has a quality a little inferior to that of Xiegma, made of hairs taken from belly and back of the sheep and usually used for making the Tibetan robe and trousers. The third, called Kohsia or



*Flagon(Bronze with Silver
Clad and Gold Inlaid)*

Ch ' aichan, is made of hairs taken from the chest or belly of the sheep, and often used for making robes or aprons. The fourth, called T'aierhma or T'ichu, falls in the moderate quality and is made of hairs taken from any part of the sheep dyeing to brown or black, and is often used for making robes of cassocks of the monks. The fifth, called Kochan, is made of hairs of the goats and with an ordinary quality, and mostly used for the ordinary beddings or bags. The sixth, called Chuchu, is relatively rich in variety, among which, the shag and pushed wool are widely applied and used for making the premium beddings. The last one, called Ch'itzu, is made of hairs taken

from any part of the sheep and often used for making winter coats. As for the apron (Bangdian). It has usual width of 10 cm and also falls in to seven categories. The first, called Koch'a, is dominated by white color and usually worn by little girls during festivals. The second, called Ch'ach'in, is worn by the old ladies during festivals. The third, called Chiangchiatse, is usually worn by ladies above 40 during festivals. The fourth, called Sehsia, is worn by nuns. The fifth, called Ech'iungpantian, is worn by little girls below 15. The sixth, called Xagchapaissa and said to be specifically originated for supplying to the Xagcha family, the once big noble family in Tibet and thus named, is cherished now by young ladies. The seventh, called Chajungpaissa and said to be specifically originated for supplying to the Chajung family, also the once big noble family in Tibet and thus named, is also very popular now among young ladies.

The pulu and apron are usually decorated by different patterns and textures. Especially for the apron, which's textures are vividly presented. For example, its cloud texture, called Chiang in Tibetan, is woven with woolen threads of different colors, such as blue, red, green and yellow, etc. Both pulu and apron are highlighted with perfect combination of the serviceability and decoration. The most prevalent textures are as: Guti, Chialo, Chiangti, Chiang, Seti, Koti and

Nati, etc, which are not only colorful and eyes catching, but also meaningful. For instance, the Guti means nine eyes. And it is said that this kind of texture can expel the evils. There are also some dramatic stories behind the origin of some textures. Take the Chialo as an example, which says that more than one thousand years ago, an inspiration occurred upon a young man when he looked at the mono-tune pulu without any decoration: to make some cross patterns on it. He made so and brought a batch of pulus with the cross pattern decoration to Chinese inland region, which were soon sold out. This en-



Flat Kettle(Bronze with Frog Pattern and Gem Inlaid)

couraged him to bring back the technology to Tibet. Chialo, meaning brought back from Chinese inland, was so named.

The carpet and kadian are also important kinds of textiles in Tibet. Their working procedures are generally similar, but somewhat different in specifications and craftworks. The carpet is larger in size and often with a square shape and daintier craftwork; while the kadian is smaller and usually with an oblong shape, and mainly used as beddings. The patterns and textures of the carpet are various, among which that of cloud, drill rod, dragon, dragon & phoenix, double dragons and good luck, etc, are all the fashion. The carpets are soft, good in heat retention and beautiful, thus favored by Tibetan people.

The wood wares and wooden furniture making also grow as a well-established trade. The products are both durable and good-looking. The Tibetan hutches and tables are beautiful but solemn and sober, the colors of which reflect stillness and also somewhat easiness. The ornaments are curved or painted with very fine workmanship. The patterns, such as the flower, grasses, tree, dragon, phoenix, tiger, lion and personage are all lively presented

Today all kinds of commodities are easily available in Tibet, just as in any other part of China. However, this does not cast shadow on the traditional handiworks, instead, they are shining even brighter. Beside the traditional production in households or small workshops, the up-to-date



Flint (Used Also as an Attire of Men)

machinery and technology have also been introduced. The examples of this are Lhasa Carpet Works, Nyingchi Carpet Works, Gonggar Apron Works, and etc. By doing so, the state of art is increasingly improved and the products keep changing in styles and designs, which are not only favored by the domestic market, but also well accepted by the neighboring countries and regions, such as Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim and etc.

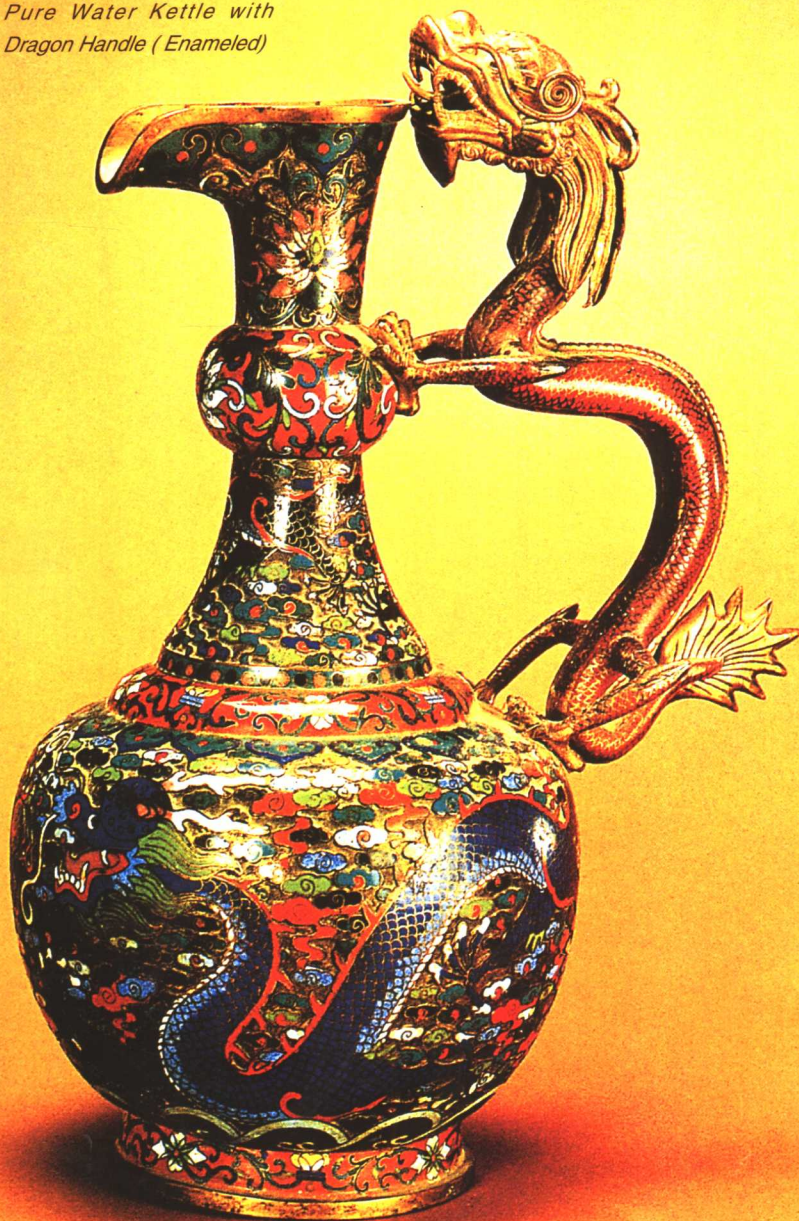


Teapot (Gold)



Hot Food Tank (Gold and Gem Inlaid)

*Pure Water Kettle with
Dragon Handle (Enameled)*





Embroidered Pulu (Lhasa)



Flagon(Iron)



Flagon and Cups (Silver)



*Teapot and Mild Fire Kiln
(Red Copper)*



Iron Locks of Tibetan Style



Iron Lock of Tibetan Style



*Tibetan Knife
(Silver Sheath)*



Chinese Traditional Trumpets





Waist Decorations(Silver)

Tibetan Knife and Baldric



Saddle with Copper Ornaments



Copper Bell(Crest for the Cattle)



Saddle Ornament



Silver Lighter



Liquor Bowl(Silver)



Pottery Wares



Potting