

Signs of Yuan Dynasty Imperialism in Tibet:
Decoding the Fourteenth-Century Painted Representations of Textiles at Shalu Monastery

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“This room is worth the whole trip. It’s to die for. Ancient texts line the walls, and the most spectacular, rich paintings of five Buddhas decorate the main wall. No picture does the colors or the artistry or the painted textiles justice.”

- On Shalu’s Kanjur Lhakang
Excerpt of my field journal, July 2014

I experienced the wonder that is Shalu Monastery for the first time last summer, falling captive to its charms the moment I stepped into the beautifully painted interior circumambulation hall. It was the monastery’s library and the awe-inspiring paintings of textiles that canvased its walls, however, which truly enchanted me, intrigued me, and prompted a months-long journey to try and discover what they mean.

INTRODUCTION

Divine inspiration, perhaps, explains the wonder that is Zha lu (Shalu) Monastery's Kanjur Lhakang (fig. 1). Dozens of ancient texts, wrapped in red and yellow fabric bookcovers, stack the room's east and west walls. Nestled together on enormous shelves that reach nearly to the ceiling on one wall, the traditional Tibetan texts reveal a connection to the contemporary world only in the paper money that peek out from between the stacks, evidence of devotees who have worshipped here (fig. 2). A decorated altar, too, exposes that Shalu stands in the twenty-first century, rather than the fourteenth, as the offerings left on and beside the statuary images of deities reflect more current times. The dazzling larger-than-life paintings of the five Tathāgatas that dominate the wall directly behind this altar, though, appear ageless—seemingly unravaged by the centuries that have passed since their creation and untouched by modern sensibilities (fig. 3). The rich colors, the exquisite artistry, and the masterfully painted representations of textiles reflect the fourteenth-century era of opulence in which they were produced, and nearly seven hundred years later their visual impact has not dwindled. These murals could leave even the most stoic man breathless.

Founded in Central Tibet in 1040, Shalu Monastery's rich history of monastic scholarship and imperial patronage warrants attention.¹ Shalu's power to enthrall, however, comes from the splendid paintings that cover its walls. Through an extensive analysis of Shalu Monastery's Kanjur Lhakang, I argue that its fourteenth-century paintings, and in particular its painted representations of textiles, function as signifiers of the Yuan-dynasty Mongols' savvy appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic in Tibet for imperialist purposes.

¹ Amy Heller, "Did Atisa Visit Zha lu," in *Buddhist Art and Tibetan Patronage: Ninth to Fourteenth Centuries: PIATS 2000: Tibetan studies: Proceedings of the Ninth Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Deborah Klimburg-Salter and Eva Allinger, eds., (Boston: Leiden, 2002), 46.

Two primary questions guide my thesis. First, why did the Mongols, one of the most powerful empires of Asia ruling Tibet at the time (1279-1368), not establish their own aesthetic or simply import one of the well established Chinese aesthetic systems associated with courtly patronage to Shalu?² And second, why do the painted representations of textiles in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang, specifically, as opposed to another stylistic element, signal the Yuan-dynasty Mongols' politically motivated appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic?

To understand the significance of my argument, it is necessary to define this historical period and its dramatis personae. The Mongols experienced a swift rise to power in the thirteenth century, beginning with Genghis Khan's (ca. 1162-1227) unification of the nomadic tribes and continuing with the empire's conquest of much of Eurasia (fig. 4).³ Kubilai Khan (1215-1294), who established the Yuan dynasty in 1279, was particularly savvy. He founded the capital in what is modern-day Beijing, adopted Chinese administrative structures in his government, and employed a number of Chinese officials.⁴ Kubilai's approach to imperialism, then, was one modeled after appropriation and adoption rather than cultural chauvinism and disruption, suggesting that he understood the multiethnicity and polyreligious reality of the massive region he ruled.

Perhaps most significant in his imperially minded maneuvers was Kubilai's conversion to Tibetan Buddhism in 1253, seven years before he even took on the title of Kubilai Khan.⁵ Kubilai's conversion to Tibetan Buddhism occurred under the guidance of Drogon Chogyal Phakpa ('Phags pa, 1235-1280), a Tibetan Buddhist monk of the Sakya tradition; thus, a

² There did not exist a single Mongol court style that could be said to carry with it clear ideological messages. (Robert L. Thorp and Richard Ellis Vinograd, *Chinese Art and Culture*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2001), 285-286.)

³ Susan Huntington and John Huntington, *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pala India (8th-12th Centuries) and its International Legacy* (Seattle: University of Washington, 1991), 20.

⁴ Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 230.

⁵ Huntington and Huntington, 298.

longstanding relationship of patronage and religious advising between the Mongols and the Sakya tradition was born.⁶ The importance of this “spiritual master-imperial patron relationship” cannot be overstated.⁷ Called *yon mchod* in Tibetan, the partnership was mutually beneficial: the Mongol rulers supplied monasteries with the physical and material resources they needed, while the Sakya monks offered the Mongols spiritual protection and ensured the sanctification of the state.⁸ The significance of this relationship skyrocketed with Kubilai’s establishment of the Yuan dynasty in 1279.

Shalu Monastery’s own alignment with the Sakya tradition afforded it the patronage of the Mongols, allowing for its extensive renovation and expansion in the early fourteenth century during the Yuan dynasty.⁹ The height of efforts to revive and re-establish Shalu occurred between 1306 and 1333, after the Mongol court instated Sakya lama Drakpa Gyeltshen as the ruler of Shalu.¹⁰ The patronage of the Yuan-dynasty Mongols permitted Drakpa Gyeltshen to bring artists from the Yuan court back to Shalu to assist with his plans for new construction.¹¹ The artists had been trained at court under Anige (1245-1306), a Newar artist known for his incredible talent and skill.¹² Kubilai’s enthusiasm for and continued patronage of Anige throughout his life (which included the gifting of a Chinese wife, a manor, and numerous titles) illustrates the Mongols’ seeming acceptance and appreciation of the Himalayan aesthetic made famous by the Newar artists (fig. 5).¹³ But the Mongols’ adoption of the Newar aesthetic hardly

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Roberto Vitali, *Early Temples of Central Tibet* (London: Serindia Publications, 1990), 98.

⁸ Anning Jing, “Financial and Material Aspects of Tibetan Art Under the Yuan Dynasty,” *Artibus Asiae* 64 (2004), 214.

⁹ Vitali, 99.

¹⁰ Hugo Kreijger, “Mural Styles at Shalu,” in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*, eds. Jane Casey-Singer and Philip Denwood, (Boston: Weatherhill, 1997), 175.

¹¹ Vitali, 105.

¹² Anning Jing, “The Portraits of Khubilai Khan and Chabi By Anige (1245-1306), A Nepali Artist at the Yuan Court,” *Artibus Asiae* 54 (1994), 39.

¹³ Ibid, 42, 49.

signifies mere appreciation of the artistic style. I suggest that the appropriation of the Newar aesthetic at Yuan-patronized sites in Tibet, like Shalu, reveals the Mongols' political strategy: rather than impose Mongol artistic traditions in Tibet, or those of newly conquered China, the Mongols usurped power from within through the adoption of Tibet's religious tradition and artistic styles, providing evidence of the imperially-minded strategy of appropriation they employed in order to establish authority throughout their newly conquered territories.

The painted representations of textiles in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang best illustrate this appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic for imperial purposes. South Asian artists have long employed textile representations as signifiers of the sacred. The importance of this function of textile representations cannot be overemphasized, as this theme exists across media, across time, and across regions. A second-century schist relief panel from Gandhara (a region that is today northern Pakistan and Afghanistan), for example, depicts the distribution of the Buddha's relics between the princes of eight territories (fig. 6). More impressive than the carefully sculpted figures, relics, and table, is the intricately carved textile that drapes gracefully over the table's side. Eight vertical bands delineate the thick, woven textile, and either a whimsical or geometric pattern adorns each band. Tassels on the bottom corners of the textile defy gravity to expose the underside of the textile, which boasts two meticulously carved patterns—one on each edge. The artist's incredible attention to detail in the textile suggests that the textile serves as much more than a decorative table covering. Rather, the textile's placement suggests that the holy relics of the Buddha could not be placed on a bare table. It seems, then, that the presence of the textile in the image signifies the sacredness of the scene. This is indeed a visual trope well used throughout South Asia for centuries, as suggested by Alexander Soper, who argues that textiles

hanging from temple ceilings serve as “domes of heaven,” and Deborah Klimburg-Salter who extends this argument to include painted representations of ceiling textiles.¹⁴

Shalu’s meticulously produced painted representations of textiles continue in this tradition, though the Yuan appropriation of the textile representations signifies a complex web of political and religious motivations. The Five Tathāgatas depicted on the south wall of the Kanjur Lhakang wear almost identically patterned dhotis that seem to be made of airy cotton (fig. 7). The geometric patterns in these textile representations resemble those achieved with woodblock printing, which requires the artisan to dye the fabric and then print the textile’s designs directly onto the fabric with woodblocks dipped in different dye colors.¹⁵ Cotton is particularly conducive to woodblock printing, suggesting that the textiles represented on the walls of Shalu could not be Tibet’s dark woolen textiles; and the lack of shine in the textile representations suggests that the fabric depicted is not China’s famous embroidered silk. It seems that the artists, then, likely based these painted representations of dyed cotton textiles on those coming to Tibet from India or Nepal—two regions with which Tibet not only had longstanding commercial relationships, but also religious and artistic relationships.¹⁶

That the aesthetic most prominent in the rendering of the painted textile representations in Shalu’s Kanjur Lhakang pulls heavily from Himalayan artistic tradition cannot be disputed. A *thangka* painting (Tibetan painting on primed cotton canvas) at a thirteenth-century monastery in Central Tibet, believed to be of the Sakya tradition like Shalu, provides an excellent comparison for the Tathāgatas painted on the wall of Shalu’s Kanjur Lhakang. Produced by an unknown

¹⁴ Alexander Coburn Soper, “The ‘Dome of Heaven’ in Asia,” *Art Bulletin* 29 (1947), 225-248; and Deborah E. Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo, a Lamp for the Kingdom: Early Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Art in the Western Himalaya* (New York: Thames and Hudson Inc., 1998), 174.

¹⁵ Jennifer Harris, ed., *Textiles: 5,000 Years: An International History and Illustrated Survey* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1993). 53.

¹⁶ Huntington and Huntington, 254.

Newar artist, this thirteenth-century Tathāgata illustrates the Newar artistic tradition through its inclusion of delicate miniaturized details that were prevalent in Nepalese manuscripts, the style of the thrones on which the Tathāgatas sit, and the images' overall liveliness and energy (fig. 8).¹⁷ The textile representation in this Tathāgata *thangka*, with its seemingly light material and its colorful, geometric pattern, echoes the diaphanous feel and woodblock-produced patterns present in the Tathāgata images at Shalu. The rhythm within the pattern, along with some of the design elements—like abstracted florals and bands of color—appear in the dhotis of the Shalu Tathāgatas, too, suggesting the existence of a visual trope in Newar and Tibetan textile representations that the Yuan artists at Shalu consequently appropriated in their depictions of the Five Tathāgatas in the Kanjur Lhakang.

Kubilai's decision to fund the decoration of Shalu's library in a strongly Himalayan style is a choice steeped in political, religious, and aesthetic motivations that play out across the walls of the library. And the presence of the Newar aesthetic at Shalu gains even greater significance when painted textile representations from the fifteenth century are considered. With the collapse of the Yuan dynasty and the start of the Ming dynasty in 1368, the depiction of textile representations undergoes a noticeable shift in style. Many art historians regard Gyantse's Pelkhor Chöde, a Central Tibetan monastic complex completed in 1425, as the first monument painted in a purely Tibetan style.¹⁸ In the Gyantse Kumbum's murals, the Tibetan artists weave together elements of Indian, Newar, and Chinese artistic traditions to create their own unique aesthetic.¹⁹ Unlike the textiles depicted in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang, the textiles depicted in these

¹⁷ Steven M. Kossak and Jane Casey Singer, *Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998), 140.

¹⁸ Erberto Lo Bue and Franco Ricca, *Gyantse Revisited* (Florence: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1990), 70.

¹⁹ Franco Ricca, "Stylistic Features of the Pelkhor Chöde at Gyantse," in *Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style*, eds. Jane Casey Singer and Philip Denwood, (London: Laurence King Publishing, 1997), 198.

Gyantse murals reflect a Chinese aesthetic: the sheen of the representations gives the fabrics the appearance of silk; and rendered in rich reds and vibrant golds, the textiles also feature chrysanthemums and flying phoenixes—Chinese motifs—dancing across the fields of color (fig. 9). While pinpointing the exact reasons for the emergence of a distinctively Tibetan style that embraces Chinese elements under the Ming dynasty would take me beyond the parameters of this thesis, it is clear that under the Ming, the renderings of painted textiles in Tibet look different. This stylistic shift emphasizes the weightiness of the Yuan dynasty's political and religious motivations in its appropriation and application of the Himalayan aesthetic at Shalu.

I. METHODOLOGY

To answer the questions my thesis presents, I rely heavily on formal analysis achieved through rigorous close-looking at the wall paintings at Shalu and their Indian, Newar, and Tibetan antecedents, and through an extensive study of social history that includes a complex web of religious and political relationships between the Mongols and their Newar and Tibetan neighbors. Little has been written on the subject of Tibetan textiles and their painted representations, so I have modeled my approach to the material on the works of Austrian scholars Christiane Papa-Kalantari and Erna Wandl, who have both written on the function and significance of textile representations in Tibetan wall painting. There is also no substantive monograph on Shalu Monastery, so I have relied heavily on the work of John Huntington and Roberto Vitali to understand the monastery's history. Though the lack of resources and texts specifically concerning Shalu and textile representations has been challenging, Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang offers rich visual material that serves as compelling evidence for my argument. Conducting fieldwork at Shalu in the summer of 2014 also helped my understanding of the

space, the intricacy of the paintings, and the overwhelming power of the Yuan-dynasty Mongol's appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic writ large on Shalu's walls.

II. NOTES ON DEFINITIONS AND STYLE

When I refer to the Himalayan aesthetic, I am referring to the artistic styles found in the Himalayas, specifically India, Nepal, and the Tibetan plateau from the eleventh through fourteenth centuries. It is important to recognize that during this three-hundred-year period, Tibetan artists drew from the Newar aesthetic and that Newar artistic tradition in turn borrowed elements from India's Pāla style. When I refer to appropriation, I am using the definition articulated by Robert S. Nelson: appropriation "maintains but shifts the former connotations [of an object] to create the new sign and accomplishes all this covertly, making the process appear ordinary or natural."²⁰ Tibetan terms and proper nouns will first appear in Wylie transliteration, and their Romanized versions will follow in parentheses. I will use the Romanized version of that term or name in following references.

III. ORGANIZATION

In order to fully address each facet of my thesis statement, I have divided my argument into four chapters. In the first chapter, I examine the significant role of textiles in South Asia during the eleventh through fifteenth centuries, or those centuries that predate and postdate the expansion and reconstruction of Shalu Monastery under the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty. In the second chapter, I construct the socio-political and religious framework surrounding the construction of Shalu, with a concentration on the relationships between the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, the Yuan dynasty, and Shalu Monastery. The third chapter includes extensive descriptions of the painted representations of textiles in the Tathāgata murals in Shalu's Kanjur

²⁰ Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation," in *Critical Terms for Art History*, eds. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 119.

Lhakang and provides information about the murals' Indian, Newar, and Tibetan antecedents. The exploration of the Shalu murals and their antecedents together offers a useful, though abbreviated, compendium of visual vocabularies used in painted representations of textile from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I discuss the new textile tradition that emerges at Pelkor Chöde Monastery in Gyantse, only ninety kilometers away from Shalu, in the fifteenth-century. This fifteenth-century textile tradition incorporates Chinese motifs of chrysanthemums and flying phoenixes and layered, heavily embroidered patterns within the already well-established Newar and Indian textile patterns. Gyantse's murals illustrate the precise, meticulous manner in which artists paint representations of textiles, which in turn showcase the development of a purely Tibetan aesthetic that reveals Tibet's own cosmopolitan awareness.

IV. CONTRIBUTION

Shalu Monastery and its Himalayan aesthetic have long intrigued Tibetan scholars, but they have not yet taken the conversation beyond connoisseurial intrigue. Yes, Shalu's murals are beautiful—exquisitely rendered in incredible detail; but what I do in my thesis is move the discussion about Shalu beyond artistic appeal and into a conversation about how the paintings, and particularly the form of textile representations, serve a very subtle, but very important imperial function for the Yuan dynasty. This thesis provides the first substantive visual and socio-political analysis of painted representations of textiles at fourteenth and fifteenth-century sites in Central Tibet. In so doing, the findings of this paper offer an interpretation of textiles that subverts the generally superficial analysis of their artistic and aesthetic merit, in favor of a critical analysis that provides a framework in which textiles can be understood as incredibly potent signals of themes that transcend art and art historical contexts.

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROLE OF TEXTILES IN SOUTH ASIA BETWEEN THE TWELFTH AND FIFTEENTH CENTURIES

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines three interrelated issues that together illustrate the significance of textiles in Asian culture—particularly South Asian culture—between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, or those centuries that predate and postdate the reconstruction of Shalu Monastery under the patronage of the Mongols during the Yuan Dynasty. First, I examine the geography of the Silk Road tributaries that brought textiles into the regions that are today Tibet, India, and Nepal, and the importance of textiles as a medium of exchange. I then discuss textile production techniques as a means of understanding the appearance of textiles from different regions, specifically Tibet and India. Finally, I turn to an analysis of South Asia’s long-established tradition of representing textiles in a variety of artistic media, with a particular focus on the significance of painted representations of textiles.

I: TRADE ROUTES AND TEXTILES AS A MEDIUM OF EXCHANGE

*“In its heyday, this was one of the most cosmopolitan areas on earth: merchants carrying fine silk and ornamented lacquers westward from China would mingle with traders bringing fragile Roman glass to the east, or with Indians seeking markets for superbly carved ivory cosmetic boxes or gold ornaments for fashionable women.”*²¹

-Milo Cleveland Beach on the Silk Road

The importance of the Silk Road and its tributaries as facilitators of exchange cannot be overstated. Operating between the first century B.C. and through the reign of the Mongols in China during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Eurasian network composed of the Silk Road and its corollaries allowed for the exchange of religion, particularly Buddhism and Islam;

²¹ Milo Cleveland Beach, “Foreward,” in *Along the Silk Road*, ed. Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 6.

the sharing of technologies, like agricultural methods and writing; and the trade of a variety of goods, ranging from camellias to camels.²² Textiles, especially silk, were perhaps the most valuable commodities of exchange, as they were considered luxury items and served practical purposes as well. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries in South Asia, textiles performed several different functions in addition to their use as currency: though of varying materials and quality, textiles clothed laypeople, monastics, and aristocrats; textiles distinguished a space or figure as being sacred; and textiles were given as offerings.²³

What is known today as the Silk Road was established as early as 106 B.C., when Zhang Wian, representing China's Han Dynasty, crossed the Pamir Mountains into Central Asia.²⁴ Having failed to form an alliance with Central Asian rulers against a Han enemy in his first westward voyage in 139 B.C., Zhang Wian returned in 106 B.C., intent on establishing trade and offering gold and silk in exchange for horses.²⁵ This initial exchange formed the basis for the Silk Route; and the network of smaller roads sprouting from the main route connected much of the Eurasian continent, reaching from China to India and the Mediterranean.²⁶ Chang'an, a city in north central China, historically served as the origin of the Silk Road (figs. 10 and 11). From there, the route wound northwest towards Dunhuang.²⁷ To Dunhuang's west, the Silk Road crossed a pass called the Jade Gate, where the main Silk Road diverged into two separate routes, one following the north edge and the other passing along the south edge of the famously perilous

²² Irene M. Franck and David M. Brownstone, *The Silk Road: A History* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1986), 2.

²³ Harris, 8.

²⁴ Vadime Elisseeff, *The Silk Roads: Highways of Culture and Commerce* (New York, Oxford: Berghen Books, 2000), 3.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road: The Search for the Lost Cities and Treasures of Chinese Central Asia* (London: John Murray Publishers, 1980), 17.

Taklamakan desert.²⁸ The northern route crossed the bases of the T'ien Shan, a mountain range stretching from Turfan to Kashgar. The southern route, which plays a more important role in interpreting the painted representations of textiles at Shalu Monastery, wound through northern Tibet to Yarkand before reconnecting with the northern branch of the Silk Route at the western edge of the Taklamakan.²⁹ After the seventh century, the southern route dipped slightly further south into Tibet, seemingly integrating the region more fully into the trade route.³⁰ A tributary of the southern branch of the Silk Route also ran from Yarkand on the western edge of the Taklamakan desert down to Leh, and then to the Bombay coast, connecting India to the greater Silk Road, a socio-geographic relationship that is also essential to the analysis of painted representation of textiles at Shalu.³¹ So a series of capillaries of commercial routes, rather than one road that merely connected the East to the West, facilitated the exchange of a wealth of goods across East and South Asia. Though Shalu Monastery did not directly participate in the exchanges that took place along the trade routes because of its distance from them, the abundant commercial exchange of textiles throughout East and South Asia played an integral role in shaping the textile-rich Tibetan culture that Shalu's painted representations of textiles reflect.

Through Zhang Wian's employment of silk as currency in transactions with Central Asia, China introduced the textile to foreigners as being as valuable as gold with the inception of the Silk Road in the first century B.C.³² Foreign merchants quickly recognized the profitability of the material, risking run-ins with bandits, high taxes, and natural disasters in order to secure Chinese

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid 18.

³⁰ Franck and Brownstone, 6. That the trade route moves deeper into Tibet is likely due to the increasing imperiousness and growing military force that occurs in Tibet during the seventh century. (Matthew T. Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), xvii)

³¹ Hopkirk, 18.

³² James C. Y. Watt and Anne E. Wardwell, *When Silk Was Gold: Central Asian and Chinese Textiles* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), 7.

silks to bring home to the aristocrats of Europe and the rest of Asia, who viewed these fabrics as highly desirable luxury items and would offer top dollar for them.³³

The Chinese, however, had prized silk as a valuable form of currency for nearly two thousand years before the Silk Road's inception.³⁴ The people of northern China were the first to discover how to harvest silk: they boiled the cocoons of silkworms, which fed on native mulberry trees; and the boiling water dissolved the binding substance of the cocoons' fibers, allowing farmers to unwind the silk threads that composed the cocoons.³⁵ By 2000 B.C., silkworm farming was common practice in China, likely because families could pay their taxes with silk.³⁶ Records indicate that silks were also used to bribe nomads to prevent raids on Chinese farmland in 400 B.C.³⁷ The nomads would then take these silks with them across the Eurasian steppes, thus introducing silk to the Greeks, who lived on the western edge of the nomads' domain.³⁸ Despite the overwhelming trans-regional interest in silks, or perhaps because of it, Chinese law prohibited the export of silkworms or mulberry seeds, even threatening the death sentence as a consequence for smuggling.³⁹ As a result, the Chinese effectively held a monopoly on the silk trade until the sixth century A.D.⁴⁰ This control of the silk trade essentially ended after Nestorian monks allegedly smuggled silkworm eggs and mulberry seeds into Byzantium.⁴¹

³³ Deborah Klimburg-Salter, *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path* (Los Angeles: UCLA Art Council, 1982), 19-20.

³⁴ Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis, ed., *Along the Silk Road* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 15.

³⁵ Elizabeth Barber, "Fashioned from Fiber," in *Along the Silk Road*, ed. Elizabeth Ten Grotenhuis (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2002), 57.

³⁶ Grotenhuis, 16.

³⁷ Barber, 58.

³⁸ *Ibid.* The Romans, too, were enormous importers of silks, which they encountered on the battlefield via Parthian flags. The Parthians took on the incredibly profitable role of middleman between China and Rome and further grew the Western interest in Chinese silks (Hopkirk 20).

³⁹ Barber, 59.

⁴⁰ Grotenhuis, 16.

⁴¹ Hopkirk, 19.

Silk, however, was not the only textile traded along the Silk Road: the Chinese, who were as unfamiliar with cotton production as the Greeks and Romans were with silk production, imported cotton goods from India with frequency.⁴² Cotton, like silk, is easy to dye, so much of cotton textiles' appeal was likely rooted in the luxuriousness of the colors used to decorate them.⁴³ Just as silk was well established in China, cotton had a long history in the more temperate regions of South Asia, like India and Pakistan. Starting around 3000 B.C., farmers grew cotton in the Indus Valley (what is today northern India and Pakistan).⁴⁴ Farmers also grew cotton in the plains of Gujarat and the areas surrounding the Narbada and Tapti Rivers in India, which provided an ideal environment for the production of the raw material.⁴⁵ The plant and textile then appeared in Assyria, Egypt, and Central Asia around 1000 B.C. as “a botanical curiosity and luxury import.”⁴⁶ India gained great fame across Asia for its woven cotton textiles, especially the muslins, which were so finely woven that they “became invisible to the eye when laid on wet grass.”⁴⁷ Though Indian-produced cotton had long been valued as an imported good in China, it was not until the thirteenth century that cotton was of such import to the Chinese that it actually competed with silk.⁴⁸

Wool, however, predated both cotton and silk as a commodity exchanged trans-regionally by about two thousand years, as evidenced by the discovery of mummified remains dressed in woolen clothing in Central Asia.⁴⁹ Called the “Beauty of Loulan,” a mummified woman was found at the center of the Silk Route wrapped in wool that had extra loops woven in to provide

⁴² Franck and Brownstone, 225.

⁴³ Barber, 59.

⁴⁴ Franck and Brownstone, 225.

⁴⁵ Harris, 104.

⁴⁶ Franck and Brownstone, 225.

⁴⁷ Rustam Jehangir Mehta, *Masterpieces of Indian Textiles* (Bombay: D.B. Taraporevala Sons, 1970), 4.

⁴⁸ Barber, 59.

⁴⁹ Barber, 61.

warmth for the extreme winters of the region.⁵⁰ Other mummified remains found near Cherchen, just over the Kun Lun Mountains from what is now Tibet, were also clothed in tightly woven wool garments, which were dyed in hues of red, purple, and brown—lacking the elaborate patterns associated with Chinese silks.⁵¹ Though the mummies were discovered in Central Asia, it seems that the wool came all the way from sheep originally domesticated in the Zagros Mountains, between Iran and Iraq.⁵² The wool trade continued long past the fifth century B.C. date given to these mummies and into the days of the later Silk Road, largely due to the movement of the nomadic herders throughout Central Asia and the Eurasian Steppes.⁵³ Some of these nomadic herders likely came from the mountains and plateaus of Tibet, as pastoral nomadism has long been the basis of the Tibetan economy.⁵⁴ These nomads moved around the region, allowing their herds of yak, sheep, and goats to graze in different pastures during different seasons.⁵⁵ The rough, outer wool of the yaks could be used for covering the nomads' tents, while the fine, inner wool was valued for its cashmere-like softness.⁵⁶ Unlike the silks of China and the cotton textiles of India, Tibet's woolen textiles rarely boasted patterns, likely because of the dark coloring and heavy nature of the raw materials from which they were woven.⁵⁷ How and where Tibetan wool and woolen textiles were exported and traded is not exactly clear, but it seems that nomads acted as the vehicles for the wool trade. Based on the flow of artisans between Nepal; China, via the Mongol rulers; and Tibet (a relationship that will be discussed at length in the next chapter) in the fourteenth century, it seems likely, too, that the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 62.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Franck and Brownstone, 39.

⁵⁴ Agriculture," Tibet Environmental Watch, last modified April 26, 2000, accessed October 30, 2014, <http://www.tew.org/tibet2000/t2.ch3.agriculture.html>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Susi Dunsmore, *Nepalese Textiles* (London: British Museum Press, 1993), 48.

⁵⁷ Erna Wandl, "The Representation of Costumes and Textiles," in *Tabo: A Lamp for the Kingdom*, ed. Deborah Klimburg-Salter (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 179.

wool coming out of Tibet was transported to Nepal and China, where it could be traded for cotton.⁵⁸ Southern Nepal, like India, was temperate enough for the growth of cotton, and by the fourteenth century, cotton had also taken hold in China.⁵⁹ This relationship among Tibet, Nepal, and China, then, may explain the appearance of diaphanous cotton textiles in Tibetan art.

The success of silk, cotton, and wool as commodities exchanged on the Silk Road did not depend solely on the European and Asian aristocrats who bought them in great quantities. The monasteries located along the Silk Route also participated heavily in the exchange, offering hospitality to the merchants and missionaries who traveled along the silk roads.⁶⁰ In return, these merchants funded the monasteries, consequently allowing the resident monastics to patronize religious arts.⁶¹ Because they were used to decorate temples, particularly those in the Western Himalaya,⁶² textiles were a significant form of religious art in which monastic systems readily invested.⁶³

Tibet, in particular, has a long history of using textiles to create luxurious atmospheres in temples, leading Ruth Barnes to deem Tibet as having a “textile-conscious” culture.⁶⁴ This religious use of textiles further emphasizes the extraordinary value of the Silk Route’s textiles trade and the fact that the materials made their way well south of the primary east-west corridors. From the tenth century on, textiles consumed temple interiors in the Western Himalayan region: painted *thangkas* hung from upper beams of ceilings; silk banners cascaded down pillars; and

⁵⁸ Based on archeological findings in Syria and Egypt, Tibet was not the only region trading wool. India’s famed Kashmiri wool made its way along the Silk Route and its tributaries, too. See Anamika Pathak, *Pashmina* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2005), 10.

⁵⁹ Barber, 59.

⁶⁰ Klimburg-Salter, *Silk Route*, 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Christiane Papa-Kalantari, “From textile dress to vault of heavens: some observations on the function and symbolism of ceiling decorations in the western Himalayan Buddhist temples of Nako, Himachal Pradesh, India” in *The Temple in South Asia: Volume II of the proceedings of the 18th conference of the European Association of South Asian Archaeologists*, ed. Adam Hardy (London: British Association of South Asian Archaeologists, 2005), 150.

⁶³ Klimburg-Salter (1982), 20.

⁶⁴ Papa-Kalantari, 150.

sacred texts peeked out of colorful wraps.⁶⁵ Within these highly decorated temples, textiles also served to dignify the image of a deity or honorable figure: textiles either dressed sculptural images of honorific figures or were positioned overhead the figures as canopies (fig. 12).⁶⁶

II. TEXTILE PRODUCTION TECHNIQUES

Certain raw materials allow for different types of decorative patterning. Tibet's woolen textiles, for instance, because they were so heavily weft, were generally dyed solid colors and lacked pattern.⁶⁷ Evidence of these rather plain Tibetan textiles exists in a Nepalese illuminated manuscript from between the tenth and eleventh centuries (figure 13). With the exception of one figure, whose robe bears a floral pattern, the figures wear heavy, belted white robes synonymous with the Tibetan aristocracy.⁶⁸ One donor wears a solid yellow cape over his shoulders, while another dons a solid red cape. A third donor wears a tunic with red sleeves underneath the white robe. In addition to indicating class rank, these robes also highlight the simplicity and absence of patterns in the heavy garments typical of Tibet.

India's airy muslins, cottons, and silks, however, which likely came to Tibet through trade with Nepal, lent themselves to whimsical colors and elaborate patterns, which were created through embroidery, printing, or dyeing.⁶⁹ Embroidery was commonly used to embellish textiles in India. During the weaving process, intricate designs were stitched by hand in silk, gold, or cotton thread, generally in floral motifs.⁷⁰ Many of India's textile patterns were also created with the woodblock printing technique, a method cultivated and perfected there.⁷¹ When an artisan used this technique, he would carve out the negative space of an image on a wooden block,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Klimburg-Salter (1997), 174.

⁶⁷ Wandl (1998), 179.

⁶⁸ Heller, 91.

⁶⁹ Harris, 37.

⁷⁰ Mehta, 6.

⁷¹ Harris, 37.

leaving a relief of the image he wanted to transpose onto cloth.⁷² The woodblock technique was used to create both whimsical florals and ordered geometric patterns, which appear quite similar to the relatively ordered patterns on the dhotis that the Tathāgatas at Shalu Monastery are depicted as wearing (figs. 14 and 15).

In addition to embroidery and printing, artisans creating textiles in India also used dyeing as a means of producing patterns on textiles. There were two primary methods of pattern dyeing employed in India: resist dyeing and mordant dyeing.⁷³ In order to create a pattern using resist dyeing, an artisan would have to apply a resist substance, like wax or clay, onto the textile.⁷⁴ The areas covered by the wax and mud would not absorb dye, allowing those design elements to remain white even after the rest of the fabric had been dyed.⁷⁵ The resist substance was then removed to reveal the pattern (figure 16). Tie dyeing, known as *bandhana* in India, was another form of resist dyeing employed by artisans.⁷⁶ In this process, areas of the cloth were tied so that they would not be colored by the dye; when the dyeing process was complete, artisans removed the ties to reveal a negative pattern.⁷⁷ Finally, Indian artisans employed mordant dyeing to create patterns on textiles. The opposite of resist dyeing in that it reveals a positive pattern rather than a negative one, mordant dyeing was used to ensure that color would soak into fabrics.⁷⁸ Many of the colors used in Indian textiles were created from indigenous plants and minerals: indigo plants offered shades of blue; trees and plants that produced alizarin, an organic dye, provided rich crimsons and deep reds; and saffron and turmeric yielded bright yellows.⁷⁹ The saturation and

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 39

⁷⁴ Marika Sardar, "Indian Textiles: Trade and Production," in *Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000), n.p.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Harris, 39.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁷⁹ Sardar, n.p.

hue of a textile's colors depended on the length of the dye bath, the concentration of the dye, and the number of dye washes.⁸⁰

Because of the rich colors, intricate patterns, and light appearance of the fabric in the dhotis of the Shalu Monastery Tathāgatas, it seems as though the Tibetan artist attempted to recreate textiles and textile production techniques—which originated in India, but were then used widely in Nepal—in his paintings. The next chapter makes specific mention of different textile production techniques in order to identify these different types of textiles that the Shalu artists tried to replicate in their murals.

III. PAINTED REPRESENTATIONS OF TEXTILES

Despite the prevalence of textile representations in various media in South Asian art across regions and time periods, there are very few extant material textiles to study because textiles begin to fall apart from the moment they are created.⁸¹ It is this abundance of elaborate artistic representations of textiles in temples across South Asia, then, that reveals information about what these textiles may have looked like and how they were used. The importance of these painted representations of textiles must be emphasized for three primary reasons. First, because there are almost no remaining swatches of fourteenth-century textiles, painted representations of these textiles may reveal the answers to these questions: what did textiles look like in fourteenth-century Asia? How were they used? What identifying distinctions did these textiles infer? Second, that artists invested so much time and energy into these detailed illustrations of textiles demonstrates the incredible commercial and symbolic value of textiles in fourteenth-century Tibet. Third, these painted representations of textiles can elucidate the cross-pollination of

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Harris, 8.

aesthetics that was a result of trans-regional communication and exchange via trade and pilgrimage routes.

Though brilliantly painted renderings of textiles exist in abundance at Shalu, artistic representations of textiles appeared in South Asian art long before the fourteenth century. These earlier representations of textiles in art established the use of textiles as signifiers of the sacred. The importance of textile representations as indicators of the sacred cannot be overemphasized, as this theme exists across media, across time, and across regions. The second-century schist relief panel from Gandhara, which I referenced in the introduction, offers just one example of this historical use of textiles as indicators of the sacred.

The Nesar Manuscripts, a collection of illuminated manuscripts produced in Nepal between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, demonstrate another instance in which artists use textile representations to signify the sacred.⁸² A scene depicting a consecration ritual performed by lay donors, for example, is placed against a textile-like background (figure 17).⁸³ Edged in a thin border of bright yellow, a rectangular field of vibrant red whimsically decorated with flowers serves as a backdrop to the scene. Because of a smaller green field placed behind the altar atop the rectangle of red, it seems as though the artist wanted to depict two rugs—one simple and one more elaborate rug—and the birds-eye view allowed him to achieve this. The presence of such textiles would further emphasize the sacredness of the rituals performed in the scene, just as the textile did in the Gandharan schist relief.

Tabo, a tenth-century monastery in India, boasts resplendent eleventh-century wall paintings in which textiles are represented. A protective goddess in the Assembly Hall wears rich robes, but the robes pale in comparison to the decorative cloth, embellished with painted floral

⁸² Amy Heller, *Hidden Treasures of the Himalayas: Tibetan Manuscripts, Paintings and Sculptures of Dolpo* (London: Serindia Publications, 2009), 84.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 91.

medallions and columns of diamonds, which acts as a canopy above and behind her (figure 18). As in the Gandharan schist relief panel and the illuminated manuscripts from Nepal, the inclusion of a textile representation in this Assembly Hall painting at Tabo once again suggests the figure's relationship to the sacred realm. These three examples, taken from three different areas of South Asia and representing different time periods, reveal a consistent and lasting tradition of using textiles to indicate the sacred.

The painted representations of textiles that appear throughout the eleventh through fourteenth centuries provide insight into the patterns and styles of textiles produced during that period. Because of the consistencies evident in painted textile representations, it seems that the artists reproducing these textiles in murals and wall paintings were actually looking at textiles being exchanged throughout Tibet at this time, rather than conjuring up the patterns in their imaginations. These painted representations were meant to remind viewers of luxury items of their world. That reality and materiality is painstakingly reproduced in these painted renditions of textiles. Support for this statement comes from similarities seen in these painted representations of textiles: a monastic painted on the wall at India's Tabo Monastery in the eleventh century, for example, wears a robe covered in a patchwork, brick-like pattern; this same pattern appears on the robe of a monastic depicted at Shalu in the fourteenth century (fig. 19). Because the murals were not completed in the same century or in nearby locations, it is impossible for authorship to explain these stylistic consistencies: the same artist could not be painting these murals. The best explanation, then, is that these artists were actually recreating these robes from actual textiles that they had seen.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ The *Vinaya* text essentially served as a guidebook for Buddhist monastics. One of the *vinaya*'s tenets required that monastics vow to wear only those materials that he could "procure from dust-heaps or cemeteries." It is reasonable, then, to assume that these artists working within a Buddhist context had seen monastics wearing such garments. See T.W. Rhys Davids and Hermann Oldenberg, trans., *Vinaya texts* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1881-1885), 89.

Painted representations of textiles also reveal the function of textiles in fourteenth-century Asia. In Central Asian art specifically, textiles serve a religious function: the inclusion of an umbrella or canopy distinguishes a person of honor or a deity.⁸⁵ This artistic motif of the canopy is translated in a variety of ways in temples across Buddhist South Asia: at Tabo Monastery in India's northern state of Lahaul and Spiti, strips of textiles hang from ceilings above the Vajradhātu-mandala in the Assembly Hall; at another site in India, painted ceiling panels create an opulent illusion of a painted fabric canopy in the Sumtsek temple in Alchi Ladakh; at Nako in Himachal Pradesh, India, wooden beams boast elaborately painted representations of textiles; and at Shalu Monastery's Kanjur Lhakang, a painted ruffle decorates the length of the wall on which the Five Tathāgatas are painted (fig. 20).⁸⁶ Cloth canopies, unlike their painted counterparts, actually served a practical purpose: to prevent dust falling from the roof and into the temple.⁸⁷ Tabo, however, is the only site where we actually find these cloth canopies; the other temples are merely decorated with the illusory painted canopies. A painted canopy carries equal significance because it performs the same symbolic function within the temples that the cloth canopy does. The painted canopies serve as honorific umbrellas for the deities who reside below them and act as "threshold[s] to a sacred, heavenly sphere;" they are, as Alexander Soper calls them, "the "domes of heaven."⁸⁸ The prevalence of painted canopies in South Asian monasteries provides further evidence of the long-lasting use of painted representations of textiles to signify the sacred in South Asian art.

In addition to demonstrating what actual textiles looked like in the fourteenth-century and how they were used, these painted representations of textiles also signified the identities of their

⁸⁵ Klimburg-Salter, *Tabo*, 174.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, and Roger Goepper, *Alchi: Ladakh's Hidden Buddhist Sanctuary: the Sumtsek* (Boston: Shambhala Limited Editions, 1996), 225.

⁸⁷ Goepper, 225.

⁸⁸ Papa-Kalantari, 172, 176. Soper, 225-248

wearers. Artists depict Buddha and other deities as wearing lavish robes, sitting atop thrones draped with sumptuous textiles.⁸⁹ They portray monastics, on the other hand, as wearing much simpler robes, which are either solid in color or are decorated in simple, muted patterns. On the south wall of Shalu Monastery's Kanjur Lhakang, for example, the Five Tathāgatas don colorful dhotis with intricate patterns, while the monastics surrounding them wear plain robes with far less ornamentation.

Finally, painted representations of textiles offer insight into the cross-culturalism resulting from textile trade via the tributaries connecting Tibet, Nepal, and India to the Silk Road that traversed the regions north of them. For example, the Five Tathāgatas painted on the south wall of Shalu Monastery's Kanjur Lhakang wear brilliantly patterned dhotis made of what appears to be light, diaphanous cotton. The artists could not have painted these dhotis based on actual textiles produced in Tibet for two reasons: first, cotton cannot be grown on the high mountains and plateaus of the Himalayan region; therefore Tibetans could not be producing this delicate, airy material.⁹⁰ Second, the rich pattern of the dhotis suggests that the artist was not representing Tibetan textiles in these murals.⁹¹ As mentioned in the section on textile materials and techniques, Tibetan garments rarely feature patterns, perhaps because of the heavy nature of the raw wool materials used to create textiles.⁹² It seems that the artists, then, likely based these painted representations of textiles on imported luxury goods materials coming to Tibet from other places well south of the Silk Route, like India and Nepal.

The painted representations of textiles at Shalu Monastery provide valuable information about the material textiles that existed during the fourteenth century and the trade routes that

⁸⁹ Papa-Kalantari, 151.

⁹⁰ Weiping Wu and Piper Gaubatz, *The Chinese City* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 22.

⁹¹ Wandl, 183.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 179, 183.

brought those textiles to Tibet, despite its position well south of the Silk Route. Tibet's strong relationship with the Mongols during the Yuan Dynasty undoubtedly played a significant role in their access to artisans, textiles, and wealth; in the following chapter, I discuss the implications of the patronage of Tibetan monasteries by the Mongols.

CHAPTER TWO

THE HISTORY OF SHALU MONASTERY AND THE IMPERIAL PATRONAGE OF THE SAKYA TRADITION BY THE MONGOLS OF THE YUAN DYNASTY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the web of relationships that produced an aesthetic in the fourteenth-century painted representations of textiles at Shalu Monastery that reflects the Yuan dynasty-Mongol patronage of the monastery. First, I explore Nepal's essential role as an interface between India and Tibet, Nepal's part in the spread of Buddhism throughout Tibet, and Nepal's contribution to the development of a conflated Pāla-Newar aesthetic in Tibetan Buddhist art.⁹³ Next, I discuss the earlier stages of Shalu's history. I then examine the Sa skya (Sakya) tradition's relationship with the Mongols, the marriage that connected the sect to Shalu Monastery, and the crucial role that the Sakya tradition played in forging later ties between Shalu and the Mongols. Finally, I turn to the Mongols' patronage of Shalu Monastery and their employment of Newar artisans at Shalu as a means of flaunting their control of the region, their cosmopolitan awareness, and the strength of their trans-regional socio-political relationships.

I. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEPAL AND TIBET

The relationship between Tibet and Nepal can be traced back earlier than the seventh century, as the regions were political allies and partners in trade.⁹⁴ The existing alliance between Nepal and Tibet was cemented when Srong brtsan sgam po (Songtsen Gampo, r. 629-650), the king of Tibet, married a Nepalese princess, who brought Buddhism and Newar artisans with her to Tibet.⁹⁵ The marriage, which further established Buddhism in Tibet, also led to the

⁹³ Huntington and Huntington, 253.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, and Andre Alexander, *The Temples of Lhasa: Tibetan Buddhist Architecture from the 7th to the 21st Centuries* (London: Serindia Publications, 2005), 30.

construction of several Buddhist temples, thus instituting royal patronage of Buddhism in Tibet.⁹⁶ Supposedly, this Buddhist state all but disappeared during the reign of King Lang Darma, a fervent practitioner of Bön, the native religion of Tibet.⁹⁷ It is thought that Lang Darma so severely persecuted Buddhism that the “first dissemination” of Buddhism, or *snga dar* (Ngardar), in Tibet, which had started with Songtsen Gampo, came to a close, with practitioners forced to worship only underground.⁹⁸ The “second dissemination” of Buddhism in Tibet, or *phyi dar* (Chidar), did not occur until the tenth century, when Tsenpo Khore, a Tibetan king, renounced his title, became a Buddhist monk, was renamed Ye shes ’Od (Yeshë O), and sent twenty-one Tibetan monks to India and Kashmir to study.⁹⁹ This reestablishment of Buddhism in Tibet allowed for the development of local schools of Buddhism.¹⁰⁰

In addition to bringing Buddhism to Tibet, Nepal was perhaps most significant for the connection it enabled between Tibet and India, whose style was incorporated into Tibetan Buddhist art and architecture, especially during the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet.¹⁰¹ Monasteries, like Shalu for instance, were often built “like [their] Indian predecessors” on the east-west axis with an east-facing entrance.¹⁰² Tibetan artists drew extensively from traditional Indian artistic styles and iconography—so much so that India’s established Pāla style essentially became incorporated into Tibet’s own artistic style.¹⁰³

Nepal also benefitted from its role as the middleman between its more powerful neighbors:

⁹⁶ Huntington and Huntington, 289.

⁹⁷ John Powers, *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2007), 134.

⁹⁸ Ibid. Mathew Kapstein problematizes this narrative in *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, suggesting that the continued knowledge of “Tibetan-Sanskrit lexicography” after Lang Darma’s rule reveals that Tibetan Buddhism’s dark age was not quite so drastic (Kapstein, 10-11).

⁹⁹ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰¹ Huntington and Huntington, 253.

¹⁰² Kreijger, 170.

¹⁰³ Huntington and Huntington, 284.

In this environment one of the world's aesthetically richest and mostly dynamically creative artistic traditions evolved and developed, producing astonishingly beautiful works in all media through several complex periods.¹⁰⁴

For better or worse, the Mongols would recognize the talent and skill of Newar artisans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and summon the artisans to China and Tibet to complete religious art and architecture that reflected the Mongols' adoption of Tibetan Buddhism.

II. THE HISTORY OF SHALU MONASTERY

Lce btsun Shes rab 'byung (Chetsün Sherab Jungne, ca. 1007-1060) established Shalu Monastery in Central Tibet in the early eleventh century after promising his master that he would build a temple at the “distance of an arrow shot.”¹⁰⁵ There are two dates generally associated with the founding of Shalu, as historians have not seemed to reach a concrete conclusion about the exact date: Alexander, Vitali, and Kreiger, citing Vitali, place Shalu's first phase of construction as early as 1027, while Stein suggests 1040 as the date of the monastery's establishment.¹⁰⁶

Regardless of when exactly Shalu was established, the eleventh-century phase of construction at Shalu illustrates the significance of the longstanding relationship between Tibet and Nepal. A mid-sixteenth-century Tibetan blockprint text, titled *Chos grva chen pod pal zha lu gser khang gi bdang po jo bo lce'i gdung rabs*, reveals the importance of foreign donors at Shalu's founding and also establishes the presence of Newar influence at Shalu as early as the eleventh century:

At that time there were Indian, Nepalese and Tibetans from Dbus and Gtsang as donors. In particular the Nepalese were the very good donors (because) they had wealth from the

¹⁰⁴ Huntington and Huntington, 254.

¹⁰⁵ Vitali, 89.

¹⁰⁶ Heller (2000), 46. Vitali, 89. Alexander, 83.

properties of rGyan ri and Zhal ri (n.b. these are the two mountains of Zha lu and rGyan gong, the monastery built earlier down the road from Zha lu).¹⁰⁷

That Newar artisans worked at Shalu in the fourteenth century is well documented, but this text and its mention of Nepalese donors are significant because they suggest the presence of Newar artists at Shalu as early as the eleventh century.¹⁰⁸ This donor relationship between Nepal and Shalu in the eleventh century provides additional evidence of the strength of the connection that existed between Nepal and Tibet long before the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty discovered and appropriated the talent of Newar artisans for the renovation and expansion of Shalu in the fourteenth century.

Shalu entered a “dark age” in the twelfth century, during which it remained relatively unchanged.¹⁰⁹ Vitali argues that Shalu essentially became irrelevant in this period because its religious and lay leaders lacked charisma and enlightenment.¹¹⁰ Whatever the reason for Shalu’s relative disappearance during the twelfth century, the monastery experienced a splendid revival when the Mongols came to power in China in the thirteenth century.¹¹¹

III. THE MONGOLS, THE SAKYA TRADITION, AND SHALU

The Mongol Empire rose to power in China in 1206, and by 1207 the Mongols had declared lordship over the Tibetan princes and lords.¹¹² In 1239, Mongol Prince Godan attacked Tibet, summoning Kun dga rgyal mtshan (Sakya Pandita, 1182-1251), the lineage holder of Sakya Monastery, to China as a Tibetan ambassador in 1244.¹¹³ Sakya Pandita brought his

¹⁰⁷ Heller (2000), 47.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Vitali, 98.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Huntington and Huntington, 559.

¹¹³ Ibid., 298.

nephew Chos rgyal 'Phags pa (Phakpa, 1235-1280) with him, finally meeting Godan in 1247.¹¹⁴ Despite the productivity of the meeting, the death of Sakya Pandita in 1251 resulted in another Mongol invasion of Tibet in 1252.¹¹⁵ Phakpa went back to Godan's camp in 1253, and a relationship between the Sakya tradition and the Mongols was finally established, launching the Sakya into power within Tibet.¹¹⁶ When Godan declared himself Kubilai Khan over all the Mongols in 1260, Phakpa served as his advisor in the reorganization of Mongol leadership, further strengthening the ties between the Sakya order and the Khan.¹¹⁷ Kubilai consequently named Phakpa suzerain of Tibet and declared Tibetan Buddhism the official religion.¹¹⁸ In his role as the Khan's religious leader, Phakpa acquired great wealth, which he used to undertake an enormous building program in Tibet.¹¹⁹

The importance of this “spiritual master-imperial patron relationship” between Kubilai and Phakpa cannot be overstated.¹²⁰ Referred to in Tibetan as *yon mchod*, the partnership was mutually beneficial: the Mongol rulers supplied the monasteries with the physical and material resources they needed, while the Sakya monks offered the Mongols spiritual protection and ensured the sanctification of the state.¹²¹ The significance of this relationship skyrocketed with the Kubilai's establishment of the Mongols as the rulers of the Yuan dynasty in China in 1279; the Mongols would remain in control of the Yuan dynasty until 1368.¹²²

Though it did not wield great power until 1253 when its relationship with the Mongols was established, the Sakya tradition of Tibetan Buddhism emerged much earlier with the

¹¹⁴ Huntington and Huntington, 298.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Jing, 2004, 213.

¹¹⁹ Huntington and Huntington, 299.

¹²⁰ Vitali, 98.

¹²¹ Jing, 2004, 214.

¹²² Young Yang Chung, *Silken Threads: A History of Embroidery in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2005), 12.

construction of Sakya Monastery in 1073, establishing itself as the first order of Tibetan Buddhism.¹²³ Shalu Monastery, however, did not become associated with the Sakya sect until around 1265, after the sect had already achieved ascendancy through its connection to the Mongols.¹²⁴ Perhaps facilitated by Sakya Pandita's earlier travels in the area, the daughter of a Shalu ruler married a Sakya ruler around 1265, establishing a lasting relationship between the leaders of Shalu and the Sakya sect.¹²⁵ This alliance consequently afforded Shalu Monastery the patronage of the Mongols, allowing for its extensive renovation and expansion in the fourteenth century during the Yuan dynasty.

The height of efforts to revive and re-establish Shalu occurred between 1306 and 1333, after the Mongol court instated Sakya lama Drakpa Gyeltshen as the ruler of Shalu.¹²⁶ The patronage of the Yuan-dynasty Mongols permitted Drakpa Gyeltshen to bring artists from the Yuan court back to Shalu to assist with his plans for new construction.¹²⁷ The artists had been trained at court under Anige (1245-1306), a Newar artist known for his incredible talent and skill, and their work at Shalu reflects a conflation of the Yuan and Newar styles that they learned at the Mongol court in China.¹²⁸

The relationship between the Mongols and Newar artisans, however, can be traced back to the middle of the thirteenth century; and Phakpa is considered responsible for forging this initial relationship between Newar artisans and the Mongols.¹²⁹ When Kubiliai funded the construction of a golden stūpa in memory of Sakya Pandita as a testament to his conversion and devotion to Tibetan Buddhism in 1260, Phakpa recruited artisans from Newar and India, as he

¹²³ Powers, 139

¹²⁴ Vitali, 99.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Kreiger, 175.

¹²⁷ Vitali, 105.

¹²⁸ Kreiger, 175. Jing, 1994, 39.

¹²⁹ Jing, 42.

knew them to be the most talented.¹³⁰ Of all the artisans recruited by Phakpa, Anige was considered to be the most skilled; and Kubilai's enthusiasm and continued patronage for Anige throughout his life (which included the gifting of a Chinese wife, a manor, and numerous titles) illustrates the Mongols' seeming acceptance and appreciation of Himalayan artistry and the Himalayan aesthetic.¹³¹ But the Mongols' adoption of the Newar aesthetic hardly signifies mere appreciation of the artistic style. The adoption of the Newar style at the Yuan court and in Mongol-supported sites in Tibet instead reveals the Mongols' political strategy: rather than impose Mongol religious and artistic traditions in Tibet to control the region, the Mongols instead usurped power from within through the adoption and appropriation of Tibet's religious tradition and artistic styles. By sending Drakpa Gyeltshen back to Shalu in 1306 with a team of Yuan court artisans, who were trained under Anige, the Mongols further established their dominance in Tibet, appropriating and perhaps even superseding the Himalayan aesthetic at the monastery as a means of demonstrating their mastery of the style, their control of the region, their cosmopolitan awareness, and the strength of their socio-political relationships with their neighbors.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 41, 42.

¹³¹ Ibid., 42, 49. It should be noted that the Himalayan aesthetic was one of many artistic styles adopted at the Yuan court, providing further evidence that the Mongols knew how to wield art as a manipulator and means of controlling a territory from within.

CHAPTER THREE

A FORMAL ANALYSIS OF THE PAINTED REPRESENTATIONS OF TEXTILES IN SHALU MONASTERY'S KANJUR LHAKANG

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an extensive formal analysis of the painted representations of textiles in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang, the library. First, I offer a detailed description of the dhotis worn by the Five Tathāgatas painted on the south wall of the Kanjur Lhakang and demonstrate that the artists of Shalu were drawing upon painted textile patterns from regions of India and Nepal in order to fashion their own exquisite rendition. I then examine antecedents of the painted textile representations at Shalu: an eleventh-century Indian manuscript; two Tibetan wall paintings painted at Tabo and Alchi in the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, respectively; and a set of three thirteenth-century *thangkas* from Central Tibet painted by a Newar artist that best demonstrates the Newar artistic style adopted at Shalu Monastery. I then turn to a brief address of the circumambulatory corridor at Shalu Monastery, which is decorated with murals that feature both Newar and Yuan stylistic elements. Finally, I explore the complex relationship between politics and religion that I posit motivated the Mongols' employment of the Newar-Tibetan aesthetic at Shalu Monastery.

I. TEXTILES OF THE FIVE TATHĀGATAS IN SHALU'S KANJUR LHAKANG

Tibet's connection to India—a relationship briefly explored in the previous chapter—is illuminated in the textiles featured in the murals painted on the south wall of Shalu Monastery's library, the Kanjur Lhakang. The Five Tathāgatas painted on the south wall of the room are depicted wearing brilliantly patterned dhotis made of what appears to be light, diaphanous cotton. The artists, who traveled to Shalu with other artisans from the Mongol court in China, likely did not paint these dhotis based on Tibetan textile prototypes, which were primarily

produced from yak wool. That the artists did not consult Tibetan textiles for inspiration is plausible for two principal reasons: first, cotton cannot be grown on the high mountains and plateaus of the Himalayan region; therefore Tibetans on the plateau could not produce the seemingly airy material represented in the paintings.¹³² Second, the rich patterns of the dhotis were atypical of Tibetan garments, which were rarely patterned and were generally dark colors; the patterns instead resemble those achieved with woodblock printing, a common textile practice in India.¹³³ It seems that the artists, then, likely based these painted representations of textiles on the cottons coming to Tibet from India through Nepal—two regions with which Tibet had longstanding trade relationships—or following a visual trope common in Indian, Newar, and Tibetan artistic traditions.

The Five Tathāgatas wear almost identically patterned dhotis that appear to be made of airy cotton (fig. 21). Wide bands of a rich red that alternate with slender bands of green-blue, white, and marigold comprise the pattern. Outlines of subtle red diamonds and floral medallions of blue and white ornament each red band of fabric. The patterns in these textile representations resemble those achieved with woodblock printing, which requires the artisan to dye the fabric and then print the textile's designs directly onto the fabric with woodblocks dipped in different dye colors. Cotton is particularly conducive to woodblock printing, suggesting that the textiles represented on the walls of Shalu could not be Tibet's dark woolen textiles; and the lack of shine in the textile representations suggests that the fabric depicted is not China's famous embroidered silk. Despite the many similarities in fabric and style of the Tathāgatas' dhotis, subtle differences in color and patterning appear in each.

¹³² Wu and Gaubatz, 22.

¹³³ Wandl, 183. Harris, 37.

Rin chen 'byung gnas (Ratnasmbhava)¹³⁴ wears a light, cotton dhoti secured to his waist by a gold, jeweled belt that circles a deep blue band of fabric and appears to be tied with a ripple of blue-green and yellow cotton in the back (fig. 22). Two half circles, each created by a band of gold flanked by two slimmer bands of blue, decorate the upper thighs of the dhoti (fig. 22a). Within these semi-circles, geometric flowers, some with small blue petals and others with white, bloom in an ordered fashion across the field of red. This ordered pattern continues in the next bands of red, although in these and in the next bands of red, muted red outlines of diamonds separate the flowers from each other. In the fourth bands of red, muted red circles replace the diamond outline, repeating the circular shape of the flowers and consequently producing a medallion pattern. Finally, in the fifth bands of red, which reach just below the knees, the flowers appear as they did in the semi-circles of fabric at the top of the dhoti: ordered, but without any geometric outlines surrounding them. A circle of marigold flanked by two thinner circles of blue edge the legs of the dhoti. The pattern disappears completely on the accordion-esque, two-tiered, red and blue skirt that stacks narrowly underneath Ratnasambhava's crossed ankles, allowing the viewer to focus on the movement of the airy fabric of the skirt, rather than the pattern.

Mi bskyod rdo rje (Akshobhya) sits to the right of Ratnasambhava, wearing a very similar dhoti (fig. 23). Unlike Ratnasambhava's dhoti, which prominently features the color blue at both the top and bottom, Akshobhya's dhoti is predominantly red, perhaps because the deity himself has blue skin (fig. 23a). A gold, jeweled belt rests on a band of red fabric that encircles Akshobhya's waist. As on Ratnasambhava's dhoti, two large semi-circles adorn the thighs of Akshobhya's dhoti, though these semi-circles stretch halfway down the thighs, rather than decorating only the upper thighs. The geometric flowers of Ratnasmbhava's dhoti reappear on

¹³⁴ This is the Sanskrit version of the name. The Sanskrit versions of the deities' names will follow the Wylie transliterations in this section.

this expansive field of red, though these flowers are larger and have more pronounced petals. The second band of red on this dhoti, which stretches from halfway down the thigh to directly above the knee, features the diamond-and-flower motif present in Ratnasambhava's dhoti. The third and final region of red on the dhoti is covered in the medallion pattern that appears in the fifth band of Ratnasambhava's dhoti, though these flowers are larger and more closely nestled together. The solid red skirt of Akshobhya's dhoti fans out underneath his feet, with slivers of blue peeking out from the underside.

Mnam par snang mdzad lo tsa ba (Vairochana) takes center stage of the Tathāgatas, flanked by Ratnasambhava and Akshobhya on one side and tshe dpag med (Amitābha) and don yod grub pa (Amoghasiddhi) on the other. The red swath of fabric that extends from Vairochana's lap and rests on his forearm distinguishes it from the first two dhotis (fig. 24). Small, symmetrical flowers in blue and white dance across this decorative drape, echoing the patterns that ornament the rest of the dhoti (fig. 24a). As in the other dhotis, five distinct bands of red, punctuated with slender bands of marigold, blue, and white, decorate Vairochana's dhoti. At the top of the dhoti, just below the wide gold belt that rests on a waist of blue, are two sets of concentric half-circles of red; two of these semi-circles each feature a yellow diamond. The five bands of red appear below these half-circles. Horizontal diamonds stretch across this first red band. Small, whimsical flowers appear on the second and third bands of the dhoti leg, though they do not appear to be as clearly, geometrically rendered as the flowers that appear on the other dhotis. The floral medallions that ornament the previous two dhotis decorate the fourth band of Vairochana's dhoti, and blue trefoils, a stylistic element that does not appear in either Ratnasambhava or Akshobhya's dhoti, compliment these medallions. The fifth band, which sits just below the knees, is decorated with quatrefoils in blue and white, another stylistic element not

present in the first two dhotis considered here. Like the other dhotis, Vairochana's dhoti has a pleated section that peeks from below his crossed ankles. This dhoti skirt, however, red with a blue border, fans out much less dramatically than the other two.

The fourth of the Tathāgatas, Amitābha wears a red dhoti with a blue waistband crowned by a gold, jeweled belt (fig. 25). Like the dhoti of Vairochana, Amitābha's dhoti has a green-gold strip of fabric that stretches from his lap and drapes over his forearm. The two semi-circles of color on the upper thighs of this dhoti are this same green-gold. Like the other dhotis in the library, Amitābha's dhoti features bands of red divided by alternating lines of blue, white, and marigold (fig. 25a). The right leg of the dhoti (the viewer's right), however, contains six bands of red, while the other has only five. This difference is likely due to the artist's handling of the bent left knee, rather than an interest in diversifying the pattern. Unlike the other dhotis, which have a wider variety of patterns within the red bands, white floral medallions adorn every section of this dhoti. The skirt of this dhoti distinguishes itself from the other dhoti skirts depicted in the Kanjur Lhakang: Amitābha's lays completely flat underneath his feet and boasts a geometric pattern—concentric circles of green, gold, and blue, with red triangles painted on the outermost edge.

Finally, Amoghasiddhi dons a dhoti with a pattern that appears to abandon the more geometric, ordered patterns of the other four dhotis for a more whimsical design (fig. 26). While the first bands are covered in structured quatrefoils circled in medallions and orderly quatrefoils outlined in diamonds, a fluid vine of green-gold winds around the sea of quatrefoils that decorates the bottom band of the dhoti (fig. 26a). In addition to having the most playful of patterns, Amoghasiddhi's dhoti also seems to be a confluence of three of the other dhotis painted on the wall of the Kanjur Lhakang: the red tail of fabric that drapes over the forearm echoes the

dhoti of Amitābha; the decorative dhoti skirt recalls the costume of Vairochana; and the diamonds in the pattern resemble those in the dhoti of Ratnasambhava (fig. 26b).

II. ELEVENTH-CENTURY INDIAN ANTECEDENTS

A manuscript of the *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* from Nālandā monastery in India, dated circa 1073, offers meaningful comparisons to the painted representations of textiles at Shalu, especially because the manuscript circulated throughout Tibet and thus spread India's Pāla style throughout Tibet. At one time, though after the production of the wall murals in the Kanjur Lhakang, the text was even in the possession of Shalu monk and scholar Bu ston rin chen grub (Buton Rinchen Drub, ca. 1290-1364), though not until after the murals at Shalu had already been complete.¹³⁵ Still, the manuscript serves as a precursor to the Shalu murals and offers examples of the Indian artistic tradition with which the Newar artists of the Yuan court would have been familiar.

The eleventh-century leaves of the *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* demonstrate the finest elements of the Pāla style through their saturated color palettes, meticulously drawn lines, and the elaborate details evident in the representations of textiles.¹³⁶ On one of the upper leaves, Shes rab phar phyin (Prajñāpāramitā) sits atop a throne, flanked by two attendants (fig. 27). She wears a sash across her chest that is visible only because of the black flecks that decorate the sash's edge and what appears to be a deep blue and red floral pattern that dances across the otherwise transparent cloth, which undoubtedly references the incredibly fine cottons and linens for which India was famous. The diaphanous cloth also shrouds the waist and legs of the deity: the textile's presence is marked here by the crimson details on the waist and cuffs of the dhoti and a pattern composed of navy diamonds nestled between concentric circles of red and navy, in which flecks

¹³⁵ Huntington and Huntington, 186.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

of navy appear. A red skirt, very similar to those that appear in the Shalu Tathāgatas, fans out beneath the deity's crossed feet. Prajñāpāramitā's attendants wear dhotis that look as luxurious as her own: the transparent fabric that covers their legs is dotted in small flecks of blue and red that resemble flowers, and swaths of red fabric encircle their waists. They also don sashes that resemble that of Prajñāpāramitā, and the pattern on their sashes seems to echo that of their dhotis. The artist's incredible attention to detail in the textile representations, even in the small attendant figures, matches that of the attention paid to the textiles worn by the smaller figures that surround the Tathāgata images in Shalu, suggesting that there existed a growing trend towards intricacy and realistic detailing in textile representations, especially in those paintings produced by later Newar artists.

An image of Mārjvijaya on the same upper leaf of the manuscript also features an elaborately drawn textile (fig. 28). While Mārjvijaya himself wears a simple, but richly colored red robe, the throne on which he sits bears an energetic pattern of white, red, and blue. This style of throne, with a halo-like semicircle placed atop the backrest, appears throughout Indian art and at Shalu, though the throne coverings at Shalu do not have the same vibrant patterns. Whimsical wheels of blue and white with red centers spin across the red background of the throne, punctuated by swirls of blue and gold that adorn the textile. The pattern of the throne seat conveys a sense of dynamism and movement that serves to enliven Mārjvijaya's plain costume. Mārjvijaya's attendants also wear costumes that energize the composition. Stripes of red, blue, and white swing from the hips of one attendant, while the other wears a dhoti that appears to be red with a pattern—though the pattern is difficult to decipher because of the image's low quality.

Finally, an image of Mañjuśrī on another leaf offers additional support for the established tradition of carefully painted representations of textiles in Indian and Himalayan art (fig. 29).

The deity wears a costume that closely resembles the attire Prajñāpāramitā is depicted as wearing. A transparent sash falls across the deity's chest, its presence discernable because of the dainty quatrefoils of red and blue sprinkled across the fabric. The pattern that adorns the legs and waist of Mañjuśrī's dhoti appears identical to the dhoti of Prajñāpāramitā, though the colors of Mañjuśrī's dhoti and the pattern itself seem more saturated and more clearly defined. The dhotis of the deity's attendants, however, bear more adventurous patterns: the left attendant wears a red and white dhoti organized into an artful grid edged in loose squiggles of color, while the right attendant wears a dhoti with a pattern resembling tiger skin—a rich golden orange peppered with sharp black lines.

Though two hundred years older than the murals of Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang, the paintings and textile representations in the *Astasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript provide important Indian *comparanda* for the wall paintings of the Tathāgatas at Shalu. Despite the overwhelming dominance of the Newar artistic style in Tathāgatas at Shalu, which will be discussed in the following section, two elements of Indian artistic tradition that appear in this manuscript also reveal themselves in the murals at Shalu: the design of the thrones on which the Tathāgatas sit and the geometric and floral motifs that appear in the textile representations.¹³⁷ Unlike Newar-style thrones, which have carved-out backs that give way to wing-like corners, the Indian-style thrones upon which the Shalu Tathāgatas perch feature tall, rounded backs with semicircular halos crowning the bodies of the thrones (fig. 30).¹³⁸ The textile patterns at Shalu also reflect their Indian antecedents through their inclusion of geometric shapes and abstract depictions of flowers. The textile representations differ, however, in the Indian manuscript's

¹³⁷ Ibid., 146.

¹³⁸ Kossak and Singer, 41.

marked emphasis on the diaphanous nature of the textile representations. The Tathāgatas at Shalu illustrate subtler representations of the diaphanous quality of the cotton dhotis.

III. 11TH-13TH-CENTURY TIBETAN ANTECEDENTS: TABO AND ALCHI

Two Tibetan sites that predate the wall paintings of the Kanjur Lhakang illustrate the historical presence of painted representations of textiles in Tibet and provide evidence that the intricately painted representations of textiles at Shalu were an important continuation of an artistic tradition well established by the eleventh century. The eleventh-century image of Bodhisattva Ārya Avalokiteshvara in the Assembly Hall of the Main Temple at Tabo and the thirteenth-century image of a yellow Akshobhya in the back niche of the Sumtsek at Alchi's ground floor provide helpful comparisons for the Tathāgata images at Shalu: like the dhotis worn by the Tathāgatas, these figures, too, wear dhotis decorated with arrangements of colorful bands, geometric shapes, and organic floral designs.

The Bodhisattva Ārya Avalokiteshvara wears an intricately decorated dhoti of a muted palette of deep blue, maroon, peach, and yellow-white (fig. 31). Like the dhotis of the Tathāgatas at Shalu, the Bodhisattva Ārya Avalokiteshvara's dhoti is divided into regions of color by bands of contrasting colors. A large region of muted peach dominates the top of the dhoti; and dozens of tiny dark blue and maroon quatrefoils dot the fabric in an orderly way, just as the flowers and medallions were placed intentionally across the fabric in the dhotis at Shalu. Below this peach region, stripes of blue and cream alternate to comprise two bands that flank a row of small cream starbursts. Below this design, an elaborate row of floral medallions appears, though these medallions are more clearly and precisely rendered than those at Shalu, perhaps because the medallions are larger and appear in only one wide band of the dhoti. The floral medallions have alternating petals of maroon and blue, with prominently defined surrounding circles of white

outlined in black. Unlike the dhotis at Shalu, the field on which the medallions appear is not a solid color; rather, geometrically painted lines accentuate the medallions. On the bottom edge of the dhoti's legs, the bands of blue and cream stripes and the row of cream starbursts reappear, creating a rhythm in the pattern. A full dhoti skirt of blue, edged in maroon and yellowish cream is tucked under the Bodhisattva Ārya Avalokiteshvara's feet. Despite the obvious differences in the textile patterns of this dhoti and those painted in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang, there are a few notably similar elements: the dhotis at Shalu also feature regions of colors separated by bands of contrasting colors, floral medallions, and quatrefoils. The styles of the dhoti at Tabo and Shalu, too, resemble each other: the presence of a belt around the waist and the accordion-like dhoti skirt appear in both this image and those at Shalu.

The yellow Akshobhya in the back niche of the Sumtsek at Alchi's ground floor wears an extraordinarily elaborate dhoti that is predominantly maroon, cream, and blue (fig. 32). Three patterned bands that repeat themselves cover the length of Akshobhya's dhoti. In one band, lines of maroon crisscross over a field of cream, while another band features cream starburst flowers placed in an orderly fashion on a maroon background; the third band, painted solid cream, serves to break up the repetition of patterns. A wide border of deep blue edges the entire dhoti; the deep blue paint also saturates the waistline of the dhoti. Unlike the dhotis at Tabo and Shalu, this dhoti appears to float off the legs of Akshobhya in a billowy manner, rather than laying flat over the thighs. However, like the dhotis at Tabo and Shalu, this dhoti also has a flared, pleated section, though it is depicted as more of a belted scarf, rather than an accordion of fabric, as the dhotis appear at Tabo and Shalu. The dhoti's pleats also maintain the patterns of the dhoti itself, which is not the case at Tabo or Shalu.

Despite the differences between the depiction of dhotis at Tabo, Alchi, and Shalu, the overall style of the dhotis is relatively similar; and more importantly, the textile patterns at all three sites share two significant elements: in each of the dhotis, the artists use bands of color to achieve distinct sections of the dhoti; and they employ repetition of smaller patterns within the dhotis' larger patterns to create rhythm, further suggesting that there were established norms for what dhoti patterns looked like in South Asia between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries.

III. THIRTEENTH-CENTURY NEWAR ANTECEDENTS

Three *thangka* paintings of Tathāgatas at a thirteenth-century monastery in Central Tibet—believed to be of the Sakya tradition, like Shalu—provide excellent comparisons for the Tathāgatas painted on the wall of Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang. Produced by an unknown Newar artist, these thirteenth-century Tathāgatas illustrate the Newar artistic tradition through their inclusion of delicate miniaturized details that were prevalent in Nepalese manuscripts, the style of the thrones on which the Tathāgatas sit, and the images' overall liveliness and energy.¹³⁹ While not all elements of the Shalu Tathāgatas reflect interpretations of Newar artistic convention, the many similarities between the eight Tathāgatas, particularly in composition, style, and attention to detail in the textile representations, suggest the existence of a visual trope in Newar and Tibetan art that the Yuan artists at Shalu consequently adopted in their depictions of the Five Tathāgatas in the Kanjur Lhakang.

Like the Tathāgatas at Shalu, this Newar-style Ratnasambhava sits atop an ornately embellished throne at the center of the colorful, busy composition (fig. 33). Unlike the more Indian-style thrones at Shalu, this throne references the Newar style, in which the top of the throne back is scooped out and has the appearance of wings on the upper corners.¹⁴⁰ Midnight

¹³⁹ Kossak and Singer, 140.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

blue fabric, decorated with whirling spirals of a slightly darker shade of navy, envelops the throne on which Ratnasambhava sits. The loose, organic shapes featured on this painted fabric recall the throne coverings of the Tathāgatas at Shalu, which contain similar swirling patterns. Further similarities between the paintings at Shalu and the Sakya monastery painting appear in the costumes of Ratnasambhava and the other figures depicted. A jeweled belt of gray-blue, red, and dark green crowns the deep blue waistband of Ratnasambhava's dhoti. Ratnasambhava wears a predominantly white dhoti, though it appears that the layer of white was painted over a base layer of red. This layering of colors creates the appearance of texture within the painted textile. A grid of gray-blue lines stretches across the length breadth of the dhoti, creating a pattern of squares. Each square encompasses a medallion of saturated red, muted blue, or creamy white that resembles a wheel. Two concentric bands of color—the inner, white, and the outer, blue—edge each medallion. A deep red highlights the dhoti's hem. The pleated portion of the dhoti is this same red, though golden yellow peeks out from the underside.

Like the Buddha figures that surround the Tathāgatas at Shalu, the figures that surround Ratnasambhava in this painting don trousers and sashes that are as impressive—or perhaps even more impressive—than the dhoti of Ratnasambhava himself. The attendant bodhisattvas wear especially flamboyant apparel, which features elaborate patterns and sashes that seem to move as they step towards Ratnasambhava. Vertical columns of outlined circles, lines, and thin stripes edged in deep red decorate the bottom portions of both bodhisattvas' trousers. The attendant on the left of Ratnasambhava wears a rusted red pair of trousers, with the aforementioned pattern painted in a subtly darker red. The attendant to the right of Ratnasambhava wears cream trousers—the pattern painted in a shade of brown-red that is likely the same color used on the other bodhisattva, though it appears slightly darker because of the cream background on which it

is painted. Despite the similarities of the lower portions of the trousers, different geometric patterns ornament the top portions of the bodhisattvas' trousers. The bodhisattva on the left's costume features a pattern similar to that of Ratnasambhava's dhoti. Cream and blue medallions, circled in bands of blue and red, stack on top of each other to create columns of solid color against a whimsical background of creamy, orange-red flourishes. The bodhisattva on the right wears a costume that features a gray-blue grid, nearly identical to that painted on Ratnasambhava's dhoti. Unlike medallions, however, the bodhisattva's trousers feature triangles of cream and red in each square formed by the grid. Some triangles point upwards, while others point sideways or downward. The differences in the triangles' directions create feelings of chaos and confusion in an otherwise ordered pattern. The sumptuous sashes that hang from both bodhisattvas' waists seem to move with their steps, producing a sense of dynamism and naturalism in the image that entices the viewer to reach out and touch the fabrics. Navy and white flowers, created by loose dashes of color, and midnight blue ovals that resemble leaves because of small red lines that bisect them dance across the field of red that composes the waistbands of the bodhisattvas' sashes. Five pleated lengths of fabric fall from these decorative waistbands, the red upper portions giving way to tails of dark blue edged in golden yellow.

Twenty-one smaller images of deities form a header and footer for the throne. These figures, too, save the eight figures depicted in simple monastic robes, wear elaborately decorated dhotis and trousers, covered in colorful geometric patterns. Though the figures are not the image's focal point, the artist still paints them carefully, paying great attention to the details of their costumes, just as the artist at Shalu does in the costumes of the figures that surround each of the Five Tathāgatas.

The image of Amitābha at this monastery, too, exudes luxury through the artist's use of saturated colors and richly painted textiles (fig. 34). Amitābha sits on a throne, its back covered in deep blue fabric adorned with swirls of dark green. The head of the throne is covered in white fabric ornamented by thin swirls of dark cream, and the throne's seat is covered in a less decorative white fabric. A sliver of Amitābha's navy blue waistband peeks out above his clasped red hands from under a jeweled gold belt punctuated by red stones. The design of Amitābha's dhoti matches Ratnasambhava's almost identically. Amitābha also wears a white dhoti, though his seems to have brown undertones, rather than red undertones like the dhoti of Ratnasambhava. White-gray intersecting lines form the grid that covers the expanse of Amitābha's dhoti, and wheel-like medallions of gray-blue, buttery yellow, and bold red occupy each square created by the grid. Bands of white and gray encircle each of these medallions, allowing the circles to simultaneously touch all sides of the squares they inhabit. The pleated section of Amitābha's dhoti is vibrant red, and the gathering of the pleats under his crossed feet reveals a rich yellow underside.

As in the image of Ratnasambhava, the figures surrounding Amitābha also wear intricately painted costumes. The attendant bodhisattva on Amitābha's left wears trousers that feature two patterns: one pattern covers the thighs of the trousers, while the other pattern covers the knees and shins. The top pattern recalls the trousers of the costume worn by the attendant bodhisattva to Ratnasambhava's right: fairly thick yellow lines intersect to create a grid. The top points of four triangles, two red and two blue, converge in each of the grid's squares, producing a repetitive pattern within the grid. Solid yellow covers the lower half of his trousers, and a single red line vertically bisects the leg of the trouser. On either side of this line, red zigzags weave across the fabric, starting at thigh and extending to the red hem of the trousers. The bodhisattva

to the right of Amitābha wears a pair of trousers with a pattern that closely resembles that of the costume worn by the attendant to Ratnasambhava's left, though the color scheme is different. Orderly arranged red, yellow, and blue medallions, circled by bands of white, adorn the solid brownish-cream fabric of the top of the trousers. The bottom portion of the trousers, from the knees to the shins, are white, save for the thin red and gray-blue lines painted down each leg of the trousers. Subtle flecks of light red dot the trousers between these vertical lines, extending to the red hem of the costume. As in the composition of Ratnasambhava, Amitābha is also surrounded by twenty-one other small figures; with the exception of four figures depicted in solid monastic robes, the figures all wear impressively painted and patterned dhotis, evidence of the artist's painstaking dedication to detail in his painted representations of textiles.

Amoghasiddhi, the third and final of the Tathāgatas at this unnamed monastery, occupies the center of a composition that bears close resemblance to the other Tathāgata images, but the throne and the pattern of Amoghasiddhi's dhoti do not have much in common with the other paintings at all (fig. 35). Unlike the whimsically patterned thrones of Ratnasambhava and Amitābha, solid red fabric covers the head and back of Amoghasiddhi's throne, while solid white fabric covers the seat. A jeweled belt, identical to Amitābha's, circles the deep blue waistband of Amoghasiddhi's dhoti. Cream semi-circles, which encompass a small pattern of red circles with deep blue centers, accentuate the upper part of the dhoti. Sets of three slender bands of color—thin bands of red decorated in white quatrefoils flanked by two lines of pale gray-blue—edge the semi-circles. The dhoti's pattern continues in swaths of orangey yellow on both legs, which feature cream zigzags that cross the length of the band of color. The set of three bands of color (red flanked by pale gray-blue) appears again; along the length of the dhoti, these bands act as the dividers for each section of the dhoti's decorative pattern. Next, yellow bands of fabric serve

as the backgrounds for red outlines of circles that encompass cream medallions with dark blue centers. The three bands of color reappear, introducing the next pattern on the dhoti: red fields covered in slightly darker flecks of red that form flowers provide the backdrop for navy zigzags that cut across the dhoti. The yellow swaths of fabric with red circles and cream medallions with blue centers appear again on the dhoti, between another two sets of the blue, red, and white decorative bands. Muted cream-on-red zigzags decorate the final portions of the dhoti, and red colors the dhoti's bottom hems.

As in the other Tathāgata images at this monastery, two attendant bodhisattvas flank Amoghasiddhi. They wear costumes that are strikingly similar to those worn by the attendants in the image of Ratnasambhava. The attendant to the left of Amoghasiddhi wears white trousers, the top portion covered in red and blue medallions encompassed by concentric circles of white and blue and the bottom portion lined with columns of small red-brown circles and vertical red-brown stripes. The attendant to the right of Amoghasiddhi dons predominantly red trousers; the top portion is decorated in a grid of gray-blue, with red, blue, and cream alternately filling the squares; and the bottom portion appears identical to that of the other attendant's trousers, though both the background and the decorative details are painted in red. Both attendants also wear brilliantly patterned belts with five sashes that fall from their waists, producing feelings of movement and fluidity. The waistbands are painted in a saturated red, with loosely painted strokes of navy, cream, and green that seem to be representative of leaves or flowers. The sashes are also painted red, though the bottom of each sash is dipped in deep green-blue and edged with pale yellow. As in the other images, too, a number of smaller figures surround Amoghasiddhi on his throne; each of the twenty figures don elaborately decorated robes, too, once again demonstrating the meticulousness with which the artist painted the textile representations.

The artist's attention to detail in the painted representation of textiles in these Three Tathāgatas is also apparent in the painstaking representations of textiles painted on the Five Tathāgatas in the library at Shalu, suggesting that the craftsmen highly valued textiles during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and were eager to reproduce them in their own painted works. Further, the similarities of composition, style, and even dhoti patterns suggest that the artists at Shalu in the fourteenth century were working from a visual trope established by earlier artists, like the Nepalese artisan who painted these Three Tathāgatas.

Newar artistic tradition makes itself apparent in Shalu's Five Tathāgatas in the color palette, stylized depictions of nature, costume details, the images' overall compositions, exaggerated facial features and their stocky physiques.¹⁴¹ While rich hues of brilliant red, green, blue, and gold dominate the Tathāgatas and the thrones on which they sit, muted shades of gray-blue, green, and light pink used in the smaller decorative elements prevent the more saturated tones from overwhelming the images' viewers. This subtler, more understated color palette directly reflects the Newar style practiced by Anige; and as the artisans who worked at Shalu would have been trained directly under Anige, or by artists whom he had trained, the appearance of more muted colors alongside the more vibrant hues in the murals at Shalu is unsurprising.¹⁴² The stylistic representations of nature in the scenes surrounding the Tathāgatas seem to come from Newar's Beri style, which was essentially an adoption of Indian Buddhist art.¹⁴³ In this style, the natural world is represented in an abstracted manner: clouds, for example, resemble trefoils, and square blocks represent lotus flowers.¹⁴⁴ The artists at Shalu include these same stylized representations of nature in their depictions of the Tathāgatas' thrones. Ten rounded

¹⁴¹ Vitali, 108., Kossak and Singer, 144, 146.

¹⁴² Jackson, 106.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

loops of color ornament each Tathāgata's throne; though abstracted, these rounded shapes that hug the seats of the thrones evoke connections to the petals of a lotus flower. The abstracted presentation of nature appears again in the dhotis' patterns, as the artists use colorful quatrefoils to suggest flowers and small flecks of green to represent vines or leaves. The lasting impact of Indian Buddhist art on Newar artistic tradition further reveals itself in the depiction of the Tathāgatas' crowns, which are heavily bejeweled, three-tiered headdresses topped with small gold ornaments; and the inclusion of exquisitely painted roundels that ornament the backgrounds of deity-centric images.¹⁴⁵ The Newar artistic style diverges in appearance from its Indian influence, however, in three main ways: the exaggerated facial features, the stocky torsos, and that they sit on thrones. The artists paint the Tathāgatas with large, narrow eyes; long noses; delicate, little mouths; and round chins—the features positioned closely together on their full faces.¹⁴⁶ Their fleshy, round faces perch atop accordion necks connected to stout torsos; the squatter rendering of the body deviates from Indian artistic tradition, in which torsos appear elongated.¹⁴⁷ Finally, that the Tathāgatas sit on thrones is a completely Newar stylistic element: in Indian artistic tradition, artists rarely depict Tathāgatas as sitting on thrones.¹⁴⁸ The thrones also feature upturned lines, another characteristic of the Newar style.¹⁴⁹

V. MURALS IN SHALU'S CIRCUMAMBULATION CORRIDOR

That hints of the Yuan aesthetic appear at Shalu deserves acknowledgement. While the Yuan court artists exclusively employ the Newar aesthetic throughout the Kanjur Lhakang, a room that houses sacred Tibetan texts, the Newar aesthetic coexists with Yuan stylistic elements, or at least a Newar interpretation of Yuan stylistic elements, in the monastery's

¹⁴⁵ Vitali, 108.

¹⁴⁶ Kossak and Singer, 43.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Kossak and Singer, 144.

circumambulation corridor.¹⁵⁰ Like the Kanjur Lhakang, the circumambulation corridor that laps Shalu's interior was also constructed under Drakpa Gyeltsen.¹⁵¹ Dozens of small paintings of seated Buddhas decorate the inner walls of the corridor, while *jātaka* scenes, or those scenes that depict the life of the historical Buddha, cover the outer walls.¹⁵²

Most of the *jātaka* scenes are painted in the Newar aesthetic, which becomes especially apparent in the renderings of landscapes, dancing figures, the costuming, and the facial features.¹⁵³ A Newar courtly scene provides an excellent example of the aesthetic most heavily employed in the circumambulation hall (fig. 36). Just as the Tathāgatas reflect Newar artistic sensibilities, this scene also includes the stylized depictions of nature, detailed representations of costumes, exaggerated facial features, and figures with stocky physiques that flag the image as being of Newar artistic tradition.¹⁵⁴ Whimsical, organic swirls of red comprise the background of the image, while exotic flowers and plants—colored white, pale red, and green—seem to float through the air over the heads of the figures. The central figure kicks one foot up and throws her arm over her ornamented head as she dances on a geometrically patterned platform. Her skirt, which features a pattern composed of red, blue, and white bands, swings from her hips; and the colorful scarf tied around her waist also sways, contributing to the image's feelings of movement. Six figures flank her, three on either side. Women wrapped in loose-fitting head-to-toe robes—white fabric, presumably cotton, edged with blue and red—play instruments immediately beside her. Four men, their chests exposed and their bottom halves clothed in loose trousers similarly patterned to the women's robes, frame the image, playing drums and what appear to be rhythm sticks; their hair is tied up in buns, which are wrapped in scarves atop their

¹⁵⁰ Krieger 175.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Vitali, 108. Kossak and Singer, 144, 146.

heads. The entire scene takes place below a beautifully painted hanging textile that undoubtedly serves as a signal of the importance of the court in which this scene takes place.

Another mural in the corridor appears to be much more Yuan in style, simply because of the architecture, the costuming, and the appearances of the figures (fig. 37). Roberto Vitali suggests, though, that the Newar aesthetic remains dominant even in this image and that only the less significant details of the image reflect Yuan artistic tradition.¹⁵⁵ The landscape and natural elements—like the abstracted depictions of clouds, trees, and the flowers that seem to float across the sky—certainly reflect the Newar aesthetic, as they closely resemble that of the other *jātaka* image discussed here. The structure that dominates the image, however, reflects a more Chinese style, as turquoise-green glazed tiles cover the roof—a common Yuan architectural element that is included in Shalu itself.¹⁵⁶ The costumes of the figures have no resemblance to the costumes donned by the figures of the strongly Newar *jātaka* image. While their extravagantly patterned robes do not necessarily resemble the simpler layered robes that appear in a number of Chinese hanging scrolls and ink paintings on silk attributed to artists of the Yuan dynasty, the costume representations in this mural have more in common with those than they do with the dhotis of the Kanjur Lhakang Tathāgatas or the costumes depicted in the other *jātaka* mural (figs. 38 and 39). The hairstyles and facial features of the figures in this mural also bear no likeness to the figures depicted in the other *jātaka* scene. Rather than being tied up in simple buns, the hairstyles donned by these men are extravagant, curled and perched in shapely stacks below the black hats typical of the Chinese court.¹⁵⁷ Their facial features appear pinched and small, in contrast to Newar artistic tradition's emphasis on large, exaggerated features. However, their tiny features, set close together, do not reflect the facial features present in the scrolls and

¹⁵⁵ Vitali, 107.

¹⁵⁶ Kreiger, 175.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

ink-on-silk paintings associated with the Yuan dynasty, either, in which facial features appear to be larger and more widely spread out across the face. This aesthetic evident in the facial features and costuming, which is neither fully Newar or Yuan aesthetic, then, seems to suggest that the images on the outer walls of the circumambulation corridor reflect a Himalayan interpretation of the Yuan style that establishes the presence of the Yuan-dynasty Mongols at Shalu Monastery. The presence of this Newar interpretation underscores the Yuan dynasty Mongols' comprehensive appropriation of the Newar aesthetic at Shalu. Though the court artists working at Shalu were well aware of other aesthetic traditions associated with the Yuan dynasty, their main interest at Shalu was to adopt the Himalayan aesthetic wholesale, perhaps because it was quaint for the Yuan court to see themselves through the eyes of those they conquered.¹⁵⁸

VI. PAINTED TEXTILE REPRESENTATIONS AT SHALU AS EXPRESSIONS OF THE YUAN APPROPRIATION OF THE HIMALAYAN AESTHETIC

The previous description and comparison demonstrates the presence of the Newar aesthetic at Yuan-patronized Shalu, and highlights the complex relationship between religion and politics at play in Tibet during the Yuan dynasty. The employment of the Newar aesthetic at Shalu reveals the Mongols' political strategy, which was one of adoption rather than disruption. Indeed, this becomes a perfect example of Robert Nelson's ideas of appropriation when he writes that the practice of appropriating art, "shifts the former connotations [of an object] to create the new sign and accomplishes all this covertly, making the process appear ordinary or natural."¹⁵⁹

The Yuan-dynasty employment of the Himalayan aesthetic at Shalu is not an isolated occurrence; in reality, it is only one component of the Mongols' larger policy in China, where they adopted Chinese administrative policy, employed Chinese officials, and created a universal

¹⁵⁸ Michael Sullivan, *The Arts of China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 208.

¹⁵⁹ Nelson, 164.

script that could be understood in all of the regions they ruled.¹⁶⁰ Kubilai's approach to imperialism was one modeled after appropriation and adoption rather than cultural chauvinism and disruption, suggesting that he understood the multiethnicity and polyreligious reality of the massive region he ruled. The Mongols, therefore, were not as interested in exporting to Shalu their own court styles, which was decidedly more Chinese but also eschewed old-order court art of the Song period.¹⁶¹ Rather, they appropriated the Newar artistic tradition wholesale, and, some could argue, even superseded what the Newar artists had achieved in wall painting at that time.¹⁶² The presence of the heavily Newar aesthetic is not unique to Shalu, of course, as Tibetan art—and painting, specifically—had always borrowed extremely heavily from Indian and Newar artistic traditions, and Central Tibetan temples had long embraced these stylistic elements in their design and decoration.¹⁶³ Shalu's Mongol patronage, however, makes the use of this regional aesthetic in its Kanjur Lhakang especially distinctive. In the Yuan-appropriated interpretation executed by court artists at Shalu, the Himalayan aesthetic appears in its finest, most spectacular form, further distinguishing the monastery from its peers. Shalu, then, becomes a capital of *haut* taste, with the politically motivated aesthetic connoisseurship of the Yuan dynasty writ large on its walls.

That the Yuan dynasty specifically uses the painted representations of textiles at Shalu to achieve its subtle imperialist agenda is unsurprising, given the centuries-old South Asian tradition of adorning deities and temple spaces in the finest textiles and silks.¹⁶⁴ In the Yuan-appropriated interpretation occurring at Shalu, the textile representations, of course, become

¹⁶⁰ Rossabi, 230. Paul D. Buell, "Khubilai Khan" in *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, ed. Karen Christensen and David Levinson (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2002), 362.

¹⁶¹ Sullivan, 207-208.

¹⁶² Jing, 72; and Sullivan, 208.

¹⁶³ Jackson, xi, xvii.

¹⁶⁴ Papa-Kalantari, 150.

more than purely aesthetic or symbolic of the sacred. Rather, the textile depictions serve as a semaphore system, signaling Yuan dynasty imperialism in Tibet. And this becomes even clearer when the style employed in the painted textile representations of Shalu—which reflect Himalayan artistic tradition—essentially disappears with the end of Yuan-Sakya dominance in Tibet. Sites constructed in Tibet in the fifteenth century, like Gyantse’s Kumbum, for instance, provide evidence of a new textile tradition—one that more readily mixes Chinese, Newar, and Tibetan stylistic elements. I will explore this massive change in textile depictions in Tibetan wall painting at length in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

FASHIONING A TIBETAN AESTHETIC: PAINTED REPRESENTATIONS OF TEXTILES AT GYANTSE

INTRODUCTION

Gyantse's Pelkhor Chöde monastic complex, about ninety kilometers southeast of Shalu, provides excellent fifteenth-century Tibetan *comparanda* for Shalu for three primary reasons: first, like Shalu, Pelkhor Chöde is royally patronized; second, the monastery, has connections to the Sakya tradition; and third, Gyantse has a grand tradition of art and architecture that follows in Shalu's footsteps, perhaps even outdoing its precursor in artistic importance.¹⁶⁵ This chapter explores the shift in the painted depiction of textiles in Tibet in the fifteenth century that is especially evident at Gyantse. I will briefly discuss the fall of the Yuan dynasty and the consequent political and religious circumstances that framed Gyantse's building program in the early fifteenth century. I will then turn to an examination of the Tibetan artistic style that emerges at Gyantse and appears in the murals of the fifteenth-century SKu-'bum (Kumbum) of dpal 'khor chos sde (Pelkhor Chöde monastery). Finally, I will address the significance of the shift in painted representations of textiles that occurs in Tibetan painting in the fifteenth century in relation to the Yuan appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic at Shalu.

I. FALL OF THE YUAN DYNASTY AND THE RISE OF GYANTSE

While Kubilai had initially established a successful dynasty in China through adopting the Chinese administrative structure, converting to Tibetan Buddhism, and employing a number of Chinese officials, the end of his reign was marked by expensive failed military campaigns and demanding economic policies crafted by non-Chinese officials.¹⁶⁶ These decisions alienated the Chinese and exposed fractures within Kubilai's enormous empire. Kubilai's 1294 death left

¹⁶⁵ Lo Bue and Ricca, 67. Ricca, 198.

¹⁶⁶ Rossabi, 230.

authority over the empire in the hands of his grandson, but political infighting commenced soon after, eventually leading to the collapse of the Yuan dynasty in 1368.¹⁶⁷ With the fall of the Yuan dynasty and the consequent decline of Sakya power in Tibet in 1368, the princes of Gyantse maintained near-total independence for almost thirty years.¹⁶⁸ This peaceful autonomy allowed the princes to undertake an extensive building program that included the construction of the Gyantse Tsuklak Khang, the principal temple at Pelkhor Chöde monastery, and the famous Kumbum (fig. 40). Construction on the Tsuklak Khang ended in 1425, and the Kumbum was completed two years later, though its interior decoration was not finished until 1440.¹⁶⁹

Though Sakya power had lessened, Gyantse's princes maintained their relationship with the tradition, as the Sakya rulers gave them abundant titles in exchange for their continued opposition of another political faction in Tibet, the Phag-mo-gru-pas.¹⁷⁰ Whatever the reasons for the continuance of this relationship, Gyantse's association with the Sakya tradition connected it to the Ming dynasty, as the link between the dynasties of China and the Sakya tradition had also continued into the fifteenth century with the Ming dynasty's establishment.¹⁷¹ While the princes of Gyantse patronized the expansion of the Pelkhor Chöde complex, the relationship between the Ming dynasty and the Sakya tradition cannot be ignored, as it could explain the presence of Chinese artistic elements in the Tibetan artistic style developed at Gyantse. Questions about the impact of this relationship, however, cannot be addressed within the confines of this paper, as they are not essential to the advancement of my argument. That the representations of textiles in Tibetan wall paintings begin to reflect a Chinese sensibility in the fifteenth century, after the Yuan dynasty fell, is more significant.

¹⁶⁷ Rossabi 228.

¹⁶⁸ Lo Bue and Ricca, 66.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 70, 71.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 53, 67.

II. PAINTED REPRESENTATIONS OF TEXTILES AT GYANTSE

By the start of the fifteenth century, Tibetan artists were well versed in executing Newar, Indian, and Chinese artistic styles; and their knowledge and understanding of these artistic traditions reveal themselves in Gyantse's murals, in which elements of Newar, Indian, and Chinese painting are woven together to produce a uniquely Tibetan aesthetic.¹⁷² Referred to as the "school of Gyantse," the masterful composite aesthetic demonstrates a fully developed Tibetan art produced by Tibetan artists (fig. 41).¹⁷³ The style developed at Gyantse earns the distinction of being a truly Tibetan tradition because of the homogeneity of the wall paintings in their melding of artistic styles; this uniformity suggests a consensus among the Tibetan artists, who are identified in inscriptions on the Kumbum's walls, about the manner in which the murals should be painted.¹⁷⁴ The stylistic consistencies in the paintings likely also result from the role of Gyantse prince Rab-brtan-kun-bzang-'phags-pa (Rabten Kunsang Phakpa, 1389-1442) as patron and advisor in the Kumbum's construction.¹⁷⁵ The iconographic program, too, was inimitably Tibetan, as it was rendered to reflect the work of Bu ston rin chen grub (Butön Rimpoche, 1290-1364), who served as one of Shalu's most noteworthy and prolific abbots.¹⁷⁶ The uniquely Tibetan aesthetic appears in full force throughout Kumbum's myriad wall paintings, providing a wealth of comparisons for the Tathāgata murals in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang.

As is common in Tibet's composite aesthetic, Chinese artistic elements appear throughout the images in Gyantse's Kumbum, particularly in the portrayal of textiles. A painting of Vairochana, attributed to Döndrub Sangpo, adorns the northern wall of a chapel on the third story of the Kumbum (fig. 42). A brilliant red scarf drapes over the shoulders of the smiling

¹⁷² Kossak, 176. Lo Bue and Ricca, 66.

¹⁷³ Ricca, 198.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 196.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ricca, 196. Kreiger 170.

deity, and the tendrils of fabric flank his chest as they fall to his crossed feet and loop back over his elbows. The fabric seems to be heavy, as it puddles in folds on the deity's shoulders; and it seems to catch and reflect light, giving the fabric the appearance of silk. Chrysanthemums, which appear to be stitched in gold thread, dot the scarf, evoking a connection to China's famous gold-threaded embroidered silks.¹⁷⁷ In addition to the textile's resemblance to the embroidered silks produced in China, the scarf's style is also Chinese, as it bears a likeness to the scarves sculpted on the bronzes produced during the reign of the Chinese Yongle emperor of the Ming dynasty from 1403 to 1424 (fig. 43).¹⁷⁸ Like the scarf, Vairochana's trousers also have the appearance of heavy silk. Rendered in the same shimmering red and gold of the top piece of his costume, Vairochana's dhoti features stitched gold diamonds composed of crosshatched lines, sprinkled across the expanse of bold red. Deep olive green silk covers his waist, wrinkling into a series of identical folds as it hangs over his shins. The green silk is fringed in a border of dark green, which features an organic design of loosely painted vines. The combination of the two silks used in Vairochana's costume, coupled with the embroidered elements and intricately decorated edges, yield impressions of extravagance and splendor in the image.

The image of Buddhaguhya, attributed to Döndrub Kyabpa, decorates the northern wall of a chapel on the Kumbum's fourth story (fig. 44). Buddhaguhya's robe bears a strikingly similar pattern to that of Vairochana's costume. The robe, which appears to be silk, drapes over both shoulders and gathers at his waist; that the robe falls in such a way suggests the weight of the textile. The fiery red of the textile is punctuated with gold-threaded chrysanthemums. Unlike the delicate blossoms embroidered on the scarf of Vairochana, the chrysanthemums depicted on Buddhaguhya are more geometric and resemble sunbursts. Buddhaguhya's robe gapes open at

¹⁷⁷ Watt, 132.

¹⁷⁸ Ricca, 200.

his chest and on the sleeve to expose the soft navy blue and sea-foam green that comprise the robe's lining. A smooth gold border, so seamlessly rendered that it almost appears to be molten, edges the entirety of the robe, contributing to the incredible opulence of the garment. The throne on which Buddhaguhya sits, however, exceeds the luxuriousness of his robe in its intricately crafted design. As most of China's colorful embroidered textiles feature the same theme present in this depiction of the seat covering—flowers and wildlife—it is likely that this throne cushion is meant to emulate an embroidered textile (fig. 45).¹⁷⁹ A cream background provides the ideal background for the colorful flora and fauna that overwhelm the pillow. Whimsically painted vines accented with leaves weave throughout the design, tying together the blue chrysanthemums and pinwheel-like red flowers scattered across the throne's cushion. Two flying phoenixes, whose flaming tails fan out behind them, dominate the design, bringing a sense of energy and dynamism to the image. Like chrysanthemums, the flying phoenix motif appears frequently in Chinese textiles, providing evidence that the Tibetan artists at Gyantse were infusing their newly formed artistic style with Chinese elements and including Chinese motifs in their depictions of textiles.¹⁸⁰

A detail of a larger mural in the Kumbum offers further evidence of the Chinese motifs appearance in the textile representations of the Tibetan aesthetic at Gyantse (fig. 46). A swath of red silk rests across the knees of an unseen deity, falling into wrinkles that stack on the seat of the throne. A gold floral scroll edges the garment, and gold chrysanthemums appear in an orderly, though scattered, design across the robe. The textile that hangs from the throne's seat exceeds the luxuriousness of the actual robe. Edged in a thick border of royal blue, the fabric square falls into a pleat. The cream background of the textile showcases a spray of blue and red

¹⁷⁹ Watt, 172.

¹⁸⁰ Ricca, 203.

blossoms woven together by a leafy green vine. A red triangle bordered by a thick band of forest-green swirls divides this cream background into two triangles. Despite having a small surface area, the red triangle boasts incredible detail in the form of a golden flying phoenix. The ends of the phoenix's tail appear to transform into a gold bloom still attached to the vine. The intricate minutiae included in the smallest aspects of this image provide evidence of Gyantse's continuance, or perhaps even surpassing, of the magnificent tradition of painting that flourished at Shalu.

While Chinese motifs and materials seem to dominate the textile representations at Gyantse, it cannot be ignored that Newar and Indian textiles also make appearances. The melding of the Chinese, Newar, and Indian styles manifests itself in another image of from the Kumbum, in which the deity is depicted as wearing a scarf that appears more in line with the Chinese costume elements seen at Gyantse, but dons a richly patterned cotton dhoti that subtly recalls the geometrically patterned dhotis of Newar and Indian antecedents (fig. 47). A red silk scarf with a deep emerald green underside shrouds the deity's shoulders, falling into ribbons that wrap his wrists and loop around his knees, reminiscent of the Yongle bronzes' scarves referred to earlier in this chapter. The dhoti that covers the deity's legs, however, more readily conjures comparisons to the dhotis of the Shalu Tathāgatas. Row upon row of white petal-like trefoils stretch across the red dhoti, connected by green-blue dots to create a pattern of artful diamonds that enclose smaller white trefoils encircled by faint lines of the same green-blue. The combination of the Chinese scarf with the Newar-Indian dhoti representation illustrates the unique matrix of aesthetics that emerges at Gyantse.

Rather than featuring the diaphanous, woodblock-printed cottons of the dhotis on display in the Tathāgata paintings at Shalu, the murals at Gyantse generally seem to embrace a Chinese

aesthetic in their representations: the fabrics are painted in a way that gives them the appearance of silk, for which China was famous; and they are rendered in rich reds and vibrant golds, with chrysanthemums—a stylistic element common in Chinese art and textiles—dancing across the fields of color. The replacement of boldly patterned cotton dhotis with luxurious embroidered silks illustrates the shift in textile representations in Tibetan wall paintings.

III. THE 15th-CENTURY SHIFT IN TEXTILE REPRESENTATIONS

With the collapse of the Yuan dynasty and the start of the Ming dynasty in 1368, there is a noticeable shift in the depiction of textile representations. While pinpointing the exact reasons for the emergence of a distinctively Tibetan style that embraces Chinese elements under the Ming dynasty in the fifteenth century is a discussion that cannot be fully addressed within the confines of this paper, two points become clear: first, under the Ming, an original Tibetan artistic tradition emerges; and second, artists in Tibet are treating painted representations of textiles differently. Painted representations of fabrics that suggest luxuriously embroidered Chinese silks appear in place of the woodblock-printed, cotton dhotis that appear in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang Tathāgata images and their Newar and Indian artistic predecessors. While it must be acknowledged that the Indian-style dhotis present in the Tathāgata murals at Shalu still make appearances at Gyantse, the new emphasis on Chinese motifs and representations of silk in the Gyantse murals indicate the change occurring in Tibetan wall painting after the disintegration of the Yuan dynasty. It is this stylistic shift in the rendering of textile representations that suggests just how weighty the Yuan dynasty's political and religious motivations in its appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic at Shalu actually were.

CONCLUSION

Through their adoption of the Tibetan Buddhist religious tradition and their employment of the Himalayan aesthetic at Shalu Monastery in Central Tibet in the fourteenth century, the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty established power over Tibet from within the region. The painted representations of textiles in Shalu Monastery's Kanjur Lhakang, specifically, illustrate the Mongols' appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic for their own imperialistic devices, revealing their political savvy in maneuvering socio-political relationships with China's neighboring regions, particularly Tibet. The change in the depiction of textiles in Tibet in the fifteenth century at the Gyantse Kumbum, then, reflects the impact of the decline in Yuan-Sakya power in Tibet, as it gives way to the emergence of an identifiable Tibetan artistic style that freely blends Chinese, Newar, and Tibetan influences, thus reflecting the region's own cosmopolitan awareness and its ascent from under Yuan dynasty imperialism.

That the Yuan-dynasty Mongols chose to employ the painted representations of textiles in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang as proxies of their imperialist agenda underscores the centrality of textiles in South Asian culture, and especially Tibetan culture, during the fourteenth century. But the importance of textiles to South Asian culture, of course, was established much earlier than the fourteenth century. The Silk Road and its tributaries facilitated the emergence of textiles, particularly silks, as having incredible commercial value in the first century B.C., as they were used as currency. The tradition of clothing deities' images in luxurious fabrics and the custom of dressing temples in layers upon layers of rich brocades of an image or place had appeared across South Asia in a number of artistic media for centuries.

Because centuries of textile-steeped traditions had preceded their rule, the Yuan-dynasty Mongols of the fourteenth century could quite easily capitalize on the existing polyvalent nature

of textiles in order to use textile representations to transmit their own messages at Shalu.

Through the appropriation of the Himalayan aesthetic in the painted representations of textiles in Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang, the Yuan-dynasty Mongols play an "active, subjective, and motivated" role in the transformation of textiles from objects of artistic, commercial, and spiritual value into political signs of the Mongols' conquest of and dominance over Tibet.¹⁸¹ That the Mongol patrons saturated a space used to house Tibetan sacred texts in an entirely Himalayan aesthetic was no accident. The Mongols of the Yuan dynasty were savvy rulers who wielded the Newar artistic tradition as ruthlessly and as intentionally as they wielded their weapons in battle, and they were therefore successful in writing large their imperialist agenda across the walls of Shalu's Kanjur Lhakang.

During the fourteenth century, textiles in Tibet have demonstrated commercial value, religious value, and then under the Yuan dynasty, political value. While textiles' exact meaning or purpose shift to reflect the numerous contexts in which they are used, textiles never lost their centrality in South Asia during this period. And it is this consistent centrality that makes the argument I have posited here so significant. Through Yuan manipulation, the painted representations of textiles at Shalu become a system of signs that express political associations and cultural alignments. Through substantive visual and socio-political analysis, I have attempted in my thesis to decode these signs, infer their deeper meaning, and establish a framework in which textiles can be understood as symbols of universal themes.

The importance of this paper's analysis of Shalu's textile representations as symbols of Yuan-dynasty imperialism is illuminated at Gyantse, where the textile-representation-as-signal appears again—though this time in a sign language composed of Chinese motifs layered with well-established Newar and Indian patterns. But this language of motifs and patterns has not yet

¹⁸¹ Nelson, 163.

been decoded to reveal issues of patronage or ownership or nationalism. It is at Gyantse, on the walls of the Kumbum, which showcase an emerging Tibetan artistic tradition, where so many questions remain.

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