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Tibetan Art: Towards a Definition of Style. Edited by Jane Casey Singer and Philip Denwood. London: Laurence King, 1997, 319 pages, 341 illustrations (257 in color) and two color maps, ISBN: 1-8566-9099-7, £65 (cloth).

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This lavishly illustrated book is based upon papers delivered at a 1994 international conference on Tibetan art organized by the Department of Art and Archaeology of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum. Articles from twenty-three contributors, including the two editors, are variously concerned with painting, sculpture, textiles, and architecture, and range over a wide historical field from the beginnings of Tibetan civilization to the present day. Most of the articles are relatively short, the average length being around eleven pages, and many incorporate previously unpublished illustrations, not the least Tom Laird's spectacular photographs of the murals of the Jampa Lhakhang in Lo Msnthang which appear in Keith Dowman's contribution (described below). The editors have chosen to render Tibetan names and terms phonetically (I also follow this system to avoid complication), although the helpful glossary and index give many of these correctly transliterated in a version of the Wylie system.

In a prefatory essay, "Towards a Definition of Style in Tibetan Art," Pratapaditya Pal briefly summarizes previous work on the study of Tibetan art with particular reference to the largely unsystematic use of style-names such as those related to geographical location (Tucci's preferred option), doctrinal affiliation, patronage, or the appearance of non-Tibetan influences. Both Pal and the editors take a dim view of terms like "Indo-Tibetan," "Sino-Tibetan," "Tibeto-Kashmiri," and so on, which, it is claimed, are based on an assumption that there is no authentically Tibetan art. However, it should be stressed that this high-minded aim is not maintained throughout the collection as a whole, with some contributors regularly falling back on this apparently discredited terminology.

The magnitude of Guiseppe Tucci's contribution to the study of Tibetan art is beyond dispute. However, in her editor's introduction Singer identifies two contrasting periods in that influential scholar's career. In the first, represented by the monumental *Tibetan Painted Scrolls* (1949), Tucci employed an approach which emphasized the specifically religious aspects of a work of art. As such, he did not pursue its fundamental character as art and his early "...aesthetic, stylistic and formal discussions must be read with discretion" (p. 19). From Singer's perspective, only work from the tail end of Tucci's career, such as *Transhimalaya* (1973), makes the decisive shift towards the evaluation of the "artistic" dimensions of Tibetan art with a consequent recognition of indigenous style-elements. In a sense, subsequent work in the field, including much of this book, inherits and carries forward elements of Tucci's final period of scholarship. Now the analysis of stylistic features must be an important feature of the study of

Tibetan art, since the ways in which artists manipulated line, color, form, and motif, as well as their materials, undoubtedly provide important clues to the geographical and temporal point of origin of the work. However, it would be unwise to entirely omit Tucci's earlier preoccupations from the critical equation, as Singer seems to suggest, since a middle way combining both stylistic analysis and a more religious studies approach will surely offer the most satisfactory route to further understanding of Tibetan art.

In the space of a short review it is impossible to do justice to all the contributions to the volume, so I shall confine myself to those that seem particularly relevant from the perspective of Buddhist Studies. In his "Stylistic Features of the Pelkhor Chéde at Gyantse" Franco Ricca employs on-site inscriptional evidence, as well as other Tibetan historical source material, to investigate the twenty-nine named painters and their assistants responsible for the magnificent fifteenth century murals inspired by the earlier iconographical program of Butón Rimpoche (1290-1364). Despite the wide geographical area in central Tibet from which these painters came, as well as their prior doctrinal and stylistic affiliations, Ricca detects sufficient homogeneity in the results of their labours to talk of a "Gyantse school" (p. 198). Within the overall school, Ricca draws our attention to individual styles in the depiction of specific figures be they wrathful, pacific, arhats or mahāsiddhas, and so on.

In "Sculptural Styles According to Pema Karpo," Erberto Lo Bue continues previous investigations into the sixteenth century Drukpa scholar's *Mouth Ornament (li-ma brtag-pa'i rab-byed smra-'dod-pa'i kha-rgyan)* which seeks to classify metal images along geographical lines. Pema Karpo additionally relates such styles to the use of specific metal and stones. Intriguingly, here is an example of a native Tibetan employing categories that are deemed inappropriate from today's scholarly perspective. Despite the fact that such styles are hardly recognized today, Lo Bue successfully correlates this classificatory schema with a variety of extant metal images. Terese Tse Bartholomew, in her "Thangkas of the Qianlong Period," looks at the impact of Tibetan painting on the Chinese court during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1736-1796), an important Chinese patron of Tibetan Buddhism. Bartholomew shows how during his long reign the Emperor, guided by his teacher Role Dorje, patronised many kinds of art, particularly thangkas, and made very exacting demands on his master painters. He also built the Xumifushou temple complex in Chengde in imitation of Tashilhunpo monastery to celebrate a visit of the Sixth Panchen Lama in 1780. Of particular interest in connection with this project are the many thangka portraits that the Emperor commissioned, including two of the Sixth Panchen Lama and a lineage painting of himself dressed as a monk

depicted as an incarnation of Mañjuśrī. These works produced by a team of monks and court artists incorporate many authentically Tibetan motifs. However, the faces are rendered in a highly realistic manner and may have been painted by European artists active in China at the time. Certainly the Bohemian Jesuit Ignaz Sichelbart was working in the imperial palace at the right period.

In his “The Maṇḍalas of the Lo Jampa Lhakhang,” Keith Dowman attempts a preliminary study of the Maitreya Temple at Mustang, only recently photographed by Tom Laird, the first floor of which appears to have been decorated according to the iconography of the *Tattvasaṃgraha Tantra*, perhaps by the Newar painter Devānanda, in the second quarter of the fifteenth century. Dowman notes some stylistic similarity between this work and that found at the Gyantse Kumbum and concludes with an urgent plea for further detailed investigation of this important set of Tibeto-Newar murals as soon as the political conditions in Mustang allow. David Jackson’s short article “Chronological Notes on the Founding Masters of Tibetan Painting Traditions” represents an initial foray into the territory much more thoroughly covered in his *History of Tibetan Painting* (1996) and reviewed elsewhere in the pages of the *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. Here is a good indication of the time spent in bringing the present volume to publication. Finally, two articles focus on contemporary Tibetan painting. In the first, Clare Harris’s “Towards a Definition of Contemporary Painting Styles,” consideration is given to the manner in which Tibetan artists have adapted to existence as refugees. To take a simple example, paintings of traditional warriors are now often accompanied by modern weaponry, howitzers, aircraft, and the like, even though the warrior himself will still be depicted in archaic battledress. Harris identifies the Dharamsala Library Art School, established by the Dalai Lama as the powerhouse of a neo-orthodox Menri style (associated with the fifteenth century master Menthangpa Menla Dśndrub) to such an extent that it is “now rare to see any deviation from stylistic norms” (p. 267) in Dharamasala. On the other hand, around Manali a “Spiti Style” (this seems to be a term coined by the Indian Tourist Board — in fact, painters like Dorje and his disciple Sonam Stanzin paint largely in the Karma Gardri — literally, the “encampment style,” a Chinese-influenced style associated with the Karma-pa hierarchs of the second half of the sixteenth century) predominates. Meanwhile, in Tibet itself, particularly given the difficulties involved in depicting traditional Tibetan heroes, new styles of painting have emerged. The work of Gonkar Gyatsho, a leading member of the “Sweet Tea House” group founded in 1985, although still explicitly Buddhist, has moved strongly in the direction of abstraction while retaining some landscape elements. Indeed, to the untutored observer

his painting *Buddha and the White Lotus* (p. 269) appears to show familiarity with the work of Mark Rothko. It would be interesting to know if this was really the case. Tsarak Pema Namdol Thaye is a contemporary painter who, in “A Painter’s Approach to Style” briefly lists the six traditional styles acknowledged by most Tibetan artists today. He was taught by his uncle, Lama Gśnpo Tenzin, who had himself trained in the Menri and Karma Gardri styles. In his own work he attempts to strike a balance between the two while observing that the simplicity of backgrounds in the Gardri is an important aid to visualization, particularly for those who have difficulty in this area of practice.

In one sense, the editors have done little to integrate the stylistic and other observations of individual contributors. Indeed, given the wide geographical and historical spread and material variety of artifacts discussed this was probably never going to be possible. As such, the volume retains the feel of the conference hall. On a more positive note, however, the book is an excellent indication of the strength and range of contemporary scholarship in the field and there is certainly much here that will be of interest to those with a scholarly interest in Tibetan art and culture.