

HIRAYAMA SILK ROAD FELLOWSHIP

UNESCO PROJECT

Significance of Jewellery in Silk Road Studies

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INTERIM REPORT

The re-discovery of the cultural heritage of 'silk Roads' has acquired an important place in international research studies. Under the aegis of UNESCO, many projects of multi-disciplinary approach are trying to throw light on this highly dimensional area of research. The 'Silk Roads' are the corridors of 'dialogue of cultures' between Europe and Asia. Silk Roads are significant since they developed into a great source of contacts between the communities of East and West. Many times natural hazards and political interruptions created the disturbance for activities on the Silk Road. But the natural passion for encounters between the east and west has discovered many channels for establishing the links between the countries that encompass the Silk Road.

Under the umbrella of 'Silk Road Studies' various areas of research have been covered by eminent scholars. The studies in the fields of Archaeology, History of Art, History, Philosophy, religion, musicology, Anthropology, Museology, Architecture, social sciences and medical sciences have widely touched upon many interesting aspects of life and activities of Silk Road. The studies related to the trade have highlighted the different types transported between East and West. Silk, the major article from China was highly regarded in exchange to precious stones, gold, ivory and other expensive materials.

The spread of Buddhism through silk Roads has definitely transformed the customs and traditions of the countries that were swept by Buddhism. The countries like Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma form a nucleus of the Buddhist traditions greatly influenced by India. The major settlements of this region were connected by a network of trade routes. The so-called 'silk routes' the most important of these ancient trade roads, connected China to India and the Mediterranean world. The northern and southern branches of the silk route intersected in Chinese central Asia (East Turkestan) where they joined the three main trade routes from North West India. These latter routes traversed the Hindu Kush, the Pamirs and the Karakoram. The political and religious institutions that grew up along these trade routes facilitated contact among the diverse ethnic groups inhabiting the area. The Buddhist monasteries that levied the routes commissioned a vast amount of religious art and encouraged the development of distinctive artistic traditions. This monastic art reflected at different themes the artistic traditions of the three great civilizations of the area - China, India and Tibet. The similarity of patronage, function and cultural heritage created a shared vocabulary of forms and styles, which can be identified throughout the Vajrayana monastic

art of the Trans-Himalaya (The silk route and the Diamond path - by Acborach E.Klimburg Salter P.12)

The art and living style of the people of the Himalayan region to a greater extent has reflections from along the Silk Route during 7th to 10th centuries. In the cosmopolitan oasis towns and trade centers of central Asia one could find adherents of most of great religions of the world Zoroastrians, Manicheans, Nestorian Christians, and Buddhists and from the eighth century on Muslims. The art reflects the extraordinary cultural diversity of the population and shows the influences of India, China, Iran and Mediterranean. It is not surprising therefore that the Tibetan conquest of the rich central Asian cities along the silk routes such as Khotan, Kucha and Dunhuang, brought cultural and material wealth to Tibet (The silk route and diamond path P.21)

The culture of the nucleus region comprising Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma has been determined to a large extent by the similarity in the artistic approach by geographical situation and by the natural environment. This region has a unique influence of two great neighbouring civilizations, India and China, absorbing the bonds through Buddhism. The influence of India is primarily religious and intellectual, China has left lasting impressions on Tibet's politics and administration' (The Art of Tibet by Pratapadityapal P.13) The ethnic and geographic setting of this Himalayan region experienced the process of socio-cultural transformation owing to the spread of Buddhism through trade routes during the 9th to 13th centuries.

Jewellery forms a very important aspect of Silk Road culture. Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, each in the turn were seduced from their simpler, more sparking ways by Phoenician purples, Chinese silks, Arabian perfumes, Indian spices, and central Asian gems (Silk Road a History by Irane M. Frank E David M. Brownstone). Throughout the centuries the caravans from different places transporting silk in exchange would stop over at this cross road comprising of Tibet, North India, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma and sometimes would have never took off due to some reasons. As a result the silk, precious stones, jewellery and other artefacts were poured into this region thus making a substantial contribution to the development of art and culture of this region. Vajrayana Buddhism a vibrant expression of Buddhist cannon through Hindu idiom enliven in the atmosphere of Asian crossroads. The visual, decorative and performing arts of Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, Burma and Indonesia have the combination of elements from the countries around with indigenous cults. The visual arts like

painting, sculpture and architecture are highly decorative in expression. The use of designs for jewellery is very well brought out from painting and sculpture.

Culturally this area was a meeting point for ancient trade routes extending northwards, westwards and southwards into the Indian sub-continent. Thus this crossroads of Asia remained a strategic focal point for a long time for travellers, traders and missionaries who originally came from ancient civilizations. The binding force of this meeting point was Buddhism which came from India & Nepal and spread towards Tibet and Burma in about 7th century A.D. Buddhism with all its changing dimensions in modified form, from its homeland spread through central Asia to China. While accommodating Buddhism on the soil of Tibetan and Burmese or Nepalese culture, local colour and customs were incorporated. At the beginning there was the resentment from already existing folk religious life. This fusion of Buddhist and folk local traditional has acquired different connotations in Tibet, Nepal and Burma. The religion promoted the visual and decorative arts in these countries. The great monasteries and wealthy laymen were probably two of the most frequent patrons who employed painters, sculptors and craftsmen in wood, metal and stone to make holy objects for ritual use and private devotion (Tibetan Art Victoria and Albert Museum by John Lowry P.6)

While studying in detail the type of jewellery that used to adorn the deities and the people wearing them has a direct link obtained from religious nomenclature. For the purpose of understanding the significance of jewellery, a close observation of paintings and sculpture originating from these five countries were made. The actual specimen of jewellery in appearance and designs goes with the visuals in the form of stone and metal sculpture the Tangka paintings and the manuscript miniature works.

To have a first hand knowledge of decorative objects, actual specimens of jewellery and the tangka paintings a visit to the Victoria and Albert Museum, British Museum at London, Musee Guiment at Paris and National Museum, New Delhi was arranged. The study of the sculptures (stone and metal), the Tangkas and the actual jewellery in the collections of these museums supported with Library references, discussions with the scholars in the varied areas of culture of these countries has really created background for the further investigation in this field of Art History.

WORK DONE DURING 1993-94

First Phase: September and October 1993.

The research project commenced with library reference in the local libraries. Trying to establish contacts with the concerned countries through correspondence, a local collector by name Mr. H.K.Kejriwal has good collections of Tibetan Tankas – Svetoslav Roerich's studio and library has a display of original tankas from Tibet and decorative objects from Nepal. A preliminary study of these collections provided an insight towards the identification of the religious and cult jewellery, their dimensions and usage.

Second Phase – December 1993.

A trip to Delhi to study the collections of National Museum and contacting the Embassy of Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and Burma.

National Museum Delhi – Few of the silk painting in the store and at display are studied from the point of view of identifying jewellery.

1. Silk painting of Manjurri - 7th & 8th C. A.D.
2. Painting of Manjurri in gallery - exhibit early patterns of jewellery in Tibetan art.
3. Ambrosia - Tibetan, silver, gold-gilded, display variety of jewels along with the crowns.
4. Munjughosha - Nepal - displayed in gallery of 16th century especially interesting for long necklaces.
5. Manjusri painting on cloth - 1750 A.D.
6. Virabhairava Yamantaka Tibet 17th C. delicacy in jeweler's art could be noticed.
7. A gold pendent - 48 , 9/23

Vishnu seated on Garuda in 8aphire.

8. Earring - Two ear rings a pair - Vishnu seated on Garuda tow Gandhara's flying with attributes, a tiny crown is on their head. The rubies and safires are cut according to the shapes of body and limbs.

Along with a detail study of artefacts, library reference and discussion with the people in charge of these galleries helped to collect the relevant material.

Third Phase - A visit to London and Paris.

April/May 1994.

1. Collections of paintings, sculpture and jewellery in the Indian and South East Asian section, Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

a) A survey and study of 50 Tibetan & Nepalese paintings were made - photographed some, from the point of jewellery.

Painting

Tanka Tibet The paradise of the west

IM 58 - 1910

Tanka Tibet The white Tara - IM 57 1910

Tanka Tibet Dhyani Bodhisatva IM 121 - 1910

Tanka Tibet Mahakala 18 15 1969

Painting Nepal Samvara-Yab-yum 18 12 1958

Sculpture

Bronze Tibet Seated Buddha - profusely jeweled

Bronze Sino Tibet Ushnisha Vijaya IM 126 - 1910

Bronze Tibet Maitreya IM 189 - 1923

Bronze Nepal Kinnara IM 59 - 1884

Jewellery

Jewellery Tibet/Ladakh Brooch 18 - 5 - 1944

Jewellery Tibet Tiara IM - 92 - 1910

Jewellery Nepal Head band IM - 296 - 1913

Jewellery Nepal A chest ornament IM - 160 - 1913

= Nepal Necklace IM - 385 1940

= Nepal Ear ring IM - 88 1911

= Nepal Ear ring IM - 149 1910

= Nepal Ear ring IM - 181 1913

Jewellery

Jewellery Burma Shoulder belt IS - 15 - 1947

= Burma Neck ornament 03164 18

= Burma Necklace - 123 - 1852

= Burma foil with inscription 1S ISC 1947

= Burma Ear tubes

= Burma a tassel 02.753 IS

Burma Bracelet of gold filigree 03-167 1S

= Burma Ear plug 03 172 IS

= Burma Necklace 03, 165 IS

= Burma Necklace - filigree 03, 162 IS

= Burma Pectoral cross IM 48 1932

= Burma A pair of Ruby Bracelet - 03.159 & A1S

= Burma Neck chain 03160 (IS)

= Burma Hair pins 81A & 1980 IS

= Burma a gold ruby studded cup 92, 749 IS

= Burma Box-semi-circular 03, 168 1S

= Burma Vase of gold set with ruby 02, 750 IS

= Burma Comb – two sided 2-1902 IS

= Burma A circular ruby studded box with a lid 02, 752 A

= Burma ceremonial golden bowl 02, 748 IS

Photo archives and library of V & A provided resource material for further studies.

Fruitful discussions were held the curatorial staff of Victoria & Albert Muse London.

John Clark - Asst. Curator - study on Tibetan Ritual objects.

John Guy - Asst. Curator - consulted for Indonesian sculptures.

Dr. Deborah Swallow - Curator - consulted for Burmese life & customs.

British Museum - Study room and Photo Archival material helped to make a preliminary survey of the jewellery, painting & sculptures of Tibet, Nepal and Indonesia. Many of interesting rental sculptures and ornaments are displayed in the Oriental Gallery. Some of them were photographed and for others order for photographs was placed.

Photographers acquired by order –

Dhyani Buddha – sculpture

Dharmapala with consort – sculpture

Manjusri – Metal sculpture

Dhakini Vajravarahi – bronze

Vajrasatva – bronze

Photographs of the objects displayed in the gallery mainly bronzes and ritual objects from showcase were photographed. Discussion with Richard Blurton Asst. Curator Oriental Antiquity Section of British Museum helped a great deal in studying on the collections of Indonesian golden finger rings in the collections of British Museum.

VISIT TO PARIS –

UNESCO - Mr. Nagochi Director of Fellowship section and his staff were impressed by the study I had conducted and they were briefed about the work done by me from September 1993 to May 1994.

Mr. Diene, in charge of Silk Road studies was on a Mission. His assistant, coordinator for silk-road studies was immensely helpful for the reference material provided during the stay.

Musce Guirnet The galleries of Tibet, Nepal and Indonesia display the cult jewellery, ritual jewellery, stone sculptures, metal sculptures and paintings. The photographs were taken focusing on the objects displayed in the gallery. Ritual Object - Bhairva plaques - Nepal - MA 5941 Bronze - Mayadevi Nepal - MA – 1779

Jewellery - Nepal Crown with Dhyani Buddha M.A. 4929

Painting - Tibet Vajrasatva M.A. 1089

Bronze - Tibet Vajrapani M.A. 3546

Bronze - Tibet Devi Sitpatra M.G. 11270

Bronze - Tibet Dakini

Bronze - Tibet Ekadasha Mukha Avalokiteswara

Ritual objects - Tibet - Vajra, Shanta etc. M.A. 1453

Ritual objects - Tibet - All the ritual objects

Ritual objects - Tibet of Dhyani mudra

Charn boxes - Tibet Interesting size & shape

Metal - Tibet - Mandala

Bronze - Tibet - The Dakini cavari

Some of the Javanese stone sculptures displayed in the gallery are interesting for the further Indonesian studies.

Photo Archives: Studied the photographs of Tibet, Nepal and Indonesia.

Had discussions with scholars and curators and xeroxed the required photographs.

Mr. Le Bonhaur – Curator – Indonesian expert – had discussions regarding the places of visit in Indonesia and about the collection at Musee Guimet.

Gilles Beguin – Conservator in chief consulted for Tibetan Art. Had detail discussions regarding the crowns of ritual and secular use of Tibet and Nepal.

Future plans: The research programme is progressing and going as per the time schedule mentioned in the project proposal. During the month of November 1994 a trip is proposed covering Dharmshala, Delhi, Nepal, Bhutan and Indonesia. Visit to Burma and Tibet is given up as the political situation is not favorable for the visit in the near future. But Victoria and Albert Museum, British Museum and Musee Guimet has provided adequately the material for the study of these two countries.

Dharmshala - in Himachal Pradesh is known as Mini - Tibet, with study material already collected it would be possible to consult His Holiness Dalai Lama and other experts on Tibetan ritual jewellery. A study on contemporary jewellery also will be touched upon.

Nepal - The whole environment of Nepal serves as the back ground and foreground for this project. A study on the ancient sculptures, temple jewellery, collectors' items, and royal collections and Museum collections will be conducted.

Bhutan Not much material has been collected for studying Bhutan. The museums visited do not contain much of Bhutanese collections. A visit to Bhutan would help in collecting the required data for the project.

Indonesia - The survey on Indonesian sculptures and jewellery is already made, International exhibition catalogues are referred, and Indonesian experts at the Musee Guimet and the V&A were consulted. A visit to the museums of Jakarta and other ancient monuments would enable us to work on the significance of Indonesian jewellery comprehensively.

Final Report - After the visit to these places which forms the last phase of personal visits for the purpose of the project, the process of compilation begin.

- January 1994 to May 1994 –

During this period a final report of the project will be written based on the materials collected. By June first week the report will reach UNESCO office.